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ABSTRACT

This handbook, intended for English language arts teachers, principals, curriculum and testing specialists, superintendents, and all educators interested in preparing students for the grade 8 California Assessment Program (CAP) writing assessment, provides the practitioner with information about the content of the test, the rationale underlying it, and materials to help administrators and teachers prepare for and respond to the assessment. It is a practical and open-ended document that contains descriptions of the eight types of writing tested in the eighth grade (report of information, evaluation, problem solution, autobiographical incident, firsthand biography, observational writing, story, and speculation about cause or effect), as well as information about the importance, characteristics, and interrelatedness of the various types of writing. In addition, the guide includes the following items: exemplary student essays and an example of one student's writing process; suggestions for classroom writing assignments; samples of a range of students' writing, including essays written for the CAP writing test; examples of published essays; recommended readings for use in the classroom; and a scoring guide for rhetorical effectiveness. (SR)

Writing Assessment Handbook

California Assessment Program

Grade Eight

Prepared under the direction of
Francie Alexander, Associate Superintendent
Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment Division

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Preface

In a landmark study by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), *Writing Trends Across the Decade: 1974–1984*, two major conclusions were reported:

- American students are writing no better in 1984 than they were ten years earlier.
- Performance of these nine-, thirteen-, and seventeen-year-old students was distressingly poor.

If one accepts the assumption that a piece of writing is a reflection of how the writer thinks, then the problem is even more serious—as are the implications for our democracy.

In California prior to 1987 there was no existing data base to parallel that provided by NAEP. Concerned educators and citizens have only been able to guess at the present and past levels of student writing achievement.

The California Assessment Program (mandated in 1972) has been limited to multiple-choice tests of written expression, which test knowledge about writing ability and correlate moderately with writing tests but which fail to test the real thing: actual student writing. Without a statewide writing achievement test, we simply cannot answer the question: How well do students in California write? In *Writing Trends Across the Decade: 1974–1984*, the authors suggest that to move beyond the current levels of achievement, a more systematic program of instruction may be needed—one focused more directly on the variety of different kinds of writing students need to learn to do and span a wider range of levels of complexity.

This suggestion is consistent with the *English–Language Arts Model Curriculum Guide (K–8)* and Standard Number Ten in the English–language arts section of the *Model Curriculum Standards (9-12)*: "Districts and/or schools develop a systematic writing program." (Both the guide and the standards are published by the California Department of Education.) Under this standard, educators are encouraged to increase the frequency of writing assignments, teach writing as a process, increase the number of types of assignments, model the writing process, assign types of writing that exist in the real world, and teach writing across the curriculum.

The CAP writing assessment is based on this philosophy, which is stated also in the Department's *Handbook for Planning an Effective Writing Program* and the *English–Language Arts Framework*. The *Writing Assessment Handbook: Grade Eight* is intended for English–language arts teachers, principals, curriculum and testing specialists, superintendents, and all educators interested in preparing students for the grade eight CAP writing assessment. A committee of teachers and writing specialists carefully prepared this material to ensure that any preparation for the CAP writing test will also result in improving writing instruction for students. This handbook will provide the reader with information about the content of the test, the rationale underlying it, and materials to help administrators and teachers prepare for and respond to the assessment.

In the spirit of the *Model Curriculum Guide* and the *Model Curriculum Standards*, we hope all members of the educational community will pull together toward this common goal. Working together, we will surely succeed in helping students be effective in their use of the written word. As Ernest L. Boyer put it, "Clear writing leads to clear thinking; clear thinking is the basis of clear writing. Perhaps more than any other form of communication, writing holds us responsible for our words and ultimately makes us more thoughtful human beings."

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Deputy Superintendent
Curriculum and Instructional Leadership

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Director, Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment Division

Dale Carlson
Assistant Superintendent
California Assessment Program

Acknowledgments

To acknowledge all of the people who have contributed directly or indirectly to California's writing assessment requires telling the entire story about the evolution of writing assessment in California. Writing assessment began in 1972 with the transformation of the state testing program into the California Assessment Program.

The first step was the formation of the CAP English–Language Assessment Advisory Committee. This group formulated basic principles and guidelines for the multiple-choice assessment of written expression. Those guidelines were germane to the development of the direct writing assessment. That committee, led by elected chairperson Helen Lodge and Department of Education Consultant Jim Fulton, also spearheaded a direct writing assessment of California high school seniors in 1975. That study provided a useful backdrop of experience and information for the more recent developmental work of the 1980s. The names of the members of the original English–Language Assessment Advisory Committee follow:

Robert Bennett, Shirley Boring, Gwen Brewer, June Byers, Lee Cronbach, Joanne Dale, Dan Donlan, Maude Edmonson, Tom Gage, Julia Gottesman, and Al Grommon. Also, Wayne Harsh, Barbara Hartsig, Roger Hyndman, Barbah Lea Johnson, Helen Lodge, Barbara Mahoney, Marie Mathios, Marguerite May, Joanna McKenzie, and Fred Myers. Also, George Nemetz, Warren Newman, Darlyne Rice, Alice Scofield, Elaine Stowe, William Stryker, Violet Tallmon, Jane Wise, William Wise, Dick Worthen, Thelma Worthen, and John Yockey.

The first tests of written expression were introduced for grades six and twelve in 1974–75. Always striving for improvements in the testing program, members of the committee worked very hard on the development of new and revised tests. The tests evolved over the years, as did the committee, which was aware of the severe limitations of multiple-choice tests and the desire for an improved testing approach.

The names of the members of the 1987 English–Language Assessment Advisory Committee follow:

Diana Adams, Sheila Anchondo, Mary Barr, Robert Beck, Stephen Black, Judy Carlton, and Robert Flores. Also, Bonnie Garner, Bernard Goodmanson, Julia Gottesman, Jim Gray, Mel Grubb, Wayne Harsh, and Helen Lodge. Also, Marguerite May, Joanna McKenzie, Jim Musante, George Nemetz, Dale Oscarson, Alice Scofield, Linda Short, Barbara Tomlinson, and Bill Wise.

In spite of the improvements in the multiple-choice tests, a need still existed for an assessment of real student writing. In 1984 a pilot project was initiated at grade eight to explore alternative approaches to writing assessment methodology and identify experienced teacher-evaluators of student writing throughout California. At this time a statewide Direct Writing Assessment Advisory Committee was constituted to guide our effort. Members of that committee were:

Diana Adams, Arthur Applebee, Eva Baker, Mary Barr, Nancy Brownell, Sherryl Broyles, Jacqueline Chaparro, and Charles Cooper. Also, Karla Dellner, Alice Furry, Mary Lee Glass, Jim Gray, Mel Grubb, Rosemary Hake, and Wayne Harsh. Also, Marilyn Kahl, Katy Kane, Joe Lawrence, Helen Lodge, Dorothy Maloney, Miles Myers, Joanna McKenzie, Kathleen Naylor, George Nemetz, Shirley Patch, Edys Quellmalz, Jim Scarpino, and Ed White.

Special leadership on that 1984 pilot project was provided by Edys Quellmalz and Alice Furry, who, working with the Writing Assessment Advisory Committee, responded efficiently to the arduous demands and time line of the project. Other persons providing important leadership during the grade eight pilot project were county coordinators Jacqueline Chaparro, Alice Furry, Mel Grubb, and Katy Kane; and scoring directors Mary Barr, Nancy Brownell, Sherryl Broyles, Karla Dellner, Katy Kane, and Kathleen Naylor. Linda Murai, Joan Herman, and John Walters provided valuable administrative support that helped the project to move forward on schedule. Charles Cooper and Ina Mullis also served as advisors during the project. Pilot project readers were:

Kathryn Gail Ackley, Tom Alves, Floyd Andrus, Joanne Arellanes, Jackie Bartz, Fred Biggs, Judith Bomgardner, Frank Bonach, and Irene Boschken. Also, Sheila Budman, Rosalee Carlson, Jeanne Carrington, Jacquelyn Carter, Joyce Cellilli, Kathleen Clark, Peg Coffey, Maxine Cunningham, and Harriet Danufsky. Also, Diane Dawson, Jeannette Barthel Derry, Nancy Doran, James E. Dunwoody, Alyce Ellis, Robert Flores, Phyllis Ford, Jill Fulton, Peggy

Gurnik, Pauleen Holmes, Jeffrey Paul Jones, Janice La Duke, and Robeye Lamb. Also, Joe Lawrence, Gail Lindsey, Will Lindwall, Dee Ann McPherson, Pamela Meyer, Ellen Nevins, Jean Nix, Katie Peters, and Carole Pierce. Also, Nancy Preston, Lenny Preyss, Jane Reed, Pat Reneau, Ann Rich, Alice Rodgers, Arlene Rose, Anna Runyon, Harriet Savage, Jane Schaffer, and Elizabeth Shaw. Also, Lynn Smith, Momoyo Tada, David Toone, Mary Weber, Brett Weiss, Patricia Whittington, Richard Witte, and Stanley Zumbiel.

Following the 1984 pilot project, the CAP Writing Assessment Advisory Committee continued to function in a central advisory capacity, bringing continuity to the 1985–1987 developmental process. Special ad hoc groups were created to deal with specific tasks and issues arising along the way. The first of these tasks was to map a comprehensive array of the types of writing that exist in the real world and in a strong English–language arts curriculum for students in kindergarten through grade twelve. A special ad hoc committee was formed to address that important task in the context of designing a writing assessment. Participants in the group included:

Arthur Applebee, Charles Cooper, Mel Grubb, Catharine Lucas, Helen Lodge, Jim Moffett, and Edys Quellmalz.

Another important ad hoc committee was convened to resolve a broad variety of difficult scoring issues. Participants in these meetings were:

Arthur Applebee, Mary Barr, Tom Boysen, Charles Cooper, Alice Furry, Mel Grubb, Dorothy Maloney, Edys Quellmalz, and Flo Stevens. Phil Daro from the Department of Education served as facilitator.

Special groups of teachers were convened from time to time to assist in the development of literature-based prompts to ensure alignment between the writing assessment and the *Model Curriculum Standards*. Educators who have participated in these prompt development meetings include the following:

Ruby Bernstein, Loyal Carlon, Jan Gabay, Mary Lee Glass, Wayne Harsh, Joe Lawrence, Helen Lodge, Don Mayfield, and Susan McCleod. Also, Sharilyn McSwan, Irwin Peckham, Claire Pelton, Edys Quellmalz, Leo Ruth, Pat Taylor, Mary Weber, and Marilyn Whirry.

Moving toward large scale test development, in September, 1985, a Request for Proposal was distributed to companies interested in bidding for the development of the CAP Writing Assessment. The contract was awarded to Educational Testing Service (ETS), which had submitted a joint proposal with the California Writing Project; Charles Cooper of the University of California, San Diego; and Stanfill Associates. Representing the Western Regional Office of ETS were John Bianchini, Pat Elias, and Barbara Voltmer, who provided invaluable administrative, technical, and conceptual support. Jim Gray and Mary Anne Smith of the California Writing Project worked hand-in-hand with ETS and other professionals in providing leadership in both test development and staff development activities. Mary Barr, then director of the Curriculum Implementation Center for the English–Language Arts and now Director of the California Literature Project; and Mel Grubb, English–Language Arts Consultant for the Los Angeles County Office of Education, volunteered their services to ensure that the CAP Writing Assessment reflects the objectives of the California Literature Project. Julia Stanfill and Brandilyn Collins of Stanfill Associates headed the communications strand of the project, including the production of the *Writing Assessment Handbook*, with graphics and design by artist Laurel Daniel. Phillip Gonzales, from the University of Colorado, served as a special consultant throughout the prompt development and provided advice about the needs of bilingual and special education students.

Working closely with the Department of Education, the contractors formed the CAP Writing Development Team. This group of outstanding teachers represents the California Writing Project, the California Literature Project, and a cross-section of geographical regions and constituencies throughout the state. Working with Charles Cooper as facilitator, who was directly assisted by Irv Peckham, this team has provided key leadership in both test development and staff development activities for California. The members of the CAP Writing Development Team were:

Sherryl Broyles, Loyal Carlon, Fran Claggett, Kent Gill, Stephanie Graham, Alice Kawazoe, Joe Lawrence, Helen Lodge, Barbara Miller-Souviney, and Marie Neer. Also, Claire Pelton, Carol Penara, Nancy Preston, Sandy Rogers, Bill Saunders, Julia Simpson, Carol Tateishi, Fred Vogt, Marilyn Whirry, and Don Windsor.

The members of the CAP Writing Development Team created the writing guides contained in this document as indicated on each guide. Although many persons reviewed and critiqued all chapters of this document, the primary authors for each of the major chapters are:

Program Overview: Charles Cooper; **Management Guidelines:** Mel Grubb and Julia Stanfill; **Writing Assessment and the Curriculum:** Mary Barr; and **Students with Special Needs:** Phillip Gonzales.

Eighty outstanding teachers of English–language arts were identified through the California Writing Project to participate in a special field study of the writing prompts conducted in March of 1986. The field test participants were:

Yolanda Almanzar, John Angelo, Marilyn Baty, Bethel Bodine, Suzanne Borenstein, Darlene Bowe, Marcia Brownfield, Jo Ellen Carlson, Carl Chatfield, Lois Clark, William Clawson, Anne Coffer, Diane Cookston, Carol Crawford, Karen Daniel, Harriet Danufsky, Robin Davis, Mary Ann Dawson, Gary Diehl, Judy Dixon, Colleen Doyle, George Edmondson, Charles Evans, Cynthia Evans, Joanna Exacoustos, Audrey Fielding, Ellen Finan, Lawrence Fischer, Russ Frank, Maureen Fredrickson, Michael Genga, Theodora Goodrich, Kathleen Grubb, Robert Hagopian, Kip Hearron, Carol Hendsch, Joyce Hollenbeck, Bonita Horn, Mary Hubler, Todd Huck, Yvonne Hutchinson, Sheralyn Ilg, Margaret Janofsky, Ellen Jeffrey, Leilani Johnson, James Jordon, Susan Jundanian, Kristi Kraemer, Richard Latimer, Henry Lewenberg, Andree Licoscos, Gail Lindsey, Edith Lucas, Anita Lyons, Ann Martin, Donald Mayfield, Clara Meek, Jack Meyer, Carol Minner, Michael Mitchell, Bryce Moore, John Nicholson, Judith Ohlemacher, Glenn Patchell, John Peckler, Will Penna, Pam Peschken, Winnie Phillips, Joan Price, Michael Quinn, Susan Rich, Elaine Serrano, Gail Siegel, Geraldine Slaght, Rita Sorenson, Momoyo Tada, Harrie Walker, Annie Winfield, Daniel Wolter, Helen Ying.

Many educators participated as readers and CAP writing evaluators in California's first statewide central and regional scoring sessions during the summer of 1987. Those readers were:

Downey: Irma Bank, Frank Bonach, Darlene Bowe, Sherryl Broyles, Rosalee Carlson, Jaime Castellanos, Patricia Ellis, Jane Hancock, Barbara Hawkins, Errol Jacobs, David Jay, Jane Livezey, Wendy Lopour, Helen Lodge, Phyllis Manley, Valerie McCall, Mike McClure, Viola Morrison, Barbara Myrick, Barbara Smith-Palmer, Claire Pelton, Joseph Provisor, Michelle Reynolds, Alice Rodgers, Sandra Rogers, Donna Rowland, Bill Saunders, Harriet Savage, Elaine Serrano, Cynthia Shelton, Julia Ann Simpson, Sally Smith, Grace Warren, Marilyn Whirry, Richard Witto.

Sacramento: Marlene Barber, Linda Blaney, Fran Claggett, Mary Lou Gerbi, Kent Gill, Jeffrey Hallford, Pauline Holmes, Benjamin Jameson, Sylvia Stevens Jones, James Jordon, Alice Kawazoe, Robeye Lamb, Paul Lathrop, Joe Lawrence, George Lober, Vern McCorkle, Ben Morasch, John Peckler, Nancy Preston, Jacqueline Proett, Arlene Rose, Pauline Sahakian, JoAnn Speakman, Carol Tateishi, Sue Thomas, Barbara Vaterlaus, Christine Watkins, Lynn Zumbiel. (Readers' Aide: Mary Lue Wilson; ETS Staff: Pat Elias; California Writing Project: Mary Ann Smith; Sacramento County Office of Education: Lynn Kinghorn.)

San Diego: Kathryn Gail Ackley, Margaret Bowles, Loyal Carlon, Joyce Cellilli, Gerardo Chavez, Lynne Coffin, Charles Cooper, Jon Davies, James Dunwoody, Kathleen Dutenhoeffer, Carolyn Foy-Stromber, Diane Hamilton, Mary Lee Huntington, Robin Briscoe Luby, Marcia Mattson, Kathleen McKee, Linda Miles, Barbara Miller-Souviney, Akiko Charlene Morimoto, Marie Neer, Peggy Ormsby, Irv Peckham, Carol Penara, Vivian Kay Peters, Lenny Preyss, Stefany Sanders, Jane Schaffer, Barbara Shaw, Mary Steckbauer, Judy Tillyer, Fred Vogt, Mary Weber, Patricia Whittington, Don Windsor, Cat Xander, Ed Yandall. (Readers' Aide: Joanne Acker; ETS Staff: Pat Elias; Department of Education, San Diego County: Jacqueline Chaparro.)

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We extend a special thanks to Shelly Spiegel Coleman of the California Association for Bilingual Education and to Fred Tempes and Daniel Holt from the Department's Bilingual Education Unit for reviewing and providing useful suggestions for the section "Students With Special Needs."

The production of this document and the entire staff development effort supporting this project would not have been possible without the moral and fiscal support of Laura Wagner. We especially appreciate her insistence on a spirit of cooperation among the many groups in the educational community as CAP writing staff development flourishes. Our mentors and colleagues within the Department

of Education have provided a model for this kind of cooperative activity, especially James R. Smith, Francie Alexander, Sally Mentor, Donavan Merck, George Nemetz, and Gary Ducket.

We sincerely appreciate all of the dedicated professionals with whom we have had the privilege of working over the long development of this exciting project. We are grateful for their willingness to devote time that was being saved for other professional efforts; for their willingness to endure unconscionably long waits before expense checks arrived; for their patience and tolerance for the opinions of others in an arena where all professionals hold tenaciously to carefully formed views; and most of all, for making our lives richer, more exciting and fulfilling. They have put our assumptions to the test, given us new perspectives, and taught us much about writing, about writing assessment, and about ourselves. We look forward to working with you as together we draw out the full potential of assessment for helping teachers help students improve their ability to think, express thoughts more effectively, and develop a broad repertoire of capabilities to communicate those thoughts and feelings; that is, to be able to "play freely the whole symbolic scale."

From Teacher to Teacher

The CAP writing guides were written by California classroom teachers for our colleagues. Our intent was to provide a practical and open-ended document that contains descriptions of the eight types of writing tested in the eighth grade—report of information, evaluation, problem solution, autobiographical incident, firsthand biography, observational writing, story, and speculation about cause or effect—as well as information about the importance, characteristics, and interrelatedness of the various types of writing.

In addition, each guide includes the following:

- Exemplary student essays and an example of one student's writing process
- Suggestions for classroom writing assignments
- Samples of a range of students' writings, including essays written for the CAP writing test
- Examples of published essays
- Recommended readings for use in the classroom
- A scoring guide for rhetorical effectiveness

As members of the CAP Writing Development Team, the following educators helped to develop this writing assessment handbook (years of membership are indicated in parenthesis):

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Program Overview

As stated in the *English–Language Arts Model Curriculum Guide: Kindergarten Through Grade Eight*, the goals of English–language arts instruction involve preparing all students to (1) function as informed and effective citizens in our democratic society; (2) function effectively in the world of work; and (3) realize personal fulfillment. In supporting these goals, English teachers recognize that humans use language actively, interactively, constructively, strategically, and fluently as they create and communicate meaning. Students grow in their ability to use language as they explore the universe of discourse through their reading, writing, and thinking.

The writers of the *Model Curriculum Standards: Grades Nine Through Twelve* for English–language arts and the *English–Language Arts Model Curriculum Guide* envision a meaning-based English–language arts program that engages students actively in writing and reflecting on literature and human experience. Standard Number Twenty-Five of the *Model Curriculum Standards* states: "Assessment methods and tools should be aligned with the new emphasis (1) on substance; (2) on the integration of writing, comprehension, and speaking; and (3) on contextual acquisition of vocabulary and technical skills."[1]

Clearly, multiple-choice tests will not do. An entirely new approach to assessment is needed—one that goes beyond multiple-choice questions, one that integrates the language arts, one that involves a range of whole types of writing existing in the real world and in the best English programs, one in which literature can stand at the core along with the experience that students bring to it, one that approaches writing as a process, one that reflects a range of higher-order thinking, one that can be extended across the curriculum, and one that is for all students.

The California Assessment Program launched such an assessment in the spring of 1987 for the eighth grade. The twelfth-grade assessment followed in December of 1988. All students who normally take the CAP test participate in the writing assessment. The essays are scored in the summer, and results are reported in the fall. A test administration period of one hour, with 45 minutes of uninterrupted writing time, is required for the writing assessment.

This effort was spearheaded by the Department of Education in conjunction with the CAP Writing Assessment Advisory Committee, which consisted of elementary and secondary teachers; curriculum specialists; testing experts and administrators from district and county offices; university professors; and representatives from the California Writing Project, the California Literature Project, and the National Assessment of Educational Progress. The writing assessment committee functioned in an advisory role from its creation in 1984, when a grade eight pilot project was conducted, until 1988. In addition to the advisory committee, the CAP Writing Development Team, which consists almost entirely of eighth-grade and twelfth-grade teachers and California Writing Project and California Literature Project representatives, was constituted to provide leadership in the central test development and staff development activities.

Program Description

California's writing assessment, designed to be a state-of-the-art assessment, reflects the philosophy of the *Model Curriculum Standards* and the *Model Curriculum Guide for English–Language Arts: Kindergarten Through Grade Eight* and research about effective writing instruction. The writing assessment has been designed to:

- Monitor achievement in writing in California schools and detect any decline or improvement in achievement at grade eight.
- Assess the implementation of the *English–Language Arts Framework*.
- Encourage more writing and more different types of writing in California classrooms.
- Provide information and materials that will help teachers strengthen their writing programs.

The writing assessment relies on the traditional CAP matrix sampling format to focus on school-

[1] *Model Curriculum Standards: Grades Nine Through Twelve* (First edition). Sacramento: California State Department of Education, 1985, p. E-32.

level achievement, and it assesses a variety of types of writing to identify the strengths and weaknesses of students and recognize schools that encourage frequent writing in a broad array of writing/thinking tasks.

California's new writing assessment can best be understood by a consideration of the three primary parts of the program:

- The domains or types of writing to be tested
- The writing tasks or prompts
- The scoring system

Each part of the program, as well as the rationale and development process for each part, is described in the following paragraphs.

Types of Writing

Eight types of writing were selected by the CAP Writing Assessment Advisory Committee as most appropriate for the eighth grade: autobiographical incident, report of information, problem solution, evaluation, story, observational writing, firsthand biography, and speculation about causes or effects. Those types of writing allow students to write from personal experience, from information acquired in all subjects in the curriculum, and from literature. Each student writes an essay in response to a topic (prompt) drawn from one of the eight types of writing.

Rationale

Assessment of student achievement or of the effectiveness of instructional programs must concern itself with the central domains of a school subject. In the case of writing, those domains are the various types of writing assigned in exemplary school writing programs. The purpose of a writing assessment must be to determine students' thinking, problem-solving, and text-making strategies in varied writing situations.

To assess writing achievement, then, we assess students' skills in writing dialogues, fables, autobiographies, reports, summaries, interpretations, proposals, evaluations, and so on. We want to know what students can do when they reflect on personal experience, describe how something works, speculate about the causes of a trend, interpret an unfamiliar story or poem, or defend an evaluation of a movie. The criteria and standards of assessment can then be derived from a careful study of each type of writing. Because each type requires special composing and text-making strategies, the criteria and standards differ for each type. The eight types of writing cover a variety of writing experiences, including presentational or imaginative writing (story), personal writing (autobiographical incident and firsthand biography), expository or explanatory writing (report of information and observational writing), and argument or persuasive writing (problem solution, speculation about causes or effects, and evaluation).

The approach is consistent with the *Model Curriculum Guide* and with Standard Number Ten in the *Model Curriculum Standards*: "Districts and/or schools develop a systematic writing program."[2] Under this standard, educators are encouraged to increase the frequency of writing assignments, increase the number of types of assignments, assign types of writing that exist in the real world, and teach writing across the curriculum.

It is also consistent with Standard Number Eleven: "All students will learn that writing is a process that includes stages called prewriting, drafting, revising, and editing."[3] Those writing stages include higher-level thinking processes, such as convergent and divergent thinking, analysis and synthesis, and inferential and evaluative skills. Under this standard teachers are reminded that:

- Students develop fluency in writing as they write frequently on a variety of topics.
- Students develop a sense of audience for their writing as they compose papers for a variety of groups or individuals.
- Students identify a special purpose for each piece of writing.

Presenting several writing tasks in different types of writing ensures that the writing assessment reflects the *Model Curriculum Standards* and that it does not narrow or constrict school writing programs. Quite the contrary, presenting several tasks encourages careful teaching of several types of writing in the spirit of the *Model Curriculum Standards*.

Development

Our first step in developing the writing assessment was to specify a comprehensive list of types of writing that would define the possible content domains to be assessed. We sought a comprehensible framework including types of writing that would be desirable in a complete writing curriculum. The framework covered a broad range of types including presentational (imaginative), personal, expository (explanatory), and persuasive writing. It was from this comprehensive list of types of writing

[2] *Model Curriculum Standards*, p. E-14.
[3] *Model Curriculum Standards*, p. E-17.

that the Writing Assessment Advisory Committee derived the types to be assessed at grade eight. Only continuing field testing and developmental work can disclose the types of writing that are ideally suited to a grade level. In the absence of such definitive information, the Writing Assessment Advisory Committee identified the eight types of writing, using the following criteria:

- *Curricular emphasis of the best school writing programs.* We asked whether California's best writing teachers at a grade level were likely to assign a type of writing. We wanted to be certain that the best teachers would both value a type of writing and consider it central to the curriculum as suggested by the *Model Curriculum Standards.*
- *Students' reading experiences.* We asked whether most students would have been reading a type of writing on our list.
- *Students' cognitive development.* We asked whether students were developmentally ready to engage in a type of writing.
- *Curricular sequence between grades three and twelve.* We considered whether a grade-level set of writing types appropriately followed an earlier set and at the same time prepared students for a later set. We also considered what kinds of writing and thinking are needed for success in other disciplines, such as history/social science and science.
- *Appropriateness for testing.* We asked whether it was fair to expect students to compose a given type of writing in a 45-minute testing period. Such types as song lyrics and poetry, while desirable in a complete writing curriculum, were judged as inappropriate for assessment purposes.

Writing Tasks

For each type of writing to be tested there are several writing tasks or prompts. A test administration period of one hour, with 45 minutes of uninterrupted writing time, is required so that students have an adequate amount of time regardless of which prompt they happen to receive. Each writing task for the grade eight test is divided into two parts: a writing situation and directions for writing. An illustrative prompt designed to assess evaluation follows:

Writing Situation: Think about all the literature—stories, novels, poems, plays, essays—you have read this year in your English class. Choose the one you have enjoyed the most.

Directions for Writing: Write an essay for your English teacher in which you evaluate your favorite literary work. Give reasons for your judgment. Tell your teacher why this work is valuable or not valuable. Your teacher will use your evaluation in selecting literature for next year's class.

Rationale

The writing situation orients students to the type of writing they will be doing, and it gives them a specific topic or a choice of topics. It defines (directly and through examples) any special terms or concepts. It focuses students' thinking and planning and helps them anticipate problems they must solve and information they must generate as they write.

The directions for writing suggest requirements and features of the essay without being prescriptive or formulaic. The directions provide a purpose for the essay, and they always mention readers, sometimes identifying a particular reader and at other times merely referring to readers' expectations or needs. This process ensures that the prompts are based on a communication model for which a specific audience has been identified.

Every writing task gives all students an equal chance to demonstrate their skills as writers. The array of tasks gives every school and district an equal opportunity to demonstrate high levels of student writing achievement. Each task is worded clearly and invitingly in a conversational style, providing some context without unnecessary wordiness.

Development

The prompt development for this assessment has been a comprehensive, rigorous, and painstaking process. Initially, large numbers of prompts were collected from numerous sources, including district item collections, Educational Testing Service advanced placement tests, other state assessment programs, the National Assessment of Educational Progress, and California teachers' files. These prompts were first classified by the type of writing to be assessed in grades eight and twelve. The Writing Assessment Advisory Committee and several other groups met throughout the course of a year to develop and add to the prompt pool prompts for the types of writing selected by the committee for grades eight and twelve. In February, 1986, the CAP Writing Development Team was formed to

assume responsibilities for test development. Before its first formal meeting, members of this group reviewed all of the prompts in the prompt pool and wrote five to ten new prompts. At their first meeting the CAP Writing Development Team and some members of the Writing Assessment Advisory Committee narrowed a pool of 300 prompts to a pool of 156 prompts.

Eighty outstanding teachers were identified through the California Writing Project to participate in a special field study of the 156 prompts in March, 1986. Each of these teachers administered two essay topics to 100 students (50 per topic), helped students complete a student questionnaire, examined the students' essays and questionnaires, conducted interviews with students about the prompts and their difficulties with them, summarized the information on each of the two essay topics on teachers' questionnaires, and returned the materials for the scrutiny of the CAP Writing Development Team. The prompts were then revised and narrowed to a 56-item pool by the team members, who used carefully specified prompt revision guidelines. In addition, the prompts were checked against the following six criteria. According to the criteria, each prompt should:

- Invite the type of writing we want (all or nearly all student essays are readily recognizable as the type we want to elicit).
- Engage the thinking, problem-solving, composing, and text-making processes central to the type of writing.
- Be an assignment that teachers would want to give to students.
- Be challenging for many students.
- Be easy for many students and produce interesting, not just proficient, writing.
- Be liked by some students.

Seven prompts for each of the eight types of writing then were field tested. Every district that wished to participate in field testing was included, resulting in a statewide sample of 25,195 students.

The papers from the May, 1986, field test were then used for the development of the scoring guides for the central and regional scoring sessions conducted in the summer. Data and reader responses generated from the scoring sessions resulted in additional feedback to be used for continued refinement of the prompts.

A final reading in December, 1986, resulted in additional feedback for final revisions of the grade eight prompts. The essential steps in this test development process have been repeated with minor modifications for the test development and renewal process every year since 1986.

Scoring System

To monitor achievement in writing, the readers for the CAP writing assessment analyze and score essays (1) for rhetorical effectiveness; (2) for a general feature, such as coherence or elaboration; and (3) for conventions.

Rhetorical Effectiveness

All writing from the various tasks devised to assess one type of writing is scored with a special criterion-referenced scoring guide. A rhetorical effectiveness score (on a scale of one to six) is assigned to each essay. That score focuses on thinking and writing requirements for each type of writing. The six rhetorical score points identify a wide range of achievement in a type of writing—from inadequate through acceptable to exceptional. Results enable a school to know how well its students have learned to compose several types of writing.

Feature Score

All essays written in a type of writing are also scored (also on a scale of one to six) for an appropriate general feature, such as coherence or elaboration. The feature will be tailored to each specific type of writing. The six feature score points identify a wide range of achievement with respect to the specific feature within each type of writing. That score provides additional information about school-level achievement that helps school and district personnel identify strengths and weaknesses in writing programs.

Conventions

Essays are also examined (on a scale of one to six) to determine students' success with the conventions of standard edited English. The conventions score reflects student mastery of English usage, mechanics, and spelling.

Rationale

A three-level scoring system has numerous advantages. The rhetorical score provides teachers and administrators with information about students' achievements in the special thinking and composing requirements of a type of writing, and the scoring guide provides clear directions to teachers to use in helping students improve their writing achievement without being limiting or restrictive. Teachers can compare student achievement among different types

of writing so that instructional strengths and weaknesses can be determined, leading to improved curricula focusing on different kinds of higher-order thinking, writing, and communication abilities. The special feature score provides additional information about students' ability to achieve coherence within a given type of writing or to provide sufficient support and elaboration for a given discourse type. Evidence from existing CAP tests and from the National Assessment of Educational Progress suggests that students have difficulty perceiving and achieving organizational patterns within text and providing sufficient support and elaboration for their generalizations. The special feature score provides feedback with respect to these abilities tailored to the context of each type of writing. The conventions score reflects information about students' mastery of the conventions of standard edited English so that teachers can compare and contrast student achievement on higher-order composing skills (as reflected in the first two scores) to student achievement in the more mechanical supporting skills of standard English usage, punctuation, capitalization, and spelling—all reported holistically as a general impression conventions score.

The scoring system corresponds to the concept of teaching writing as a process as elaborated in the *Handbook for Planning an Effective Writing Program* and in the *Model Curriculum Standards* for the English–language arts. The rhetorical effectiveness score and feature score reflect higher-order thinking, composing and communication abilities, which are central to the prewriting, drafting, and revising stages of the writing process. The conventions score is separate and last and corresponds to the concept that supporting skills are best treated in the context of real writing during the editing stage of the writing process, after the student has wrestled with the ideas and information he or she wishes to communicate to a given audience.

Development

The scoring system evolved out of a 1984 grade eight pilot project. Several scoring systems were explored during this preliminary study because the primary goal of the pilot project was to examine various writing assessment methodologies to determine the most appropriate approach for the California Assessment Program.

A special ad hoc committee was formed to resolve a number of complicated scoring issues that had arisen during the grade eight pilot project. After considering the instructional implications of each scoring system and the relationship of those to the *Model Curriculum Standards*, the ad hoc committee agreed on the three-part scoring system described here.

Members of the CAP Writing Development Team developed the scoring guides for the types of writing to be assessed at grade eight. The criteria and standards embedded in each scoring guide were derived from a careful study of each type of writing. Members of the CAP Writing Development Team first wrote on a given prompt from the array of prompts for a given writing type. The teacher-created essays were then used as the basis for a discussion about the special characteristics of each type of writing. Using an abundance of student essays produced during the May field tests, members of the team continued an in-depth study of the students' papers to determine the special requirements and range of possibilities for each type of writing. Once the scoring guides were drafted, they were made available to the members of the Writing Assessment Advisory Committee for review. The scoring guides were then tested during central and regional scoring sessions in July, 1986. Reader responses from the scoring sessions provided useful feedback for continuing revision and refinement of the guides. Additional scoring guide development sessions were conducted throughout the fall of 1986. In December all parts of the three-part scoring system were tested.

Special Features

California's new writing assessment has numerous features that make it unique in the nation. These features arise from the alignment of the assessment with the *Model Curriculum Standards* for English–language arts, a highly sophisticated, state-of-the-art curriculum. The most important of these special features are highlighted here:

- Literature and the experiences students bring to it are central to the new writing assessment. Just as the *Model Curriculum Standards* encourage teaching a variety of literary genres and kinds of writing, so does the new writing assessment cover a variety of writing types. Each CAP writing guide in the *Writing Assessment Handbook* contains illustrative student essays, an example of a published piece exemplifying a given writing type, and lists of high-quality literary selections that can be used to help center the teaching of reading, writing, and oral language around literature.

  Each prompt can be classified as one of three kinds: (1) experience-based, which requires the students to rely only on per-

sonal experience; (2) literature-based, in which students are asked to draw on their memories of a favorite book, story, fictional character, hero, and so forth in their responses to the prompt or in which a literary text is provided in conjunction with a prompt; and (3) curriculum-based, which requires students to draw on their reading and studies in other subjects and from their observations of events and activities. If all of the prompts were literature-based, certain kinds of extremely valuable student writing, such as autobiographical incident and firsthand biography, would be completely excluded from the assessment, resulting in a much narrower array of writing types. Certainly, if we wish students to acquire the ability to lead "an examined life," we must include types of writing that encourage students to reflect on their own experiences as well as on literature. The final pool of prompts in the assessment include all three kinds with the greatest emphasis on experience-based prompts. The slow and careful phase-in of types of writing for the writing assessment was designed to give curriculum planners and teachers time to orchestrate the implications of a fully integrated language arts assessment at the local level. Thus, additional literature-based and curriculum-based prompts can be incorporated in future years.

- A complete range of higher-level thinking processes such as convergent and divergent thinking, analysis, synthesis, and inferential and evaluative skills—as called for in the *Model Curriculum Standards*—is being tapped through this assessment. In the writing assessment students cannot get by with merely filling in blanks. They must show in writing their ability to think; that is, to draw on knowledge, including memory of personal experience, to do such things as narrate an incident, report information, argue for a solution to a problem, and justify a judgment. Each type of writing embodies a complete set of thinking, composing, decision-making, and problem-solving requirements that cannot be addressed without engaging those centers of the brain that preside over higher-level thinking.
- The types of writing/thinking to be assessed in the grade eight assessment can easily be extended across the curriculum. For example, report of information, problem solution, speculation about causes or effects, and evaluation are kinds of writing occurring naturally in the study of science and history/social science. The CAP writing guides in the *Writing Assessment Handbook* include examples of prompts that can be used in a variety of curricular areas. This is in keeping with Model Curriculum Standard Number Eight, in which students are urged to learn more about the perspectives of other disciplines, such as science, history, economics, mathematics, and art. Under this standard departments are encouraged to plan their syllabi together, allowing each area of thought to impact on the other areas, enriching and balancing them. History, science, mathematics, economics, physical education, and art teachers may wish to become more familiar with the types of writing being assessed through the California Assessment Program to expand their thinking about desirable writing/thinking tasks possible within their disciplines. All teachers at a school site will be interested in the results of their eighth-grade writing assessment since these writing/thinking skills must be the shared concern of all educators.
- A test worthy of reflecting the far-reaching goals of the *Model Curriculum Standards* must be an achievement test, not a minimal competency test. The purpose of this test is not to rank, categorize, label, diagnose, or in any way address the specific ability levels of individual students. The assessment is not designed to measure the minimal skills that students might need to function at a marginal level in society. On the contrary, the writing assessment is a wide-range achievement test for all students. It enables all students to demonstrate their achievements as writers, while challenging the best students. It sets high standards of achievement for each type of writing assessed. Since the scoring system describes in detail the standards of achievement for each type of writing, teachers and students will know what they must do to achieve success. Hence, the scoring system is sensitive to good teaching and improved achievement as the characteristics of "good" writing are demystified. The results will be useful at the program level for strengthening schoolwide writing programs to benefit all students.

Time Line

Students entering public school in 1990 may participate in the CAP writing assessment four times before they graduate from high school. If the total program is fully funded, by 1993 the test would be given in the third, sixth, eighth, and twelfth grades.

The following schedule outlines the proposed implementation sequence by grade level and the approximate timing for test administration, scoring, and reporting.

Writing Assessment Time Line

Month	1986-87	1987-88	1988-89	1989-90	1990-91	1991-92	1992-93
September				Grade 8 teacher reports for 1988-89 distributed	Grade 8 teacher reports for 1989-90 distributed	Grades 6 and 8 teacher reports for 1990-91 distributed	Grades 6 and 8 teacher reports for 1991-92 distributed
October		Grade 8 teacher reports for 1986-87 distributed	Grade 8 teacher reports for 1987-88 distributed				
November				Grade 8 district/ school reports for 1988-89 distributed	Grade 8 district/ school reports for 1989-90 distributed	Grades 6 and 8 district/school reports for 1990-91 distributed	Grades 6 and 8 district/school reports for 1991-92 distributed
December			Grade 12 assessment administered (4 types tested)	Grade 12 assessment administered (6 types tested)	Grade 12 assessment administered (8 types tested)	Grade 12 assessment administered (8 types tested)	Grade 12 assessment administered
January							
February				Grade 12 essays scored	Grade 12 essays scored	Grade 12 essays scored	Grade 12 essays scored

This schedule is for grades 6, 8, and 12 only.
Full implementation is dependent on state funding. Exact dates for future years are subject to revision.
DWA for grade three, although included in future plans, has not yet been added to the proposed funding schedule. For this reason, grade three does not appear.

Writing Assessment Time Line (continued)

Month	1986-87	1987-88	1988-89	1989-90	1990-91	1991-92	1992-93
March			Grade 12 essays scored				
April	Grade 8 assessment administered (4 types tested)	Grade 8 assessment administered (6 types tested)	Grade 8 assessment administered (8 types tested)	Grade 8 assessment administered (8 types tested)	Grades 6 (4 types) and 8 (8 types) assessments administered	Grades 6 and 8 assessments administered	Grades 6 and 8 assessments administered
May			Grade 12 teacher reports for 1988-89 distributed	Grade 12 teacher reports for 1989-90 distributed	Grade 12 teacher reports for 1990-91 distributed	Grade 12 teacher reports for 1991-92 distributed	Grade 12 teacher reports for 1992-93 distributed
June							
July	Grade 8 essays scored	Grade 8 essays scored	Grade 8 essays scored	Grade 8 essays scored	Grades 6 and 8 essays scored	Grades 6 and 8 essays scored	Grades 6 and 8 essays scored
August			Grade 12 district/ school reports for 1988-89 distributed	Grade 12 district/ school reports for 1989-90 distributed	Grade 12 district/ school reports for 1990-91 distributed	Grade 12 district/ school reports for 1991-92 distributed	Grade 12 district/ school reports for 1992-93 distributed

This schedule is for grades 6, 8, and 12 only.

Reporting

The results of the grade eight writing assessment are reported annually in three documents:

- *A Report to Teachers on Writing Achievement* is designed for instructional use by principals and teachers. It is scheduled for distribution in the fall.
- A school and district report entitled *Survey of Academic Skills, Writing Achievement*, which follows the *Report to Teachers*, is designed for reporting to the public, for making district and school comparisons, and for charting year-to-year progress. This report is normally scheduled for distribution in November or December.
- A state report provides California's policy makers, journalists, educators, and parents with statewide results and interpretations of the writing achievement of California's eighth graders and recommendations for improvement. Last in the series, this report follows the school and district report.

Teacher and Principal Reports

A Report to Teachers on Writing Achievement is specifically directed to teachers. A sufficient number of copies is provided annually so that every eighth grade teacher can have his or her own copy. This report, although called a report to teachers, contains only school-level information and not individual classroom information. *A Report to Principals on Writing Achievement* is included as part this annual mailing to every school site. The *Report to Teachers* is tailored to the information needs of principals and classroom teachers. It gives a short description of each type of writing tested and each type of score (rhetorical effectiveness, feature, and conventions) assigned. The results contained in this report are not intended for public reporting. One set of annotated student essays, illustrating performance at each score point on the 1-to-6 rhetorical effectiveness scale for each type of writing assessed, is typically included for every school principal to share with teachers for interpretive and instructional use. It is imperative that district administrators distribute copies of *A Report to Teachers* and *A Report to Principals* to the appropriate school sites, or the benefits of these important resources will be unrealized for students and teachers.

School and District Report

The second report, entitled *Survey of Academic Skills: Writing Achievement*, follows *A Report to Teachers*. This report is designed for charting progress over the years, reporting to the public, and making school and district comparisons. This report begins with tables containing content-referenced descriptions of each score point for each type of writing assessed, answering the question "How well do the students in my school (district) write and compose in the eight types of writing assessed by CAP in a first-draft writing situation?" Additional tables answer other questions, such as "How well do the students in my school do in composing (rhetorical effectiveness) as compared with correctness (conventions)?" "How do my school and district compare to all other schools and districts in the state?" "How does my school compare with schools with similar background characteristics?" and "How did subgroups (such as boys versus girls) within my school compare in writing achievement?" Results are presented in a way that allows for comparisons among schools by accounting for the relative differences in difficulty among writing assignments. Results are reported on the scale used for other CAP tests in which the statewide mean is set at 250 for the baseline year of testing (1987 for grade eight writing assessment).

State Report

The third report is the state report, which presents the statewide results of the assessment. This report includes year-to-year changes, patterns of strength and weakness statewide, illustrative essays, interpretations of the results for each type of writing, teacher comments, and recommendations. The first state report, *Writing Achievement of California Eighth Graders: A First Look* (1989), contains a description of the assessment and an explanation of its rationale and development. Subsequent state reports will not contain information on these topics in the same degree of detail. For this reason *A First Look* is the foundation document in the series.

Management Guidelines

Preparing for Change

The state's direct writing assessment may well be one of the most important elements of expansion planned for the California Assessment Program (CAP) over the next decade. Its impact on evaluation and instruction is being felt at all grade levels throughout the curriculum. The success of an assessment program of this magnitude depends on how well all of those affected, directly or indirectly, understand and support the program.

This section of the handbook includes information for district- and site-level managers who are responsible for preparing boards of education, staff members (certificated and classified), students, parents, other involved citizens, and the media for the writing assessment. Answers to frequently asked questions about the direct writing assessment are highlighted as a reference and for use in staff and community publications.

Activities outlined provide a framework for linking the writing assessment with the goals and objectives of each district's instructional program. Materials for local use include:

- A sample action plan for districts and schools
- Sample letters and other types of information pieces for students, staff, and parents
- Questions and answers most frequently asked about the CAP writing assessment
- Sample informational transparencies

Many administrators will find that they have already used a number of the suggestions highlighted in this section of the handbook. Existing management plans for some districts and school sites may already focus on the types of writing to be assessed. Other districts may need major planning and development activities to be prepared for the writing assessment. The following guidelines are designed to provide whatever level of assistance managers need to help their students succeed.

Developing a Management Plan

A management plan can help district and school site personnel in identifying and organizing the key tasks that must be accomplished to prepare for the direct assessment of writing at grade eight. Before the major management tasks can be undertaken, they must be clearly defined. This requires the early involvement of those affected by or responsible for carrying out identified instructional goals. After determining what needs to be done, district and school administrators can decide how, when, and by whom each task is to be accomplished.

Putting the Plan into Action

Implementing the management plan begins with an examination of the district's current educational philosophy and curriculum as they relate to this assessment. District goals should be reviewed, modified or developed to ensure that the material covered in the assessment is integrated into the curriculum.

California schools serve a diverse student population, diverse in the ways that students learn and respond to instruction. Other sections of this handbook suggest ways to help all students prepare for the direct assessment of writing, including limited-English-proficient students or those in certain remedial programs.

The responsibility for establishing policies and allocating resources to support instructional plans rests with district boards of education. School administrators need to present these decision makers with timely information regarding the direct assessment of writing at grade eight. The following question and answer section may be useful to administrators in this effort.

Education is a shared responsibility. The professional staff must recommend for board adoption what students are to learn and the resources necessary for implementation of the curriculum. Desired student outcomes need to be clearly stated and resources must be adequate for effectiveness. Students must realize that they have the responsibility for their individual efforts. Parents must demonstrate that they value education and encourage their children to strive toward increasingly higher levels of achievement. Informed professional staff, parents, and students working toward common goals can be successful in achieving higher district scores.

Keeping the Public Informed

Keeping the various publics that a district serves informed is critical for building local support. Key to that communications process is the media—newspapers, radio, and television. These information channels reach all segments of their communities and are usually viewed as the most credible sources. Information about all of the significant features related to the assessment of writing should be made available to reporters on a regular basis. They will decide what information should be presented to readers, viewers, and listeners. The district's interest is best served by providing information that fills the news media's needs and specifications. Reporters cannot report what they do not know.

Proposed Management Activity Checklist

	Action	Person responsible	Estimated time line
	Review District English–Language Arts Goals		
____	• Assess district goals in English–language arts and/or writing continuum, district educational plans, current textbooks, and other classroom support materials. Check to ensure that instructional goals provide that all students will experience the following:		
	– Writing as a process		
	– Systematic writing (over the span of grades) that incorporates the types of writing plus the content to be tested by the California Assessment Program direct assessment of writing		
____	• Adjust, as necessary, existing English–language arts course content to provide for a systematic writing program that integrates into the curriculum the types of writing in the CAP assessment of writing.		
	Augment District/School Staff Development Programs		
____	• Provide for teachers opportunities to develop the knowledge and expertise to teach writing as a process, incorporating the CAP types of writing (Section I).		
____	• Use the California State Department of Education publications on which this assessment is based. These publications include.		
	– *The English–Language Arts Framework for California Public Schools* (1987)		
	– *Handbook for Planning an Effective Writing Program* (1986)		
	– *Model Curriculum Standards: Grades Nine Through Twelve* (1985) (See section on English–language arts.)		
	– *English–Language Arts Model Curriculum Guide: Kindergarten Through Grade Eight* (1988)		
____	• Provide for district and school-site administrators, mentor teachers, and classroom teachers to attend conferences, institutes, and workshops related to the teaching of writing.		
____	• Provide for ongoing staff development that meets various needs of all English–language arts teachers, including teachers of limited-English-proficient students or students in other special-help programs.		
	Establish a Budget for English–Language Arts Program Enhancements		
____	• Provide for release time for teachers to attend conferences, institutes, and workshops during their working day.		

	Action	Person responsible	Estimated time line
____	• Secure trained consultants to provide high-quality staff development.		
____	• Fund the costs of district and school-site administrators, mentor teachers, and classroom teachers to attend conferences, institutes, and workshops.		
____	• Provide for teachers to develop teaching materials that augment those listed in the CAP writing guides (sections VI through XIII).		
____	• Provide for the purchase of teaching materials and textbooks that support the test-content specifications.		
	Introduce the CAP Assessment of Writing		
	District Tasks		
	Board of Education		
____	• Inform the governing board of components of the CAP test, staff development plans, curricular modifications, and budget needs.		
____	• Recommend board adoption of the district management plan for implementation.		
	Staff		
____	• Present an overview for the administrative staff that describes basic content, format, administration, time line, staff development opportunities, and assistance materials.		
____	• Invite feedback from principals and curriculum leaders concerning staff development and curricular needs.		
____	• Determine management strategies for school-level planning and implementation.		
____	• Distribute an overview of the new test, including questions and answers, and a schedule of testing to certificated and classified staffs.		
____	• Prepare brief announcement of CAP test for staff bulletin (newsletter) prior to spring testing.		
	Parents and Community		
____	• Present overview of CAP direct writing assessment to PTA, district/school site council, and other parent groups. (See section XV.)		
____	• Prepare brief articles for principals to use with newsletters to parents (prior to spring testing and during the reporting period). (See samples at end of this section.)		
____	• Include writing assessment presentation as a program offering for community group meetings (service clubs, chamber of commerce, and so forth). Some service clubs or chambers will print information articles in membership newsletters.		

	Action	Person responsible	Estimated time line
	• Review district's community publications for possible inclusion of information articles and features that spotlight exemplary writing programs and/or related staff development activities.		
	• Prepare press release for responding to media requests for information about local writing instruction and assessment. The news media may want information about: – The effect of the CAP assessment on the district's curriculum – How the assessment will be administered to special student populations – Who will participate in the test – Who will be scoring the student papers and what the report will look like – Specific teachers with exemplary writing programs – Special activities (young authors, writing fairs, and so forth) that promote good writing – Results of the writing assessment at the district and school levels		
	School Tasks Staff		
	• Present overview of CAP writing test to certificated and classified staff.		
	• With those teachers directly involved in the processes described in the testing/reporting and program overview sections, review the training materials pertaining to the types of writing to be assessed.		
	• With the teachers involved, assess their needs for staff development and classroom support material as they relate to the CAP test.		
	• Review the impact of the writing assessment program with staff and appropriate parent leadership on current school-level education plans (School Improvement Program, bilingual, Chapter I, and so forth).		
	• Prepare a staff development plan that includes: – Recommended tasks – Time line – Support materials		
	• Work with staff to extend, modify, and augment writing guides to meet individual school, student, and teacher needs.		
	• Provide for teachers to adjust the writing guides for use with sixth-grade and seventh-grade students.		
	• Coordinate staff development planning and implementation with district activities to make cost-effective use of consultant time and support materials.		

	Action	Person responsible	Estimated time line
____	• Keep staff informed about planned student activities and encourage their participation and support.		
	Students		
____	• Present an abbreviated overview of the direct writing assessment to eighth-grade students. Discuss students' concerns with student leaders (student council) and enlist support of leaders.		
____	• Use student leaders and staff advisors to:		
	– Review current activities (visiting authors, student write-offs, young author celebrations, and so forth) that emphasize the varieties and importance of writing. Plan additional activities as needed.		
	– Develop a promotional campaign for students that will encourage them to do their best on the test.		
	– Provide opportunities for students to interview principals, teachers, and others for a series of articles for the student newspaper in which they explain and support the new test.		
	– For the principal, prepare a series of letters in which he or she emphasizes the purpose of the test and promotes school spirit by encouraging students to do well (see sample student letters in this section). (Some principals may want teachers to present material orally in writing classes.)		
	Parents/Community		
____	• Showcase exemplary teachers of writing through reports to the district and presentations before the school board, local professional and community organizations, and school parent groups (PTA, district advisory committees, school site councils, and so forth).		
____	• Plan short information sessions for parents.		
____	• Send home to parents information sheets on the direct assessment of writing (prepared from the questions and answers included in this section).		
____	• Include information articles in parent newsletters (PTA, SIP, and so forth; see samples).		
____	• Have information handouts available in school office.		

Sample Letters and Releases

The following letters can be sent to students. The letters include information to explain the upcoming assessment. The information in the first letter could be given orally, if preferred.

Sample Student Letter #1

Dear Eighth-Grade Student:

This year, you will have an opportunity to help your school and improve your writing skills at the same time. The California Assessment Program, the state's official testing series, will ask you to write a paper in which you demonstrate different types of writing.

All eighth graders in California will take part in this test, as well as in tests of mathematics, reading, editing, history-social science, and science. The results will be used to tell us how well we are teaching necessary skills for all academic areas.

The direct writing test should only take you about one class period. It is very important to all of us at the school that you put your best effort into taking this test. Your score, along with all your classmates' scores, will tell us how our school is doing. From this information your teachers and I will plan the future instruction for our school.

We all share a great deal of pride in our school's achievements, and this year that pride and school spirit has grown with your class. Let's continue this positive effort during this important testing program.

Thank you for your cooperation in helping our school show its best effort. Also, thank you for thinking about those students who will come after you and the value of their education.

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to discuss them with me or any of your teachers. Good luck and do well. We are counting on you.

Sincerely,

Principal

Sample Student Letter #2

Dear Eighth-Grade Student:

COUNT DOWN!

_____ is the "CAP Write Off" for all eighth graders at our school. This is the day you will write a paper for the state test.

The results of the CAP (California Assessment Program) will show how well we as a school are doing. We hope you will enjoy writing on the topic you get and ask only that you do your best!

Sincerely,

Principal

The following are suggested letters and releases to be sent to parents and/or included in parent newsletters.

Sample Parent Letter #1

This spring our students will be part of a statewide writing improvement program, which includes a test conducted by the California Assessment Program (CAP). All eighth graders will be asked to write papers to show how well they can handle the different types of writing that students need to read and write in school and later in their lives.

Results of the CAP writing assessment will be reported to the Legislature, the State Board of Education, school districts, and the media. There will be no individual scores, but each school will receive results. The information from this test will be an extremely important tool for evaluating and improving our current writing curriculum.

You, as parents, can support efforts to strengthen your student's writing skills by:

- encouraging them to read a variety of papers, magazines, and books
- encouraging them to keep a journal
- training them to write thank you letters for gifts

The attached fact sheet details more information about the new test. If you have additional questions or concerns, feel free to call me.

Sincerely,

Principal

Sample Parent Letter #2

We informed you in October that all of our eighth graders would be preparing for the state's direct writing assessment. Conducted by the California Assessment Program (CAP), this test asks each student to write a paper during one 45-minute period. Several kinds of writing will be tested, although each student will write on only one topic.

Staff and students have been working hard to improve the writing program. The test will be given in English classes on _____(day), _____(date). Special staff training activities, provided through the _____, helped teachers develop specific writing experiences covering the kinds of writing to be tested.

Parents also were asked to assist their students through a variety of activities, and your positive response was appreciated. You can continue to help your student improve in writing by:

-
-
-

Please feel free to call with questions or concerns about this or any of the state or district testing programs. Thank you for being an active part of the _____ School team. Our accomplishments would not be possible without you.

Sincerely,

Principal

Releases

The first two suggested releases are for inclusion in parent newsletters; the third would be for a staff newsletter.

Eighth Graders to Participate in Writing Assessment

Next week (date) all eighth graders will participate in the state's direct writing assessment. Special thanks are due to our writing teachers, _____ and _____, who have been part of the statewide movement to improve writing. Results of our students' writing will be announced next fall and will be used in the continuing process of writing improvement in all areas of the curriculum.

Direct Writing Assessment Results Are Here

Our school's results of the state's direct writing assessment for 19__ are here. Last year's eighth graders performed well for their initial effort. Reports from the California Assessment Program showed _____ _____ (identified areas of strength in the report).

Areas in which we need to improve include _____ (identify areas to improve from the report). This information will be used by staff in our continuing effort to improve the curriculum.

Eighth Graders to Participate in California Assessment Program Writing Assessment

Next week our eighth graders will participate in the California Assessment Program's (CAP) direct writing assessment. Students across the state have been preparing for the assessment by following the writing processes developed for each of the eight types of writing that will be assessed. Our writing teachers, _____ and _____ have been a part of this movement to improve writing.

Results of the tests will be announced next fall. We will use these results in planning and refining our writing programs in the future.

Press Release

_____School District

Date:

Contact:

Next week _____ eighth-grade students at _____ school(s) will be taking the state's direct writing assessment.

The assessment was developed by California teachers for the California Assessment Program (CAP) as a method for pinpointing the strengths and weaknesses of students' writing. Announcing the test, Superintendent _____ noted that the intent of the statewide writing assessment is to help teachers of writing and school administrators formulate current teaching strategies and develop new ones to strengthen student writing skills.

(Continue superintendent's quote or insert a quote on local benefits by person in charge of testing.)

This program is designed to assess student writing ability by asking students to write an essay on a specific topic in a 45-minute period. More than _____ eighth-grade students in the state will take part in the new test that is the latest addition to the CAP assessment for grade eight.

Results will be reported on school and district levels only; individual student scores will not be available. The results will be announced in the fall. The _____ School District will use the results to plan and refine its writing programs in the future.

Why a direct writing assessment for California?

The indirect, multiple-choice approach to writing assessment has proven successful at testing knowledge of writing skills but has tended to de-emphasize writing instruction in favor of instruction in writing-related skills. A method of assessing writing ability, not knowledge about writing—in other words, direct writing assessment—was needed.

The writing assessment in the California Assessment Program (CAP) is expected to reinforce the importance of writing in the curriculum, stimulate more instruction and student practice in writing, and provide more valid information to teachers about the strengths and weaknesses of their writing programs.

Are any other states testing writing by a direct assessment?

Many other states, including Texas, New York, Wisconsin, South Carolina, and Florida, are assessing writing directly. Most states assess writing as part of their minimal competency programs.

How is California's program different?

California's writing assessment is unique in several respects. The use of matrix sampling allows CAP to administer a variety of prompts reflecting a variety of types of writing. The types of writing assessed are defined at a greater level of specificity than is traditionally done in other states. For example, instead of a broad, general category of writing termed expository writing, more specific types of writing have been defined, such as report of information and evaluation. Lastly, scoring guides have been developed and tailored for prompts within each type of writing.

How does this test relate to the *Model Curriculum Standards*, the *English–Language Arts Model Curriculum Guide, K–8*, and the *English–Language Arts Framework*?

The test reflects Standard Number Twenty-Five of the *Model Curriculum Standards*, which states that assessment of student achievement should emphasize substance or content over form, the integration of writing with comprehension, and the conventions of language use and vocabulary development within the context of making meaning. Each of these emphases is explained fully in the framework as the result of putting research and good practice to the test.

Who developed the test?

The CAP writing assessment has been essentially the purview of California teachers, most of whom are teaching at the grade levels to be assessed. The program began several years ago with the formation of a statewide committee of writing specialists representing a cross section of geographic regions and educational institutions in California. Members of that group—the CAP Writing Assessment Advisory Committee—included elementary and secondary teachers, curriculum specialists from district and county offices, university professors, and representatives from the California Writing Project and the California Literature Project.

Several hundred teachers have participated in test development activities. Selected teachers of writing—the CAP Writing Development Team—created materials and provided technical leadership for all phases of the test development.

How was the test developed?

Preliminary work on a statewide writing assessment was initiated through a grade eight pilot study in 1984. Since that time, large numbers of essay topics have been compiled, most of them written by California teachers. In February and March of 1986, teachers from CAP's Writing Development Team reviewed, revised, and screened 300 existing prompts and wrote additional ones. Eighty outstanding writing teachers selected through the California Writing Project tried out the prompts in classrooms. The Writing Development Team then evaluated teacher and student responses and reviewed prompts. A second field test for the revised topics was conducted in May of 1986, and a scoring of student papers that summer involved about 150 teachers.

How is this assessment field tested?

The CAP essay topics are evaluated through at least two phases of field testing. During the first phase, teachers identified for their abilities to teach writing administer a large number of topics to their own students and the students of other teachers. The teachers seek verbal and written reactions of students of all levels of language ability and add their own comments, criticisms, and suggestions. As a result essay topics are refined or rewritten and subjected to a second round of field testing by additional teachers who volunteer to work with CAP. Student essays from the second phase of field testing are used to develop and refine the CAP scoring systems.

Will schools receive individual pupil scores?

No. As with all CAP tests, the results of the writing assessment will be reported for district and school levels only.

What are the characteristics of the types of writing to be assessed?

Eight types of writing have been identified for the direct writing assessment program for grade eight:

- Autobiographical Incident—narration of a specific event in a writer's life. The writer states or implies the significance of the event.
- Firsthand Biography-Sketch—the writer tells about a person he or she knows well by characterizing via incidents and descriptions. The writer shows how the person is or was significant in his or her life.
- Observational Writing—the writer tells about a person, group, or event that was objectively observed.
- Report of Information—the writer collects data from observations and research and chooses material that best presents a phenomenon or concept.
- Speculation About Effects—given a specific event, the writer conjectures about its results.
- Problem Solution—the writer describes and analyzes a specific problem and proposes and argues for a solution.
- Evaluation—writer makes a judgment on the worth of an item, such as a book, movie, art, or product. Writer must support the evaluation with reasons and evidence.
- Story—writer shows a central conflict between characters or between a character and the environment. Either third or first person. May include dialogue and description.

What is matrix sampling?

CAP uses a procedure for distributing "items" on a test called "matrix sampling." The procedure allows the testing of a wide variety of skills in minimal testing time. For the assessment of writing achievement, each essay topic is an "item." For example, in a classroom of 30 students, each will write an essay in response to a different topic. Every topic represents one of the types of writing to be assessed. Student essays will then be scored to produce comprehensive reports for each school.

Why is matrix sampling used?

Matrix sampling as a tool simply allows the assessment of a greater number and variety of skills in less time than would be the case if all students responded to the same assignment. It provides a more complete picture of a school's or district's achievement pattern than would less sophisticated sampling procedures. Moreover, matrix sampling has proven more statistically accurate than conventional testing in which all students take the same test.

Matrix sampling has been used nationally by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) for some time. It is especially appropriate as a tool for the CAP assessment of student writing.

What grades will be tested with a direct writing assessment?

The CAP direct writing assessment began at grade eight in the spring of 1987, and was expanded to grade twelve in December of 1988. The hope of the English–Language Arts Assessment Advisory Committee is that direct writing will be expanded to grade six by 1991.

Who is to be tested?

Pupils whose native language is English, even if they speak a second language, should take the test. This includes all pupils who speak English, even if they do not speak it fluently.

Special education pupils enrolled in regular classes and classified as eighth graders for enrollment purposes are to be tested, including students who participate in pull-out type programs, such as resource specialist programs.

Who is not to be tested?

CAP does not test the following categories of students:

- Those who meet a strict definition of non-English speaking with these criteria:
  1. They have been classified as limited-English proficient (LEP).
  2. They have not received instruction in an English reading program since November 1 of the current school y ..
- Those enrolled in special day classes or centers or students with a physical handicap that prevents their taking the test in the same manner in which it is administered to other pupils.

How much time does the writing assessment take?

Students need 45 uninterrupted minutes to write in response to the writing assignments. It is not permissible to allow for more or less writing time.

For the accommodation of most class periods, the following procedure is suggested:

- Have all students complete the information section the day before the test.
- Allow 15 additional minutes the day of the test to distribute the booklets and writing assignments, read the directions, and collect the completed test booklets .

Does the state use a certain scoring system, such as holistic, primary trait, or analytic?

The assessment of student essays has, in general, fallen under three rubrics: holistic, primary trait, and analytic. The holistic scoring system is designed to rate general quality. Most users have moved beyond that by adding criteria designed to give schools and teachers a better idea of strengths and weaknesses.

To date, the primary trait system has been a general rating system linked to specific types of discourse. In practice, it, too, is usually supplemented by additional scoring criteria to provide more specific information and is sometimes termed "focused holistic."

Analytic systems involve multiple scores for text-level and/or more mechanical aspects of writing, such as punctuation, sentence structure, and spelling. This method also reflects the need for a more detailed understanding of student performance.

A combination of the major types of systems described is used. Three scores are provided to maximize congruence with specific types of writing and usefulness for improving instruction. These are rhetorical effectiveness, feature, and conventional scores. The unique CAP application of the primary trait approach has been to expand it from the topic to a more general type of writing level.

How are the papers scored?

The scoring guides developed for the direct writing assessment involve three scores: (1) a basic rhetorical score focusing primarily on criteria unique to the type of writing assessed, emphasizing the critical thinking, problem-solving, and composing requirements of that type; (2) a score for a supplementary feature, such as elaboration or coherence, which includes focus and organization; and (3) a conventions score, reflecting mastery of standard English usage, mechanics, and spelling.

Who scores the papers?

Outstanding California teachers score the essays under supervised conditions to ensure consistency.

Does this assessment measure higher level thinking skills?

The direct writing assessment scoring system focuses on students' critical thinking and problem-solving as well as their composing abilities. Without slighting sentence-level skills and writing strategies, it assesses students' achievement in composing and thinking as they meet the specific requirements of each type of writing. The scoring system offers a full range of scores to reflect all levels of student achievement, not just basic skills.

How can districts and schools prepare for the test?

As districts and schools prepare systematic writing programs to meet the *Model Curriculum Standards* and the kindergarten through grade-eight curriculum guides, they will want to build instructional programs that include the types of writing to be assessed at grade eight. Further preparation could include:

- Use of the *Writing Assessment Handbook: Grade Eight*, prepared by the California Assessment Program to aid teachers in guiding their students through the eight types of writing
- An overview of each type of writing for board members, district and site administrators, teachers, parents, and students
- Staff development that is ongoing, supportive, teacher-centered, and based on the types of writing to be assessed
- District-level and site-level support for all students to read literature for its meaning and to experience writing as a process

Are the writing guides in this handbook for grade eight teachers only?

Suggested topics of writing may be integrated into the broader total school program so that children at other grades can practice a full range of writing types. These guides can be easily adopted to fit immediately adjacent grade levels. Other kinds of writing will be assessed at other grade levels, writing that reflects the developmental and experiential levels of pupils at those grades.

Where can I get more information about this test?

Write the California Assessment Program, attention Beth Breneman, at:

California State Department of Education
PO Box 94427
Sacramento, CA 94244-2720
(Telephone 916-323–5942)

Writing Assessment and the Curriculum

Writing demands attention to ideas. Fledgling writers and seasoned professionals alike recognize this fact. They also share the need to express their ideas to others, to shape their ideas to address various audiences for a variety of purposes—whether to report information, evaluate results of an experiment or the worth of a literary work, or reflect on the significance of a personal experience. Because writing requires students to focus on ideas and their formulation, writing is an integral part of California's curriculum reform.

As both a communication skill and a means for thinking about subject matter, writing is a part of every curriculum area. Therefore, the CAP writing assessment affects all areas of the instructional program. Because of the importance of writing in the education of all students, a clear understanding of the specific connections between curriculum and the assessment described in this section will help curriculum personnel, principals, and teachers strengthen the total instructional program.

Relationship of Writing Assessment to Frameworks, Model Curriculum Standards, and Curriculum Guides

Especially important to improving student performance at all grade levels and in all subject areas is the match of assessment with what is being taught. State Department of Education documents such as the *English–Language Arts Framework;* the *Model Curriculum Standards: Grades Nine Through Twelve;* and the curriculum guides for students in kindergarten through grade eight set the overall direction for implementation of the California curriculum reform; that is, they provide general principles for what is being taught. CAP has based its writing assessment on these principles which are stated succinctly in the new *English–Language Arts Model Curriculum Guide: Kindergarten Through Grade Eight:*

- The English–language arts program emphasizes the reading and the study of significant literary works.
- The English–language arts program includes classroom instruction based upon students' experiences.
- English–language arts instruction is based on a balanced program in which listening, speaking, reading, and writing are taught in concert so that they will be mutually reinforcing.
- English–language arts is an integral part of the entire curriculum.
- Evaluation of the English–language arts program includes a broad range of assessment methods.

Standard Number Twenty-Five of the *Model Curriculum Standards: Grades Nine Through Twelve* directly addresses the issue of assessment: "Assessment methods and tools should be aligned with the new emphasis (1) on substance; (2) on the integration of writing, comprehension, and speaking; and (3) on contextual acquisition of vocabulary and technical skills."[1] Similar statements regarding assessment are found in the K-8 guides and the *Framework.*

The CAP writing assessment, in acknowledgment of the new direction, moves measurement of student achievement beyond the multiple-choice test. It measures the extent to which students at given grade levels are able to draw meanings from given examples of text, from text they have already read in their classroom studies, or from personal experience and to use these meanings for a broad variety of purposes.

At grade eight the following purposes are provided:

- Narrate an incident from personal experience and reflect on its significance (autobiographical incident).
- Characterize a person using firsthand biographical information and incidents to support any claims made about that person (firsthand biography).
- Apply self-developed criteria to assess the worth of an idea, an experience, or a work of art (evaluation).

[1] *Model Curriculum Standards: Grades Nine Through Twelve.* Sacramento: California State Department of Education, 1985, p. B-32.

Determine and describe appropriate solutions for a given problem (problem solution).

- Conjecture about the consequences of a given circumstance or action (speculation about effects).
- Create an imagined world in which human beings deal with a given conflict (story).
- Select and formulate data so that someone else can understand it (report of information).
- Describe a person, group, or event from firsthand observation (observational writing).

Each kind or genre of writing results from a particular thinking and composing task the writer has set or has had set for him or her. In English–language arts, where literature is the core of the curriculum, students are encouraged to read and write across the range of the kinds of writing previously cited as well as many other kinds. In other subject areas specific kinds of writing prevail over others.

The scoring procedures for the CAP writing assessment also reflect attention to the new framework in English–language arts. Two of the three scores on the test, the rhetorical effectiveness and the feature scores, assess the abilities of students to express and support, in writing, their opinions, interpretations, solutions, explanations, and evaluations; that is, the emphasis of those scores is on substance and meaning.

The assessment of language conventions, the third score, is also in keeping with the curriculum reform. The facets of edited written English are, as the framework makes clear, developed through use in realistic communicative situations. Because grammar, usage, and spelling are learned best in the context of their use, the CAP writing assessment measures them that way. The test measures the control students have gained over such conventions or technical skills as punctuation and spelling within their own writing. To provide information for instruction, therefore, CAP writing supports the framework's emphasis on students' ability to make sense (the rhetorical effectiveness and feature scores) and to edit their work (the conventions score).

Teaching Writing as a Process

One of the negative effects of multiple-choice testing has been the rush to direct instruction of the surface features of the written product; that is, the conventions of edited written language. The result has been that students often can recite the rules of language use but are unable to put them into practice in their own writing. A test which recognizes the connections between thinking and writing as well as the developmental nature of acquiring skill with the conventions of written English is needed.

The emphasis on writing as a process is a reaction to the historical emphasis on assignment and assessment of student-written products without teacher intervention. With evidence from both research and practice that all students benefit from instruction and reader response before and during the writing task, teachers have been urged to redirect their energies and time toward helping students learn to use the adaptable and recursive steps that good writers typically take; that is, the steps of the writing process. Briefly, the steps are:

- Generating ideas, discovering and clarifying prior knowledge, and making connections with new information (the prewriting stage, which may occur throughout the process)
- Trying out those ideas in an appropriate form or kind of writing; for example, a story, report, or poem (the drafting stage, which may consist of any number of tryouts)
- Making changes in each draft as a result of reviewing what has been written and rethinking the effect of it on the intended reader (the revising stage)
- Correcting errors in usage, adding transitions, and selecting just the right words for the intended purpose (the editing stage)

Learning to manage the writing process will help students face time limits and the blank page with confidence because they will know how to proceed. The teacher's role is to foster the process, setting the classroom climate for the sharing of ideas and their formulation as a regular part of instruction. The writing guides, prepared by CAP for each kind of writing, explain and illustrate ways to use the writing process in each of the communicative situations out of which emerge the variety of genres—reports, reviews, biographies, and stories, to name a few.

Relationship of Writing Assessment to Subject Areas Other than English–Language Arts

At the heart of the curriculum reform in all disciplines is the need for a rigorous academic program for the majority of students at all grade levels. Academic rigor requires a comprehensive,

coherent, and articulated focus on context-based writing instruction. Therefore, teachers of all subject areas will be interested in the CAP writing assessment.

Although the teaching of English–language arts traditionally focuses on helping students learn to write well, instructional emphases in other subject areas also benefit from the way writing helps students to think and compose in the forms germane to learning those subjects. For example, teachers of science typically expect students to write reports of information as a way of clarifying concepts as well as a way of measuring understanding. History–social science teachers feature the biographical sketch as a way of helping students develop historical perspective. The problem solution paper is an important kind of writing in all subjects. The kinds of writing to be assessed on the new grade eight writing assessment are important types of writing and thinking for teachers in all content areas to understand and teach where applicable.

Benefits of Assessing Writing Development

When the CAP writing assessment is fully implemented, school staffs will receive yearly reports of the achievement of their students at key grade levels in specific kinds of writing. Teachers will be able to trace the extent to which students at their schools are learning set standards. Those standards reflect those of a cross section of California students and, while high, are standards achievable by most. Because the standards are explained fully in the CAP writing guides and demonstrated in special workshops conducted throughout the state by the California Writing Project and the California Literature Project, teachers will be able to use them for measuring student progress in their own classrooms, schools, and districts.

Benefits of Matrix Sampling for Testing Writing

Reporting test results by individual pupils would base achievement on a single kind of writing for each student, an accomplishment of dubious value because writing ability is not constant across different writing types. Each student would receive a score on a single writing assignment, but the score would not reflect ability in other kinds of writing. Matrix sampling, however, permits reports on student achievement in a variety of kinds of writing from across the range of students at any given school. All students at the specified grade level will, therefore, contribute to the picture of student achievement at a given school or district.

Topics for the Assessment

Tests require use of assigned tasks, and statewide testing requires that the tasks reflect the interests and instructional levels of a wide range of students. Although the writing tasks are posed under test conditions, which no writer would consider ideal for writing well, they are based on the kinds of real writing available in trade books, magazines, and newspapers as well as in anthologies.

As for assigned versus self-selected topics, the National Assessment for Educational Progress suggests that although students control topic and purpose for writing in a variety and range of tasks, sometimes "careful directions can help them accomplish more complex purposes." The types of writing in the CAP writing assessment illustrate only a few of the many writing tasks that should be assigned and carefully taught in a school writing program. (Cumulative collections or portfolios of student writing during the year should also include student-selected topics and purposes so that students have ample opportunity to gain real fluency.)

Relationship of CAP Writing Assessment to District and School Instruction and Assessment

The Sequence of Instruction

Using CAP writing assessment as a context for district and school student achievement in the various kinds of writing each year, teachers may want to choose several on which to focus at specific grade levels in order to ensure that students receive instruction across a range of thinking and composing situations. For example, teachers at grade six through eight could plan that the curriculum include experience with autobiographical incident, firsthand biography-sketch, evaluation, and report of information. Over the three-year span of time, students would become not only familiar but at ease with the demands of these kinds of writing assessed in grade eight. In an articulated three-year program such as this, students would read many examples of each kind of writing in their textbooks and in trade books. They would also frequently write each kind with the help of peers and teachers.

The CAP writing assessment tests only a fraction of the number of kinds of writing students need to know how to do. Restricting instruction and opportunity to only those kinds assessed would be an unfortunate constraint on curriculum. By encouraging a broad variety of purposes in writing, teachers help students understand how the kinds of writing link to and define each other.

Because CAP writing measures achievement rather than placement on a scale, CAP writing is especially useful to schools and districts for assessing the outcomes of instruction.

Resources for Staff Development

Writing Guides

A writing guide has been prepared for each kind of writing assessed by CAP at grade eight. Each guide contains an overview of the type of writing, sample prompts, suggestions for teaching this type of writing, examples of student-written essays, an example of one student's writing process from prewriting to editing, and a reading list of published writing of this type.

Other Printed Materials

In addition to the *Framework;* the *Model Curriculum Standards: Grades Nine Through Twelve;* and the kindergarten through grade eight curriculum guides, the *Handbook for Planning an Effective Writing Program* has been published by the State Department of Education. The handbook provides specific rationales and activities as well as reviews of relevant research for schools to use in upgrading their writing instruction across the curriculum. *Practical Ideas for Teaching Writing as a Process,* by teachers in the California Writing Project, features classroom-tested strategies and activities. Information about purchasing these publications, as well as others published by the Department, may be found at the back of this document.

Year-round Teacher Training and Summer Institutes

At 19 sites statewide the California Writing Project (CWP) provides staff development during each summer and school year for teachers, kindergarten through university. The training includes the teaching of writing generally and the CAP writing assessment specifically. These programs are in addition to the workshop series in teaching writing for teachers across the curriculum, in onsite, district, or cross-district groups. Information about the CWP is available from local site directors or James Gray, CWP Director, School of Education, University of California, Berkeley.

The California Literature Project (CLP) provides summer institutes and two years of follow-up for teachers of English–language arts, kindergarten through grade twelve, with special attention to the *English–Language Arts Framework* and its support documents; for example the *Model Curriculum Standards: Grades Nine Through Twelve* and the kindergarten through grade eight *Model Curriculum Guide.* Since its inception in 1985, CLP teacher leaders provide curriculum development services for districts and schools that include CAP objectives and assessment materials.

Grade Eight Writing Guide:

Report of Information

The writer's main task in preparing a report of information is to convey information accurately and effectively so as to (1) increase readers' knowledge of a subject (2) help readers better understand a procedure or process; or (3) help to enhance readers' comprehension of a concept or idea. Report of information, one of the eight types of writing assessed in the grade eight CAP test, is a carefully organized recounting of facts about a specific subject; the skills necessary to accomplish this task are related to skills used in several other types of writing tested in the CAP writing test, notably reporting the problem in *problem solution* and presenting a scene in *observational writing*.

Importance of Reports of Information

To complete a report of information, the writer must gather, organize, and report useful information in a clearly organized manner. Students have read many reports of information in their textbooks and in reference books obtained from the library and used for school and personal interest. Reports of information are regularly assigned to students in class as part of I–Search papers and oral and written reports. (I–Search papers result when a person conducts a search to find out something he or she needs to know for his or her own life and writes the story of his or her adventure.)

Outside the school setting, reports of information appear regularly in newspapers, magazines, public speeches, interviews, product manuals, television and radio programming, and personal or business letters. Such reports of information involve such things as a comparison of products (brands of skateboards, shampoos, backpacking gear), services (motorcycle repairs, fast-food restaurants), or techniques (methods of styling hair, cooking food, or surfing). In addition, students frequently use reports of information to provide written or oral directions for making something or for getting to an unfamiliar location.

Characteristics of a Report of Information

Writers who report information establish themselves as authorities on their subjects by identifying the needs of their audience and then carefully selecting, describing, and ordering the appropriate facts and details. The primary purpose in writing the report is to convey information rather than to validate opinions, argue in favor of a specific viewpoint, or persuade readers to make a decision. In a report of information, the writer:

- Speaks with an authoritative voice
- Organizes selected information
- Develops a controlling idea
- Elaborates information with supporting explanations, facts, or details (organization)

Voice

In a report of information the writer presents information clearly and conveys a sense of authority about the subject. By knowing both the subject of the essay and the audience for whom the essay is written, the writer expresses his or her commitment to sharing information through effective use of language.

Writing Team

Loyal Carlon
San Diego City Unified School District
San Diego, California

Stephanie Graham
Calabasas High School
Las Virgenes School District
Calabasas, California

Barbara Miller-Sorvinay
Office of the San Diego County
Superintendent of Schools
San Diego, California

Bill Saunders
Los Angeles Unified School District
Los Angeles, California

Fran Claggett, Editor and Consultant
Forestville, California

Charles Cooper, Consultant
University of California, San Diego

Organization

The organization of a report of information depends on the content and the writer's purpose. The writer's goal is to organize the information so that readers can follow the essay easily and understand and remember the key points. Organization in the best essays will appear to be almost inevitable, arising naturally from the writer's carefully focused intent.

Controlling Idea

The controlling idea is the writer's primary concern and determines the writer's choice of points for elaboration. The controlling idea may be either directly stated or implied; however, the idea will be clear to the careful reader. The writer often uses the controlling idea to convey his or her point of view or attitude toward the topic of the essay. In some reports of information, however, the writer will attempt to maintain an objective stance.

Elaborated Information

The writers of the most successful reports of information rely on a variety of strategies, including elaborating and providing carefully selected examples, facts, and details. Strategies used by eighth-grade writers for elaborating information include the following:

- Listing or describing activities
- Differentiating, naming, and describing parts
- Narrating a personal anecdote
- Narrating the process of making, using, or participating in an activity
- Reporting the history of a subject
- Explaining benefits
- Comparing and contrasting subjects
- Imagining a scenario
- Creating images and analogies
- Narrating the writer's history of involvement with the topic
- Exploring motives for interest
- Outlining the requirements for knowing or participating in an activity

An Exemplary Student Essay

This exemplary essay was written by an eighth-grade student in response to the prompt, "Favorite Activities." The writer focuses on the mental rather than the physical aspects of football. Notice the clear presentation of a controlling idea, the organization of the subject into component parts, and the obvious voice of a devoted football player.

Football

What I like doing best is playing football, mainly because it is one of my best sports. One of the greatest things about it, in my opinion, is the anticipation, wondering what the other players are thinking about what you might do. Football is a physical game, of course, but it's the mental aspect that I appreciate the most.

[Clear commitment to subject; clear statement of controlling idea]

At times football can get grueling, which makes the game even more exciting. The first time you make contact with another player (even with all that equipment) you get very sore. That is true for everyone, but in time you get used to the aches and pains. After awhile, you develop mental discipline which allows you to ignore some of the pain. The mental discipline then allows you to go all out, to unload everything you have, every play. That's how you win games, everyone going all out, giving 110%.

[Component: mental discipline tied to controlling idea; logical development: contact-pain, pain-discipline, discipline-football]

The game takes concentration, just as much as any other sport, if not more. You develop this aspect in practice. That is why it is so important to have hours and hours of it. Mentally, you have to get over the fear, the fear of eleven madmen waiting for chance to make you eat dirt. And that comes through practice. Once you overcome the fear, you can concentrate on the more important things, like anticipating the other guy's next move. Studying the playbook and talking with other players also helps.

[Importance of attribute again; components tied to controlling idea; again, development of components of game]

During the game, your mind clears of all thoughts. These thoughts become instinct. You have to react, and react quickly, and you develop reactions and instinct in practice. For example, when you're carrying the ball or about to make a tackle, you want to make sure you have more momentum than the other guy. If you don't you'll be leveled. But, you should react instinctively to that situation by increasing your momentum.

[New context: game; tie back to practice; explains level of instinct and its importance]

Playing defense, all you want to do is hit the man with the ball, hit him hard. Right when you unload for a stick, all your body tightens. Then you feel the impact. After you regain your thoughts, you wonder if you're all right. You wait for your brain to get the pain signal from the nerves. Even so, if you do get that signal, which is always the case, you keep right on playing. You can't let that experience shake your concentration.

[Descriptive example; importance of previously mentioned component, concentration]

On offense, while playing receiver, you can actually "hear" the footsteps of the defensive back as you're concentrating on catching the ball. What separates the men from the boys is the one who "hears" the footsteps but doesn't miss the ball. That's mental discipline, concentration.

[Subdivision of football: offense; descriptive example]

Football is very physical or else it wouldn't be fun. But it is also a mental game and that is why it's challenging. You can get hurt in football if you screw up and ignore the right way to do things. However, mental discipline and concentration, which you develop during hours of practice, helps you avoid such mistakes.

[Acknowledgment of other aspects–physical; importance of controlling idea–mental aspect emphasized in new light]

One Student's Writing Process

This section includes a description of the activities leading to the writing of the previous essay. These activities include prewriting, precomposing, writing, and discussing and revising the essay with other students.

Prewriting

The class discussed the title "Favorite Activity" and identified variations on the theme, such as hobbies or sports. Students then listed specific hobbies, sports, and other activities. Students were encouraged to develop extensive lists from which they could select personal favorites. Under the heading "sports," the writer of the exemplary student essay listed *football, motorcycle riding, baseball.*

The students were then required to cluster or list what they knew for each topic before deciding on one topic as the subject of their report of information essay. Some students listed subtopics for two or three choices and then selected the topic that yielded the greatest number of subtopics. The writer of the exemplary student essay had more information to report about motorcycle riding than he had about football, but he chose football because he was attracted to the idea of explaining a physical sport as a mental challenge. His list of subtopics for football included *mental aspects, physical requirements of different positions, techniques of different positions,* and *football fans.*

Precomposing

After selecting their topics and subtopics, the students analyzed each subtopic and identified additional components of their subtopics. The writer of the exemplary student essay identified three components of the mental aspect of football: discipline, concentration, and instinct. After writing a one-sentence definition and listing some possible examples for each component, he was ready to begin a draft.

Writing

The writer wrote for one entire class period and produced the following first draft.

Football

What I like doing best is playing football. Mainly because it is one of my best sports. One of the greatest things about it, in my opinion, is the anticipation, wondering what the other players are thinking what they might do. Making the wrong decision could mean the game.

It is a highly physical and mental game. At times it can get grueling, which makes the game even more exciting. Preparing for a game can be hard work, but in the long run with all the equipment, you feel very sore. But in time, you get used to it. After a while, your mental discipline of pain, the game turns from you not going all out, to unloading everything you have, every play. That's how you win games, everyone going all out, giving 110%.

The game takes concentration, teamwork, and cleverness just as much as any other sport, if not, more. That is why it is very important to have hours and hours of practice. Studying the playbook, talking with other players about certain situations, and most important, is getting over the fear; the fear of the eleven madmen waiting for the chance to make you eat dirt.

During the game, your mind clears of all thoughts. These thoughts become instinct. When you're carrying the ball or about to make a tackle, you want to make sure you have more momentum. If you don't, you will be leveled.

Playing defense, all you want to do is stop the man with the ball, hit him hard. Right when you

unload for a stick, all your body tightens, then you feel the impact. After you regain your thoughts, you wonder if you're all right, waiting for the brain to get the signal from the nerves. Even so if you do get the signal, which is always the case, you keep right on playing.

On offense, playing receiver, you can actually "hear" the footsteps of the defense back before catching the ball. What separates the man from the b[illegible] is the one who "hears" them and doesn't miss the ball.

The game is very physical, or else it wouldn't be fun. It gets your mind off them. It's worth being sore afterwards. The sport is dangerous, but after all, all you can get is hurt, unless you really screw up and break your neck which is possible by pulling your head down before contact.

Discussing and Revising the Essay

The next day the students met in small groups to discuss their drafts. Instead of reading their essays at this point, the students explained the subjects they chose; the methods they used to report their information; the reasons for choosing their topics; and, if possible, the strategies they used. Students then discussed their comments with each other. The following day each student read his or her paper to a partner. The writer of the essay titled "Football" received high praise from his partner, but he and his partner resolved that in the final draft he must clearly emphasize the application of the mental game to the actual playing of football and include clearer explanations of the development of the components of the game (concentration, practice, discipline).

The writer's discussion with his partner was successful because he came to better understand his objectives in writing his essay, and, with the help of others, he got ideas for revision. (The final draft of the writer's essay appears in the section "A Student's Exemplary Essay.")

Response and Revision

In the process of sharing information in a report, writers concentrate on the clarity and completeness of the information. After writing a first draft, students participate in a variety of activities designed to help them revise their drafts. They might work individually, in pairs, or in groups. A list of questions designed to help students respond to and talk about their drafts is included in this section.

Those questions help students to focus on the characteristics of a draft of a report of information–voice, organization, controlling idea, and elaborated information. As students develop skills in revising drafts with a specific purpose, audience, and voice in mind, they will realize that revision is based on a need to share information effectively and accurately. Response groups help writers determine whether they have fully communicated their intended purpose and provide them with specific suggestions for revising their drafts.

Initially, teachers might select two to four questions from the list for the response groups to work with. Students who have participated in response groups will need little direction from the teacher. Their responses will come naturally.

Students who clearly understand the characteristics of a report of information will write better reports than those who do not understand them. The CAP scoring guides further support the relationship between the characteristics of this type of writing and the use of student response groups to aid revision. (The scoring guide for report of information is included at the end of this section.)

Suggestions for Response and Revision

The suggestions and questions that follow may be completed in discussions or in writing.

- Who is the audience of this report? (Audience)
- Are you convinced that the writer is an authority on this topic? (Voice)
- State the topic of the report in your own words. Does the writer agree that you understand the topic? (Controlling Idea)
- Is the report well organized and easy to follow? If not, identify the sections that you found difficult to follow. (Organization)
- Does the report include any information, that is not important to the writer's topic or would not be of interest to the intended audience? (Elaboration)
- Do you need additional information to understand the report? (Elaboration)
- Identify any key terms or phrases that, unless defined or explained, confused you. (Elaboration)
- Describe the ending of the report. Can you think of a more effective ending? (Organization)

Classroom Writing Assignments

Reports of information are appropriate assignments in every area of the curriculum. For example:

- The history–social science teacher might ask students to report on historical figures, explorers, trends, or events.
- The science teacher regularly requires reports at various stages of unit studies or laboratory experiments. The teacher might require students to develop their formal laboratory conclusions and notes made during observations into reports of information.
- The industrial arts teacher might require students to write reports in which they explain to other students the procedure or steps involved in building a particular project.
- A mathematics instructor might ask students to write a report in which they describe the methods they used to solve a problem.

Prewriting activities are designed to encourage students to think about a topic and to collect and organize information. Prewriting activities may include but are not limited to the following:

- Participating in individual, group, or class discussions to help focus thinking about a topic
- Brainstorming, clustering, or mapping to generate ideas
- Keeping diaries, journals, or learning logs in which events, observations, or background information is recorded
- Conducting surveys, polls, or interviews to investigate the attitudes or opinions of students and members of the community about various issues
- Making lists and categorizing to accumulate and organize existing information
- Compiling lists of particular audiences that would benefit from the information to be reported
- Analyzing the knowledge and expectations of one audience for which the essay might be written
- Sketching, drawing, or painting to illustrate or model a process, event, or technique
- Participating in panel discussions, debates, or impromptu presentations to report findings from research, experience, recent readings, or investigations
- Recounting a memorable trip and then focusing on aspects of particular interest
- Answering questions designed to help writers focus on areas in which they will need additional information
- Conducting research in the school library or on field trips

Sample Writing Assignments

The following writing assignments demonstrate the range of application of the report of information.

Music

Your Exploration of Music class is studying different types of popular music. After writing and taking a survey, students in your class discovered that they enjoyed many of the same types of music and musical groups. Your class now wants to learn more about the types of music their families like. Each student will report to the class on the types of music enjoyed by his or her family members. Survey members of your family, using the questionnaire developed by the class to write a report about the types of music they like and the groups they enjoy. Also find out from family members the special features of each type of music. Be as specific as you can in your report because your music class will compare the information in your report with the information contained in the other reports.

Disaster Preparedness

Approximately every 100 years, a major earthquake occurs in California. Scientists now predict that a major quake will occur in the near future.

Your school officials are concerned about the possibility of an earthquake occurring during school hours. In preparation for this emergency, a committee made up of students, teachers, and parents has been formed to develop a school disaster preparedness plan. You have been selected as a student representative to the committee. The goal of the committee is to present a disaster preparedness plan to the staff and students at your school.

Your first responsibility is to survey students about what they believe the school's disaster preparedness plan should include and then write a report to present to the committee. Be as specific as you can about the students' concerns and their recommendations for preparing for those concerns.

The committee will combine your report and the reports from the parents and teachers group to develop your school's disaster plan. The information you provide will play an important role in shaping your school's plan, so be as accurate and

complete as you can when reporting the information you collected.

Artifacts

Your eighth-grade history class has been learning about ancient civilizations. Your teacher introduced the class to each civilization by showing pictures or replicas of artifacts made by persons of that culture and discovered by archaeologists. (An artifact is any object made by humans.) When you were learning about Egypt, you learned about artifacts such as sundials, papyrus, and farming tools. As you studied the artifacts, you discovered information about the Egyptian people and their culture.

Select an artifact you use in your daily life. Think about ways in which you use the object. Do you use the object frequently? When you use the object, do you follow any special rules or procedures?

Write a detailed description of your artifact so that 200 years from now archaeologists can easily understand the purpose of this object by reading your essay. You may want to use drawings.

Additional suggestions for writing a report of information include assigning students to:

- Observe the cafeteria and lunch areas during a three-to-four-day period and report what they have observed about litter in those areas.
- Report on fads that were popular when their parents were teenagers.
- Write a letter to incoming sixth or seventh grade students in which they explain what those students need to know to be successful in junior high school.
- Write a report in which they explain the benefits or complications of a modern convenience.
- Report on the style of clothing they are most comfortable wearing.
- Describe a favorite room, the objects in that room, and the location of those objects.
- Explain the route they travel from home to school so that someone not familiar with the route could duplicate it.
- Interview someone at least five years younger or 50 years older and write a report about the interview.
- Compile a collection of successful study habits to share with incoming seventh graders.
- Survey and recount students' eating habits during lunchtime so that the information can be reported to the student council.
- Research the history of their school through interviews, old annuals, and school papers.
- Report on a specific event (school play, contest, accident, or sporting event).

Subject Area Suggestions

Teachers may wish to consider the following subject area suggestions for preparing a report of information. Suggestions are included for art, foreign languages, science, history-social science, and industrial arts.

- Write a report on the art of an artist whose work you enjoy.
- Report on a visit to an art gallery or museum.

- Interview an exchange student.
- Report on the types of articles and feature stories in a foreign magazine or newspaper to students interested in developing a school newspaper/magazine in a second language.

- Compile and explain some information about laboratory techniques to incoming science students
- Present a step-by-step explanation and description of a recent classroom experiment.

History–Social Science

- Interview people at school to determine their knowledge about certain historical events.
- Compile a list of and report on the major concerns expressed in either the editorial or letters-to-the-editor section of the local paper.

Industrial Arts

- For your school newspaper write a report on common accidents or incidents of misuse of shop equipment in a shop class over a specific period of time. Interview people working in jobs in which they use the skills learned in a shop class.

Additional report of information assignments can be developed by considering what students may observe or experiment with in their own environments.

The CAP Writing Prompt Format

The writing prompts used by the California Assessment Program and included as examples in the CAP writing guide are organized into two sections: the writing situation and directions for writing. The writing situation contains information about prewriting activities and directives designed to motivate students to think about the assignment. The directions for writing section includes background information about the topic that students can use to prepare for the writing assignment. In addition, this section includes specific instructions regarding the assignment intent, topic, and audience for the assignment as well as other directions for students to keep in mind when responding to prompts.

Art Project

Writing Situation: In your art class each student is required to complete an original project using any available materials (clay, wood, glass, plastic, metal, fabric, construction paper, watercolors, oils, pen and ink, and so forth). The project may take any form (sculpture, collage, mobile, painting, pottery, and so forth).

Directions for Writing: Write a report in which you explain the reasons you chose your art project and the methods you used to create and develop the project. In your report provide enough information for the class to understand the methods you used to develop the artwork from beginning to end and deal with any unexpected problems you encountered as you created your piece of art.

Science

Photosynthesis

Writing Situation: You have been asked to explain the process of photosynthesis to a small group of sixth-graders. You want to explain the process clearly so that students can easily understand and remember it.

Directions for Writing: Write a report in which you explain the process of photosynthesis to sixth-grade students. Give specific details and examples so that the students will find your report both interesting and informative. You want the students to understand the process clearly.

History–Social Science

The Spanish-American War

Writing Situation. In 1898 a debate raged in the Congress over whether the United States should declare war on Spain. Most Republicans wanted war. They felt that a war would result in Cuba being freed from Spain. Most Democrats feared that the United States would annex Cuba if the country went to war. Congress finally adopted the Teller Amendment, which included the provision that the United States would not annex Cuba.

Imagine that war has been declared and your older brother has enlisted in the Army to fight in Cuba. Your best friend asks you to explain the reasons for the United States declaring war on Spain.

Directions for Writing: Explain to your friend the reasons for the Spanish-American War. Include specific information and descriptions of events that contributed to the declaration of war. You are not trying to persuade your friend that the United States

was right to declare war. You simply want to explain to your friend the issues involved so that he will understand the reasons for the war.

Additional Exemplary Essays by Students

In the next two essays, the writers share information about their favorite activities and trace the development of their appreciation for the activities. Notice that the writers' exuberant voice helps to enliven the report of information. The writers' obvious commitment to the activities lends credence to both reports.

Piano

My favorite thing to do is play the piano. When I play the piano, all of my frustrations and worries seem to disappear. I just concentrate on my music and listen to the piano's sound. If I'm upset about something, playing the piano always makes me feel better. There is always a feeling of fulfillment when I play a very difficult piece or one that is really beautiful, because I know that I am the one that is making such a wonderful sound.

It takes a lot of hard work to learn how to play the piano. I realize that now. When I first started, I hated it. I quit with two teachers and almost quit with my third one. But when I got to the level where I liked the music (actually when I got to a point where I could really play the music), I started to enjoy the piano. After awhile, the sense of accomplishment that came with learning a piece that was difficult for me made me want to work harder. I worked to accomplish more.

Even now that I really enjoy playing the piano, it really takes a lot of patience to progress. As the music gets harder it takes more time to learn the right fingering and dynamics. The fingering comes first. I have to patiently practice the actual movements of my finger to be able to locate each note.

The dynamics is the timing, working towards a smoothness that produces music instead of just note.

I suppose I wouldn't even play the piano at all if I didn't really love the music I play. Most of the music is classical and most of the kids my age have a definite distaste for it. I would never tell someone at school that I like Mozart better than Huey Lewis and the News. But, I don't blame kids for not liking it because it really takes awhile to get used to it. I always have to go over my pieces two or three times to get a real sense of the feeling it is supposed to have. Then I like to play it over and over because some of the melodies are so lovely. Now, since my playing has improved, I can do more than just practice the pieces I'm working on. Sometimes it is fun to just experiment with the piano by making up chords or little tunes, or trying to figure out how to play the theme from a TV show.

I know I will probably never be one of the greatest piano players in the world, but I will keep on playing because it is so enjoyable. Some people have hobbies like stamp collecting or building things, but playing the piano is best for me. It makes me feel happy and fulfilled. Even though I may tear up all of my piano books from frustration when I can't play something, I will never quit because the piano is part of me.

In this next report the writer focuses on his development as a disc jockey (D. J.). Early in the first paragraph, the writer speaks as an authority, as a convincing reporter should. The writer organizes his essay around his development as a D. J. (in chronological order), and is clearly aware that a potential audience may not be familiar with his subject matter. Addressing his audience, he offers clear and detailed explanations of the types of music and the techniques he understands so thoroughly.

D. J.

Music is one of my top favorite hobbies. I'm what they call a D.J. I've been a D.J. for five years now. Right now, I'm working on a record titled Def Jam. Being a D.J. is really hard work, but music is my life. I D.J. dances, weddings, and anything that has to do with music. But the music I'm really into is Hip Hop and Soul.

Hip Hop is another type of music. It's hard to explain, but it's all about rap. Rap and Hip Hop are a lot the same. Rap is a song that rhymes; it's just that you say the words with a beat instead of singing them. I rap too. I can rap about any person, place, or thing. I started rapping five years ago when I became a D.J.

What got me started was when I went back to New York. I went to 49th Street in downtown Brooklyn. There were people doing these weird things on turntables (record players), called "scratchin." You scratch by moving the record underneath the needle while the record is playing. You do it with a beat which adds to the song. You can also mix while you scratch. You mix by playing two records at the same time, on different turntables. But you go back and forth from one song to another by working the volumes. Scratchin' and mixin' were everywhere in New York, all through Queens, Bronx, Bronxville, Manhattan and East Harlem.

So when I came back to California I asked my dad if he'd get me two turntables, a mixer, speakers

and all other kinds of equipment for my birthday. When my birthday came, my dad got me everything that I asked for. I couldn't believe it. After awhile, I got really good at it. I practice all the time. The whole block could hear me. But by then I needed better equipment, so the next year I sold it for a high tech quality. I started buying records too. I've got 732 records of Hip Hop and 207 of Soul. I've spent a lot of money on this, but I've made money too.

People from around the area heard that I was a good D.J., and they came down to compete against me in the Battle of the D.J.'s. This was held at the Coliseum. And with luck I took first place in the top two finals. It was hard work to learn how to D.J. Nobody ever taught me how to do it. I learned by myself by watching others and practicing by myself.

Now I'm in a group called "Funky Fresh Scratch Master." In other words, I'm a street D.J. It's just my brother and I in the group. We're heavily into scratchin'. Being a D.J. takes time. It's hard work, but that's what I like to do best.

To complete the following essay, students were required to write a report to Canadian students about a favorite class in their school. In "D.C. Publications," the writer explains both the rewards and the minor frustrations of the class. The student reveals an honest affection for the class and reports information accurately and fairly.

D.C. Publications

Canadian schools are probably a lot like American schools. Most students in both countries have favorite classes, and I certainly have mine. Our journalism class is called D.C. Publications, and it is the best class I have ever had. We produce a newspaper every four weeks which is called The News. It is not just an average paper. It is a collection of fine stories written by talented students. We have 38 staff members which creates an abundance of talent.

The equipment used in the class is standard; we have your usual layout sheets, pasting boards and wax guns. The equipment allows us to put all the articles, pictures and headlines together so we can then copy the full version of our newspaper. Instead of using typewriters (some still do, but not many), we type our stories on a pair of Apple II computers. With the Apple Works program we can do more than you could dream of on a typewriter (such as revising, centering and making multiple copies). Even with computers, however, most of our work is done with good-old pencil and paper.

In D.C. Publications there is a lot of learning going on. We have learned to: prepare headlines, write in inverted pyramid style, write objectively, and how to edit. Some of the more fortunate have been able to do layouts, take pictures or paste-up stories. Others, such as myself, have used the computer to prepare stories for publication. An important side effect of his class is greater knowledge of, and respect for, the rules of English. Articles must be clearly written, and everyone in the class comes to understand that.

Having 38 students in a class does not seem that bad, but it can get very hectic, especially when the paper is about to go to press. At this time, all stories and feature materials (i.e., song dedications) are due. There is a frantic rush for everybody, but there are only so many materials to go around. Take the computers for example. For three weeks no one needs it or wants it. Then, just before press time, everyone has an urgent need to use it.

Fortunately, only a few work with layout and paste-up. We have pre-printed sheets to plan our stories on. After layout we cut and paste our stories to fit together. We take these paste-ups to the printer and then we have a finished paper.

I am proud of The News. The paper and its writers have won several awards in the past, and will probably do so in the future. It isn't easy publishing a newspaper, but I am sure you would enjoy this class if you come to our school. I am also proud of my school. Not only do we have a great journalism class, we have excellent English, math, science and social studies departments.

The following report of information,"How to Blind a Cyclops," was written in response to a literary text.

Writing Assignment: Odysseus and his men, rejoicing over their return from their ten-year odyssey, have decided to write a survival manual for other warriors setting out on an odyssey. One chapter in the manual will include instructions for escaping from a giant Cyclops.

Imagine you are one of Odysseus' men. Write an entry for the survival manual entitled "How to Blind a Cyclops." Describe the supplies needed and the steps to follow. You want your fellow Greek warriors to clearly understand the supplies they need and the steps they must take to escape.

How to Blind a Cyclops

Fellow warriors, if you should find yourself trapped in a Cyclops' cave, here is a plan that is guaranteed to free you. First, be sure to bring along a sword for sharpening and our famous drink, ambrosia of the gods. As soon as the giant leaves to

tend his sheep in the morning, get a log of an olive tree. There will be lots around the cave because the Cyclops use it for firewood. Take your sword and sharpen it to a point then hide it. You don't want the giant to find it. If he does, you can forget escaping. When the giant returns in the evening, he will build a fire. While he is making the fire, offer him some of the ambrosia. He will love it and demand more. Let him drink until the fuddle and flush come over him. Three bowls should be just enough. When he tumbles backward and passes out, quickly and quietly uncover the sharpened log you hid earlier in the day. Drag it over to the fire. Stick the point in the flame. Let it redden and glow. If any of the men start to punk out, give them a pep talk. Lift the log high over your shoulders, sprint forward and ram it into the giant's crater eye. His eyelid will sear and the eyeball will hiss, sizzle, broil and then pop out. This will make the giant very mean and angry. He will probably bellow and go wild. Run hide. Don't let him catch you or you are dead! In the morning, he will sit by the door. He is going to feel all the sheep to to make sure no humans try to get out. Don't let that bother you. Just get underneath the sheep on the pectoral fleece. It won't smell good, but you'll have to hold your nose or something. The giant will only stroke the top. He won't feel you underneath. When he lets the bleating sheep go out, he will be letting you out too. Once you are out, run like crazy for the ship. If you follow this plan exactly like I told it to you, you won't have any problems escaping from the Cyclops.

Essays Written for the CAP Assessment

When writing essays for the CAP writing assessment, students are to produce a first draft during one 45-minute period. Students write in response to a specific prompt from one of eight types of writing. Students use the writing strategies and techniques practiced in class to think through and develop their essays. The following samples of students' writings were written for the CAP writing assessment. These papers are labeled "High Achievement," "Mid-Range Achievement," or "Low Achievement," depending on the students' ability to meet the specific demands of this type of writing. (Note: The Rhetorical Effectiveness Scoring Guide for Report of Information is included at the back of this section)

High Achievement

In "Music in My Life," the writer focuses on why she enjoys listening to music. She successfully avoids the trap of simply naming group after group and song after song. Each of her five reasons is extensively elaborated and she uses a variety of strategies to elaborate her reasons.

Music in My Life

I suppose the activity I most enjoy is listening to music. There are many reasons for this, first of all music helps me relax. Some of my favorite groups are the Beatles, the Cure, U2, The Replacements, Tears for Fears, and ABC. When I come home after school, I am usually tense. All I have to do to make myself feel better is stick a U2 tape into my taperecorder and I usually calm down. The music lifts me and I just close my eyes and relax.

Another reason why I like listening to music so much is that it is good exercise. Actually, listening to music isn't exercise, but dancing is. If I feel like working off some energy, I put on "How To Be A Zillionaire" by ABC and dance to the beat. It is a very good workout and I feel exhilarated afterwards.

Still another reason why I like music is because it makes me happy. If I am feeling depressed and lonely, music always makes me feel better. For instance, I was worried about something yesterday, but then I put on "TN" by the Replacements and my troubles seemed to disappear. Most of the songs are happy and I didn't have the heart to think about my problems while listening. Another good tape to cheer me up is "The Head On The Door" by the Cure. Such songs as "In Between Days" and "A Night Like This" never fail to change my depression into happiness.

Concentration is another asset of music. Often times if I have a report to do or other homework, I just do not feel like concentrating. I get so upset about the job that lies ahead that I just cannot set my mind to it and my thoughts start to wander to other things. It is then that music comes in handy. If I play a tape like "Songs From The Big Chair" by "Tears For Fears" quietly, it always helps me to concentrate and do my work. Sometimes I do not even need to play the whole tape as I am working. Just a few songs are enough to get me in the mood.

The last reason why music is so important to me is because it inspires me and rouses my creativity. I write poetry myself and often if I am having a mental block, music will start me writing again. My absolute favorite group is the Beatles, and I have all of their tapes except for one. Many of their songs have been inspirations for my poetry. I don't try to copy the Beatles at all. Instead, their words and music put ideas in my head which I then put on paper. I don't always write poetry after or while I'm listening to the Beatles, but they do help.

I have just explained why I enjoy music as much as I do. Music is like therapy for me in that it is good for my soul. To sum it up in three words: Music is my life. It will always be, and when I die, I hope someone is playing "I Need You" by the Beatles at my funeral because that is the way I feel about music.

Mid-Range Achievement

The writer of the report "Woodshop" attempts to inform his readers about a class he is taking. The writer relies on a series of generalizations to develop the report and presents his information through a series of lists and names.

Woodshop

One of my favorite classes at my school is woodshop. My woodshop teachers name is Mr. Jackson. He is a sturdy looking man with dark gray hair. He sometimes get so busy that a person must wait ten minutes to ask a question. But the projects in woodshop are neat.

One of my friends whom I met in that class made a wooden duck that waddled when you pushed it. Another boy I know made several crosses. I only made a dog plaque, a word plaque, and now I am working on a shelf plaque.

I have quite a few friends in that class. Many I just met this year in the class.

In woodshop I learned about many types of saws and other woodworking machines. Such as the Bandsaw, the jigsaw, the drill press, the bowl lathes and the table saw, just to name a few. They also have handsaws and rulers.

I am hoping to get woodshop next year in high school.

Low Achievement

The writer of the report "Skateboarding" uses repetition of generalized ideas to tell his story. This report does not include new or useful information for readers interested in learning about skateboarding.

Skateboarding

Skateboarding is my favorite activity. Skateboarding is my favorite activity because, their are many tricks. While skateboarding people can be in tournaments against other skateboarders. When people are skateboarding, it's fun to ride skateboard ramps. When doing this activity, it takes protection, skill and practice.

Skateboarding is my favorite sport because, its fun, many tricks, go to tournaments, ride ramps, it take protection, skill and practice.

Published Example of a Report of Information

The following report of information, "The Death of an Elephant," appeared in *Life* magazine, accompanied by a dramatic series of photographs taken by Horst Munzig. Even though you do not have the photographs here, the power of the words alone allows you to picture this scene in your mind.

Death of an Elephant[1]

According to legend, a dying elephant wanders off to a hidden "elephant graveyard," where stark piles of bleached skeletons promise a fabulous treasure in ivory tusks to any adventurer who can find them. Even though game wardens find hundreds of elephant carcasses each year, scattered over the East Africa reserves, the exact nature of an elephant's death has remained a mystery.

In December 1970, 28-year-old ecologist Harvey Croze and photographer Horst Munzig came across a dying cow elephant in Serengeti National Park. In an extraordinary sequence of photographs they were able to record every detail of her final hours. The stricken animal did not die in solitude. The anxious herd tried desperately to revive her. "You don't have to be around elephants long before you fall in love with their incredible concern for other members of the group," says Croze. "Elephants love elephants. It's as simple as that."

It was early afternoon when Croze and Munzig first spotted the sick elephant. She stood about 75 yards from the grazing herd, her head lowered and her great ears flopped forward. A bull elephant approached her from the herd, sniffed at her head with his trunk, gave a gentle rumbling noise, and then returned to his feeding. For 20 minutes the cow remained motionless except for an occasional curl of her trunk. Then she dropped silently to her haunches. Immediately the entire herd, screaming and trumpeting, thundered toward her and formed a semicircle around her. Then her forelegs collapsed and she slumped onto her belly.

As the cow lay helpless on the ground, the bull pushed the larger elephants away but allowed some youngsters to touch her. One laid his trunk on her back while a baby pushed vainly at her rump.

A young elephant nuzzled the cow's ear. Then the bull lowered his head to her side and with a

[1]"Death of an Elephant," *Life* (February 26, 1971), 660-65.

gargantuan effort tried to lift her. She was too heavy. With a roar of frustration he moved to her head and tried to lift that. Then he tore up a trunkful of dry grass and herbs and forced it into her mouth. But she would not respond.

The young elephants pressed forward again and one, placing a foot on her back, tried to rouse her. "It almost seemed as if they had tried every behavior they could think of: threatening, lifting, feeding," says Croze.

But the cow was finished. With a final convulsion she heaved onto her side. The herd broke out in a renewed clamor and moved off to feed restlessly nearby. The bull remained beside her, making occasional attempts to rouse her. One by one, family units within the herd returned to the body as if to mourn and then, at dusk, moved away together and disappeared over a ridge.

Readings in Report of Information

Magazines

National Geographic
Nature
Seventeen
Mother Earth News
Boys' Life
Audubon Magazine
Science
Popular Science
Consumers' Report
Science Digest
American Heritage

Books

Carson Rachel. *The Sea Around Us*. New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 1961.

Carson, Rachel. *Silent Spring*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1962.

Cousteau, Jacques, and Frederic Dumas. *Silent World*. New York: Nick Lyons Books, 1987.

*De Garza, Patricia. *Chicanos: The Story of Mexican-Americans*. New York: Julian Messner, 1973.

Eiseley, Loren. *The Immense Journey*. New York: Random House, Inc., 1957.

Fox Fire: Hog Dressing, Log Cabin Building, Foods and Planting by the Signs, Snake Lore, Hunting Tales, Faith Healing, Moonshine and Other Affairs of Plain Living. Edited by Eliot Wigginton. New York: Doubleday &Co., Inc., 1972.

Fox Fire. Vols. 7-9. Edited by Eliot Wigginton. New York: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1986.

*Freedman, Russell. *Children of the Wild West*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1983.

*Gemming, Elizabeth. *Lost City in the Clouds: The Discovery of Machu Picchu*. New York: Coward, McCann & Geoghegan, 1980.

The Japanese American Journey: The Story of a People. Edited by Florence M. Hongo and Miyo Burton. San Mateo, Calif.: JACP, Inc., 1985.

*Kohn, Bernice. *Talking Leaves: The Story of Sequoyah*. Dallas, Tex.: Hawthorne Publishing Co., 1969.

*Lester, Julius. *To Be a Slave*. New York: Dial Books for Young Readers, 1968.

Loeper, John J. *The House on Spruce Street*. New York: Atheneum, 1982.

Lord, Walter. *Day of Infamy*. New York: Bantam Books, Inc., n.d.

Lord, Walter, *A Night to Remember*. Mattituck, N. Y.: Amereon Ltd., n.d.

*McGaw, Jessie B. *Chief Red Horse Tells About Custer*. New York: Lodestar Books, 1981.

Sloane, Eugene A. *The All New Complete Book of Bicycling*. (Rev. edition.) New York: Simon and Schuster, Inc., 1981.

*St. George, Judith. *The Brooklyn Bridge: They Said It Couldn't Be Built*. New York: The Putnam Publishing Group, 1982.

*Listed in *Recommended Readings in Literature, Kindergarten Through Grade Eight* (Annotated edition). Sacramento: California State Department of Education, 1988.

Rhetorical Effectiveness Scoring Guide for

Report of Information

Writers must satisfy special demands when they prepare reports of information. They must present themselves as authorities on a subject and impress readers with their knowledge and understanding. They must select and present enough specific details to characterize their subject for their readers. They must quickly orient readers to a subject, help keep them on track with a coherent report, and end the essay in a satisfying manner. In the best reports of information, writers express their involvement with the subject and commitment to sharing it with readers. They develop their report around a single theme that they use to provide coherence to their essay.

In reporting information, writers are not concerned with persuading readers to take action, justifying judgments or opinions or presenting autobiographical disclosures. Instead, they are concerned with informing readers. Reports of information may be found in textbooks, research reports, technical manuals, newspapers, letters, and essays about familiar activities and places. The prompts for report of information ask eighth-grade students to write about their schools, communities, and interests.

Writers organize reports of information around a theme that they use to integrate the information included in the report. They classify and carefully arrange their information so their readers can easily read and understand the report. They support main points and elaborate their ideas with specific facts and concrete examples.

Score Point 6—Exceptional Achievement

Voice. The writer reports the subject in an interesting and clear manner. The writer establishes himself or herself as an authority on the subject. We hear a lively voice.

Information. The writer includes specific information in the report—facts, details, examples, anecdotes, explanations, and definitions. By identifying objects carefully and accurately, the writer indicates to readers that he or she is an authority on the subject. The writer presents specific and concrete information relevant to the subject and the point the writer is making.

Depending on the writing situation, writers may choose several of the following strategies to present information (examples are taken from eighth-grade students' test papers):

- Using a personal anecdote (telling about a fishing trip as a way of sharing information about fishing)
- Creating a scenario (an imaginary baseball game as a way of informing readers about the agonies and uncertainties of baseball)
- Differentiating, naming, and describing the parts of a subject (administrators, teachers, goals, groups, activities at a school; different types of fins on a surfboard)
- Demonstrating a claim or assertion (describing how students carelessly drop trash around a school)
- Listing or describing activities associated with a subject (swimming, hiking, biking, walking, sight-seeing in a town; reading, writing, working on projects, participating in group work, socializing in a class; riding, racing, washing, currying, spraying, feeding a horse)
- Comparing or contrasting subjects as a way of generating information about a subject (contrasting a private and a public school)
- Telling the history of a subject (what the earliest surfboards were like, how a school or a team began)
- Narrating the process of making, using, or participating in an activity (waxing a surfboard, playing in a football game)
- Creating images or analogies (a surfboard leash is like a dog leash)
- Naming and providing details about the features of a subject (trout, salmon, shad; American River, Nimbus Dam, Sacramento River; a surfboard leash is a solid line of plastic, about as thick as a pencil, with a velcro strap at the end)
- Explaining the benefits of a subject ("When I play the piano, all of my frustrations disappear. . . ." "Football takes your mind off things. . . .")

- Narrating the history of involvement with the subject ("When I first started playing the piano I hated it. . . ; I quit. . . but then. . . .")
- Exploring motives for interest in a subject ("I will keep on playing piano (softball, football, etc.) because it is so enjoyable.")
- Describing the joy of victory, the agony of defeat ("I love to tie flies. . . .")
- Outlining the requirements for knowing about or participating in a subject (passing a three-page test to get into a journalism class)

The writers of the best essays incorporate several strategies in their essays.

Controlling Idea. In addition to using the essay to inform us about a subject, the writer of a six-point essay has stated or clearly implied a controlling idea. When we know the writer's controlling idea, we know the writer's attitude toward the subject. The writer uses the controlling idea to provide coherence and a focus to the essay.

Organization. A six-point essay is well organized. It begins with helpful orientations to the subject or a context for reading about it. It is coherent and clearly patterned. The writer creates this pattern by focusing on components of the subject and developing one or more components with specific information. The writer ends the essay in a satisfactory manner.

Score Point 5—Commendable Achievement

Voice. Like the writer of a six-point essay, this writer clearly reports information about the subject in an interesting manner. We hear an authoritative voice in the essay.

Information. The writer gives us useful information, but not as much information as the writer of a six-point essay. This information is relevant to the subject and includes facts, details, and examples.

Controlling Idea. The writer of a five-point essay has stated a controlling idea and maintains a consistent attitude toward the subject.

Organization. Like a six-point essay, a five-point essay is well organized. The writer begins and ends the essay effectively but may not have established as clear a pattern as the writer of a six-point essay and may not display the same degree of control.

Score Point 4—Adequate Achievement

Voice. The writer reports the subject eagerly, but without the authority of the writer of a five-point essay.

Information. The writer gives us considerable information, sometimes as much information as the writer of a five-point or six-point essay. However, some information may not be well integrated into the essay and may be general rather than specific or concrete. The writer has arranged and grouped the information but may have as carefully or consciously selected the information as the writer of a five-point or six-point essay.

Controlling Idea. The writer of a four-point essay states a controlling idea and in general uses the idea to provide consistency. However, the writer's attitude toward the subject may waver.

Organization. In a four-point essay, the writer reveals a plan, but the essay may not be well organized. The essay may have an effective beginning but may end hurriedly and clumsily. The writer of some four-point essays give up control or momentum to respond to the suggestions in the prompt. (An essay can earn a four- or five-point score without paragraph boundaries. Decide whether the essay has some coherence and direction.)

Score Point 3—Some Evidence of Achievement

Voice. The writer of a three-point essay responds to the prompt. The writer may seem interested in informing readers and may communicate the sort of eager personal voice we hear in a four-point or five-point essay. However, the writer may focus on opinion or evaluation rather than on information.

Information. A three-point essay generally presents less information than a four-point essay. The writer may rely more on generalization, opinion, or evaluation than on specific information and may not provide enough information to characterize the subject. The writer may only list titles, names, or places without any elaboration or include personal information not relevant to the point or helpful to readers who want to understand the subject.

Controlling Idea. The writer may present a simple statement of subject without a controlling idea.

Organization. A three-point essay stays on topic but it may be weakly organized. It may circle back to an idea as an afterthought. It may seem added on, sentence by sentence, but it will not digress too far. It may just follow an order of presentation suggested by the prompt.

Score Point 2—Limited Evidence of Achievement

Voice. The writer of a two-point essay may show some awareness of readers and may even reveal a lively voice.

Information. Very thin development. The writer does not seem to understand how to report information. Rarely will the writer use specific detail to develop a point. The essay will usually be brief, but some may be as long as three-point or four-point essays without the specific detail.

Controlling Idea. The essay may be no more than a simple statement of subject.

Organization. Organization may be shaky. We may not be sure where the writer is going, though the essay will usually be readable. Writer sometimes digresses and shows little sense of planned progression. May rely on suggestions in the prompt for organization.

Score Point 1—Minimal Evidence of Achievement

On topic. The writer has a subject.

Voice. Will usually reveal little sense of voice or awareness of readers.

Information. Unlike a two-point essay, a one-point essay does not deliver much information. It contains few points or ideas and rarely includes details. The writer may seem to be giving information but actually is evaluating or asserting opinions.

Controlling Idea. May be no more than a simple statement of subject.

Organization. The essay is badly organized and sometimes incoherent. Brief.

Score Point 0—Inappropriate Response

Off topic.

Grade Eight Writing Guide:

Evaluation

In evaluation the writer presents a judgment about the worth of a subject (a book, movie, work of art) and then, using either established or asserted criteria, supports this judgment with reasons and attempts to convince the reader of the soundness of the judgment.

Although evaluation is related to problem solution, another form of writing assessed by CAP at grade eight, there are clear distinctions between the two types of writing. In preparing an evaluation, the writer focuses on a judgment and the reasons for the judgment. In preparing a solution to a problem, the writer describes a problem, offers a solution, and attempts to convince the reader that the solution is viable.

Importance of Evaluations

Writers may evaluate by using personal judgments about what they experience, hear, and see as well as by citing external authority and drawing on what they read and what other people say about a subject.

When they become adults, students will be faced with making significant evaluative decisions—whether to go to college, what job to take, where to live, and so on. Exploring decisions in writing can help them to focus on evaluating several aspects of the situation before they make a final decision. Consequently, the processes to be learned through writing effective evaluations go far beyond a classroom essay; they have lifelong implications.

Characteristics of Evaluations

Many strategies can be employed in evaluative writing. The strategies described in the following paragraphs may be interrelated in many different ways as writers decide what must be done to achieve their purposes in different evaluative writing situations.

Identified Subject

The writer identifies, defines, or describes the subject being evaluated and provides the context necessary for the reader to understand the evaluation.

Judgment

The writer clearly states a firm judgment and remains committed to that judgment throughout the essay. *(Note:* In writing a first draft, a writer may discover through the process of writing that the original judgment may need to be altered or reversed. This kind of essay should provide a valuable tool for showing the process of thinking in writing.)

Supporting Reasons

Supporting reasons are the center of the essay. They support and justify the judgment with conviction and plausibility. The following reasons have been used in the papers written by eighth graders and examined by teachers on the writing development team:

- Personal experience
- Personal associations
- Personal preference or taste

Writing Team

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Sandra Rogers
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Marilyn Whirry
Mira Costa High School
South Bay Union High School District
Manhattan Beach, California

Jan Claggett, Editor and Consultant
Forestville, California

Charles Cooper, Consultant
University of California, San Diego

- Evidence or examples from the subject being evaluated (citing parts of the text, quotations, and so forth)
- Evidence cited from a variety of sources (scientific facts, opinions of experts, statistics)
- Analysis of the subject being evaluated
- Comparison and contrast to a related subject
- Emphasis on the uniqueness of the subject being evaluated

Tone

The tone must be appropriate to the judgment made and give the reader the feeling of the writer's conviction. The writer's word choice and syntax determine the tone of the essay.

Organization

Reason and evidence must be organized both logically and convincingly. The most important evidence is usually placed either first or last in the essay; the most significant reasons are those that are most thoroughly developed. A forceful and explicit conclusion reaffirms or underscores the writer's judgment.

Coherence

The evaluation must engage the reader immediately. It must show direction, purpose, and movement and provide a sense of closure.

Sense of Audience

The writer must maintain an awareness of possible questions and needs of readers and must attempt to convince the readers of the plausibility of the evaluation.

An Exemplary Student Essay

This evaluation was written by a seventh-grade student, whom we will call Brian, in response to a prompt asking for a review of the best book or story the student had read. It represents a typical student's response to such an assignment.

The Wild Party

There are funny stories, and there are funny stories, but "The Wild Party" by Jay De Jesus is a winner. Jay De Jesus is a 7th grade student who wrote this brilliant story for an assignment.

[This paragraph tells the reader the title of the work being discussed and places it in context.]

"The Wild Party" starts at a modern 7th grade Christmas party in room 14. The music is blasting away, people are laughing, and everyone is having a good time. Suddenly, the door blasts open, and the Schoolboys march in. The Schoolboys are a band of mean nerds who like to crash parties. The leader, Waldo McDonald, pulls out a gun and shoots. Everyone gasps as Mr. Bruce Amsadel, the teacher, slumps over, dead. Then, when all looks lost, Jay De Jesus steps up, yells "Let's do it for Mr. Amsadell" and throws an eraser at Waldo. The Eraser hits Waldo's gun and turns it around, making Waldo shoot him.

Then Jay is proclaimed the hero. I thoroughly enjoyed "The Wild Party" for various reasons. It is hilarious, creative, and has a brilliant finale. I liked how the author takes a simple, ordinary chalkboard eraser and creates a weapon of it. This shows imagination. Taking objects we see everyday and making them seem fantastic and full of possibilities makes me feel that my life can be more exciting than how I usually see it.

[Here the writer summarizes concisely. He tells us about the plot and the characters with enthusiasm.]

Another reason why I enjoyed this story is that I can relate to most of the characters in real life. I know Jay and also the people who the teacher and Waldo represent. I am in the class that the party was supposed to take place in. This gives me a personal place in the story. I am a character living in this fictional story. For others, the story will seem real because it's evident that the author knows about kids and knows how they think and what they fantasize about. Being a kid himself, Jay uses his firsthand knowledge of his friends and classmates to tell a story any kid would like. All kids imagine wild things taking place in classrooms where often there are only rules and work and discipline. Jay breaks open the dullness of the classroom and brings in excitement—a wild party, gang rivalry, a teacher being killed. The Schoolboys killing a teacher? That's ironic. Using an eraser to kill? That's funny.

[The writer backs up his judgment, naming specific qualities of the story and then giving examples from the story to support what he says. Firsthand knowledge makes the story believable—another reason for his liking the story.]

I feel that almost anyone would enjoy this story, especially people who like funny stories. But even if you don't fit in this category, read this story, because I don't know too many people who didn't enjoy this story.

[The evaluation reaches out to its audience and concludes with convincing enthusiasm.]

One Student's Writing Process

The process of writing the previous essay involved many steps. The process began with a series of short responses or "quickwrites" given to an entire seventh-grade class. After thinking of the best book or story they had read, the students each wrote one title on a sheet of paper. Then they did the following quickwrites:

1. Write why you liked this book or story so well. Do not write what the book was about. Write what you think about the book, why you liked it.
2. In one sentence give your judgment of the book. Do not use any of the following expressions: I like this book.... This book is good/interesting/ the best/great....(The students helped to make the list of what not to use.)
3. Write a very brief plot summary (two or three sentences).
4. Expand the plot summary (half a page or so).
5. Tell what you learned from reading this book.
6. What is your recommendation to other students about this book?

Brian's Quickwrites

The Wild Party

1. *I liked the Wild Party, by Jay DeJesus, because it was funny and I could relate to the people involved in it. It was organized and put together in a good way. I liked how Jay made him be the hero, haha, and how he saved us from Waldo McDonald and the Schoolboys. The funniest part was when Mr. Amsadel got shot.*
2. *Judgment: One of my favorite storys is one called the Wild Party. It is written by Jay DeJesus. I enjoyed this story because it is humorous and different.*
3. *Summary: The setting is in a modern day teenage classroom, and a party is going on, but then a band of crashers called the Schoolboys break in. The leader of the Schoolboys, Waldo McDonald shoots the teacher. Then Jay DeJesus throws an eraser at Waldo and he shoots himself, and Jay is proclaimed the hero.*
4. *Detailed summary: The story begins at a Christmas Party at a Junior High School. The party starts getting just a little out of hand when the Schoolboys, a dangerous gang, barge in to crash the party. Waldo McDonald, the leader pulls out a gun and assassinates the teacher, Mr. Amsadel. Then Jay DeJesus throws an eraser at Waldo and makes him shoot himself. The other Schoolboys flee. The students bow there heads in memory of their teacher, and Jay is proclaimed a hero.*
5. *When I read this story, I didn't learn much. I did learn that erasers can be dangerous though. I also learned it doesn't pay to crash on a party.*
6. *Recommendation: I recommend this story to anyone who likes funny, modern storys they can relate to. They should like a good laugh, too. They shouldn't be old fashioned, and should know what a teenage party can be like. So if you qualify in most categories, or maybe even all, I think you will enjoy this story.*

The quickwrites were given orally and took most of a class period. The next day, the students took out these notes and read them over. The teacher explained that they would now put these notes together in an evaluation of the book/story they had chosen. Their audience would be the general public, persons their own age and adults. They could use anything they had already written or they could change anything. They could put what they had written as quickwrites in any order, or they could pick and choose from what they wrote, using all of it or some as they saw fit.

First Draft

This is an evaluation of "The Wild Party," by Jay DeJesus. It is a creative, modern, humorous, imaginative story that many people will enjoy.

The Wild Party starts in a modern, 7th grade Christmas party in Rm. 14. The music is blasting away, people are laughing, and everyone is enjoying it. Then the door blasts open and the Schoolboys march in. The schoolboys are a gang of mean party crashing nerds who are lead by Waldo Mc Donald. Waldo pulls out a gun and shoots. Everyone gasps as Mr. Amsedel, the teacher, slumps over, dead. Then, when all looks lost, Jay De Jesus steps up, yells "Let's do it for Mr. Amsedel!" and throws an eraser at Waldo. The eraser hits Waldo's gun and turns it around, making Waldo shoot himself. Then Jay is proclaimed the hero

I liked the Wild Party because it was hilarious and creative. I like how Jay creates the ending, how an eraser can kill someone. I especially liked it because I could relate to most of the characters in real life.

I would recommend this book to most people, as long as they have a good sense of humor and can take a good joke. They shouldn't be too old fushtoned. But even if you don't fit with these categories, you still may enjoy "The Wild Party" by Jay De Jesus.

After finishing the first draft, students exchanged papers with a partner and filled out revision guides.

Evaluation Revision Guide

Q: Do you feel the plot summary is in balance with other parts of the evaluation?

A: The plot summary was great but you need to tell more about the story and why you liked it.

Q: What is the best part of this evaluation? Why?

A: The ending because it tells that all kinds of people will like the story.

Q: Write down anything (word, phrase, sentence) that sounds as though you've heard it many times before.

A: "One of my favorite storys is called..."

Q: Write down the best sentence in the evaluation. Why did you like it?

A: I especially liked it because I could relate to most of the characters in real life. I liked it because he states his opinion and supports it.

Q: Does the conclusion feel like the door slammed shut or like someone gently closed the door?

A: Someone gently closed the door.

New Draft

After talking with their partners, students revised their evaluation essays. Brian's final draft appears earlier as an exemplary student essay.

Response and Revision

Sharing writing with others in pairs or small groups can help students review their work. Response from others, especially peers, is important for students to develop a sense of audience, a sense that their writing reaches more people than just the teacher. Having others look at their work gives students a sense of purpose; they realize that they write to communicate, not merely to get a grade. Students also see what others are doing and learn from the successes and failures of others.

Peer response involves both the teacher and the students. The teacher needs to work with the students to help them find ways to talk with each other about their writing in a helpful way. Modeling with the entire class is a good introduction. Beginning with only four or five questions for a response sheet provides students with the opportunity to focus on what is important in the writing without the reader or the writer feeling overpowered. Student readers are responsible for reading for meaning, thinking about what is good in the writing and what might be improved, and communicating those ideas to the writer.

The focus of a response and revision activity will differ depending on the specific assignment. Using positive questions helps students build confidence. For effective evaluative writing, students need to consider whether they clearly state their judgment, use enough developed reasons to support their judgment, and use vocabulary appropriate to the judgment they make. Response guides can help students focus on such considerations. General questions help students to see the overall impact of an essay, while specific questions focus students' attention on more localized issues. Asking a peer what he or she remembers after reading an evaluation will often point to the strongest part of the writing, while the first impressions of a peer reader may help the writer to determine whether the judgment is clear or reasons convincing. Once teachers have decided on the purpose of a specific assignment, they can select the questions appropriate to that purpose.

Written responses (after hearing the writer read the paper aloud) provide a solid basis for response group discussions. With experienced response groups, the teacher may depend on student-generated questions for discussion.

Response Guide Suggestions

General Questions:

- What were your first impressions?
- What interested you?
- What did you like best?
- What do you immediately remember about the evaluation?

Specific Questions:

Judgment and Reasons

- What is the subject of the essay?
- What is the writer's judgment of the subject of the evaluation?
- What specific examples does the writer use to illustrate the reasons or evidence?
- What would you like more information about?
- Does the evaluation seem complete? Why or why not?

Coherence

Did the beginning gain your attention?

Could you follow everything without being confused?

Were you satisfied with the ending?

Tone

Circle the words that show the writer's conviction, seriousness, or enthusiasm.

Audience

What questions or objections do you have about the writer's judgment?

Are you convinced of the writer's judgment?

Classroom Writing Assignments

There are numerous ways to elicit evaluative writing in the classroom. It is important to keep in mind that the CAP test must be limited to a first draft written in a 45-minute time period and a prompt that provides a context or writing situation with an explanation of the writing assignment or directions for writing. In the classroom we can extend the time, capitalize on situations our students are involved in, guide prewriting exercises, engage students in responding to each other's essays, and work through necessary revisions.

Models

In learning to write good evaluations, students can profit from models of both student and professional writing. Students and teachers can read several examples, discuss the characteristics that make a good evaluation, and then read more models to test the students' ideas. Models are important because they present options in approaches and strategies available to writers.

Suggested Situations

Choose from what you do already in your classroom for evaluation topics. If you do journal writing, have students select their best/worst journal entry and then write an evaluation of it. Read a unit in an anthology and have students evaluate a story/poem of their choice from the unit. Have students evaluate books for book reports or one of their textbooks. Students can also evaluate school-related topics, such as procedures for elections or community facilities for teenagers. The possibilities are endless.

Revisions

Students' revision needs will vary greatly. As students work with peers, they will learn how they write and how they may need to revise. Models may be used at different stages of writing to demonstrate various strategies. One revision session may be devoted to helping students begin their papers; another may be devoted to helping them develop a variety of ways in which to state their judgment; yet another may be devoted to helping them focus on elaboration strategies. (See Response/Revision section.)

Publication

Students will need to write a number of evaluation essays during a school year to become proficient in evaluative writing. Posting a student's paper on a bulletin board, printing it in the school newspaper, or, if written as a letter, actually sending it to its intended reader (perhaps receiving a reply) may encourage students to feel their writing is worthwhile and increase their confidence for taking on the next writing task.

Subject Area Evaluations

The following classroom writing assignments may be used to provide practice in writing evaluation essays. These assignments represent various content areas and are meant to serve as models for teachers as they design their own writing tasks.

Art

Editors of the school newspaper are asking for articles written by students about the work they are doing in school. The editors will publish articles that show students' enthusiasm for learning and commitment to excellence. Their feeling is that all students do work they can be proud of and that this pride should be shared.

You have now finished your semester of art. During the semester you did many pieces of artwork—contour drawings, collages, block prints, paintings, and others. In each kind of artwork you aimed for a visual expression by using different techniques. For example, in contour drawings you used the techniques of seeing the outlines of objects; in collages you used the technique of arranging bits of things to create a pattern; in paintings you used the techniques of perspective, color, and shape.

Think about the artwork you have done this semester. Choose what you feel is your most successful work. Write about the work you have chosen. Tell why it is your best work. Relate any personal feelings you may have about the particular

work you have chosen that explain why you feel it is successful. Tell about any experiences you have had that make this piece of art important to you. Remember that you are writing for your school newspaper.

Prewriting Activities

Imagine that you are setting up a show of all the artwork that you have completed during this semester. On a piece of paper draw the display you wish to make of your work. Then imagine that you are an art critic or a judge visiting the completed show and evaluate each piece of work as you stand before it. You might jot down your thoughts on the paper display as you think about which work is your most successful.

Home Economics

You have read that many manufacturers like to hear from consumers concerning their products. Think about a product that you or your family use regularly. It may be a particular brand of food or toothpaste. Perhaps it is an article of clothing. Think about why you or your family like this product. (You may want to make lists or cluster ideas before you decide what product to choose.) Write a letter to the manufacturer of the product you have chosen. Tell the company why you like this product. If your letter is selected for publication, you will receive a free gift and will also see your letter in advertisements.

Literature

In the unit we have just finished, you read many different stories, but all of these stories are related to the theme of growing up. They express ideas about growing up in different ways. Some are humorous; others are dramatic. Some of the stories are very abstract; others are more like stories we tell in our daily lives.

Publishers like to hear from students regarding their reading preferences. They have asked students to write and send them reviews of stories they feel are the most worthwhile. They plan to use the students' reviews in their advertisement.

Look at the list of stories you have read and decide which story in the unit you feel is best. In a letter to the publisher, explain why you chose this story.

The CAP Writing Prompt Format

The writing prompts used by the California Assessment Program and included as examples in the CAP writing guides are organized into two sections: the writing situation and directions for writing. The writing situation contains prewriting information and directives designed to motivate student thinking about the assignment. Students are given background about the topic and are prepared for the specific assignment that follows in the directions for writing section where students are given specific instructions regarding the assignment.

Science

Climate

Writing Situation: Your science teacher has asked you to think about climate as influencing the choice of the place you would want to live. Examine the following description of an island.

This island's south and east coasts are washed by a warm ocean current, the Gulf Stream. As you might guess, the warm Gulf Stream current begins in the Gulf of Mexico.

Winds usually blow from the west over Ireland. These winds carry masses of moist air from over the Atlantic Ocean.

Low mountain ranges ring the Irish coast. The interior of the country is mostly flat. When warm, moist air from the sea meets Ireland's coastal mountains, the air rises, cools and forms layers of clouds. It is a rare day indeed when there are no clouds in the Irish sky. Through all seasons, rain falls frequently and softly on the Irish landscape. Fierce thunderstorms are rare. Hot, dry spells are even rarer.

In summer, the combination of sea breezes, the high moisture content of the air, and frequent cloud cover helps keep the atmosphere relatively cool. The average July temperature ranges from 11 degrees Celsius at night to around 19 degrees Celsius in the daytime.

The ocean breezes and moist air that help cool Ireland in summer also act to keep the country relatively warm in winter. The average January temperature ranges from 3 degrees Celsius at night to around 9 degrees Celsius in the daytime. Snow and hard frosts are rare during Irish winters.

Changes from season to season are not very sharp on this island. Some days in summer, winter,

spring, and fall may seem very similar—wet, windy, and moderately cool.[1]

Directions for Writing: Your science teacher has asked you to decide whether you would want to live on this island and to write an essay informing him of your decision. He also has asked you to support your decision with reasons. You want to convince your science teacher that your decision is reasonable and is based on specific information about the island.

History–Social Science

Political Conventions

Writing Situation: Every four years political parties have conventions to nominate the person they wish to represent them in the presidential election. Imagine that you are a delegate to one of the conventions and that you have been chosen to present the presidential candidate of your choice to the other delegates.

Directions for Writing: Choose a president you admire and write a speech to deliver at the nominating convention. Use the information you have regarding this man to present him to the nominating convention. Tell why he would be the best man to represent your party in the presidential elections. Use reasons and specific examples that will support your judgment that this man is the best man to represent your party. Your purpose is to convince the other delegates to agree with your evaluation of this candidate.

Language Arts

Best Poems

Writing Situation: Your teacher is asking the students in your class to compile a book called *Best Poems for Eighth Grade.*

Directions for Writing: Read the following poem carefully and then write an evaluation for your teacher, who has read the poem. Convince her that the poem should or should not be included in the collection of poems for eighth-grade students. Give reasons why the poem should or should not be included and give specific evidence from the poem to support your reasons.

Foreign Student

In September she appeared
row three, seat seven,
heavy pleated skirt,
plastic purse, tidy notepad,
there she sat,
silent,
Straight from Taipei,

and she bowed
When I entered the room.
A model student
I noticed,
though she walked
alone through the halls,
every assignment neat,
on time, complete,
and she'd listen
when I talked.

But now it's May
and Si Lan
is called Lani.
She strides in
with Nareyo, and Lynne
and Natavidad.
She wears slacks.
Her gear is crammed
into a macrame
shoulder sack.
And she chatters with Pete
during class
and I'm glad.[2]

—Barbara B. Robinson

Physical Education

School Sports

Writing Situation: Your physical education teachers want to know which sports or activities students value the most. To help the teachers select activities for the next semester, they ask you to write an essay evaluating the sport or activity that you feel was the most worthwhile.

Directions for Writing: Think of the sports or activities you have done in physical education this semester. Choose the one you feel was of the most value to you and write an essay discussing why this sport was the most valuable. You might compare the techniques and skills of the sport you choose with those of another sport that you feel is not as important.

[1]"Climate," in *General Science–A Voyage of Exploration.* Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall Inc., 1986, p. 384. Used with permission.

[2]Barbara B. Robinson, "Foreign Student," *English Journal* (May, 1976). Copyright 1976 by the National Council of Teachers of English. Used with permission.

Microscope

Writing Situation: A meeting of scientists is being held to celebrate the various scientific tools that have contributed to the development of science. You have been invited to submit a paper in which you evaluate how useful the microscope is in scientific discoveries. You have made significant discoveries yourself with the aid of the microscope, so you are enthusiastic about its scientific value. Your paper will be printed for the meeting.

Directions for Writing: Write a paper that you would distribute at this meeting of the great scientists of our time. The purpose of your paper is to evaluate the use of the microscope as a scientific tool. State your judgment and support it with reasons and specific examples. You want to convince your readers to agree with your evaluation of the microscope.

Additional Exemplary Essays

In the following essay, a student evaluates *Where the Red Fern Grows*, giving a short but succinct summary at the beginning. The writer then goes on to tell of his personal reaction and feelings for the book.

Where the Red Fern Grows: A Review

Ever since he was a young boy, Billy wanted to get coonhounds and turn them into champions. His family could not afford the dogs, so he saved and saved money for many years. After Billy bought the dogs, he trained them until they reached perfection. He entered a contest to see what dogs could catch the most coonhides. His strength and faith helped him acquire his goal of victory, but he was not aware of the sadness that would follow. After one of the dogs is killed by a cougar, the other one dies of loneliness.

I remember this book because of the determination and struggle of a boy trying to turn dogs into champions. The relationship between the boy and the dogs is full of love and adventure. At the end the dogs die, but he remembers them because of the red fern that grew on the dogs' graves. There is an old Indian legend that only an angel could plant the seeds of a red fern, and where one grew, that spot was sacred.

The relationship between the boy and the dogs made this book excellent and pleasing to read. By reading this book I learned that achieving a certain goal is possible by being determined and having faith. I think this is one of the best books I have read and I encourage everyone to read it.

The next essay is an evaluation of a cookie. Students clustered the qualities of good cookies and then bad cookies. Cookies were passed out, eaten, and evaluated. The writer of the following begins her evaluation by giving the story of what happened, helping the readers to put themselves in the situation. Her sense of humor and description enliven the essay. Using the strategy of comparison and contrast, she shows us what an excellent cookie would be and gives us a better idea of why she rated the sample cookie as she did.

Soft Batch Chocolate Chip Cookies: An Evaluation

As we are sitting in the classroom, our teacher passes out cookies for us to eat and write about. She sets a Soft Batch Chocolate Chip Cookie by me. By looking at it you can tell that there are chocolate morsels in it. Already I know I'm not going to like it. It is too small. I pick up the lumpy cookie and take a bite.

Not too bad, but not too good either. A little bit too salty. Not as moist as I would have liked it to be. Isn't too sugary. It is not fresh and hot either. The chocolate is pretty good though. On a scale from 1 to 15, it would be a 7. If it were a little bigger, it would be an 8.

The best cookies I have ever eaten are freshly baked by my Grandma. They satisfy wants the first bite I take. They have gooey chocolate chips all over. The outside is not as soft as the inside, but not hard. The sweetness and saltiness of the moist, delicious cookies are just the way I like them. The dough is not hard to chew, and the chocolate chips squash with the touch of my tongue. The altogether taste causes an explosion of ecstasy inside my sensitive body.

My Grandma's cookies are the most luxurious cookies I have eaten. Soft Batch cookies come pretty close, though, because they are soft and chewy. I just can't get over how they make it so chewy. I wonder what they put in it? Maybe one of these days I'll find out and start a cookie company named: Grandma's Best.

The next essay is also an evaluation of a cookie. In the essay the writer orients the reader to the purpose of the evaluation and expresses a clear judgment. The evaluation is enlivened by specific details and by the writer's humor.

Recently my English class held a chocolate chip cookie taste test. We each tasted three soft brand chocolate chip cookies and rated them on softness, size and number of chips, and homemade flavor. Then we voted for the one we each liked best. I want you to know I voted for your cookie, Chewy Chips Ahoy, as the best. They were great. They were even better than the cookies my mom makes and I thought she made the best cookies around!

I guess you want to know what I liked about your cookie. Well, first I liked the smell. It had a nice vanilla aroma with a hint of chocolate. I also liked the size of your chocolate chips. They weren't too large like chunks and they weren't too small. One of the cookies I tasted had chocolate specks and another one had no chips. One had chocolate melted in the middle. How can you call that chips? The best part of your cookie was the texture and flavor. Your cookies were soft and chewy. The first bite melted in my mouth. It was silky smooth. There was an excellent homemade flavor in the cookies. I couldn't believe some machine made these by the thousands. Are you sure you don't have hundreds of mothers and grandmothers around the country baking these in their kitchens and sending them to your plant?

Some of the other cookies left an aftertaste or were greasy but not yours. If I had to name one thing bad it was the cookies were just a little salty. Try leaving some of it out. Maybe you could hire me as your official tester to make sure they are always just right.

Keep up the good work and keep baking those rad cookies!

Essays Written for the CAP Assessment

The following essays were written as part of the CAP writing assessment. They represent a range of high, medium, and low achievement.

High Achievement

Dear Author,

I wanted to commend you on your terrific book Holding Me Here. It was such a personal and realistic book that it appealed to me in almost all respects.

I especially liked the character development of the young girl. At the beginning of the story, she dreamed the lady who would be renting out the extra room would be exotic and famous. She even thought she might be a newsreporter doing an article on the typical American family and taking pictures of her and her mom day after day. When the woman wasn't, she was very upset. She snooped in this lady's room and found her diary and pictures. She read her diary and was shocked to find out that this lady had left her family for no apparent reason. She wrote about how she missed them. It was all very peculiar. So the young miss set out to reunite the family. She should have never done this. Meanwhile, she couldn't cope with her parents' two year divorce. Her mom was dating again and she hated her for it. Her dad wasn't dating and she hated him for it. At this point in the story I felt the girl was immature, but as she got into deep problems, she began to "wake up" and understand life.

I also liked the certain descriptions you used. I liked how you described the woman as being like Gretel, lost in the woods. I felt it was very effective. I also felt the way you described the girl's anger towards her mother's boyfriend was realistic. She never gave him a chance and never let him be too nice to her.

Another area I liked was the whole situation of divorce. It faces many young people and it sometimes comforts them to see how other people like in books work out their problems. It is a very deep and serious matter but I thought you did a fine job.

Now to be honest, I thought that the diary was a little too revealing because I knew right off that the woman was abused by her husband. I could tell right off that he drank a lot. I concluded right off that she missed her children, but was leaving them for their own good. I thought it was very strange that the girl couldn't see this. Unless it was part of the attempt to make the girl seem naive I don't think it was realistic.

Another part I didn't think was reasonable was when the woman's husband found out his daughter Lesley had seen her mother and him come to the main character's house. In your story, he was drunk and pounded on the door and there was a real chase for him trying to catch her. Personally I thought this was like "The Dukes of Hazzard" car chases which are very long and don't get anywhere. I think you could have found an alternate incident.

Despite these two parts, I found the book impossible to put down. I loved this book just the same and I hope you write some sort of sequel. It was really great.

Admiringly,

Your Greatest Fan

Commentary

The judgment expressed in the previous essay is clear and distinguished by the specific statement of its being "personal and realistic." Those qualities are then supported by reasons—character development

of the young girl, descriptions, and the divorce situation—and these reasons are, in turn, amplified by specifics from the book. The scope of the evaluation is widened by a discussion of the book's weaknesses. The judgment remains clear, and the essay ends with a feeling of the student's personal involvement with the book.

Mid-Range Achievement

My favorite type of music is New Wave. Most New Wave songs are written and produced by the English. The words in every New Wave song tell a special love story. The stories are very sad and romantic. Some stories even relate to what really happens in the life of my friends and myself. Also, the words I listen to help bring myself into my world of fantasy. While listening to the words of this kind of music, my imaginaries start taking place. I'd dream of things that I wish would really happen someday. I think dreamers would enjoy New Wave as much as I have.

Another reason why I really love New Wave music is their rhythms. It's not too fast like rock music, nor it is too slow and boring like classical music. It is more like the beats of our hearts.

I think New Wave music is the kind of music that will be enjoyed by every teenager in the future years.

Here are some of the titles of the New Wave songs: "Heart & Soul", "Heartache", "I Can Loose My Heart Tonight", "Dream Away", and many more.

Those are the reasons why New Wave is my kind of music. It's great.

Commentary

This average-scoring essay is coherent and focused on one subject—New Wave music. The judgment is clearly stated and supported by many reasons. The essay is uneven, it starts out well but ends weakly, devolving into a list of songs and an example of lyrics. The reader must make the connection between the list, the lyrics, and their importance in pointing out the worth of the music.

Low Achievement

My favorite music is rock. It has alot of beat into it. It also has many more new technology instruments. Most of it is electric. Like guitars, drums, and keybords. All of this equipment is more louder. I think it sounds alot better. Everything in this music is just perfect. In the way they make it. This music has made me like rock music. I think it is good. It really gets you going and feeling good.

Commentary

In this essay, the judgment is stated, but the reasons supporting the judgment—the beat, "new technology instruments," and "feeling good"—are not elaborated. The essay seems to be a random sequence of statements about the writer's favorite music.

Published Example of Evaluation

Machine Dreams by Jayne Anne Phillips is an astonishingly and deceptively simple novel about family life in America from the Great Depression through the Vietnam War. Phillips, whose first novel this is (earlier, she published a much praised volume of short stories, Black Tickets), tells the plain tale of two generations of the Hampson family—Mitch and Gene, the father and mother, and their daughter and son, Danner and Billy.

Nothing much happens in Machine Dreams that is not likely to happen in most American families. The men go off to war; the women stay home and worry. People live and die as they do in real life, and the sum understanding of the novel is that life will prevail, at least over the long haul.

What makes Machine Dreams work is Phillips' eye for detail and her ability as a storyteller. Born in West Virginia (where she sets her story), Phillips says she "grew up hearing a lot of stories, mythic kinds of stories from neighbors and relatives. Some of these undoubtedly became the stuff of her first novel, much to our great enrichment. I sat riveted for most of the novel, marvelling at the talent of this young writer. There are many wonderful vignettes which make outstanding reading aloud for a high school classroom. My particular favorite is a long passage which tells the story of Mitch's early childhood encounter with a Chinese railroad worker who has been isolated in a small shack in the wilderness when it is discovered that he is a leper. This little story is worth the entire price of admission. Machine Dreams is available in paperback from Pocket Books for $3.95, a bargain to be sure.[3]

—Dave Burmester

Readings in Evaluation

Evaluations are readily available in review sections of magazines, newspapers, and journals. In addition to reviews, many works of nonfiction, especially those which make strong thematic

[3]Dave Burmester, *California English* (Sept./Oct., 1985). Used with permission.

statements, contain evaluations which can be used as classroom models. The titles of a few resources follow:

Active Voices II: A Writer's Reader, compiled by James Moffett and Phyllis Tashlik. Boynton/Cook Publishers, Inc., 1987 ("Review," pp. 295–299)

Literary Cavalcade and *Scope Magazine*, Scholastic, Inc.

Rolling Stone

Seventeen

Time Magazine

Newsweek

California English (publication of the California Association of Teachers of Education)

Rhetorical Effectiveness Scoring Guide for

Evaluation

Evaluation requires writers to state a judgment and support or justify their judgment with reasons and evidence. The writer of a convincing evaluation offers thoughtful, relevant reasons for the judgment and then argues them convincingly with evidence, examples, or anecdotes. Those requirements make evaluation a form of argument.

Prompts for evaluation invite students in grade eight to evaluate a wide range of phenomena and activities: games, writers, books, movies, poems or stories, music, or musical groups.

A writer focuses or controls an evaluation by asserting a firm judgment and selecting relevant reasons to justify it. A writer organizes an evaluative essay through a sequence of reasons coherently developed. An evaluation is supported or elaborated through the evidence, examples, or anecdotes a writer chooses to justify the reasons for the judgment.

Score Point 6—Exceptional Achievement

Judgment. Writer names or identifies the subject to be evaluated and states a firm judgment of it. This judgment is clear: I just finished a fantastic book; soccer is my favorite game; it would be hard to find a better movie than this one. Fresh, unusually stated judgment may be one characteristic of a six-point essay.

If the writing situation requires it, the writer describes the subject to be evaluated. This description does not dominate the essay but provides only a context or background for the evaluation.

Reasons. Writer gives a reason or reasons for the evaluation. These reasons clearly justify the judgment. The central focus of the essay stays on these reasons.

Evidence. Writer may give many reasons for the evaluation, but at least one reason will be fully supported by examples or evidence. Some of the strategies for justifying an evaluation follow:

- Bringing in personal experience
- Revealing personal associations
- Mentioning personal preference or taste
- Giving evidence or examples from the subject being evaluated, including text of song or story where appropriate
- Analyzing the subject being evaluated
- Comparing or contrasting related subjects in the same category
- Emphasizing the uniqueness of the subject being evaluated

Voice and Style. Essay is coherent. It engages the reader immediately; it has direction, purpose, movement, and provides a sense of closure.

Writer seems aware of readers' questions and needs throughout the essay. The essay seems to be written to particular readers. The writer convinces the readers of the plausibility of the evaluation.

Writer's choice of words, sentence variety, and sentence fluency demonstrate commitment to the writing as well as serious thinking about the subject.

A six-point essay demonstrates qualities all readers admire: conviction, enthusiasm, freshness. A six-point essay may demonstrate the writer's integration or immersion of self into the evaluation. These essays may use an unconventional rhetorical approach. In a six-point essay, the writer may take chances and succeed.

Score Point 5—Commendable Achievement

Judgment. Identifies the subject to be evaluated and expresses a firm judgment of it. Description does not dominate the essay.

Reasons and Evidence. Writer gives a reason or reasons and develops at least one fully. Essay is coherent. In all previously listed ways, a five-point essay is like a six-point essay. It reveals that the writer knows about writing evaluations. The essay is detailed, well-argued, and convincing.

Voice and Style. We notice some confidence and authority, but a five-point essay may be more predictable or conventional than a six-point essay. It is fully competent but less resourceful. It lacks the freshness, appeal, and originality of a six-point essay.

Score Point 4—Adequate Achievement

Judgment. Writer identifies the subject to be evaluated and expresses a firm judgment of it.

Reasons and Evidence. Essay includes a reason or reasons to support the judgment. At least one reason is moderately developed but not in the sustained, convincing way of a five-point or six-point essay.

In a four-point essay, the writer will do some things as well as the writer of a five-point essay, but the essay will not have the balance of a five-point essay. The essay may be uneven, or parts may be out of proportion. For example, the writer may spend too much time describing the subject at the expense of arguing to support the judgment of the subject. Even though the essay is uneven or unbalanced, it will still be focused and coherent.

The writer demonstrates the ability to develop an argument justifying an evaluation but cannot pull it off with the confidence of the writer of a five-point essay or the polish of a writer of a six-point essay.

Voice and Style. The writer of a four-point essay may express the authority expressed by the writer of a five-point or six-point essay but does so without the fresh thinking revealed in apt word choices and flexible sentences.

Score Point 3—Some Evidence of Achievement

Judgment. In a three-point essay the writer expresses a judgment and gives a reason or reasons for it. The writer reveals that he or she understands basically how evaluation works.

Reasons and Evidence. The essay falls short of a four-point essay in two ways: (1) reasons are not developed; instead they are listed; or (2) a reason is developed, but it is not developed logically or coherently. The writer tries to develop an argument supporting the reason but is clearly struggling to do so coherently. A summary of an episode in a book or TV show does not count as a developed reason.

Reasons and support may be predictable and shallow; they indicate little insight for the subject or the writer's relationship with the subject.

Voice and Style. We may doubt the writer's commitment to the evaluation. Few, if any, surprising word choices.

Score Point 2—Limited Evidence of Achievement

Judgment. States a judgment.

Reasons and Evidence. Writer may not give any reasons to support the judgment. Instead, the writer describes or summarizes the subject being evaluated. Essay may be relatively long.

OR

Writer lists reasons; some are not relevant to the judgment. Writer may develop a reason in a rambling, illogical way. The argument used to develop a reason will seem confused, vague, fragmented.

Voice and Style. Voice and style are flat and perfunctory.

Score Point 1—Minimal Evidence of Achievement

Judgment. Writer usually states a judgment but only describes the subject briefly.

Reasons and Evidence. Writer may give no reasons or list only one or two reasons for the judgment. Reasons are not developed. Writer usually relies on weak and general personal opinion.

Essay has all shortcomings of a two-point essay but may be briefer than a two-point essay. Usually, a one-point essay will be less coherent than a two-point essay.

Voice and Style. Voice and style are flat. Writer reveals no interest in arguing for a judgment.

Score Point 0—Inappropriate Response

Off topic.

Grade Eight Writing Guide:

Problem Solution

In problem solution the writer must define a problem, propose one or more solutions, and convince the reader of the feasibility of the proposed solutions. The writer may use a number of strategies to accomplish this task, including definition, description, illustration, example, facts or statistics, and anecdote.

Problem solution is related to other kinds of writing tested in the eighth-grade CAP writing test. For example, proposing possible solutions may call for a kind of thinking similar to that used in speculation about causes or effects. Problems or solutions may be illustrated with an autobiographical incident or a report of information.

Importance of Problem Solution Essays

Problem solution may be defined as proposal writing. Making proposals and finding solutions are a part of everyday life. Politicians grapple with the problem of the homeless, a blue ribbon committee investigates a NASA space shuttle tragedy and proposes solutions to prevent its recurrence, and parents of teenagers work out solutions to the problems of telephone use or falling grades.

In writing about a problem and its solutions, students must look at cause-and-effect relationships as well as analyze points of view in offering solutions. Students must examine evidence, look at the feasibility of their solutions, and ensure that their proposal is reasonable within the context of their essays. Because problem solution relies on personal experience and information, it provides eighth-grade students with an introduction to the complexities of argumentative writing.

Students engaged in this kind of writing are encouraged to look at strategies for resolving conflicts in their own lives and become active participants in resolving problems in their immediate communities.

Characteristics of Problem Solution Essays

Essays for problem solution are essentially argumentative pieces in which a problem is clearly defined and readers are effectively persuaded that solutions to the problem are feasible. An awareness of specific readers' concerns governs the strategies writers choose to develop convincing and persuasive proposals for their points of view. Personal experience and firsthand information are often the best sources for the student writer's arguments. Many writing strategies are available to writers in developing the essential components of problem solution essays. The characteristics delineated separately in the following sections may be woven into an actual essay in many different ways, depending on the intent and ingenuity of the writer.

Engaging the Reader

The writer begins by engaging the reader's interest. The writer may address the reader directly, eliciting immediate interest in the problem by acknowledging shared concern and stressing its

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importance. On the other hand, the writer may engage the reader through such strategies as a personal anecdote, a dramatization of the problem, or a simple statement of the issues involved.

Analyzing the Problem

The writer provides sufficient information for the reader to understand the problem, its causes and effects, and, if appropriate, the consequences of failing to resolve the problem. In analyzing the problem, the writer may show the seriousness of the problem, the problem's history and development, or its current status. The writer may also reveal the problem through specific examples or appropriate anecdotes. To reveal the problem's magnitude, the writer may compare the problem to other similar problems or discuss immediate or long-range consequences of inaction.

Proposing a Solution

In a logical, coherent manner, the writer proposes one or more solutions and gives steps for carrying them out. In arguing for the proposed solutions, the writer may use any number of options. He or she may show the practicality of the solution, explain the implementation of the solution and how to get started, stress its benefits, address possible objections to the solution or possible alternatives, or focus on the solution's feasibility.

Convincing the Reader

The writer shows an awareness of readers and attempts to address their concerns throughout the essay. The writer tries to convince the reader of the problem's seriousness and of the effectiveness of the proposed solution. To accomplish this task, the writer may appeal to shared interests and acknowledge readers' experience or expertise. The writer may discuss the pros and cons of alternatives, refute counterarguments, or address potential doubts and criticisms.

One Student's Writing Process and Exemplary Student Essay

The exemplary student essay at the end of this section resulted from a classroom writing assignment based on the study of the poem "The Ballad of the Landlord" by Langston Hughes. The student writer, whose fictitious name will be John, worked his way through various stages of writing in developing this essay. The steps of the assignment and his responses follow:

Precomposing

Before reading the poem, the class discussed and wrote about ideas relating to landlords and tenants. To help focus their ideas, the class wrote on the following two main topics:

1. Topic: What are some things landlords complain about?

   John: *Landlords complain about lousy tenants, people who don't pay rent on time, people who destroy the building, people whose pets mess things up, and kids who vandalize the place and make too much noise.*

2. Topic: What are some things tenants complain about?

   John: *Tenants complain about no heat, no hot water, broken down stairs, no lights, plumbing that doesn't work, and living in a dump.*

The teacher then read the poem aloud to the class.

The Ballad of the Landlord

Landlord, Landlord
My roof has sprung a leak
Don't you 'member I told you about it
Way last week?

Landlord, Landlord
These steps is broken down
When you come up yourself
It's a wonder you don't fall down.

Ten bucks you say I owe you
Ten bucks you say is due
Well, that's ten bucks more'n I'll pay you
Till you fix this house up new.

What? You gonna get eviction orders?
You gonna cut off my heat?
You gonna take my furniture and
Throw it in the street?

Un huh! You talking high and mighty.
Talk on till you get through
You ain't gonna be able to say a word
If I land my fist on you.

Police! Police!
Come and get this man!
He's trying to ruin the government
And overthrow the land!

Copper's whistle
Patrol bell!
Arrest.

Precinct Station
Iron cell
Headlines in the press

MAN T'REATENS LANDLORD
TENA. .HELD NO BAIL
JUDGE GIVES NEGRO 90 DAYS
IN COUNTY JAIL

—Langston Hughes[1]

After the reading, the students discussed problems that could exist in the building described in the poem and wrote about these problems. John listed "roaches, rats, holes in the walls, broken toilets, and no electricity" as possible problems.

Next, the class explored solutions to the problems, possible landlord objections, and counterarguments. Each student clustered or listed responses.

1. What are some solutions?
   John: *Get an exterminator.*
   Plaster the walls.
   Call a plumber.
   Get an electrician.
2. What objections might the landlord have?
   John: *It costs too much money.*
   The rent is always late.
   I don't have time.
   The place was fixed up when you moved in.
   Move if you don't like it.
   You are a deadbeat.
3. What counterarguments will you give?
   John: *It's your job.*
   Fix the places of those tenants who pay on time. Everyone else will see it and want it done and will pay.
   Make time.
   Let us do it and deduct the rent.
   We have a lease.

After discussing the problem and possible solutions, the teacher presented the writing assignment.

Writing Assignment

Imagine that you are the president of the tenants' association. Write a letter to the landlord in which you outline some major problems you and the other tenants want addressed. Propose a course of action for the landlord. In your writing anticipate some of the landlord's objections and provide counterarguments.

First Draft

John wrote for approximately 45 minutes and produced the following draft:

Dear Landlord:

We the members of the Hamilton Tenants' Association are writing to complain about several problems we are having here at your apartments on East 70th Street. The walls have holes in them. There are rats and roaches everywhere and the toilets in many apartments either don't flush or they overflow.

We propose that you take care of those problems by plastering the holes in the walls, calling an exterminator for the rats and roaches and getting a plumber to fix the toilets.

Now I am sure that you think you have no time for these things. It is your job to keep the apartments working well. You probably will tell us that it will be difficult because many people pay their rent late. You can just fix up the apartments of those who pay on time. Since you know we have a lease, don't tell us to move.

We expect you to take care of these problems immediately or else!

John Doe, for
The Tenants Association

Peer Response

The next day the students read papers aloud in response groups and offered suggestions for improvement. Members of the class gave John the following response:

- *Your ending sounds too mean. Be nicer and the landlord might fix things.*
- *You didn't give him much time. "Immediately" will make him mad. You could tell the landlord that you can't move because apartments are hard to find. That can go with the part about the lease.*

New Draft

The students and the teacher reviewed the suggestions of the peer readers and discussed ways to improve the writing, including the need for transitions. With this help John produced the following second, more fluent draft. The annotations direct your attention to characteristics of the problem solution essay.

Dear Landlord,

As president of the Hamilton Tenants' Association I am writing to complain about several problems that you have not taken care of here at your apartments on East 70th Street. For example, many apartments have broken toilets. Some don't flush and others overflow. In addition, there are rats and

[1]Langston Hughes, "The Ballad of the Landlord," in *Selected Poems*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1959, pp. 238–39. Used with permission.

roaches everywhere. Also, there are holes in the walls in the hallways and inside the apartments.

[Writer identifies self; addresses audience directly; uses specific, concrete detail to describe the problem]

The Tenants' Association proposes that you do the following things to fix these problems. First, call a plumber to fix the broken toilets. Second, get an exterminator to get rid of the roaches and rats. Finally, plaster the holes. They make the joint look like a dump.

[Makes a direct proposal of a solution; outlines steps in carrying out the solution]

I am sure that you will tell us that you don't have time to do these things, but this is your job, man. Landlords are supposed to make sure the apartments work right. You are also probably saying to yourself that it is going to cost too much money. Just fix the apartments of the tenants who pay their rent on time. Now don't tell us to move if we don't like it here. We have a lease. Besides, you know that apartments aren't easy to find for people like us.

[Acknowledges the counterargument; offers alternative solutions to the initial solution; provides strong argument]

We are giving you a month to start working on these problems. We aren't saying they have to be all fixed up. We just want you to start. If you don't, we are going to call the health department on you. We don't think we are being unreasonable.

[Sets time limits; continues to recognize audience; states consequences]

Thank you.

[Ends on a polite note]

John Doe, for
The Hamilton Tenants' Association

Response and Revision

Writers revise their work to communicate more clearly what they want to say. A critical element in this process is an awareness of audience, of the readers. For students this awareness develops through regular opportunities to share their work with others—fellow students, teachers, members of their family, or specific readers such as a newspaper editor, principal, or friend. As students shape their writing for a specific reader, they may use such revision strategies as changing the focus, rearranging parts, beginning in a different place, adding or deleting parts or details, or making new word choices. The breadth and depth of the revision will be governed by the needs of the particular piece of writing. Some first drafts may need extensive revision while others may need only minor changes.

In problem solution essays, students describe problems and propose logical, convincing solutions for these problems. Awareness of audience is crucial. Writers need to take the reader's point of view into account as they revise to develop more persuasive, effective essays.

Response Guides

A response guide includes a list of questions or statements that focus on the process of writing a specific type of essay. Some response guides may require students to rethink only a few important concerns; other guides may require students to work through a series of questions or suggestions. The following general revision guides may be helpful in developing appropriate guides for specific assignments. Guide A is of a general nature; Guide B addresses the main features of a problem solution essay.

Guide A: General Guidelines

1. What is the focus of the paper?
2. What are the best parts of the paper?
3. What would you like to know more about?
4. What could be added?
5. What could be deleted?
6. What parts are hard to understand and need to be clearer?
7. Are there parts that need to be rearranged?

Guide B: Problem Solution Guidelines

1. How does the beginning capture the reader's interest?
2. Is the beginning appropriate for the particular reader?
3. Is the problem clearly defined? If not, can you suggest how to improve the presentation? Point out places where this part might be improved.
4. Does the description of the problem show an awareness of readers?
5. Are solutions clearly and fully described?
6. Are convincing reasons for the solutions developed?
7. Which are the most convincing solutions?
8. Which are the least convincing?
9. What techniques of persuasion does the writer use?

10. Does the writer's voice seem appropriate for the situation?
11. Are the tone and the writer's voice consistent throughout?
12. What is the strongest part of the proposal?
13. What parts need additional work?

Teachers may choose a few of the preceding questions as the focus in teacher-student conferences, in read-around groups, small writing teams, or for use by individual students to assess their own writing.

After sharing and responding, students may determine what they should do in revising their drafts.

Classroom Writing Assignments

Although the CAP writing test is an artificial writing situation, opportunities for writing problem solution essays are prevalent in many classes. Some suggestions for integrating such assignments into the curriculum follow:

Literature/Language Arts

1. In *The Diary of Anne Frank*, we see that the inhabitants of the secret annex have difficulties living together under stressful conditions. Mrs. Frank is having a particularly hard time with Anne. Pretend you are Mrs. Frank. You feel you cannot speak to Anne about your problems, so you decide to write her a letter. In your letter to Anne, describe the problems you are having with her from your point of view. Then propose a solution that is workable and would be convincing to Anne. Remember, Anne is your reader. You are trying to persuade her to accept your solution.
2. Many times in a story a character gets in trouble or behaves badly. In "All Summer in a Day," by Ray Bradbury, the children lock Margot, the main character, in a closet. Imagine you are one of the children. The next day you think through the reasons for your actions and the effect of those actions on Margot and decide to share your thoughts with the other students.

   Write a letter to the other children in which you analyze and describe the reasons for your treatment of Margot. Offer other ways you and the others could have solved the problem. Convince them of your solutions so something like this will not happen again.
3. It is common to have both major and minor disagreements with parents during the teenage years. Often, both sides have good reasons for their points of view. Think about a disagreement you have had with a parent. Think about your side of the argument and then think of your parent's side. Consider possible solutions to the problem.

   Write a letter to your parent. Describe the problem clearly. Propose a solution or solutions that would be agreeable to and fair for both sides.
4. Pretend that your town offers little in the way of appropriate recreational activities for young people. The teenagers find there is nothing for them to do in their spare time.

   Write a letter to the editor of your town's newspaper in which you draw attention to the lack of recreational opportunities for young people and present some high-quality, practical ideas to solve that problem. Convince your readers to favor your suggestions.

History–Social Science

1. History records many problems and the attempts of people to solve them. The record also shows us how these attempts came out. Here you can draw on your understanding of history to write about one of those problems and people's attempts to solve it.

   Imagine that you are a Bostonian in 1766; you are upset over the tax recently levied on tea by the British Parliament. In a letter to the editor of the *Boston Gazette*, express how you see the problem of a tax on tea. Then explore several possible solutions and write to convince the newspaper's readers to join you in those actions.
2. People who traveled west on the Oregon Trail faced many problems almost every day. Solving those problems was necessary to their survival. Assume you are a pioneer traveling on the Oregon Trail in 1846. You are in the Blue Mountains and face a steep descent onto the Columbia Plateau. You have to get the wagons down a slope that drops several hundred feet in about three miles.

   Write a letter to be carried to your relatives in the East by a returning horseman. In this letter

describe the problem you face the next day in getting your wagon safely down the steep grades. Then share your ideas of how you will solve the problem and write to reassure your family that your solutions will work.

1. Imagine that you are a volcano expert and live downwind from a volcano that has just erupted, sending huge clouds of dust and ash in your direction. You can anticipate that everything in your city will be covered with at least two inches of ash by tomorrow.

   Write a piece for the evening's edition of the local newspaper in which you warn people of what problems to expect from the ash fallout. Provide them with some solutions to these problems. Convince them of the urgency of taking proper steps.

2. Imagine that thousands of gallons of gasoline have leaked from an underground tank at a service station in your town. People in the neighborhood have been suffering headaches and fainting spells from smelling the fumes seeping into their offices and homes. You, as the city engineer, are concerned that the gasoline will contaminate a well providing water for the town.

   Write a letter to the president of the oil company that owns the station. Explain how the problem is affecting the neighborhood and urge the company to take a particular series of actions to clean up the problem.

Other Topics Appropriate to Problem Solution Writing

- Urban homeless—letter to a congressman
- Nuclear disarmament—letter to the editor
- Money for education—letter to a governor
- World hunger—letter to church members
- Teen suicide—letter to school newspaper
- Peer pressure—letter to a friend

- Supply of petroleum
- Use of pesticides
- Nuclear energy
- Alternative energy sources
- Offshore drilling
- Medical research using dogs and cats

- Spending money
- Homework
- Brothers and sisters
- Curfew
- Telephone privileges

- Alternative solution to a conflict in a specific story
- Proposed solutions to a character's problem

The CAP Writing Prompt Format

The writing prompts used by the California Assessment Program and included as examples in the CAP writing guides are organized into two sections: the writing situation and directions for writing. The writing situation contains prewriting information and directives designed to motivate students to think about the assignment. In the directions for writing section, students are given specific instructions regarding the assignment—intent, topic, audience, and other directions to keep in mind when responding to prompts.

Examples:

History–Social Science

The Buffalo

Writing Situation: In the settling of the American West in the 1880s, a problem arose because of the different life-styles of the American Indian and the settlers moving in.

The Plains Indians never settled permanently in an area. They followed the buffalo and other game that they relied on for food and clothing. Therefore, ownership of land was not part of the Plains Indians' culture.

The new settlers came from a farming culture that placed a high value on land ownership. As a result, the settlers wanted to keep large herds of buffalo from grazing on the land and trampling their crops. The Indians preferred to let the buffalo roam freely over the plains.

Imagine that you are an advisor to President Garfield in 1880. He has asked you to prepare a report that will help him decide what to do about the problem.

Directions for Writing: Write a report about this problem for President Garfield. Identify the problem and explain why it should be quickly resolved. Propose a solution that you think would settle the situation. Because you know that your report will be read by other advisors who might disagree with your solution, you should support it with arguments that will convince President Garfield that your solution will work.

Water Shortage

Writing Situation: Your community is experiencing a shortage of water. Because the last several years have been dry ones in your area, the water level in the reservoirs is low. The community has grown, and the old water supply system no longer fills the community's needs. The mayor has announced that an emergency exists and has appealed to the citizens to conserve water.

Directions for Writing: Write a letter to your local newspaper. Present the emergency so that your readers will agree that it is serious. State your understanding of the emergency. Describe some ways the citizens of your community could meet the emergency. Because your solution may be unpopular with some readers, you will have to support it with arguments to convince your readers that your solution is reasonable and will work.

Additional Exemplary Student Essays

The following eighth-grade essays were written in a timed writing situation. The writers responded to a prompt requiring the students to describe a disagreement with a parent and propose solutions to the problem. They are, of course, first drafts written in one class period.

Dear Mom,

I was thinking about the argument we had a couple days ago about my phone. I do realize that I spend a lot of time on it, but didn't you too when you were my age? You think that my phone takes up a lot of time off of my school work. But, don't I get good grades? I am an A, B student, I'm always on the Honor Roll and I get the homework I have done.

I know you thought that getting a minimum of five phone calls a night is absolutely crazy, so you took my phone away and allowed me only to get two phone calls a night for a maximum of ten minutes each. I think that is unfair. I have ten minutes to tell my friends my problems, ask advice, make plans on Saturday and drool over the new guy in school. Ten minutes in which you allow me to do this is long enough for me to say "hi," and then I have to go. The result of this is not good; I am dramatically suffering in my social status. Is that anyway to treat your daughter? Don't you feel the least bit guilty???

What I'm trying to say is this: can you extend my time on the phone? I get my homework done, I do my chores, and I'm a good girl. If you're worried that no one can get through, why don't we get call waiting? Or, we can arrange a schedule that allows me to have an hour to do all my phone calls in. There are so many different ways to work this out!!! Won't you please let me have my phone back?? I don't even get two phone calls a night, because they're all scared to call. I don't blame them. Couldn't we compromise or something?? At least can I have my phone back? Maybe I can have five phone calls a night for fifteen minutes each. Could we at least try to work things out? I'm sure we could come to an agreement. Let's give it a try.

Love,

Your daughter

P.S. If that doesn't work, maybe we can get my own line. Then, I could be the "Social Queen" of the telephone again. I do have to live up to my title, right??

Commentary

The first essay is a commendable attempt at problem solution writing. The writer presents a convincing argument for her case. She maintains a constant sense of the reader, her mother, and the mother's possible objections. She presents a detailed analysis of the problem and its effects on her everyday life. In proposing her solutions, she attempts to accommodate her mother and offer a feasible compromise. In the conclusion she urges her mother to support her and ends on a humorous note.

Dear Mom,

You feel if I play volleyball I will have no time for school work and my grades will fall behind. I think I have a logical solution. If I go to practice everyday after school from 2:25 to 4:00 p.m. and go to bed, on the average, at about 10:00 p.m., I feel six hours, which is more than I need, would be a sufficient amount of time for school work. Another thing I want to point out is usually I don't arrive home from school until 3:30 and I don't believe a half hour is going to make a big difference. It only takes me about a hour and a half, most of the time, to do my homework, and if I play volleyball I would still have that hour and a half and even more time than that, if it was needed and still be finished with it before 8:00 p.m. Therefore I don't see why I can not play this sport when all the extra time every day will only be about half an hour. Coming to this conclusion I feel playing this sport will make no difference what so ever on my grades. So, I think if I agree to drop out if my grades begin to fall then I am right and this solution we both can agree to allows me to be on the ST. volleyball team.

Sincerely,

Your daughter

P.S. I may not even make the team even if I do try out.

Commentary

This essay represents an acceptable response to the prompt. Unlike the first essay, it does not present a detailed description of the problem or its effects. Since the student was writing to her mother, however, she may have assumed the problem was well known to her reader. The writer adequately proposes and argues for a solution to the problem. She has an awareness of her mother's objections and argues against them in her solution. There are a number of errors which do not detract from the understanding of the letter. The essay does contain the basic elements of problem solution writing.

Essays Written for the CAP Assessment

The following three essays, representing high, middle, and low achievement, were written by eighth-grade students in a CAP testing situation. (The rhetorical effectiveness scoring guide for problem solution is located at the end of this section.)

High Achievement

To Miss Stacy Green, Room 30
Student Council Representative.

I am writing to you concerning the recent unrest in the student body about our dances. I would like to take a few moments to explain to you exactly what the problem is and suggest a few solutions.

First of all, I believe that the DJ's from "Sound Investment" have got to go. You say that the student body can't afford a better DJ, but if the student body complains so much, don't you think we'd be willing to have fund-raisers? Of course we would!

And another thing, I think we should have a little looser standards on what we can and can't do in the dances. For instance, everyone knows that a long time ago someone hurt themself, doing a "swing around", in which two people hold hands and swing around on a circle until they gain so much momentum that person lets go and they both go flying, but everyone still does it anyway. If someone is willing to risk doing something like that and they know the consequences, let them! You will then say that there could be harm coming to people who are hit by other people doing this "swing around". The student council should then designate areas for this activity and everyone will be happy.

The next problem I am siting with dances is the location. The gym is alright for having dances at the beginning of the year when it and the locker room next to it is nice and clean, but heaven knows that no one enjoys a dance located by a dirty, smelly, sweaty locker room that has been used for that purpose for half the year! The gym itself is not much better. Think of all those dirty tennis shoes running around in the place, not to mention sweaty feet. It's a wonder that after a dance the school doesn't break out in a mass case of athlete's foot! You even expect us to get in our nice sixty to one-hundred dollar dresses and suits at the promotion dance and go run around in a filthy gym! Instead, it would be nice to have a patio dance, on which we set up the sound system outside on the patio, where

we wouldn't have to take our shoes off, and dance in the cool night air. Or, we could have a dance in the multipurpose rooms, which I might add, are a lot bigger and cleaner than the gym.

The dances have another problem too. They are only two hours long. Do you think that we would be too tired! Students which in P.E. must run miles without stopping? Or is it that you can't find enough chaperones that will stay the longer time? Maybe you could have chaperones come in shifts, one chaperone at a post half the dance, another the last half. And, again, if there isn't enough money, we could have fund raisers.

So you see, Miss Green, the problems of the dance are many, but there are solutions. The Student body wants results, and you see, we are willing to work for them to make the dances better for everyone. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Anne
Member of the Student Body

Commentary

This essay represents a paper in the high range of achievement. The writer indicates her clear awareness of the reader throughout, addressing the student council representative directly and describing both the problems and proposed solutions clearly and fully. The writer recognizes the complexities involved in the problems with the school dances and proposes well-reasoned, thoroughly elaborated proposals from which a reasonable solution for the problems can be developed. The errors in the essay are few and do not restrict communication of her ideas.

Mid-Range Achievement

Dear Mr. Lucklow,

I have noticed the littering in the cafeteria and I realize it makes our school appear unorganized and dirty.

First of all, let me tell you how I think this problem started. When students eat lunch, they normally sit with their friends. If they sit and talk for the entire lunch break, they may be in a hurry to get to their next class and leave their trash behind. Another reason might be because students are lazy and don't want to take their trash to the trash cans. They may think that this is a waste of time or unnecessary.

If we want our cafeteria to appear cleaner, we must discover ways to make the students stop! I have some suggestions that could help. First of all. I've noticed that the trashcans are near the back wall. Maybe we could move the trashcans near the exit. This way the students could take their trays and discard them as they leave. Secondly, we could cancel after-school activities and dances. This would show the students that they can't get away with it. Third, maybe we could have an assembly. At the assembly movies or slides could be shown of other places where trash has been left. We could even show slides of how our own school appears after lunch! Maybe then the students would realize how their not being responsible affects our school. Lastly, the amount of time we spend for lunch presently could be shortened, therefore making the students realize and think about what they're doing.

Whatever we do, the littering should be stopped.

Thank you,

Cindy

Commentary

This essay represents student writing found in mid-range. From the very beginning, the writer shows an awareness of the reader by addressing Mr. Lucklow, the school principal, directly, and by drawing on mutual experiences. Later, in proposing her solutions, the writer enlists Mr. Lucklow's support by using the pronoun "we" to let him know that she sees the litter problem as a shared one, and one to solve together. The writer's suggestions for solving the problem are persuasive in their practicality and detail ("Maybe we could move the trashcans near the exit"). The writer also shows a willingness to consider some loss of privileges to solve the problem (a shortened lunch period, cancellation of activities). The thoroughness of the writer's thinking combined with the reasonable tone of the essay create a convincing argument for the writer's solutions to the problem. A lack of elaboration and development keeps this essay in the midrange.

Low Achievement

Dear Mr. Lucklow,

I read your letter and its real sad. That your kids is messing there own property. They should try to be neat. You should start taking away their privileges like no P.E. just work. And no lunch break. Just after they eat go in class and work.

This essay represents a paper scored in the low range. The writer does show some awareness of the

reader. He also provides a minimal description of the problem. Although the essay lacks a real argument, the writer suggests a possible solution ("start taking away privileges") with a few supporting details. The essay is very short and contains some problems in conventions which are distracting to the reader.

Published Example of Problem Solution

Abraham Lincoln: A Letter to His Step-Brother[2]

December 24, 1848

Dear Johnston:

Your request for eighty dollars, I do not think it best to comply with now. At the various times when I have helped you a little, you have said to me, "We can get along very well now," but in a very short time I find you in the same difficulty again.

Now this can only happen by some defect in your conduct. What that defect is, I think I know. You are not lazy, and still you are an idler. I doubt whether since I saw you, you have done a good whole day's work, in any one day. You do not have very much to work, and still you do not work much, merely because it does not seem to you that you could get much for it.

This habit of uselessly wasting time is the whole difficulty; it is vastly important to you, and still more so to your children, that you should break this habit. It is more important to them, because they have longer to live, and can keep out of an idle habit before they are in it, easier than they can get out after they are in.

You are now in need of some ready money; and what I propose is that you shall go to work, "tooth and nail," for somebody who will give you money for it.

Let father and your boys take charge of your things at home—prepare for a crop, and make the crop, and you go to work for the best money wages, or in discharge of any debt you owe, that you can get. And to secure you a fair reward for your labor, I now promise you that for every dollar you will, between this and the first of May, get for your own labor either in money or in your own indebtedness, I will then give you one other dollar.

By this, if you hire yourself at ten dollars a month, from me you will get ten more, making twenty dollars a month for your work. In this, I do not mean you shall go off to St. Louis, or the lead mines, or the gold mines, in California, but I mean for you to go at it for the best wages you can get close to home—in Coles County.

Now if you will do this, you will soon be out of debt, and what is better, you will have a habit that will keep you from getting in debt again. But if I should now clear you out, next year you will be just as deep in as ever. You say you would almost give your place in Heaven for $70 or $80. Then you value your place in Heaven very cheaply, for I am sure you can with the offer I make you get the seventy or eighty dollars for four or five months' work. You say if I furnish you the money you will deed me the land, and if you don't pay the money back, you will deliver possession—Nonsense! If you can't now live with the land, how will you then live without it? You have always been kind to me, and I do not now mean to be unkind to you. On the contrary, if you will but follow my advice, you will find it worth more than eight times eighty dollars to you.

Affectionately,

Your brother,

A. Lincoln

[2]*The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1953, pp. 15–16.

Readings in Problem Solution

Problem solution is a practical type of writing and may be found in many resources readily available in the classroom, including the following:

- Newspaper and magazine editorials and articles
- Speeches, especially campaign speeches
- Government and business proposals

Fictional characters who face problems provide many ideas for problem solution essays. Students could discuss characters' problems and propose solutions in their own writing. The following literary works are suitable for use with problem solution:

*Brooks, Polly S. *Queen Eleanor: Independent Spirit of the Medieval World: A Biography of Eleanor of Aquitane*. New York: Harper and Row Junior Books Group, 1983.

*Brooks, Bruce. *The Moves Make the Man*. New York: Harper and Row Junior Books Group, 1984.

*Burnford, Sheila. *The Incredible Journey*. New York: Bantam Books, Inc., 1977.

*Cleaver, Vera, and Bill Cleaver. *Where the Lilies Bloom*. New York: Harper and Row Junior Books Group, 1969.

*Frank, Anne. *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl*. New York: Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1967.

*George, Jean C. *Julie of the Wolves*. New York: Harper and Row Junior Books Group, 1972.

*Hamilton, Virginia. *Junius Over Far*. New York: Harper and Row Publishing Co., Inc., 1985.

*Harris, Jacqueline. *Martin Luther King, Jr.* New York: Franklin Watts, Inc, 1983.

*Hinton, E. *The Outsiders*. New York: Dell Publishing Co., Inc., 1986.

*Keller, Helen. *The Story of My Life*. New York: Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1954.

*Kennedy, John F. *Profiles in Courage*. New York: Harper and Row Publishing, Inc., 1983.

†Lipsyte, Robert. *The Contender*. New York: Harper and Row Junior Books Group, 1967.

*Taylor, Mildred. *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*. New York: Bantam Books, Inc., 1978.

*Tolkien, J. R. R. *The Hobbit*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1937.

*Twain, Mark. *The Prince and the Pauper*. New York: Airmont Publishing Co., Inc., 1964.

*Wells, H. G. *War of the Worlds*. New York: Airmont Publishing Co., Inc., 1964.

The following short stories are often found in eighth-grade anthologies:

Bryan, C.D.B. "So Much Unfairness of Things"

Chekhov, Anton. "The Bet"

*Connell, Richard. "The Most Dangerous Game," in *Tales of Fear and Frightening Phenomena*. Edited by Helen Hoke. New York: Lodestar Books, 1982.

Henry, O. "The Ransom of Red Chief"

Hughes, Langston. "Thank You Ma'am"

Hugo, Victor. "The Bishop's Candlesticks"

*Poe, Edgar Allen. "The Cask of Amontillado," in *Great Short Works of Edgar Allen Poe*. Edited by J. R. Thompson. New York: Harper and Row Publishing Co., Inc., 1970.

Stockton, Frank. "The Lady or the Tiger"

†Listed in *Recommended Readings in Literature: Kindergarten Through Grade Eight*. Sacramento: California State Department of Education, 1986.

*Listed in *Recommended Readings in Literature: Kindergarten Through Grade Eight* (Annotated edition). Sacramento: California State Department of Education, 1988.

Rhetorical Effectiveness Scoring Guide for

Problem Solution

Prompts for problem solution require writers to convince specific readers of the seriousness of a problem and the feasibility of a solution (or solutions) for the problem. This requirement makes problem solution essentially argumentative or persuasive. A complex type of writing, problem solution involves several diverse writing strategies—definition, description, anecdote, causes or results, examples, or statistics—but its central strategy is argument. Writing a problem solution is a complex and challenging assignment for students in grade eight. However, the assignment has the advantage of enabling students to rely on personal experience for content. All prompts invite students to propose a solution for a community, school, or personal problem. Because problem solution relies on personal experience and information, it provides students in grade eight with an accessible introduction to serious argumentative writing.

Writers maintain focus by identifying or defining a problem and asserting a solution to it. The identification and assertion provide the twin theses of problem solution essays. The writer's attitude toward the problem and solution, along with the writer's continual awareness of readers' needs, helps the writer maintain focus. Writers organize problem solution essays by presenting the problem coherently, describing the solution clearly, and then shrewdly sequencing reasons for readers to support the solutions. For those reasons to be convincing, writers must support them with careful arguments.

Score Point 6—Exceptional Achievement

Readers. The beginning engages readers' interest, sometimes by stressing the importance of the problem. Writer is careful to define or identify the situation and the specific problem to be solved. Writer may begin by dramatizing the problem but will eventually refer to readers and state the problem.

Writer continues to be aware of readers throughout the essay, perhaps referring to them directly, acknowledging their objections or reservations, or trying to enlist their support. This awareness of readers is expressed in a natural, even graceful, way. Writer seems to understand fully that particular readers must be convinced the problem is serious and that these readers must be convinced to take action to solve it.

Writer may accommodate readers in any of the following ways:

- Addressing readers directly
- Considering alternative solutions readers may favor
- Acknowledging readers' objections to proposed solutions
- Appealing to shared interests or common goals
- Inviting readers to improve writer's solutions or to suggest their own
- Acknowledging readers' experience or expertise
- Assuring readers they really can solve the problem
- Encouraging readers to take the first step toward solving the problem

Writer may conclude by urging readers to take action, asking for their support, making a last appeal, restating solutions, restating consequences of failing to solve the problem, or thanking readers for anticipated cooperation or action.

Problem. Writer presents the problem fully so that readers will understand the nature and seriousness of the problem.

Such strategies as the following are available to writers for presenting a problem:

- Showing that the problem really exists and is serious
- Sketching the history of the problem: how it came about, how it developed
- Exploring reasons why the problem continues to be a problem: what sustains it
- Giving specific examples of the problem or relating anecdotes that illustrate the problem
- Comparing this problem with other problems to help readers understand the nature and seriousness of the problem
- Discussing the present unfortunate consequences of the problem, the immediate

effects of the problem, or the results of the problem

- Discussing the long-range consequences of failing to solve the problem

Solution. Writer offers one or more solutions to the problem. Depending on the problem and situation, writer may offer specific, definite solutions or suggest tentative solutions in an exploratory way. Writer may list several solutions, but at least one of them is developed or elaborated fully. The writer makes a convincing argument for at least one solution. Nearly all the six-point essays argue for more than one solution.

When writers argue for their proposed solutions, they may use strategies like these:

- Assuring readers the solution really will solve the problem
- Saying the solution will not cost too much
- Saying the solution will not take too long
- Claiming the solution is not too difficult to implement
- Minimizing any other negative consequences of the solution
- Showing readers how to get started on the solution
- Stressing the general benefits of the solution for all (so as not to seem self-serving)
- Outlining steps in carrying out the solution
- Mentioning and dismissing alternative solutions
- Weighing and accepting or including alternative solutions
- Mentioning readers' possible objections to the solution

The solutions should reflect the writer's thoughtful commitment to solving the problem as his or her insight into what readers will and will not do in supporting and carrying out a solution.

Proposals may be ironic or humorous. Scorers should consult table leader about such proposals.

Score Point 5—Commendable Achievement

Readers. A five-point essay reflects readers' concerns but may lack the consistent focus on readers of a six-point essay.

Problem. A five-point essay may identify and describe the problem in a way appropriate to the intended audience but may not do so as elaborately and imaginatively as a six-point essay.

Solution. A five-point essay offers at least one relevant, well-argued solution to the problem. The best argument for any one solution in a five-point essay may lack the logic and coherence of a six-point essay.

A five-point essay is engaging, energetic, and convincing. It lacks only the balance and force of a six-point essay.

Score Point 4—Adequate Achievement

Readers. Readers may be mentioned at the beginning but are usually not referred to again until the conclusion. Concern with readers is not as evident as in a five-point or six-point essay.

Problem. Writer identifies a problem and discusses it at least briefly.

Solution. A four-point essay will offer at least one moderately developed logical solution. Solution will be relevant to the problem.

Some four-point essays may be quite engaging or convincing. Others may be matter of fact, not surprising or not especially convincing.

Score Point 3—Some Evidence of Achievement

Readers. Readers may be mentioned but are seldom accommodated.

Problem. A three-point essay identifies a problem.

Solution. Writer may list several relevant solutions, but at least one solution will be developed minimally. Essay may seem perfunctory, flat, or hurried.

Score Point 2—Limited Evidence of Achievement

Readers. Readers may not be mentioned at all, but essay will seem appropriate to the designated readers.

Problem. Writer mentions a problem. May assume the reader knows the purpose of the letter or essay.

Solution. Writer merely lists solutions without support or argument. Solution will seem relevant to the problem. Even though a two-point essay is not developed, it is usually coherent. A two-point essay contains little or no argument.

Score Point 1—Minimal Evidence of Achievement

Writer on topic.

Readers. Writer indicates little or no sense of readers' concerns. Could be written for any readers.

Problem. Problem may be difficult to identify.

Solution. Writer may not offer a solution or mentions a solution that does not seem relevant or

logically related to problem. Solutions are not argued.

Essay is brief, often not coherent.

Score Point 0—Inappropriate Response

Off topic.

Grade Eight Writing Guide:

Autobiographical Incident

Within the eight types of writing tested by CAP in grade eight, autobiographical incident occupies a central position. Because autobiographical incident focuses on a particular event in the writer's life, this type of writing can be the starting point for the other seven types of writing. That is, personal experience becomes a rich source for story, provides an informed point of view for firsthand biography and observation, and creates a reservoir of specific supporting ideas for speculation about causes or effects, evaluation, report of information, and problem solution.

Importance of Autobiographical Incident

We have all experienced the sudden recognition of ourselves in the self-disclosure of others. We recognize the universality of human experience from reading about incidents in others' lives; and we find comfort, humor, and revelation in those shared experiences.

Since eighth graders are at the threshold of recognizing the similarities in their own lives and the lives of others, autobiographical incident is an ideal type of writing for this grade level. In autobiographical incident writers tell a story from their personal experiences. Besides narrating an incident, writers tell readers what it has meant to them and disclose the autobiographical significance of the incident. Thus, while this type of writing draws on students' natural storytelling skills, it also helps them to gain perspective on their personal experiences and find the form and words with which to share this understanding with others.

Autobiographical incident prepares students to do other types of writing. As students realize the validity of their own experiences, they can use those incidents as persuasive evidence in support of their ideas. Some of the most convincing expository essays are those that draw on personal experience to support and develop generalizations. In fiction the ideas for stories and characters are often found in one's own experiences. As students learn to use their own lives and their daily experiences as resources, all their writing will be enriched.

Characteristics of Autobiographical Incident

Information about the characteristics of an autobiographical incident may be of help to the teacher when students are working with that kind of writing. The information can serve as a focus for classroom discussions and as a guide for students when they are revising their papers. Information about the characteristics follows.

Incident

The writer narrates a story that moves toward the central incident. The writer tells readers what they need to know to understand what happened and why it is significant. A list of some of the strategies the writer may use follows.

- Naming (specific names of people or objects, quantities or numbers)
- Visual details of scene, objects, or people (size, colors, shapes, features, or dress)

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- Sounds or smells of the scene
- Specific narrative action (movements, gestures, postures, or expressions)
- Dialogue
- Interior monologue
- Expression of feelings or insights the writer had at the time of the incident
- Pacing
- Suspense or tension
- Surprise
- Comparison or contrast

Context

The writer locates the incident in a particular setting by orienting the reader to the scene, people, and events. By using details relevant to the incident, the writer goes beyond identifying or pointing to the scene or people. The writer may devote considerable space in the essay to orienting readers, describing the scene and people, and providing background or context for the incident. These devices underscore the importance of the incident.

Significance

The essay reveals why the incident was important to the writer. This significance can be either implied or stated. If the significance is implied, it will be apparent to the reader. It may be stated in the writer's insights at the time of the incident or as reflections from the writer's present perspective.

Voice and Style

The authentic voice is of concern in autobiographical incident because it reveals the writer's personality as well as the writer's attitude toward the incident. Voice is in writing what speech, gesture, and personality are in the person. By choosing words, events, and details, the writer conveys a sense of self in the essay.

Although it is helpful to look at these characteristics separately during the analysis of a piece of writing, it is important to keep the entire piece in mind, recognizing that autobiographical incident is above all the chronicle of a significant event in a person's life.

An Exemplary Student Essay

The student who wrote the following essay was asked to write about how some event changed the direction of a bad day; the student was to describe the event and explain its impact on the writer. The essay is accompanied by commentary in which the student's use of strategies for writing an autobiographical incident are noted. This section is followed by an account of the steps leading to this final draft.

Unexpected Friends

"Open your books to page 67, please," Mrs. Taylor announced.

[Intriguing beginning with use of dialogue]

"Oh no," I thought. "Why can't you just let us out for our snack break a few minutes early? There are only three minutes left!"

[Internal dialogue emphasizes feelings]

"Now you may go get your snack," Mrs. Taylor finally said. These were the words I was waiting to hear. As Tina, my best friend, and I jogged down the hall to the principal's office, the banging of lockers and swarm of students were a blur to my eyes and ears. What are the results? What are the results? These four simple words kept racing through my head as I focused my eyes on the long hallway ahead. It was only last Friday, the day of the student council elections, that my friend Mary and I had competed for president and vice-president against two other teams. There had been a tie between us and one of our opponents, a boys' team of Mark and Hal. Now, only two hours ago the final runoff took place. What are the results? I slowed my jog down to a trot, trying to stay calm. There was Mr. Corey's office in front of me—a bear's den, big and foreboding. "Tina, I can't go through with this."

[Visual details of the scene. Readers oriented to mood and tone of the scene. Specific narrative action; background and context for the incident provided. Naming. Movements, postures, expressions described. Dialogue.]

"I'll ask him," she replied decisively as she bounded into his office.

[Slows the pace]

"Who won?"

He paused a moment, taking his hands out of his pockets. His eyes looked past me as he simply stated, "The boys."

Before I knew it, we were back in the hall, heading for the bathroom. Just as we were almost to our destination, just steps away, guess who we had to bump into—Mark, Hal, and Andy, their campaign manager. Andy bellowed, "Who won?" Although I had the fakest smile ever plastered on my face, they

did not get the clue. Transition to surprise and tension.

[This section less confusing in first draft (next section of guide).]

"You did, and congratulations," I answered in a high, squeaky voice.

[Specific narrative action]

As I walked back into the classroom, eyes downcast, Mr. Corey's voice came on the loudspeaker. "Congratulations to Mark and Hal, our new president and vice-president." Everyone in my class turned to look at me.

[Visual details]

My lips, although barely visible, were trembling as I sat down in my seat staring at the desk top. I pushed my hair in front of my face hoping to conceal my flushed cheeks and my sweaty forehead. Why did they have to watch me? I got up to get a drink. At least that was my excuse, but I wanted to hide the tear that was trickling down my face. On my way to the fountain, Steve came over to me.

"I thought you gave the best speech at the assembly last week, and I think you would have made a good president, too." I looked up at him in disbelief.

"Thanks," I mumbled with a slight smile. As I was bending over to get my drink, Ed came up to me.

"Are you okay? Do you need some help?"

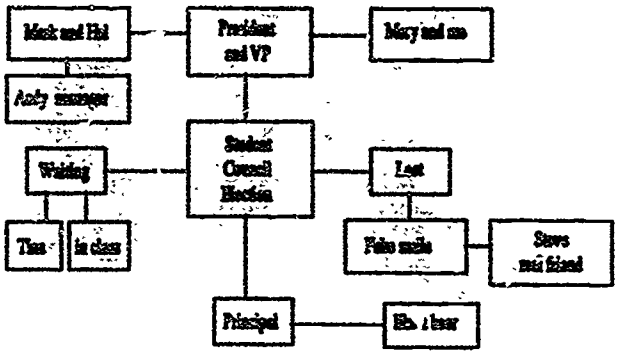
"I'm all right," I replied, but now a bigger smile spread over my whole face. "I don't need to cry over this," I thought and sat back down at my desk. "Mark and Hal are going to be a very qualified team. Now I don't have to plan out and attend student council meetings." But as much as I tried to convince myself that I didn't care, I was only half listening. Yet that was the first time I realized that sometimes in the time of deepest need, unexpected friends can cheer you up the most.

[Expression of remembered feelings or insights. Significance of event.]

One Student's Writing Process

Prewriting for a Specific Topic

After receiving the assignment to write about how some event changed the direction of a bad day, the student used the clustering technique to generate ideas for her essay. Grouped as partners, other students were discussing, comparing, and relating particular incidents to one another. The cluster and the first draft, which follow, were completed during a 40-minute class period.



First Draft

"You may go get your snack," Mrs. Taylor said.

Tina and I jogged down the hallway, to Mr. Corey's office. What are the results, what are the results? These four simple words kept running through my head. Earlier that morning the tie off elections had been taken, between me and Mark and Hal. The first voting had been Friday - but there had been a tie between both teams, and a runoff was in the making. What are the results, what are the results? I slowed down to a walk being calm, cool and collected.

Tina walked into Mr. Corey's office saying, "Who Won?"

"The boys," he simply stated.

Just as Tina and I hurriedly exited from his office, guess who had to come down the hall, bellowing "Who won?" Mark and Hal and their campaign manager, Andy. Although I probably had the fakest smile ever on my face, they still did not get the clue.

"You did, and congratulations," I replied, in a high squeaky voice.

My eyes were downcast as I slowly and methodically walked into class. Just as we entered, Mr. Corey's voice came on the loudspeaker. "Congratulations to Mark and Hal they are our new President and Vice President." Everyone in my class turned to look at me. My lip although it was hardly visible was trembling and my eyes only focused downward, at my desk. I felt hot and extremely embarrassed. I got up to get a drink of water. Steve came over to me saying, "I thought you did a good speech and you would have made a good president too." I stared up at him in disbelief.

"Thanks," I mumbled, with a slight smile.

As I was bending over to get a drink, Ed came up to me saying "Do you need some help?"

"I'm alright," I replied—but again a bigger smile was present on my face. That was the first day I realized that unexpected friends sometimes in the deepest time of need, can cheer you up the most.

Response and Revision

The writer talked with a partner to generate ideas for revising this essay. Some of the questions and the partner's responses follow:

Student Response Guide

Q: What do you like best about this paper?

A: I liked what I learned about you. I didn't know how you felt that way and how much the election meant to you.

Q: Does the beginning of the paper get your interest? What would be a different way to begin?

A: I like the way you start with conversation; but if you didn't go to our school, just that one sentence might not make much sense. Also, you can't really tell that you're worried or anything. Why don't you show how you feel more?

Q: Is the story complete? Are there any gaps in the narrative?

A: The part about the elections is really confusing. You have to explain the time and what's going on.

Q: What parts need to be developed more?

A: The election stuff for sure. Maybe more about your feelings when you and Tina are going down the hall to Mr. Corey's office. Also, when you come back to class it seems you were more sad and upset than you show in your story. You could describe Mark, Hal, and Andy more. Maybe Steve and Ed too.

Q: Where are parts where more specific detail are needed to help you picture the scene and people?

A: Same answer as for number three. But I think you need to show your feelings more than the people and scene.

Q: Are there details that detract from the main focus of the story?

A: Not really. But the election stuff slows you down.

Q: Do you understand the significance of this incident in writer's life?

A: You really say it exactly at the end.

New Draft

After considering the responses from her partner, having a brief conference with the teacher and rethinking the incident, the writer made revisions by concentrating on three areas: more specific development of feelings; clearer explanation of the election itself; and purposeful selection of details to show people and scene. (Her final draft appears earlier as the exemplary student essay.)

Response and Revision

As you can see in the final draft of "Unexpected Friends," response can help students see their work in a new perspective and begin to develop a sense of audience—a sense of communicating meaning to a reader. In developing guides for response groups, you may want to consider your own expectations for the assignment, the maturity of the writers, and their level of experience in working with a revision process. Experienced response groups will need little guidance as they talk about their essays, but novices will appreciate specific suggestions to get them started. The following suggestions for revising essays may be helpful as you develop your own guides for specific assignments.

Revision Guide

1. Does the beginning of the story capture your interest? What would be a different way to begin?
2. Who is the audience for this essay? How do you know?
3. What strategies did the writer use to relate the incident?
4. Are there details which detract from the main focus of the essay? If so, cite an example.
5. Indicate any places where more particular information or details are needed to help you picture the scene and the people.
6. Is dialogue effectively used? If not, show the writer places to use dialogue.
7. Do you understand the significance of this incident in the writer's life? What is it?

By participating in response groups, students come to understand the characteristics of autobiographical incident. Students learn to understand those characteristics as they write and experiment with readers, a process that can only lead to better writing. The CAP scoring guides further support the relationship between the characteristics of specific types of writing and the student response group

questions. (The scoring guide for autobiographical incident is included at the end of this section.)

Classroom Writing Assignments

All writing assignments should arise naturally out of the curriculum. An example of how the reading of an autobiography might lead to the writing of an autobiographical incident follows.

At the conclusion of an assignment in which each student reads an individually selected autobiography, chosen because of some interest that the author and student share, the teacher asks each student to select one incident in the life of the author. Students find such passages and, in pairs, share the incidents by reading aloud. The students then share with each other experiences in their own lives that in some way are recalled by the passages in the books.

Following the sharing, the teacher encourages the class to determine the characteristics of autobiographical incident. As students discuss incident, significance of event, context, voice, and style, the teacher asks students for examples from their own authors' works.

Prewriting: Students are encouraged to think about their own writing by following directions such as these:

- Describe the incident you selected.
- What was the importance of the incident to the author? (Was the importance stated or implied?)
- List one or two events in your own life that reading this incident suggested to you.
- Cluster or write briefly about each event you listed, noting details and stating the importance of the event for you.

The students then develop their initial drafts. They continually share those drafts with their partners or with a larger response group. Students generate and respond to questions that will help them develop a strong autobiographical incident.

Some options for publishing completed autobiographical incidents include the following:

- Students join other response groups and read their autobiographical incidents to each other.
- The teacher collects the essays and selects passages from each to read to the class.
- Members of the class exchange their essays with members of another class doing a similar assignment; students comment in writing to each original writer about the incident.
- The class publishes a class book featuring their autobiographical incidents.

This sequence of strategies, just one possible scenario, is appropriate in subjects across the curriculum. Sample assignments for several subject-matter areas follow.

The CAP Writing Prompt Format

The writing prompts used by the California Assessment Program and included as examples in the CAP writing guides are organized into two sections: the writing situation and directions for writing. The writing situation contains prewriting information and directives designed to motivate students to think about the assignment. In this section students are prepared for the specific assignment that follows in the directions for writing. In the directions for writing, students are given specific instructions regarding the assignment intent, topic, and audience.

Examples:

Memorable Incident

Writing Situation: Your English class is putting together a project about incidents that individual class members have experienced at school. Think of a memorable incident that you would like to include in this class collection. It might be an incident that made you feel a sense of belonging at the school, a funny situation, an embarrassing one, or any incident that is memorable to you.

Directions for Writing: Write about an incident that you have experienced at school. Things to consider include what was involved, what the people and surroundings looked like, what exactly happened, and how you felt about the incident. Try to make your readers, your classmates, and your teacher understand why this particular event is memorable.

History–Social Science

Student Government Elections

Writing Situation: Student government is a part of middle school and high school life. Think back to a time when a school election was important to you. Perhaps you were one of the candidates; perhaps the campaigning was unusual; perhaps the outcome was different from what you expected.

Directions for Writing: Write about one particular election experience in student government. Your essay will be included in "Election Highlights," a special school publication to be read at a future class reunion. Try to let your readers know why this one incident is memorable and important to you.

Science

Field Trip

Writing Situation: Your science class is going on a field trip. Your teacher asks all members of your class to keep journals of your experiences so that you will learn to observe carefully and pay attention to the smallest details.

Directions for Writing: Write about one incident that you recorded in your journal on the field trip. What happened? Why was it important? How did it affect you? Be sure to include enough details to make the incident clear to someone not in your class.

History–Social Science

Standing Up for Your Beliefs

Writing Situation: In your history class, you are studying historical figures who have taken a strong stand for or against a principle or an incident.

Your teacher has assigned your class to write essays about standing up for your beliefs. These essays will be submitted as entries in a schoolwide contest. The best essays will be published in the school newspaper.

Directions for Writing: Write an essay about a specific time when you stood up for something you believed in.

Write about the incident itself, how it developed, and how you became actively involved. (An incident is an event that occurs in a few minutes, a few hours, or perhaps in a day.) Be sure to let your readers know how you felt at the time and how you feel about it now.

Language Arts

Friends Forever

Writing Situation: In your English class, you have been reading stories and poems about friends. Friends have always been important, even as long ago as in the first century B.C. in China. A person whose name has been lost wrote this poem in which he or she describes taking an oath or promise of friendship.

Oath of Friendship

Shang ya!
I want to be your friend
For ever and ever without break or decay.
When the hills are all flat
And the rivers are all dry,
When it lightens and thunders in winter,
When it rains and snows in summer,
When Heaven and Earth mingle—
Not till then will I part from you.[1]

After your class talks about how important friends are, your teacher asks you to write about an incident in your own life when a friend was important. Think about an incident when a friend was important to you. It might have been an incident when one of you helped the other or a time when something you experienced made you realize how important friendship is. Perhaps, like the writer of the poem "Oath of Friendship," you took an oath of friendship after a particular incident.

Directions for Writing: Write about a time when something happened that made you realize how important a friend is to you. You will be sharing your essay with your classmates and your teacher. Include in your essay the things that will let your readers know what happened, who was involved,

[1] "Oath of Friendship," in *Translations from the Chinese*. Translated by Arthur Waley. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1941, p. 32. Used with permission.

and any of the small details that made the incident memorable for you.

Additional Exemplary Essays

The tone of the following incident provides both the drama and the implied significance of the event. The writer's details of scene create a simple starkness that frames the event itself and parallels the writer's feelings.

Christmas

The morning sun peered over the horizon letting streaks of bronze colored light stain the gray sky. It was Christmas morning. I walked out of the house, letting the wooden screen door bang noisily behind me. Under my cloud-like breath I was humming Jingle Bells. The cold air stung my cheeks, and I pulled my heavy jacket closer around me. One of my hands was buried deep in my pocket while the other hand clutched a large sugar-coated carrot. I walked down the icy steps making sure to close the gate. "Merry Christmas, Paints," I called out as I turned the corner and made my way down to the edge of our property where my rabbit's cage was located. My voice pierced the morning stillness like a light piercing solid blackness. How strange I thought as I saw his water bottle lying a few feet away from his cage. "Oh my God," I mumbled as I stared at my bunny's cage. The chicken wire had been torn away from the front, and my bunny was gone without a trace. "Dad, Dad," I yelled as I ran back up to the house, slipping and stumbling on the icy deck. "Paints is gone!"

My dad walked down with me to Paints' cage and we both stood there looking at it, grief covering our faces. "I don't see how they could have done it," he said softly.

"Who?"

"The raccoons, the ones who ate your bunny." I turned away and walked slowly back to the house, wanting to cry yet no tears came.

That was a Christmas very different from the rest. I will remember it always when I walk down to the edge of our property and look at the spot where my bunny's cage once stood.

This boy's memory of a special Little League game comes to life with close-ups of people moving and acting. He also keeps the details relevant to the importance of the incident as he jumps to the last inning of a baseball game, the only inning of significance. Time has given the writer emotional distance from this event, but we feel the poignant memory as we read his final metaphor.

The Game

Yelling a constant babble, the little proud figure stormed through the screen door screaming things about loaded bases, bats and hits. That little proud figure was me, and I can still remember that day very well.

It was baseball season in fourth grade, and the competition was intense. We were the worst team in the league, but we didn't lack spirit. This game, which we played against the second worst team, was a battle for the second-to-last position. The game had moved quickly for Little League, and it was already the bottom of the last inning with the score 3-0 in the opponents' favor. The first to come up to bat was little Tommy McCall who, like usual, struck out on three pitches. Next to bat was "Sneaky" Sam Sawyer who hit the ball to the shortstop who slapped the ball down but wisely didn't throw to first, for Sam had fantastic speed. Now came fat Don Tiddle who walked on four pitches. There were now runners on first and second, and the best player on the team was up. He was Jason Smith, and he hit a little blooper over the second baseman's head. Little Tommy loped over to third, Don waddled on to second, and Jason got to first. Bases were loaded, and guess who was up? Yours truly. Everyone got all excited because at the last game when we were down by one, I hit a double to drive in the tying run. Trying to hide my excitement, I sluggishly strolled up to the plate and stepped into the batter's box. The first pitch came, and it hit the dirt about six feet before the plate. The next pitch was in there for a strike, which really got me cranked up. The third pitch was delivered, and I swung tremendously. It seemed the echo of the bat lasted forever, but I couldn't think about that now, for I had to run the bases. I took off and, as any other little leaguer would, I watched to see where the ball would land. As I rounded first, I saw the center fielder still chasing after the ball. By third I had caught up with Jason, so we rounded the bases together. The ball was just reaching the infield when I touched home plate and accidentally ran over Jason, who really didn't care, for we had won. The next thing I knew, the whole team was on top of me cheering and celebrating.

After that small bit of celebrating, my hit was forgotten by everyone but me, who will always remember those moments of past glory that were tossed into the wind.

In the following essay a student describes his experience in a race. His visual details of the scene as well as his use of specific narrative action make this an exemplary essay.

The Course

The course was set: a hundred yards of straight downhill speed on a 20% gradient followed by a hairpin turnaround, a marker and 20 yards up the same hill we had just come down. It was a long course, but since I had been challenged, it was up to me to set the distance and turns. I trusted my stamina over my opponent's downhill speed. I knew that if I stayed with him on the downhill, I could win. Together we reached the top. I straightened my bike so it was pointing down the middle of the road. He followed my example, but on the sidewalk. This puzzled me and I looked at him quizzically but he just mumbled something about his mom not letting him ride on the street. What importance were his mother's words in such a race as this? My suspicious seven-year old mind deduced that he had a trick up his sleeve. As it was my prerogative to either call the start or ask my opponent to, I chose the latter option so I could concentrate on getting a good start. "On your marks...get set...go!" We were off.

My decision to let him call the start was paying off. I was ahead! I pedaled furiously to increase my lead. About halfway down, I looked back to see where my opponent was. That was my first mistake. As I turned around, my lapse in concentration sent my bike careening to the right side of the road. A quick turn in the other direction corrected that problem, too well. Now I was speeding toward the other side of the road! Soon my bike was wiggling from side to side uncontrollably. I decided to apply the brakes to stop from falling off. Again, this worked too well. My front tire stopped dead and the back of my bike lifted skyward. I was flying through the air over the road and there was nothing I could do to stop myself from doing a faceplant. After what seemed like an eternity in mid-air, I finally made a perfect one point landing on the asphalt. I skidded for about ten feet while still entangled with my bike. My arms, legs, and back were all scraped up, and my ribs were bruised from the bike bouncing along on top of me. Fortunately, I had ended up right in front of my house and my mother had heard my cries. After determining that nothing was broken, I got up and walked inside to be cleaned up. I swore I would never ride down that hill again in my life. But the next week I raced that friend again on the same course, and I won.

Essays Written for the CAP Assessment

The following first-draft essays were written under CAP testing conditions; that is, they were written in 45 minutes in one sitting. They were selected to represent a range of achievement.

In the first essay, an incident about a birthday, the writer specifically names objects in scenes, describes specific activities, uses dialogue appropriately, and uses specific details relevant to the incident. The significance of this event in the writer's life is unmistakable.

High Achievement

It was a bright, sunny day that looked like it was going to be an okay birthday, except for the fact that my parents were out of town, my two best friends were mad at me, and it was a Monday. I walked to the bus stop hopeful that someone had remembered. I got to the bus stop barely in time and so far no sign, no showing of knowing it was my birthday, just plain nothing. It was a regular Monday morning to all the friends I'd grown up with, but to me it was the start of what seemed to be the worst day of my life.

We arrived at school and hurriedly I got off the bus and walked to my locker. Maybe my locker would be decorated like Jenny's or Tiff's had been. I prayed it was. I arrived at my locker and opened it, nothing, nothing at all. Inside my body, my heart and soul which made me tick was dying and crying for some sort of salvation. Oh, Lord help me get through this day, I prayed. The 1st bell rang, so I got my books out and put on a semi-smile and walked to class, tall and proud.

I sat down at the lab table I shared with Tiffany, a sweet, but snobbish girl. She said to me, "It's May 6, isn't it?" a careless question which was important to me.

Hopeful that someone had remembered, I replied, "Why, yes it is. Imagine May 6, already." No sign, no acknowledgement of remembering it was my birthday. I wanted to scream and die. For the past nine years we'd gone to each others birthday parties, yet she had forgotten mine, how could she?

That's how the rest of the day went, everyone carrying on as normal, while I felt worthless and unloved inside. Becky and Shoni, my bestfriends, did their best at ignoring me. They would pass me in the halls and say nothing. I was ready to break down in tears during 7th period when I turned around and David Robinson smiled at me. Somehow that smile made me realize it wasn't so bad and that I'd live, or at least until I got home where I could cry so no one would see me.

The last bell of the day rang and I left that classroom a little more confident. I hurried to my locker and got out my homework and rushed to the

bus stop. The bus arrived shortly and I climbed on trying to remember to smile and be happy.

The bus ride home seemed to last an eternity. All I did was sit there and look out the window while everyone else laughed, talked, and had a good time. My stop came up, so I got off wishing I could stay on forever and not face going home. As I walked home I tried to relish in the beauty that was around me. It was springtime and the flowers were blooming and everything looked cheerful and happy to be alive. How could they look that way when I felt the exact opposite? I truly wanted to know.

"Sprint!" my Grammy yelled as I walked in the door, "I want you to go down to the clubhouse and deliver this for me in about 30 minutes. I was supposed to put it in the mail a few days ago, so you'd better take it down to the office, okay?" as she handed me an envelope with our rent in it.

"Sure, Grammy. How are you? Did Mom and Dad call? Are they here?" I questioned hopefully.

"My day was okay and no your parents aren't home and no they didn't call. Now, go do your homework and then take that rent to the office," she ordered me.

I walked up the stairs to my room and tried to concentrate on my homework, but was unable to. I decided to just sit and think for awhile before it was time to take the rent down. Why did this have to happen to me? I want to know why my loved ones forgot my birthday. I feel like I'm going to burst from sadness. I then looked up and saw it was time to go take the rent. The walk will do me good I thought as I walked down to the clubhouse.

The sign on the office door said, "Use other door." I turned and opened the door next to me. It was totally dark and quiet. I fumbled for the light switch and as I turned it on, all my friends from school, parents, and grandparents yelled, "Surprise!! Happy Birthday Sprint!" and there stood David Robinson smiling. My heart and soul were surely better as I began to smile and realize maybe this wasn't such a bad birthday after all.

The writer begins this next essay in an engaging manner but is unable to sustain the present-tense immediacy of the first section. The details of the first section are exceptionally well selected and presented; but, typical of the high average paper, the details are not sustained. The second section ends in a hurried and perfunctory manner.

Mid-Range Achievement

Saving the Day

My palms are damp as I grasp the test paper. My teacher looks down on me and tells me that I should come talk to him about my test. I turn the test over and place it on my desk, without looking. Then I look around the classroom and spot some kids smile as they look at their math test. My eyes then work themselves back to my paper sitting there face down. My hands then turn over my paper and rest upon my desk. My brain reminds me that I need to take a glance at my grade. I knew it couldn't be good from what my teacher had said. A big red letter blinds my eyes for a second as I look at my grade, it's a C!

A dreaded old C! I turn my paper over quickly and glance around the room again. Everyone seems to be smiling and sharing grades with each other except me. I feel hot and tense as our teacher tells us that we are excused to your next class. I'm the last one out the door as I throw my test in the garbage can. I then walk straight to my class and sit myself right down, as my history teacher passes out our U.S. Constitution test.

Now I feel as if my day couldn't get any worse. My teacher tells me that I did very well as she walks by. I asked her if she was talking to me, and she said, "Yes." I turned my paper over quickly and saw my grade. It was an A+. I couldn't believe it, an A+.

My teacher walked up to the front of the class and announced that I was the only one that got all of the questions right. I felt really good inside and at the end of the period told that teacher that she had made my day. And she thanked me, but reminded me that I was the one that did the test with finesse.

In this last student essay, the student neither orients the reader to the scene nor gives enough background information for the reader to get a clear picture of the surrounding events leading up to the incident. The essay has all the skeletal characteristics of autobiographical incident but lacks voice, detailing, and significant reflection.

Low Achievement

When I was a little kid the one thing that frightened me most was when I fell off my bed for the first time. I was on the top bunk of my bed when I fell. I was trying to reach for something on the lower bunk. It didn't really hurt it just frightened me. From then on I don't like to jump off things that are high.

An Example of a Published Autobiographical Incident Written by a Student

A Bright Spot on a Gloomy Day

One of the scariest days of my life w. my first day of school. I felt like I was being taken away and would never come back. My mother reassured me that everything would be all right.

That morning was hot and humid. My clothes clung to my body as I stood by the door, waiting for the bus to come. I had looked forward to this day with such eagerness that I drove everyone else in the family up the wall. My favorite thing to say was, "When I get four I can go to school, like Audrey!"

Audrey is my sister. I always was jealous of her because she could do so many things that I couldn't. I always cried when she left for school.

Now, as I stood by the door, I was shaki I was so afraid of what I was going to have to do in school.

The bus pulled into the driveway, and I called to my mom. She said for me to have fun, and I told her I probably wouldn't. I ran outside and went into the bright yellow school bus.

From the moment I stepped on the bus, I knew I wasn't going to like it. Most of the boys were climbing all over the seats and getting mud everywhere. Just then, I remembered that I forgot my umbrella. The bus was already out of the driveway, so I just did without it.

I sat next to my friend, Adam. Adam was a really nice kid. He had straight black hair that was always combed neatly and millions of freckles. The only thing that I didn't like about Adam was that sometimes he was too neat. Adam said hello to me, and I said hello to him. Somehow he knew that something was wrong. "What's the matter?" he asked me.

"Nothing, I'm just a little scared, that's all," I answered. We sat there a little longer, and then we started talking about our pet turtles. We each had one turtle. I named mine Adam, and he named his April.

By the time we got to school, I was laughing and so was Adam. I think Adam was just as tense as I was when he got on the bus. I asked him about it, and he said that he wasn't scared at all. I looked closely at him. "You're lying," I said.

"You're right!"

I started to laugh again, and so did Adam. We were still sitting in the sticky seat of the bus because Adam didn't want to push his way into the crowd and get his pants dirty.

I told him, "if I were in that aisle seat, I would have been out of the bus already!"

"Well, go ahead," he said, making room for me to go.

"No, I'll sit here and wait for you."

"All right, but no more yelling. These are brand-new pants."

As we walked up the green wooden steps, we ran our hands along the wet, green railing. The paint for some reason was still wet. I stared at the globby, green paint on my hand. Adam got it all over his pure, sparkling pants.

I started to laugh so hard that I couldn't stop. Adam looked at me like I was crazy. Then he looked at his pants again. His freckled face turned from a look of horror to a smiling face, glowing with friendship.

He started to laugh with me, and we walked up the stairs and into the school house.[2]

Readings in Autobiographical Incident

Students can develop a fuller understanding of the possibilities of autobiographical incident as they read published works of this type. Books, short stories, poems, essays, and current magazines are all possible sources. The following list only begins to reflect the breadth of sources available.

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[2]April Sexton, "A Bright Spot on a Gloomy Day," in *Active Voices II: A Writer's Reader.* Compiled by James Moffett and Phyllis Tashlik. Portsmouth, N.H.: Boynton/Cook Publishers, Inc., 1987. Used with permission.

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Rhetorical Effectiveness Scoring Guide for

Autobiographical Incident

Prompts for autobiographical incident require writers to tell a story from their personal experience. Besides narrating an incident vividly and memorably, writers tell readers what it has meant to them. This procedure seems simple enough: writers narrate a single remembered incident and say why it was (is still) important to them. The best grade eight writers remind us, however, that the prompts for autobiographical incident present writing situations that are far from simple.

The best writers orient readers to the incident, present the scene and other people who were present, and then tell an engaging story that may include dialogue, descriptions of movement or gestures, names of people or objects, and sensory details. Writers describe their remembered feelings, understandings, or reflections at the time of the incident; and they may also evaluate the incident from their present perspective, implying or stating its significance in their lives. The best writers use many of these strategies, selecting those appropriate to the writing situation. The challenge in writing autobiographical incident is both to select the appropriate strategies from among that varied repertoire and to integrate them smoothly into a readable personal story. Writing well-crafted autobiographical incident is as demanding as writing convincing arguments or insightful analyses of literature.

The scoring guide that follows reflects a high standard of achievement for grade eight writers, but it is not an impossibly high standard. The guide reflects the assumption that students can learn how to tell memorable stories from their personal experience.

Writers focus autobiographical incidents by controlling narrative sequence and choosing relevant details. They maintain focus by centering the essay on expressing the personal importance and significance of the incident. They elaborate primarily through sensory details, remembered feelings, and specific narrative actions.

Score Point 6—Exceptional Achievement

Incident. Writer narrates a coherent and engaging story that moves the narrative toward the central moment. The narrative tells readers what they need to know to understand what happened and to infer its significance to the writer. The writer of a six-point essay will use some of the following strategies:

- Naming (specific names of people or objects, quantities, numbers)
- Describing visual details of scenes, objects, or people (size, colors, shapes, features, dress)
- Describing sounds or smells of the scene
- Narrating specific action (movements, gestures, postures, expressions)
- Creating dialogues, interior monologues, or expressing remembered feelings or insights at the time of the incident
- Slowing the pace to elaborate the central moment in the incident
- Creating suspense or tension
- Including the element of surprise
- Comparing or contrasting other scenes or people

Rather than minimizing events, the writer of a six-point essay dramatizes the incident, using strategies like those above.

Context. Writer locates the incident in a particular setting and orients the reader to scene, people, and events. The writer goes beyond simply identifying or pointing to the scene or people by using carefully chosen details relevant to the incident. The writer may devote considerable space in the essay to orienting readers, describing the scene and people, and providing background or context for the incident–but not at the expense of a well-told incident. In a six-point essay, there is balance between static context and dramatic, narrated incident.

Significance. The essay reveals why the incident was important to the writer. This significance can be either implied or stated. If the significance is implied, the reader can infer it confidently. The significance may be apparent in the writer's insights at the time of the incident or in reflections from the writer's present perspective. Those insights and reflections may appear integrated into the narration or in the conclusion to the essay. The reflections may be humorous.

Voice and Style. In a six-point essay we hear an authentic voice that reveals the writer's attitude toward the incident. A six-point essay includes well-chosen details, apt words, and graceful, varied sentences. It often includes word play and imagery. A six-point essay engages the reader from the start and moves to a satisfying closure.

Score Point 5—Commendable Achievement

Incident. As in a six-point essay, the incident is coherent and engaging. The essay moves toward a central moment but with less drama than a six-point essay. A five-point essay relies on a narrower range of narrative strategies. A five-point essay may be structurally more predictable than a six-point essay, and it may be less focused than an essay graded six-points, especially toward the end. Still, a five-point essay tells a clear, engaging story.

Context. The five-point essay has an appropriate and adequate context as in a six-point essay. Context does not dominate the essay at the expense of incident.

Significance. Significance can be either implied or stated but will be clear, either through remembered or present reflections. The reflections may be less well integrated into the essay than in a six-point essay; they often appear at the end. Reflections may not be as perceptive as those in a six-point essay, but they will not be superficial. The reflections will be insightful but not as probing as those in a six-point essay.

Voice and Style. As in a six-point essay, we hear authentic voice in a five-point essay. The essay is competent stylistically but may not have the grace, surprise, or sparkle of a six-point essay. Like a six-point essay, a five-point essay begins engagingly and closes in a satisfying way.

Score Point 4—Adequate Achievement

Incident. Incident is well told but may lack the coherence of a five-point essay. There may be digressions, but the story comes back on track quickly. Some four-point essays are smoothly told yet unrealized dramatically. Limited use of strategies.

Context. Context will be adequate to orient readers to the incident.

Significance. Significance is either implied or stated. Reflection is not as insightful as those in a five-point essay and may be only tacked on at the end.

Voice and Style. We usually hear the voice of an earnest storyteller. Predictable sentences and word choice.

Score Point 3—Some Evidence of Achievement

Incident. Essay relates a specific incident. Very limited use of narrative strategies. Story is competently told but told more briefly than the story in a four-point essay. Essay is flat and unfocused. Incident may be presented as a loosely connected series of events.

Context. The writer of a three-point essay may either devote too much space to context while neglecting the narrative or begin abruptly without necessary orientation.

Significance. Significance is implied to some degree or briefly stated. We have an idea why the incident was memorable, although reflections may not be especially insightful.

Voice and Style. Writer does not seem to be seeing the incident as it happened. Writer relates incident in uninvolved way. Predictable sentences and word choice.

Score Point 2—Limited Evidence of Achievement

Incident. The essay may fail to focus on an incident, or it may tell an incident without orienting context or significance. Essay is usually quite brief. If longer, it may be rambling, fragmentary, or may not include details. Writer attempts to construct the incident but fails to do so because of omissions, erratic jumps in time or place, or breakdowns in cohesion.

Context. The context may be limited or even missing.

Significance. The writer of a two-point essay includes few reflections, if any. Reflections may seem superficial.

Voice and Style. Writer does not seem to be relating specific details about the incident. Evidence of personal involvement in incident is minimal. Sentences may be too short or long in a disorderly way.

Score Point 1—Minimal Evidence of Achievement

Writer responds to prompt but usually only briefly.

Incident. The writer of a one-point essay may refer to an incident without identifying it specifically or may only imply the incident in the context. May point to an incident without developing it conclusively. Reader may need to infer the incident. In the essay, writer may focus on others instead of himself or herself.

Context. In the one-point essay, context is limited or even missing.

Significance. Little or no significance is implied or stated.

Voice and Style. The writer of this essay communicates little or no evidence of personal involvement in incident. Lapses in sentence control or diction interfere significantly with the sense of the paper.

Score Point 0—Inappropriate Response

Off topic.

Grade Eight Writing Guide:

Firsthand Biography

In firsthand biography, one of several types of personal writing tested in the CAP writing test, another person is revealed through the eyes of the writer as well as the significance of the writer's relationship with that person. Firsthand biography is closely related to autobiographical incident, which is the narration of a memorable instance in the writer's life.

Although both firsthand biography and autobiographical incident deal with some aspect of autobiography, they have a different focus. Autobiographical incident focuses on the narrator, while firsthand biography focuses on another person and the writer's relationship with that person.

Importance of Firsthand Biography

In firsthand biography students explore both another person and themselves. In this type of writing, students are challenged to develop their skills in writing descriptions and narrations. As with autobiographical incident, students writing a firsthand biography remember, select, and organize details and incidents that best illuminate their subjects.

Students writing firsthand biographies are also challenged to interpret another person's actions, motives, and beliefs. They must also examine and be able to relate the significance of the other person to their own lives.

Characteristics of Firsthand Biography

In firsthand biography, the writer conveys to a reader the personality, actions, and physical traits of a person he or she knows well. The following list of characteristics of this type of writing can be used as a guide to understanding this type of essay. The form of the essay will be governed by the writer's perception of and experience with the person who is the subject of the biography.

Many options are available to the writer of high-quality firsthand biographies. Students are encouraged to experiment with varied strategies appropriate to their subjects, their readers, and themselves. The following strategies have been drawn from eighth-grade essays written for CAP.

Characterization

The writer maintains a consistent attitude toward the subject. The characterization has depth, perhaps revealing contradictions or surprises inherent in the subject's personality. Strategies available for characterizing include:

- Visual imagery (size, shape, features, dress, and so forth) (Physical details are used to enhance other attributes and are not a catalogue of vital statistics.)
- Subject's immediate environment, workplace, living place
- Subject's routines, habits, or typical activities
- Dialogue
- Comparison or contrast to other people

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- Assertions or generalizations about the subject's character

Incidents to Support the Characterization

Incidents are specific rather than generalized occurrences. Each incident presented helps illuminate the character. Strategies for presenting incidents include:

- Orientation to the incident (time, place, context)
- Dialogue
- Naming (specific names of people or objects, quantities, or numbers)
- Specific narrative action (movements, gestures, postures or expressions)
- Surprise or suspense
- Humor

Significance

Writers provide readers with an understanding of the subject's importance to the writer. Writers may convey significance in a variety of ways, including the following:

- Explicitly stating the significance
- Giving a history of the relationship with the subject
- Citing incidents to support assertions about the importance
- Presenting the subject in such a way that the significance is clearly conveyed

Tone

Writers establish a tone that clearly and consistently reveals their attitude toward their subject. Tone is established by the writer's choice of words, details, and incidents.

Organization

Writers develop their essays by integrating incidents, descriptions, and significance in any way that serves their intent. Possible arrangements include:

- Chronological development
- Settings used to illuminate the subject and the relationship of writer to subject
- A sequence in which incidents are revealed
- Different aspects of the subject's personality

An Exemplary Student Essay

The following essay was written in an eighth-grade class over a ten-day period in which both literature and writing were explored. The student's steps in writing this essay are presented in the section "One Student's Writing Process." Characteristics of firsthand biography are included in comments in brackets.

A Special Person

"Now don't you go crying over that spilled milk, baby. All God's children make mistakes. That's why He put erasers on pencils." Once again I heard that familiar refrain from the old woman as she spoke it to one of the toddlers in her day care group. Carefully and gently, she wiped away the child's tears, poured the child another cup of milk, and went about her task of preparing lunch for her charges. I watched her as she plopped back down on the kitchen chair causing it to slam up against the wall. You see, she is on the obese side. Pulling a paper towel from the rack, she slowly wiped the sweat that trickled down her forehead. Then she lifted the metal bowl from the kitchen table, cradled it between her thighs, and began to snap the green beans for the lunch meal. Occasionally she would stop and with a great deal of effort, reach down and pull up her nylon stockings which had slid down her legs and bagged around the ankles, only to have to repeat the procedure again in a few minutes. "They don't make stuff the way they used to," she muttered. I had to chuckle. Those stockings had to be at least five years old. She held them in place with rubberbands, and they had so many runs in them they made a freeway up her legs. This old woman never threw anything out until it was totally useless and even then she would try to find something else to do with it. She would always tell me that we must always make the best use of God's gifts.

[Engaging beginning. Uses an incident to introduce subject; dialogue within the incident. Narrative action—gestures, movements.]

I'm sure you are wondering who this unusual person is. She is my grandmother, Eartharene Jackson. I live with her because my own mother abandoned me when I was a child. She took me in as a baby and has been raising me since then. In fact she is raising some of everybody's kids. She takes in runaways, abused children and babysits kids too. She loves children, especially babies. She is like an Earth mother to everybody. She gives life to people who need hope. She says all God's children need love. Maybe her parents knew something when they named her Eartharene.

[History of relationship with subject; comparison to Earth Mother]

My grandmother didn't always take in children. She used to be a nurse in a hospital. When my grandfather died years ago, my grandmother had to find a way to make extra money because she had nine children of her own to look after so she started babysitting for other mothers. They would tell their friends how good she was, and more kids would come. She could never say no to anyone. Once one of my girlfriends got pregnant and her boyfriend left her. She came to my grandmother for help. My grandmother did not judge her or get on her case for being so stupid. She let her stay with us until she could figure out what she was going to do about the baby. My friend had the baby and now my grandmother keeps the baby so my friend can finish school. That's the kind of person my grandmother is.

[Uses incident to illustrate the assertion that she could never say no]

Everyone loves my grandmother because she is warm, sympathetic and understanding. She is never too busy to stop and lend an ear or give advice. If she can't help, she calls on God to help the person. She reads the Bible everyday and is deeply religious. She even talks aloud to God. From what I can see, she must be on good terms with him. She says at seventy years old she needs Him on her side because she's going to see Him soon.

[Generalizations about the subject; outlines routines]

My grandmother is one very special lady. I hope that I can be at least half the person she is.

[Ends satisfactorily with reflection about the subject]

One Student's Writing Process

The steps in the writing process followed by the writer of the exemplary student essay "A Special Person" were as described here.

Prewriting

The students read and discussed "My Grandmother Would Rock Quietly and Hum," by Leonard Adame. After clustering names and descriptions of family members for whom they have strong feelings, students wrote cinquains (five-line poems that help students focus on both descriptive and action words). The student writer's cinquain describes his grandmother, Eartharene.

EARTHARENE
sympathetic, special
giving, helping, loving
Earthmother to everyone
GRANDMOTHER

After sharing cinquains, students were given the following assignment and wrote their first drafts.

Assignment

Just as Leonard Adame had very strong feelings for his grandmother, you, too, have a family member for whom you have strong feelings. Think about the person in your cinquain. What are some things this person has done that stand out in your mind? Where do you see this person when you think about him or her? Think about a particular time when you were together. Write about this person so that whoever reads your essay will know what kind of person he or she is and why this person is special to you.

First Draft

My special relative is my grandmother. Her name is Eartharene Jackson. She is a loving, caring, special person. I live with her because my real mother abandoned me when I was a baby. My grandmother, Eartharene, took me in and has been raising me since then.

My grandmother is a day care worker now. She watches children while their parents are at work. She loves children, especially babies. Whenever they make a mistake like spilling milk, she says, "Now don't you go crying over that spilled milk, baby. All god's children make mistakes. that's why He put erasers on pencils. Then she would wipe away the child's tears and go back to what she was doing.

My grandmother can't say no to anybody. Not only does she babysit kids, but she takes in runaways and abused kids. She is like an Earth mother to everyone. She says all God's children need love. Once she helped one of my friends. She gives life to people who need hope. Maybe her parents knew something when they named her Eartharene.

Everybody loves my grandmother. I hope I can be like her, too.

Peer Response

The students read their papers aloud in pairs; then they talked about them before they exchanged papers and responded to questions on a response guide. The questions and the response partner's replies follow:

Q: What did you like best about this paper?

A: I liked the description of what his grandmother says. She's always talking about what God says.

Q: What do you remember about the person being described?

A: She is a very special person. She has a lot of love and understanding for people.

Q: What is the writer's attitude toward this person?

A: He loves his grandmother a lot.

Q: Point out places where you feel you want more information about this person.

A: How did she help your friend? You said she was a day care worker now. What did she used to do?

Q: Are the incidents provided complete? Where do you want more information?

A: You really don't give any incidents to show what she is like.

Q: Do you have any other comments for the writer?

A: Your opening is kinda' boring. It doesn't catch my attention.

The student reviewed the response answers and wrote a second draft. After talking with the teacher, he wrote a third draft, which is included in the section "An Exemplary Student Essay."

Response and Revision

Sharing writing with others in pairs or small groups can help students resee their work. Response from others, especially peers, is important for students to develop a sense of audience, a sense that their writing reaches people in addition to the teacher. Having others look at their work gives students a sense of purpose; they realize that they write to communicate, not merely to get a grade. Students see what others are doing; they learn from the successes and failures of others.

Peer response involves both the teacher and the students. The teacher needs to work with the students to help them find ways to criticize constructively. Modeling with the whole class is a good introduction. Selecting only four or five questions to be included on a response sheet gives students the opportunity to focus on what is important in the writing without the reader or the writer feeling overpowered. Student readers are responsible for reading for meaning, thinking about what is good in the writing and what might be improved, and communicating their ideas to the writer.

The following questions provide a variety to choose from when composing a response and revision sheet. For firsthand biography, the focus of a response and revision sheet depends on the specific assignment. In an initial reading students may react only to what they learned about the subject and his or her relationship to the writer. In later readings students may examine the various strategies the writer used to reveal the character or to convey the subject's significance. Once teachers have decided the purpose of the response sheet, they can select appropriate questions to use for both oral discussions and written responses. (Writing responses to some questions gives students a strong basis for talking with the writer.)

Many of the following suggestions and questions are best suited for discussion; some are useful as parts of written responses. They are not intended to be used all at once.

First Reading

First, read the draft just to learn about the person described in the sketch. Tell the writer your first impressions. What interested you? What did you like best? What do you immediately remember about the person described?

Second Reading

Now read the story more slowly a second time. Think about one or two of the following suggestions. Make some notes to use in talking with the writer.

- What incidents and details tell you the most outstanding characteristic of the person described?
- Try to find the subject's most interesting personality trait or typical way of behaving.
- What is the writer's attitude toward the subject?

Characterization and Relationships

In one or two sentences, tell the writer what you learned about the character's personality. Then tell the writer what you have learned about the relationship of the writer to the character.

Completeness

- Point out gaps or places where you felt confused or wanted to know more about what happened.
- Find the incidents. Are they complete? Would you suggest more?

- Look again at the opening of the sketch. Does it make you want to know more about the subject?
- Would you suggest any changes?

Action

Look for incidents in the sketch where the writer shows someone moving or talking. Show the writer where you would like to see more action or talk, where the sketch might be made more interesting and reveal more information about the subject.

Details

Tell the writer where you needed more details so that you could understand the character better or understand the writer's feeling better. It is easy to add more details, but try to decide whether they are necessary. Some characters and incidents need many details to satisfy readers, others need only a few.

Writer's Feelings

How does the writer tell you about feelings toward the person described? Decide whether you, as one reader, want to know more about the writer's feelings. If so, let the writer know.

Organization

Where is a place the writer moves well from one idea to another? Where is a place the writer needs to be clearer?

Ending

When you finish the story, are you satisfied that the writer came to an end? Or do you feel he just stopped writing?

- Are you satisfied with the conclusion? What more do you want to know? Where could this information you want to know more about go in the essay?
- What emotion do you feel at the end of the essay? What in the conclusion makes you feel that way?

Classroom Writing Assignments

The classroom writing assignments included in this section may serve as models for teachers as they design their own writing assignments. There are many situations in the curriculum in which firsthand biography is an appropriate kind of essay.

Literature-based Writing

Read and discuss with the students a poem such as Leonard Adame's "My Grandmother Would Rock Quietly and Hum," which focuses particularly on the images of the grandmother. [1]

Have students respond to the following assignment:

We all know many people in our lives who are not rich or famous yet they enrich our lives. The ordinary times we spend with them often become treasured memories.

Think about someone you have known for some time, someone who is important to you. Think about the ordinary things this person does. What does this person look like? Why is this person important to you? What have you experienced together? Make notes or cluster your ideas.

Now write about this person by showing your readers how this person goes about the everyday business of living each day. Include one or two special things that this person has done, either with you or with someone else. Let your readers know why this person is important to you.

Sample CAP Prompts

Language Arts

Overcoming Obstacles

Writing Situation: Your class has been reading stories about people who faced serious, difficult problems. These people had overcome their problems by continuing to work and struggle until they had overcome such problems as unhappy relationships, physical handicaps, poverty, and even the tragedies of war.

Now your teacher has asked you and your classmates to think about people in your own experience who have overcome serious problems. Each of you is to write about one person known to you for overcoming some obstacles. The essays will be collected and put into a class book.

Directions for Writing: Select a person you have known who faced and won out over a serious obstacle. Write an essay in which you show this person in a situation that involved overcoming a problem. Help the readers of your class book know this person and understand why you see him or her as special. Your readers will want to know how this person is important to you.

[1] Adame, Leonard. "My Grandmother Would Rock Quietly and Hum," in *Adventures for Readers: Book One* (Revised edition). Orlando, Fla.: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, Inc., 1985, p. 146.

Ordinary People We Admire

Writing Situation: All of us know ordinary people who do things that seem insignificant; yet their actions make them people to admire. We may admire a friend trying to learn English or a handicapped child struggling to do the ordinary things we take for granted. When we see these people, we admire their strength and courage. Often, their actions influence our thinking or behavior.

Your English teacher has asked you to write a firsthand biography about that kind of person. This kind of writing should include the kinds of details and incidents that will help the reader see and understand what the person is like. It should also show what effect the person had on the writer.

Directions for Writing: Select a person you know well. This should be a person who does things that seem insignificant but makes you admire him or her. Describe this person so your classmates will be able to see this person. Include incidents that help show what the person is like. (An incident is an event that occurs in a few minutes, a few hours, or perhaps in a day.) Be sure to tell your teacher how this person influenced or affected you.

Fighters

Writing Situation: Your class has been reading a series of stories and articles about people who kept on struggling against circumstances in their lives even when the struggle seemed hopeless. You read about Lou Gehrig and his unsuccessful struggle against a fatal disease and Dr. Trudeau and his successful struggle against tuberculosis. You also read Sperry's *Call It Courage*, a story about a Polynesian lad who fights against his fear of the sea, and Brink's *Caddie Woodlawn*, a story about a girl who deals with the hardships of life on the western frontier.

Your teacher has asked your class to write about some people in your experience who have fought against difficulty, either successfully or unsuccessfully.

Directions for Writing: Identify a person you have known who struggled hard against obstacles. Write a firsthand biography in which you reveal this person by including incidents when he or she was involved in a struggle. (An incident is an event that occurs in a few minutes, a few hours, or perhaps in a day.) Let your reader know how the person got into this struggle, what the person did, and how it came out. Also tell how this person is important in your life.

CAP Prompt Format

The preceding assignments follow the format of the CAP writing prompt. The writing situation gives the students a specific topic. It focuses the students' thinking and planning and provides a context for the writing. Any special terms or concepts the student must know will be defined in the writing situation.

The directions for writing are very clearly worded to provide the requirements and features of the task. They identify the reader and provide a purpose for the writing.

In the classroom it is important for students to practice writing for varying purposes and audiences. These two factors greatly affect the writing style, language, and content of the student's work. The primary purpose of firsthand biography is to create for the reader the uniqueness and significance of a person the writer knows well. The audience for this type of writing may be a specific reader or group of readers (for example, "Write an essay for the contest selection committee") or may be a generic reader or group of readers (for example, "Write about a friend who has helped you. Be sure to let your readers know how you feel about your friend and his or her importance in your life").

Other Assignments

In firsthand biography, the writer knows the subject personally. However, teachers may want to give students practice in writing about characters encountered in literature, history, or science. While not a true firsthand biography, the character study is a complementary assignment using the same characteristics.

One example of such a complementary assignment is to ask students who have read *To Kill A Mockingbird* to imagine that they are Scout, grown-up and talking to her own child about Atticus, the child's grandfather. Scout, reminiscing about her feelings about her father when she was a child, decides to write down her memories so that her child will have them to read later on.

Assignment: Write an essay about Atticus from the point of view of the grown-up Scout as she remembers her father when she was a child. You may make up any incidents you want, but try to be true to his character as it is in the novel.

Additional Exemplary Essays

The essays included in this section were written in an eighth-grade class over the period of a week. They are final-draft writings.

In the following essay the writer describes a person—the school counseling clerk—who has obviously endeared herself to the writer.

Mrs. Brinkowski

Mrs. Brinkowski, counseling clerk. To most adults at my school, she is nothing more than her job description. She answers the telephones, types, files and supervises the office practice students. She greets parents when they come in to register their kids and screens students who come in to see the counselors. Most people think of her as just another office person at the school. But Mrs. Brinkowski is not just another person to me or the other students. To us, she is a very unusual and special person. She is warm, friendly, caring, a little crazy and most of all understanding.

Mrs. Brinkowski is in her 40's, but she doesn't act 40. For example, she is a zany dresser. One day she wore a bright orange mini dress, lime green stockings and purple beads like those flappers wore in the 1920's. Another day she showed up in leather pants, high heels, gigantic hooped earrings and a big lace bow right on top of her head. She looks like a Madonna Wanna-Be who couldn't be. She really dresses like she reached in her closet, pulled out some things and put them on, even if they didn't match. She doesn't care that people think she looks weird. She always says that's their problem. The principal gave up talking to her because she is so good at her job. He couldn't afford to lose her.

Mrs. Brinkowski doesn't let her age affect her taste in music either. She likes the Beastie Boys and other groups that we like. She can tell you all the latest hits, most of the lyrics and where all the concerts are. She says just because she's 40 doesn't mean she's dead.

Since she thinks and acts young, Mrs. Brinkowski is able to relate well to us students. She treats us with respect. Whenever a student is sent to the counseling office, she doesn't growl at you and ask, "Why are YOU here?" as though the person is some low life scum. She always has a pleasant smile and a twinkle in her chestnut brown eyes when she greets students. Even students in on referrals get respect. Now I get sent out a lot on referrals and everytime I go in she's just as pleasant as if I was the principal. She never makes me feel stupid for being in the office again. She just takes my referral, asks me to tell my side of what happened and listens intently. She doesn't interrupt. She just listens. When I'm done, she tells me what she thinks. One time when she pointed out that I really was in the wrong, I didn't get mad because I knew she cared about me.

Students go to her with their problems. She can be trusted. She makes every problem seem important. If it is important enough to bother you, it is important enough for her to listen to. Parents don't do that. They say things like, "What's so big about that?," or they just nod and say, "Um hmm," but you know they are not listening to you.

Mrs. Brinkowski has a scrapbook of students who have long since left the school. Some even have kids of their own and she has those pictures too. You can see her at her desk lovingly turning the pages as she reminisces about this one or that one.

Mrs. Brinkowski is indeed a rare person. I'm glad she works at our school. There would be fewer teen drug and alcohol problems if there were more Mrs. Brinkowskis in the world.

The significance of this person is both implicit and explicit in the essay. The writer uses several strategies for characterization, including visual imagery ("bright orange mini dress, lime green stockings"); contrast to other people ("she's not like the other office staff"); and assertions about her character ("warm, friendly, caring, a little crazy and most of all understanding"). The essay is focused and well organized and ends with a strong assertion about the subject.

The writer of the following essay has chosen to describe her stepfather.

Terron

A very special person came into my life when my mother remarried. That person is my stepfather, Terron. It's very rare for a man who marries a woman with children to take an active interest in those children, but that's my stepfather. He married into a ready made family and accepted it totally as his own. Most men would probably just tell the wife her children are her responsibility. But not Terron. He takes time out with me and my brothers and treats us like we are his own kids. He scolds us when we need it, teaches us right from wrong and loves us a lot.

My stepfather is around 5'9" and weighs 220 pounds. He reminds me of John Henry. John Henry was a strong, proud Black man and so is my stepfather. His skin is smooth, sleek and ebony just like some African wood carvings I saw in a museum. He has coal black, piercing eyes. Sometimes I think he can see right through me, especially when I tell a lie. His hair is cut in a short, black natural. He pours cement for a living so you can imagine how muscular he is.

My stepfather believes education is very important. He makes sure we always do our homework before we do anything else and helps us if we don't

understand what we have to do. While he feels school is important, he says not all education comes from books, so he takes us places so we can learn about the world by seeing other people and places. He feels if people would only get to know other people and see how they live and think, then we wouldn't have so much hate. He takes us places our real father never even told us about. He has shown me a whole new world. I have been to San Francisco to see the Golden Gate Bridge and cable cars and hills that reach towards the sky. I have been to Lake Tahoe and seen snow-covered mountains and lakes glistening with the sun.

From what I have said so far, you might think my stepfather never gets upset with us or punishes us, but believe me, he does. Just last week, I got a week's telephone restriction because I was talking on the telephone instead of watching his dinner. The dinner burned to a crisp and he got mad. He lectured me about being responsible, gave me the restriction and left the room. I was angry at him for putting me on restriction for a whole week, but in my heart I knew he did it because he wants me to be the best person I can be. I guess I'd be angry, too, if someone burned my dinner, especially when I was hungry. Later I went in to apologize and we were friends again.

I look up to my stepfather and hope my husband turns out to be just like him.

The writer of the previous essay uses strong visual images ("His skin is smooth, sleek, and ebony"; "coal black piercing eyes" ; and "lakes glistening with the sun"). Other strategies the writer uses are comparisons to other people ("He reminds me of John Henry"); providing a history of the relationship in describing how this person came into her life and generalizing about the subject's character ("proud Black man" who "teaches us right from wrong "). The tone is one of love and admiration.

Essays Written for the CAP Assessment

The three essays included in this section were written under the testing conditions of the CAP writing assessment (a first draft written in 45 minutes). The essays represent the upper, middle and lower ranges of the rhetorical effectiveness score point scale. (The scoring guide appears at the end of this section.)

High Achievement

My personal hero would be my father. Since as far as I could remember he has been there for me. Whenever I had trouble in school or with a friend, he would sit down and talk to me about it. For example, during the third grade I started to decline as a student. My study habits became poor and I even turned to a little crime. My father one night came into my room sat down next to me with his long, sad face and began telling me I had to improve in my studies. I naturally said, "Why?" Then he began to explain about his early education. He told about how he wished he had studied harder in school because now he isn't able to comprehend the information I learn at school. This discussion we had made me feel guilty for not studying hard. I felt it was my father's dream that I would be able to achieve more than he had, but I let him down. The next day at school I was attentive. I was hardworking, and I was the best student I had ever been. Now my father is even more of an inspiration. Even though he had a poor education in Taiwan, when he came to America, he went to college and got a degree in science. He had told me in the beginning life was tough on him. He had a job which paid little and a dirty small apartment. After working for several years in a meat company he saved up enough money with my mother to buy a chicken store called Pioneer Chicken. Again he worked hard to earn enough money to buy a Burger King. Earning much money, now he is able to buy and sell land to earn profits. He is such an inspiration because he started out as a poorly educated boy to become a wealthy intelligent businessman. My father is also a leader. He is president of two associations and one of the most respected men in the city of Alhambra. When my father and I go out together for fishing or hunting he teaches me values of life. He has taught me to work hard to achieve my goal in life. When I did something bad he would punish me, of course, but he would make me feel so guilty I never ever did the crime again. For instance, once I forged his name on a check. When he found out, it was horrible! He smacked me in the behind hard. Then he just wouldn't talk to me. Everytime I walked by him he would just give me that face. The face everyone fears. I learned my lesson. I never went near checks again. In conclusion, I wanted to say even if my father has been tough on me, I understand why and I love him for it. I feel he is and always will be my inspiring personal hero.

The previous essay is an excellent example of firsthand biography. The writer has responded to a prompt about a personal hero. The essay presents a focused, well-developed characterization of the writer's father. The writer begins by exploring the history of his relationship with his father. In the process he presents incidents which illustrate his father's influence. Each incident is framed in time.

Within the incident the writer provides examples to support assertions about the father ("My father is also a leader." "He is president of two associations and one of the most respected men in Alhambra"); uses visual imagery and narrative action ("sat down next to me with his long, sad face" and "smacked me in the behind"). The writer provides background information on the father (education and early struggles) which further illuminate the character. The tone of the essay clearly conveys the respect and admiration the writer has for his father.

This next essay presents a focused and generally revealing characterization of an influential teacher.

Mid-range Achievement

I think the teacher who most influenced me was my fourth grade teacher. Her name was Miss Kennedy. She was a very good teacher, and also very nice. She was also very tall with straight blonde hair and liquid blue eyes. She always wore a smile on her face and walked straight as a ruler.

She not only influenced me, but also influenced the whole class. She would get everyone to speak up, and gave everyone a chance. She would see the good points in a person, and try to correct the bad points. She was also strict, but in a kind of good way. She would give you responsibility and expect you to go through with it.

The way she treated you was also influential because even though we were pretty small, she would have respect for us. We were all treated equally, and she had no favorites. She also taught us how to respect one another as well as ourselves and her.

She made us responsible people. She let us be independent and make choices. I think she was the one person who most influenced my life and I really learned to like her.

Throughout the previous essay the writer maintains a consistent attitude toward the subject. The tone is one of respect and admiration.

In the essay the writer uses several strategies of characterization. In the first paragraph, the writer makes general assertions about the teacher's personality traits and provides specific details of the subject's physical attributes. Here we find some very apt word choices ("liquid blue eyes" and "walked straight as a ruler"). In succeeding paragraphs the writer illustrates by citing examples to support the assertion that this teacher was a positive influence in the writer's life. Although examples chosen help reveal the character, they are generalized. The writer employs few of the narrative strategies for developing incident.

The writer of the following essay describes a special person—Grandmother—but uses few strategies for developing the firsthand biography.

Low Achievement

A very special person is my grandmother in Baltimore. She is special not because whenever I visit her she takes me any place I want to go, but because she's nice, thoughtful and caring. The best thing about her is that she will laugh with you, play games with you, and simpithise with you. One time she took me to the zoo not because I was good behaved because she loves me. That is why she is very special to me.

In the previous essay the student lists personality traits—nice, thoughtful, caring, sympathetic; however, the writer does not list many examples to support this claim. The writer refers to an incident (trip to the zoo) but does not develop it. The significance of the grandmother in the writer's life is only minimally explored. This paper would receive a low score.

Example of Firsthand Biography

Mr. Stanley

The girls in Mr. Stanley's eighth grade math class wore eyeliner, white lipstick, Tweed cologne and cinammon-colored nylons. The boys were mostly puny-looking mischief-makers with greasy hair and defiant cowlicks. Mr. Stanley was a tall, white-haired man whose uniform was a baggy blue suit and a pair of scuffed-up loafers. His face looked like a piece of red leather and when he smiled, his crooked yellow teeth were an unpleasant shock. He spoke with an Oklahoma drawl and his voice bellowed like a howitzer. During nutrition break we talked about how his fingernails were as long and scabby as a witch's. You could see their shadows when he wrote with a grease pencil on the overhead projector. During passing time he'd always stand at the door and as we hurried into the classroom we were greeted with the smell of stale tobacco.

When the bell rang, Mr. Stanley would quietly close the door as though it were the lid of a casket and he'd walk with long strides to the front of the room. He'd pick up a piece of chalk and begin writing on the board. Suddenly, he'd whip around with chalk in hand, a mathematical maestro shouting like an auctioneer with his arm waving to the beat of his voice, "THREE square it add one divide by two, divide by two—ANSWER?" At the word "ANSWER" he'd point at someone and if it was you, you'd feel like you just got poked in the chest. If

you knew the right answer it still might hide at the back of your throat for a moment until you had the guts to force it out—"Two and a half?"

"THAT'S RIGHT!" he'd shout.

The tone of the class was set immediately. You didn't talk to your neighbor like Henry Narvaez did one day when Mr. Stanley was explaining that x was because if you did he would throw down his chalk like he did that day. "Son! Get up here and teach the class!" There was a petrified silence and Henry didn't budge; he couldn't. "Son, get up right NOW and teach this class!" Mr. Stanley held out his shaking arm—a piece of chalk attached. Henry got out of his chair and everyone saw his red ears. He walked like you might to the edge of a cliff then stopped and said "I Can't, Mr. Stanley" in a voice that was ready to cry.

"Of course you can't!" retorted Mr. Stanley. "Don't you think I know that? Am I up here talking to myself?"

There was no answer.

"AM I?"

"No sir, you're not," said Henry.

"No sir I'm not! I'm here to teach you but you already know everything! Well let me tell you something. Right now I'm in very low gear. I'm SWEET compared to what I am when I'm in high gear. IS THAT CLEAR?"

Henry nodded.

At first we were scared to death of Mr. Stanley but eventually we realized that he was just using his intimidation system and he only used it if you didn't pay attention or if you cheated on a test. When he left the room during an exam we'd wait until it finally felt safe enough to share a few answers, and then Mr. Stanley's head would poke in through the window from the playground and that's how he caught Bobby Neil and Mark Coriento cheating. Another time he made Sally Bradley leave her seat during the test so that when the girl in front of her furtively turned around to get another answer, she found herself about six inches from Mr. Stanley's corroded face. "Hi there," he said in a mock-friendly tone as he daintily moved his fingers.

Mr. Stanley had two additional systems to keep us in line and one of them was a game called RED DOT. The bell would ring and Mr. Stanley would close the door as usual but instead of writing on the board he'd pull a little black notebook out of his pocket. Then he'd get a sadistic expression on his face, smile crookedly and say "Let's play...RED DOT!" Immediately papers would shuffle and in a matter of seconds our homework assignments would be on the top right-hand corner of our desks. Mr. Stanley would stalk the aisles and if you didn't have your homework, he carefully entered a red dot in his little book by your name. A red dot was worse than an F and nobody wanted one. One time I put out my French homework and I said a prayer and I was lucky he didn't catch me.

He also had a snap-the-finger system that was a killer when he wanted your attention. He snapped his fingers more loudly than anyone I've ever heard. They echoed. Anyway, one snap of the fingers and you shut right up. If he snapped them twice, it was your second warning. He had a computer-like memory and for each of his students he knew if it was the first, second or third offense. There were never more than three offenses for the whole year because if he snapped his fingers three times his thumb would automatically pop out a flag pointing in the direction of the door and that was the last time you'd be in his class.

For a dictator, Mr. Stanley was pretty neat. He always told us that there are no stupid questions, only stupid people who don't ask questions. He didn't mind explaining something more than once and when we finally understood, his eyes would twinkle and his face would light up. I guess that's why it really wasn't so surprising that when he died of a heart attack, more than half the school showed up at his funeral. It was also no mystery that my grades went down the following year in Mrs. Collins' algebra class. She catered to the bright students. And in tenth grade geometry Mrs. Kaluchek was in such a coma half the time that she never even noticed that four of the class cheated their way through the year. Mr. Stanley was truly an artist when it came to reaching the class and those of us who had him as a teacher won't ever forget.[2]

Readings in Firsthand Biography

The works here are intended to provide the teacher and students with a variety of models for firsthand biography. Particular editions are noted when pages are cited.

Biography

Gunther, John. *Death Be Not Proud.* New York: Modern Library, Inc., 1953.

Autobiography

Almost all autobiographies have elements of a firsthand biography. In a page, a long passage, or a chapter, the author may write about a significant person in his or her life. Usually, these passages contain the essential elements of a firsthand biography and can be extracted to serve as models.

[2]Danielle Alexich, "Mr. Stanley." Used with permission.

Angelou, Maya. *I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings*. New York: Random House, Inc., 1970. (Chapters 15, 16, and others)
*Hamilton, Virginia. *Junius Over Far*. New York: Harper and Row Publishers, Inc., 1985.
*Frank, Anne. *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl*. New York: Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1967.
*Keller, Helen. *The Story of My Life*. New York: Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1954. (Chapter 4 on Anne Sullivan)
Walker, Alice. *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens: Womanist Prose*. San Diego, Calif.: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, Inc., 1983.
Wright, Richard. *Black Boy*. New York: Harper Row Publishers, Inc., n. d.

Fiction

Some fiction, written in first person point of view, contains elements of firsthand biographical sketch. Sections frequently portray characters who are important to the narrator and the plot. When these portrayals contain descriptions, narration of incidents, and indications of the narrator's attitude toward the character, they may serve as models for a firsthand biographical sketch. Students may also be encouraged to find examples from their own reading of popular young adult fiction.

Lee, Harper. *To Kill A Mockingbird*. New York: Fawcett Popular Library, 1960, pp. 20-25.
Twain, Mark. *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. New York: NAL, 1971.

Essays

Orwell, George. "Such, Such Were the Joys"
Thurber, James. "Doc Marlowe"

Poetry

As suggested in the literature-based writing assignment in the classroom writing assignments, poems may well serve as models for a firsthand biography. Such poems as "My Grandmother Would Rock Quietly and Hum," by Leonard Adame, may serve as stimuli for both essays and original student poems.

*Listed in *Recommended Readings in Literature: Kindergarten Through Grade Eight* (Annotated Edition). Sacramento: California State Department of Education, 1988.

Rhetorical Effectiveness Scoring Guide for
Firsthand Biography

Firsthand biography names a writing situation that shows how another person has been important in the writer's life. The writer shows the person through recurring activities and specific one-time incidents that illustrate the subject's character. The writer must present this special person memorably to readers who do not know the person, characterizing through details of appearance and manner, description of working or living environment, habits or typical activities, presentation of dialogue, or comparison to other people.

As a type of autobiographical writing, firsthand biography informs readers about the writer as well as about another person. Although the focus is on the subject of the biography, the writer also reveals the personal (sometimes even emotional) quality of his or her relationship with the subject.

Score Point 6—Exceptional Achievement

Characterization. The writer of a six-point essay presents a comprehensive and complex characterization of a person. The characterization has depth, revealing a range of quality through direct and/or indirect means.

A writer will integrate several of the following strategies for characterization:

- Physical description (visual imagery: size, features, dress, etc.)
- Assertions or generalizations about personality and behavior
- Background description (history of relationship, subject's environment)
- Detailing of subject's routines, habits, or typical activities
- Re-creation of dialogue
- Comparison or contrast to other people

Specific Incidents or Recurring Activities. The writer develops the characterization through relevant incidents and/or as recurring activities.

The writer of a six-point essay will utilize most of the following strategies for presenting incidents:

- Orientation to the incident (time, place, context)
- Dialogue
- Specific identification (names of people or objects)
- Specific narrative action (movements, gestures, postures, expressions)
- Expression of remembered feelings or insights at the time of the incident
- Closure to the incident that relates back to the characterization

Pattern. All the parts of a six-point essay are clearly interrelated to present a sharply focused portrait of the subject. Writers of six-point essays present incidents, generalized activities, details, claims, and reflections that are built into a coherent, consistent pattern.

Significance. The importance of the subject in the writer's life is clear, either explicitly or implicitly. If the significance is implied, the reader can infer it confidently. It may be stated in the writer's insights at the time of the incident or in reflections from the writer's present perspective. These insights may appear integrated into the narration or in the conclusion of the essay.

Score Point 5—Commendable Achievement

Characterization. Subjects in five-point essays are vividly presented but in less depth and with less complexity than those in six-point essays. Writers use several strategies for characterization but not as many and not as well integrated.

Incidents or Recurring Activities. Relevant specific incidents and/or recurring activities will be present in five-point essays. However, writers may rely on generalized activities or less fully developed specific incidents. In either case, all incidents or recurring activities in five-point essays exemplify relevant characteristics of the subject.

Pattern. A coherent pattern is still evident in five-point essays. Any extraneous details are too minor to distract from that pattern.

Significance. Readers know how the subject is important in the writer's life. The significance, however, may be less well integrated into the essay than in a six-point essay.

Score Point 4—Adequate Achievement

Characterization. Although the writer may use fewer strategies of characterization, a clear sense of personality still emerges from the paper. Lacking depth, however, that personality seems simple.

Incidents or Recurring Activities. The writer of a four-point essay tends either to develop one specific incident or to list a series of recurring activities to portray the character. When the writer narrates an incident, it is less clearly focused and less relevant to the characterization. Incidents may be too long, seemingly presented for their own sake.

Pattern. The writer of the four-point essay is not in complete control of the pattern. Some descriptive details or narrated incidents may add little to the characterizations or may inexplicably detract from other assertions about the character. The writer quickly corrects this disruption by moving on to elements that coherently fit the overall pattern of the essay.

Significance. Although the statement of significance may seem tacked on rather than naturally developing from the essay, readers can readily understand the significance of the subject to the writer.

Score Point 3—Minimal Achievement

Characterization. The writer of a three-point essay will name the subject of the biography but may present that subject more as a generalized type of person than as a specific individual. Although the reader still gets some sense of who the subject is, the focus of a three-point essay is less on a clear personality and more on the topic idea of the prompt, a generalized type of personality, or on the writer himself. Some three-point essays may even seem more autobiographical than biographical.

Incidents or Recurring Activities. The writer may depend on recurring activities, presenting the subject in a quite unfocused collection of detail.

If the writer narrates an incident, the narration may ramble or digress, lacking a point or not revealing much, if anything, about the subject.

Pattern. The pattern of a three-point essay may be either not clearly apparent or too simple to contribute to a meaningful biographical sketch. When patterns are not clear, the writer of the essay may have done one of the following:

- Focused on the topic idea and presented a rambling list of generalized details
- Focused on the topic idea and presented several people who illustrate that idea
- Rambled in general about the topic idea, finally landed on one person to describe

When patterns are too simple, the writer may present one of the following:

- A detailed, rambling incident (either biographical or autobiographical in focus) with an attached character significance to meet the requirements of the prompts
- A close following of the literal directions of the prompt: a disjointed combination of introduction, physical description, long incident or series of brief trends, and importance of the person
- A catalog of scattered details that don't clarify what kind of person the subject is

Significance. The writer does not seem to be very clear about the personal significance of the subject. The significance is only briefly identified or vaguely referred to.

Score Point 2—Inadequate Achievement

Characterization. The writer of a two-point essay may make unsupported claims or generalizations about the subject or may present random details, lacking any clear point. The essay may be focused more on the writer or on several people than on one subject.

Incidents or Recurring Activities. The writer may offer an incident or mention recurring activities that add little to the identified characterization of the subject. Sometimes the reader may be able to infer some possible relevance.

Pattern. Readers will find it difficult to determine any meaningful pattern. There may be a center of focus, however. Frequently, two-point essays will contain information that does not seem to be a part of a significant pattern. The essays may seem rambling and confusing.

Significance. Reference to the significance is rare and then only in a formulaic response to the prompt. When present, statements of significance seem to have little to do with the rest of the essay.

Score Point 1—No Evidence of Achievement

Characterization. Readers get little meaningful information about the subject. Instead, the subject seems to be little more than a name with some kind of superficial relationships to the writer. Sometimes, no single subject is ever identified.

Incidents or Recurring Activities. The writer usually relies on recurring activities that are mentioned briefly. They add very little to the characteri-

zation and may seem pointless or repetitious. Inch_sms are rarely present.

Pattern. If any pattern is present, it is a superficial response to the prompt or a stream of thought.

Significance. If significance is established, it is flatly stated.

Score Point 0—No Response

A one refusing to write to the prompt; off topic

Grade Eight Writing Guide:

Observational Writing

In observational writing, writers focus on what they have seen. They re-create or represent remembered experiences. The writer's stance in observational writing is that of observer rather than participant. In observational writing students may write about what they have learned about a school or community activity after one or more observations. They may profile a community figure (after interviewing their subjects and the people who work with them); they may write up their conclusions, speculations, or reflections based on extended observations of an animal or plant; or they may take a close look at a particular place that has special importance to them.

The form in which observational writing is presented depends on the writer's intent. Essays, poems, logs, journal entries, or letters may be appropriate for writers to use in recording the results of their perceptions.

Observational writing is directly related to other types of writing in the CAP writing assessment. As writers refine various observational writing strategies, they learn, for example, how to present people most effectively in a firsthand biography; establish the situation and characters in a story; and present the problem in a problem solution.

Although observational writing is based on personal experience, it is different from an autobiographical incident and a firsthand biography in that it is more distant and impersonal, less expressive, and more presentational. Like the writer of a firsthand biography, the writer of observational writing may focus on a person; but the presentation of the person, whether well-known or not, will be more objective, requiring the writer to adopt the scientist's objective eye. Writers may implicitly or explicitly evaluate a person, place, or activity through the selection of detail; the focus, however, remains on presenting the subject, not on arguing for its value (which is a characteristic of evaluation). Observational writing can be considered, then, as a bridge from autobiography to evaluation and other forms of exposition.

Unlike the writer of a report of information, whose purpose is straightforward transmission of information, the writer of an observational essay presents a subject in a way that helps readers see the subject as the writer saw it. The focus of observational writing is on the singularity of the writer's perception. The writer's only sources for observational writing are what he himself has observed (whereas in report of information the writer may use secondary sources).

In observational writing writers may draw on memory or notes taken on the spot. Journalists on assignment to write a profile or sports story, social scientists engaged in field work, naturalists studying animals or insects, and students developing profiles of people or places take careful notes and rely on those notes when they write their observations. In a test situation, however, students must write from memory. All of the CAP writing assessment prompts require students to recall an observed subject without the benefit of notes. As you will see from the student essays included in this writing guide, students can do well in recalling observations from memory if they had opportunities to observe, take notes, write, and revise in the classroom.

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Although the name "observational writing" may be new to many teachers, it is a familiar type of writing. Many existing writing programs require students to study people, animals, places, objects, and activities as a basis for writing. Ken Macrorie, James Moffett, Elliot Wigginton, and many others have popularized such assignments.

Importance of Observational Writing

In observational writing writers move from the center of what they are recounting to the periphery and become observers of the scene or situation. In recounting what they have observed, writers select significant details from a myriad of impressions and organize them so that readers can see what the writers have observed. Relying on the perspective of the observer, writers may reflect on their observations—speculating, evaluating, and interpreting. These kinds of reflections make observational writing subjective (even though presented objectively) in contrast to the complete objectivity of the report of information.

Enhanced perception developed in observational writing may be used in various disciplines. In science, for example, keen observational habits and accurate notations of observations are essential. In social studies students are frequently asked to observe groups of people and draw conclusions from what they have seen. Observation and writing based on observation are essential in many academic specialties and careers. As students learn to use their own experiences and observations as resources, they will find their writing in all subject areas improved.

Because students' ability to write a particular type of writing is integral to their being able to read the same type of writing for pleasure and understanding, students should be given many opportunities to read examples of observational writing. Our literature is rich with poems, essays, stories, and novels that depend on a writer's ability to convey that singularity of perception that allows the reader to see what the writer has seen.

Characteristics of Observational Writing

Successful observational writing recreates a perceptual experience for the reader. It presents the writer's vision of a specific person, place, object, animal, or activity. It succeeds on the basis of its presentational strategies. The characteristics of observational writing, as found by the analysis of many samples of both student and professional writing, include assuming an observational stance, identifying the subject of the observation, providing the reader with the context for the observation, and presenting the actual experience.

- *Identification of subject*: Writers clearly identify what they have observed, the subject of the observation.
- *Observational stance*: Writers convey their observational stance through their focus and point of view. They convey this stance by the details they select and the words they use to present their observations to the reader.
- *Context of observation*: Writers locate the subject of the observation in a specific place and time.
- *Presentation of observational experience*: Writers re-create their observations by selecting and ordering details, using factual descriptions as well as such other strategies as dialogue; concrete, sensory language; narration of event; and shifts between closeups and distant views.

Exemplary Student Essays

The following exemplary student essay was written in response to the following assignment:

Memoir of Nature

Give an account of some action you witnessed in which people played little or no part, such as some animal behavior or weather that particularly impressed you. Be sure to give your own thoughts and feelings about the observation.

You may include this account in a collection of your memoirs to add diversity to them, or you may make it part of a collection of nature memoirs.

The Butterfly[1]

Out of my window I could see the mist rising from the wet ground. Finally after a while the sun was shining bright, and the mist was gone. I had to mow the lawn. After I had finished I went to lie down out on the soft green grass with an ice-cold lemonade. After a while I took a sip, and on the sweating glass was a black and white caterpillar. I screamed and dropped my glass and shook my hand

[1]Lucia Rambusch, "The Butterfly," in *Active Voices II: A Writer's Reader*. Compiled by James Moffett and Phyllis Tashlik. Portsmouth, N.H.: Boynton/Cook Publishers, Inc., 1987, p. 73. Used with permission.

as if I had just touched a poisonous snake that had almost bitten me! I was about ready to get up when I saw it; it seemed as if it was hurt. So I thought for a minute and looked at it. I finally picked it up and then noticed that the glass had barely missed him by a hair! After looking at it for a while I thought it became sweeter and sweeter.

When I went into the house I put it on the counter, thinking it wouldn't go away while I went to the other room to get a coffee can to put it in. When I returned, it was hanging upside down and the counter spitting on itself. I put the can back, realizing that the caterpillar was making its chrysalis from which it would emerge a butterfly.

I watched it all day. After a couple of hours the green threads started to look like a chrysalis. It was fascinating! I got a headache watching it go up and down, up and down, never getting tired. Soon it was dinner time, and so I set the table next to the now half finished chrysalis. Throughout dinner I watched it, always moving, never getting tired. After dinner I watched again but it was time to go to bed.

The next morning I woke up and went down to the kitchen. I had forgotten all about the chrysalis and ran my hand under the counter. I hit it softly and then remembered. I quickly knelt down to check on the damage I had done. I hadn't done much, but that didn't matter now that I was watching it! It was a brilliant electric spring green. I watched it day after day, and day after day it got darker and darker and also seemed to get a little smaller as if it were clinging to the caterpillar. Soon the chrysalis turned a brownish black and I could see the veins of the almost formed wings. Soon the chrysalis was shriveling up.

One morning I went downstairs and checked up on my chrysalis, and there was the butterfly halfway out of its chrysalis, all slimy from its protective coating of spit. I wasn't quite sure what to do because if I touched it after it came out of its chrysalis I might hurt it, and if I touched it now I might hurt it too! I decided to take it out now! I slowly and very carefully took it off of the shelf where it was hanging and laid it outside on the bench. Slowly it emerged from the chrysalis. Though it was still wet its colors were brilliant, orange, yellow and black. It was a monarch. The butterfly was lucky I had put it in the sun; because of this it dried a lot faster. Soon it went for its first flight. It flapped its wings but couldn't get off because it was still wet. Then finally it got off the ground for a couple of seconds. Then it tried again and it was off, so light that the wind carried it away.

I thought about it every day, and when I did think of my butterfly, I thought about how much it had contributed to my life, watching one body turn into another.

The following essay was written in response to an assignment to write about a person who seemed to be an outsider. The steps involved in producing this essay as well as comments from the response group are included in the following section, "One Student's Writing Process."

The Outsider

One late afternoon, when I was visiting my grandmother, my mom, grandma, two brothers and I were on our way out to dinner when we sighted an old woman walking down the street. She looked like a sweet old lady and I said so. However, my grandma had a different story to tell us.

[The occasion established; the subject introduced]

Grandma said that one day my Uncle Bill was walking and happened to come upon her. Since he is a very friendly sort of man, he greeted her with a "Hello ma'am!" That "sweet old lady" practically bit his head off. My grandma also told us that she didn't use very sweet language.

Since then I have seen this woman almost every day that I have gone to town. She always had her shopping cart from the supermarket. Always alone. Pulling her cart down the main street, up and down in front of stores. Expression, it seems, on her is nothing more than blank stare. Her clothing is very well aged. A scarf around her head, a trench coat, and old-lady shoes make up her wardrobe. The scarf has lost its color and the trenchcoat is wrinkled and dirty.

[The focus of the writing shifts to the old lady, who is described succinctly—her cart, her expression, her wardrobe. The writer depends on her own observations.]

I guess she wants to be left alone and she lets it be known. I once thought of talking to her, but had second thoughts. She has a right to live the way that she likes.

[The writer ponders this outsider and tries to understand her.]

She blocks everyone out. I have never seen her with another person. It seems, to me, that she's the type of person who it takes a key to unlock. I think of her as strong because all in all she won't let anything get her down. That is most definitely one tough lady.

[More reflection, puzzlement; a final assessment based on her observations]

One Student's Writing Process

Students' writing and thinking improve markedly when they experience writing as a process. The improvement in writing is exemplified in the student's work which follows.

Part one of writing about an outsider was presented to the class orally:

> All of us feel like outsiders at times, and we have all observed others who appear to be outsiders. People might feel like outsiders because they are different in the way they look, act, or dress. Or they might seem like outsiders because they are newcomers or forced to live in some unusual way. Being an outsider might bother the person, or it might not.

Prewriting

The class, led by the teacher, discussed the idea of outsiders and speculated about the ways people identify themselves and others as outsiders. They talked about how people become outsiders and discussed outsiders they had observed. Finally, students clustered the word "outsider" (See section IX, "Writing Guide for Autobiographical Incident," for an example of a student's cluster).

After students had talked about their clusters and shared experiences, the teacher presented part two of the assignment:

> Write about someone you have seen or known who seemed to be an outsider. Your main purpose is to present this particular outsider to your readers, describing him or her in some detail and explaining why the person seemed like an outsider. Was it because of the way the person looked or acted, because the person was a newcomer, or because of some other reason?

Draft

The Outsider

One little old lady can be a very big outcast. I was visiting my grandma in a small town outside of Modesto, Calif., called Ceres. When we visit my grandma we go alot of places, so the car is always in use. My mom, grandma, two brothers, and I were on our way out to dinner when we sighted an old woman walking down the street. She looked like a sweet old lady and I said so. Well now, my grandma had a different story to tell us. She told us that one day my uncle Bill was walking and happened to come upon her. He is very friendly sort of man and greeted her with a "Hello mam!" That old lady practically bit his head off. My grandma told us that she didn't use very sweet language. Since then my grandma has heard of a few more occurrences dealing with that old lady. As we went more places, I saw her more and more. She is very homely looking and in my opinion not to outgoing, or in this case a little to outgoing. I guess in a way it's better that she is that way, she wants to be left alone and she lets it be known. I once thought of talking to her, but I had a few second thoughts. She has a right to live the way that she likes. It's kind of funny when you think about it a little old lady yelling at a middle aged man. I guess I kind of think of her as strong (in more than one way), because all in all she won't let anything get her down. That is most definitely one tough lady.

Several days after the class wrote rough drafts, the students read their papers aloud in response groups. The groups then used the following response guide, and each student wrote unstructured, short (half-page or so) responses to two other students' work. Writers then wrote about their own work as a way of planning their revisions.

Response Guide

In your response please consider the following points and write about those that seem important to you. Add anything else you want to say to the writer.

- What person or event did the writer choose to write about?
- If there is a place in the writing where you would like more information, tell where.
- Was there any part that was confusing? Explain.
- What specific and unusual words did the writer use?
- Is there a place where the writer might use dialogue?
- Look for the sentence or sentences where the writer shows his or her reaction or shows his or her feelings about the event or people.
- What did the writer learn from the observation?
- What parts give you the writer's perceptions so that you can see what he or she has seen?

Two students' responses to the first draft follow.

Response Number One

She chose to write about a little old woman. I would like more information of how come she decided not to st_ and talk to the old woman. The writer used a little dialogue when the old lady bit her uncle Bills head off! She described the woman's clothes and how she pulled her cart up and down. I felt that I could imagine this old woman. She was understanding of the old woman's rights.

Response Number Two

The writer wrote about an elderly woman. The setting is good, but there could have been more description. Nothing was confusing. It was quite understandable. The writer showed her feelings when she thought of that lady as being quite tough. She wanted to speak to the woman, but had second thoughts. I thought her observations about the woman were very real. Her story was quite unforgettable.

The writer's own analysis of her draft follows.

In my story, I wrote about an old woman who keeps to herself. I think more information is needed in quite a number of places. I suppose in some places my story does get confusing, though I can't say that, because I know what I mean! I suppose that I could use a few more interesting words in some places! Some dialogue was used, but more might be needed. I learned something from my observation; I need to look more carefully and remember what I have seen. I could have used more description.

In the revision this student was able to eliminate irrelevant detail, add detail, paragraph more coherently, and focus her reflections about her subject. For the student's final revision, see the exemplary essay in the previous section.

Response and Revision

Student response guides are helpful in directing students to important characteristics as they read one another's observational writing. By using such guides, students may make valuable suggestions to help the writers re-see their work and improve their writing. The students' responses may be oral, with students sharing writing with a partner, a small group, or a large group; or students may write out their responses. Prepared response guides may vary from simple checklists to complete content analysis.

The following guide contains a list of suggestions relevant to the characteristics of observational writing (a more detailed response guide appears in the previous section, "One Student's Writing Process").

Student Response Guide

Identification of Subject:

- In your own words, identify exactly what the subject of the observation is.
- Try to draw or sketch the subject of the observation as you think the writer saw it. Your sketch will help the writer see whether the written words convey the actual experience. Discuss your drawing with the writer to help clarify any misconceptions.

Observational Stance:

- What is the writer's point of view? Is it the same point of view throughout the paper or does it shift? Tell the writer whether you could follow the point of view easily. If you could not, show the writer where you had trouble.
- How does the writer feel about the subject? Try to write one sentence giving the writer your ideas about the writer's feelings.
- How did you decide how the writer felt about the subject? Pick out some specific examples of words, phrases, or sentences that give you information about the writer's feelings.
- From looking at the subject of this observation through the writer's eyes, what surprises, if any, did you have? Pick out any sections that make this writer's point of view special or unusual. If you could not find any, help the writer see how his or her observations are really unique.

Context of Observation:

- What was the context for this writer's observation? Pick out those passages that show the location for the observation. Tell the writer whether you need more information about the location.
- When did this observation take place? If it is important, look for the season or time of day. Let the writer know whether the time is clear.

Presentation of Observational Experience:

- What factual descriptions does the writer include? Do you need any additional facts to see the subject?
- Give examples of concrete language (specific words that convey sensory details) that the writer used. Show the writer places where additional details would be helpful to you in seeing the subject as he or she saw it.
- Look for shifts between closeups and distant views. If the writer has included only one view, see whether you could suggest places for others.
- If the writer has used dialogue, tell whether it was helpful in presenting the scene or activity to you. If it could be used more effectively, show the writer how.
- What other strategies has this writer used to recreate the experience? Let the writer know how successful the writing is and where it might be changed to help you as the reader to see it more clearly.

Classroom Writing Assignments

Observational writing assignments require students to look around the school or go out into a natural environment or the community. Consequently, students learn to observe, take notes, and write from notes—skills that will be of use to them in many areas of their lives. Appropriate classroom assignments range from brief observational exercises to extended profile assignments. [Examples of exercises are included in *Observing and Writing* by George Hillock (National Council of Teachers of English, 1975).] In *Active Voices: A Writing Program Across the Curriculum* (Boynton/Cook Publishers, 1981) and *Active Voices II : A Writer's Reader* (Boynton/Cook Publishers, 1987), James Moffett and Phyllis Tashlik outline a range of essay and profile assignments along with examples of student writing. James Moffett and Phyllis Tashlik call the assignments "composed observation," "eyewitness memoir" (human and nature subjects), and "reporter-at-large."

Observational writing assignments help students become more perceptive as well as to focus their attention, record their observations, and draw inferences or conclusions from their records. Assignments that involve sensory descriptions lead directly to observational writing. Although the term *observational* implies the sense of sight, observational writing should be thought of as embracing all of the senses; hence, an assignment involving the perception of sound or taste or smell is an appropriate prewriting exercise for this type of writing.

Observational Writing Assignments

The suggested writing assignments included in this section cover a variety of topics. Each assignment requires students to observe carefully and to write about their observations.

California Quail

Before reading the poem "California Quail" by Pablo Neruda, ask students whether they are familiar with the California quail. You might have a student at the chalkboard draw the bird from the descriptions offered by the class. Then show the class a photograph or painting of a California quail. Let them look at the picture while you read the poem aloud.

California Quail
(Callipepla californica)

Between Yunbel and Cuatro Trigos
I saw a shadow, a shape, a bird
slipping away with its beauty,
a fruit, a feathered flower,
a bird of pure pear,
a circumstance of the air,
a sandy smoky egg:
I approached—called out, its eyes
shone with the hostile rectitude
of two flaming lances
and above its pride it wore
two plumes like two banners:
I had no sooner seen
that vision than it vanished
and I was left with the dusk,
with the smoke, the haze, and the night,
with the solitude of the road.[2]

—Pablo Neruda

After students have heard the poem, have them read it for themselves, perhaps in pairs, and indicate examples of realistic observations ("its eyes shone," "two plumes") and imaginative comparisons ("a bird of pure pear," "two flaming lances," "two banners"). They will soon see that most of the poem is composed of comparisons or metaphors, and for a person who has *seen* a California quail, the comparisons communicate the sense of the bird.

In preparation for the observational writing exercise, ask students to select and observe some

[2]Pablo Neruda, *Art of Birds*. Translated by Jack Schmitt. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985. Used with permission.

animal over a period of time. Have them keep a log of their observations, complete with drawings. Then ask them to make a list of all the words and phrases that realistically describe the animal they observed. Next, students should write a metaphor for each of the realistic descriptions and then write either a poem or a prose vignette (short sketch) of the animal, using both realistic (personally observed) and metaphoric descriptions.

Someone at Work

Visit someone at work, someone doing a job that interests you. The person could be a mechanic, nurse, hairdresser, lawyer, taxi driver, minister or rabbi, pharmacist, chef, computer programmer, or airline pilot. Observe this person at work and interview him or her. You might need more than one visit and interview. You might also want to interview people the person works with. Plan your interviews carefully, writing out some questions in advance, perhaps with a partner. You might even plan your interviews as teams.

From your observation and interview notes, write an essay about this person at work. Describe the person and the work place. Help your readers see what you understand and appreciate about this person's work.

An Expert

Choose a relative, friend, or classmate who is an expert at something—playing a sport, cooking, writing, gardening, repairing things, operating a business, and so forth. Interview this person to learn more about his or her expertise. Find out how this person became an expert and how it feels to be an expert. You will want to write some questions before your interview, and you may want to do a follow-up interview in order to understand and describe what this person does well enough to write about it.

From your notes, pick out the things that interest you and write an article for the "Experts" column in your school newspaper. Tell your readers—other students at your school—what interested you about your subject's expertise and how he or she became an expert. Help them to understand and appreciate what your subject does and to think about what it means to be an expert.

An Important Person in My Community

Who are the most respected, admired, and influential adults at your school and in your community? Choose one you would like to interview and write about. It could be a counselor, teacher, or administrator at your school, a TV newscaster, athlete, musician, business leader, police officer, city council member, or anyone else who is well known and respected.

Interview this person at least once and then write an essay about him or her. Tell your readers what you think the person is like and why you think he or she is respected and admired.

An Important Family Event

Choose an older relative (grandparent, aunt or uncle, parent) to interview. Your purpose in the interview is to discover one special event, incident, or story that you think is an important part of your family's history. Get the relative to tell you all the details of the event while you take notes.

Write about this event for other students, who will also be writing about important family events to share with you. Help your readers see what happened and why this event is important in your family.

CAP Writing Prompt Format

The writing prompts used by the California Assessment Program are organized into two sections: the writing situation and directions for writing. In the writing situation students are oriented to the special writing situations unique to observational writing. Students are given background about the topic and are prepared for the specific assignment that follows. In the directions for writing section, students are given instructions regarding the assignment's intent, topic, and audience, as well as any directions to keep in mind when responding to the prompt.

A Place That Impressed Me

Writing Situation: Your English class has been discussing how some writers manage to make you see specific places in ways they saw them when they wrote about them. These writers write so descriptively that they make you feel as if you were seeing that place through their eyes. Your English teacher has asked you to practice this kind of writing by recreating for your classmates a specific place you like to visit.

Directions for Writing: Think of a place that you like to visit and would like to share with your classmates. Write about this place so that your classmates will feel as if they were seeing it through

your eyes. Include the kinds of details that will help your classmates imagine this place and that will show them why you like to visit it.

A Character in Town

Writing Situation: Your English class has been discussing the ways in which some writers manage to describe people so that readers feel as if they were seeing the people through the writer's eyes. Your teacher has asked you to practice this kind of writing by re-creating for your classmates a character that you have often observed in your town. You are not familiar with this character, but you have seen him or her often enough to recall specific details about the character.

Directions for Writing: Write an essay in which you re-create for the other members of your class a person whom you have often observed in your town. Include the kinds of details that will help your readers imagine this character as if they were seeing him or her through your eyes. You might include specific physical details, descriptions of habitual actions, or descriptions of the way the character walks or dresses. You might want to show this character in a specific place and doing things that you have often observed him or her doing. Your readers should also know your attitude toward the character by the way you write about him or her.

Witnessing an Argument

Writing Situation: Arguments or disagreements between people often create lasting hard feelings. You have probably seen two of your friends argue while you were with them. Sometimes we can simply watch disagreements without becoming involved ourselves.

Directions for Writing: Tell about a time when you witnessed an argument or disagreement between two people. Let the reader know what happened. Describe the people involved and how each person acted during the disagreement.

The Group

Writing Situation: Every school has different groups of students. These students come together because of some common interest—sports, music, or school activities. Think of a group of friends about your age. This group should be people you know fairly well but a group you are not part of.

Directions for Writing: Write about this group. If the group has a name, give the name and the reason for the name. Explain what interest holds the group together. Describe some members of the group—what they look like and how they act. Tell about some adventures or activities of the group. Try to make this group come alive for your readers who do not know anything about the group.

Additional Exemplary Essays

In the following essay Rania Calas responds to an assignment to write about a group activity. In this observational writing, Rania, a bystander, presents her view of a family wedding as if she were recounting it to a three year old.

How Was the Wedding?

"How was the wedding?" asked my little niece Eleni.

How do you explain a Greek wedding to a three-year-old? How do you explain a Greek wedding to anyone? Greeks, after all, are not like other people. They are a species by themselves.

Imagine, for instance, the hot kitchen in the house in Athens the day before the wedding. Five husky women are standing around, gossiping, chainsmoking and arguing over what to serve eighty guests the next day. Meanwhile, visitors arrive at the house to bring wedding presents to the bride. But the bride is not here. She went to pick up her dress at the dressmaker. It still needs some adjustment and a big bow of lace to be sewn on in the back. And where is the bride's mother? She has gone to the flower shop to order huge baskets of pink roses for the church. Someone better give some cool drinks to those visitors!

And where is Aunt Emmanuella? She just remembered that she forgot to pick up her wedding dress at the dry cleaners and it is Saturday and the cleaners are closed! Isn't anybody going to clean up the house? It's a frightful mess, and tomorrow is the wedding.

Does anybody know if the groom's parents from Chicago have arrived? They'll probably drop in anytime now. Oh, god! If they saw this mess, would they really want their son marrying into this strange Greek family, and the wedding taking place in Athens instead of in Chicago?

The pandemonium lasts way into the night. Furniture is moved about. I am delegated to clean up the bathrooms. That sounds easy. It isn't. Standards of cleanliness are not the same all over the world.

On the big day, everything somehow seems to fall into place. The house is spotless; the food is

cooked; and the best tablecloth, silver, crystal, and chinaware grace the table. The bar is properly set up, because the bride wants to serve cocktails to her guests in the American manner. She has all the proper supplies. The groom asks, "Where is the ice?"

"Ice? What ice?" There is no ice. The refrigerator has broken down hours ago under the load of foods it is stuffed with.

I am one of the helpless bystanders who is delegated to procure ice. We are going to five different restaurants and ten different hotels to gather two bags of ice cubes. They melt in the Greek heat. So let's hurry! We have to be in church in an hour!

The bride looks stunning. The groom perspires. He is nervous. Maybe he thinks, "What am I doing here?"

I guess all this wouldn't interest Elleni. She would want to know who the flower girl was, and what she wore, and why do people throw flower petals at the bride and groom. She would want to know whether everybody got sugar-coated almonds and what did they do with the baskets of pink roses. I'd have to make it sound like a fairytale. I too wish it would have been a fairytale.[3]

—Rania Calas

The writer of the next essay reverses the usual order and opens with his reaction to the sight of a destroyed locker. He conjectures about the reasons for the defacement and speculates about the perpetrators. Then he focuses on sight and smell, pulls back from a close-up view to include the observed reaction of others, and concludes with no solutions to this unsolved "crime."

A Surprising Incident

"I'm glad it's not me," is exactly what I thought when a locker next to my own was swarming with ants. I did not know whose locker it was, but I figured that this person was not liked very well. I did, however, know who did it: a group of rockers who were always vandalizing something or other on the school campus. They must have done it earlier that morning before anyone, especially the teachers, arrived at school because all the junk that was smashed onto the locker was still dripping to the ground when I arrived, which was when the first bus pulled up in the parking lot 45 minutes before the homeroom bell rang.

The entire outside of the locker was smeared with what looked like green lipstick. A hammer must have been used because all four corners of the locker were hit in, leaving four large gaps which ants were using to run through. Covering the locker's combination dial was a smashed banana. On the ground was a chocolate cupcake flattened like a coin.

By the time all three buses came and went a large crowd had gathered, but everyone kept a great distance away from all the ooze and a terrible odor was sweeping around everyone. After school the janitor finally cleaned up the mess, and by then everyone had seen the locker, or at least smelled its odor. All I found out was the student was a seventh grader and that he was issued a different locker for the rest of the year. Nothing happened to him after that to make the odor of the ants come back.

In the following essay the writer presents a memorable character from her life—a street person she has seen many times. She weaves rumor and speculation with eyewitness evidence to reinforce the rumors and creates the image of a mystery man with a clouded history. She draws a pathetic picture and at the end acknowledges both a fascination and a helpless empathy for the captain.

The Captain

Quite often I see, walking down the street, a strange man who has been nicknamed Captain Columbine. He roams the streets of Columbine, never bothering anybody, but never behaving as normal people do.

Many rumors have been started about Captain Columbine. Some people are convinced that he is habitually using drugs so much that he is permanently brain damaged. Others believe he was in a severe accident of some kind and was mentally damaged.

The cause of these rumors is the strange behavior of Captain Columbine. He has been seen in various places, talking to an imaginary, three-foot tall person. He cares for it, feeds it, and even has conversations with it. I have even seen him pretend to pick it up and give it a piggy-back ride. Another odd thing about Captain Columbine is that no matter what the temperature is, he wears a heavy down ski jacket, thick pants, hiking boots, mirror sunglasses and a ski cap. Even on hot, sweltering days in the summer, he walks contentedly about, while everyone stares in amazement.

[3]Rania Calas, "How Was the Wedding?" in *Active Voices II. A Writer's Reader*. Compiled by James Moffett and Phyllis Tashlik. Portsmouth, N.H.: Boynton/Cook Publishers, Inc., 1987, p. 59. Used with permission.

Captain Columbine usually sleeps in an old, cardboard box behind the Bank of America. Every morning he walks into the bank and takes a few dollars worth of pennies, nickles and dimes out of his bank account. It is known that he has quite a large bank account. Many people believe it is an inheritance from a wealthy relative. The police have tried to find out if Captain Columbine has any relatives, but they have no way to find out what his name is because they have no reason to do a body search.

Many times I have seen Captain Columbine on the County Transit Bus. He never seems to go anywhere, he just enjoys riding from place to place. Captain Columbine always uses the change he got at the bank for bus fare. He likes watching all of the pennies, nickels, and dimes go down the slot. The problem is that he dumps it all in and always pays much more than he needs to.

I have always been fascinated by Captain Columbine, but I am sorry that there are so many rumors about him, and that so many people treat him unkindly. If I could I would try to help him in any way I could. But I know I cannot.

Essays Written for the California Assessment Program

The following essays were selected from the CAP writing field test as examples of essays representing high, middle, and low achievement. They were written in 45 minutes with no additional time for revision.

High Achievement

The following observational writing essay develops slowly. The writer begins with a generalization about "different" people and then moves to an example, an observed incident, to illustrate her generalization. She effectively combines both narration and description in her observation and concludes with a brief but effective comment.

Something There

All people are different, which is quite obvious in their personalities, cultures, looks, and other qualities. But there are some people who stand out more than others, are more different than expected. These people can be people with handicaps, or just people who look stranger than we're used to. Many times, we judge a person by how they appear to us, which is not very fair.

An example of this was when my family drove to San Diego to walk around the harbor. After about an hour of this, we decided to walk to a nearby restaurant and eat.

The streets were busy and the sidewalks were crowded, but slowly we made our way past the close buildings. After getting information about the direction of the food places, we began walking that way.

In another ten minutes, we saw the golden arches of MacDonalds ahead. While our hungry stomachs led us on, we began walking faster.

When we got to the entrance, we saw a strange man sitting against the side of the building. He had on dirty clothes that were nowhere near his size. His hair was dark and long, and strutted out in all directions. His hands and face were brown with dust, and he had a ripped, dirty blanket at his side.

As we neared the door, we tried not to stare. He looked at us through hollow eyes, while pushing the hair from his eyes.

At that moment, a young man that looked about seventeen walked out of the building. He seemed like a regular, ignorant teenager. He looked at us, then he turned his head and spotted the man sitting down. Putting his hands in his pockets, he turned and walked toward him. Just before reaching the sitting man, the young boy stooped and picked something up from the ground. He looked at the [illegible] and held out a five-dollar bill in his hand. "I believe you dropped this," the boy said.

Slowly the man reached out to take the bill. He mumbled his thanks, but the boy was already leaving.

We left the restaurant, having a good feeling. For before the young man had reached down to pick up the five-dollar bill, we had all seen that there was nothing there.

Mid-Range Achievement

In the following essay the writer identifies people and places with specific details. The descriptions are often, however, generic rather than particular and result in an observation that is not so highly focused as it might have been.

The Class Clown

I remember someone who was a class clown. His name was JS, and he attended a Saturday Japanese School. I happened to end up in the same class with him.

J had a talent for being a clown. He was extremely funny and sarcastic with our teacher.

He had black hair which he wore long and straight, and he had a slightly chubby face, but it was always cheerful. But he had one characteristic I

remember so well, which is the fact he never wore pants. He always, always, wore shorts! Never once during that school year, which is about ten months, did he wear pants.

He was such a joker, it left everyone in stitches. He didn't really try to be the class clown, it just came naturally. He really was nice and friendly, although he took everything as a joke. What he didn't take as a joke though, were his grades; he was smart, and a good student. He clowned around so class would seem funnier.

J would always crack up the teacher. If she ever came around with papers, he would make some remark that would make her laugh incredibly, and she would say, "Ah, J."

To the other students too, he would say and do things to make us laugh. He was always bringing little toys and games to amuse himself (and us) with whenever the teacher's back was turned. We would laugh, and just as the teacher turned around, he would hide his little toy, leaving the teacher puzzled. He was a fun-loving guy, a wonderful class clown.

Low Achievement

This essay, at the high end of the low-achieving essay range, uses some narrative and some description to convince us that his friend is indeed a clown and to help us picture him. The writer reflects upon his knowledge of his friend and declares his memories of him vivid. The examples are so few, however, and the digressions so frequent that the essay would receive a low score.

The Class Clown

I have known alot of class clowns. I myself am somewhat of a class clown. But the person I remember as a big class clown is B. I remember him the most because he used to make everybody laugh including sometimes the teacher. He used to bring little jokes and gadgets from home. Like whoopee cushion, remote control cars, and all sorts of other stuff. He used to influence the class till all of us were laughing so hard that one time our teacher recorded us and played it back to Vice Principal. B is short, blonde haired, blue eyed kind of stalky. Me, him and a guy named Chris Martin never stopped talking, joking, and laughing. But finally our teacher split us up and now I'm the only clown left in our math class. But I still remember all the times we went through in our math class.

Low Achievement

This very-low-range essay does not include any specific events. Because the writer did not include sensory description, we cannot visualize this class clown or imagine his tricks.

Are class clown is TR he's always the funniest. He makes people happy sometimes when your down he'll come and cheer you up. T is a very nice person everybody likes him pretty well. Everybody comes to Mr. S's and can't wait for T to come up with something fun. Myself and alot of other people like it when he comes up with something funny to brighten our day we all like him alot.

Published Examples of Observational Writing

Fragments of longer essays and two poems are used in this section to illustrate the variety of published observational writing available.

In addition to the student essays, these published essays can be used to help students see the possibilities of observational writing. The author of the first fragment is Lewis Thomas, a famous scientist noted for his ability to record his own scientific observations in a way that lets the reader see what he sees through his eyes. Comments about Mr. Lewis' essay are also included.

A solitary ant, afield, cannot be considered to have much of anything on his mind; indeed, with only a few neurons strung together by fibers, he can't be imagined to have a mind at all, much less a thought. He is more like a ganglion on legs. Four ants together, or ten, encircling a dead moth on a path, begin to look more like an idea. They fumble and shove, gradually moving the food toward the Hill, but as though by blind chance. It is only when you watch the dense mass of thousands of ants, crowded together around the Hill, blackening the ground, that you begin to see the whole beast, and now you observe it thinking, planning, calculating. It is an intelligence, a kind of live computer, with crawling bits for its wits.

At a stage in the construction, twigs of a certain size are needed, and all the members forage obsessively for twigs of just this size. Later, when outer walls are to be finished, thatched, the size must change, and as though given orders by telephones, all the workers shift the search to the new twigs. If you disturb the arrangement of a part of the Hill, hundreds of ants will set it vibrating, shifting, until it is put right again. Distant sources of food are somehow sensed, and long lines, like tentacles, reach out over the ground, up over walls, behind boulders, to fetch it in.[4]

[4]Lewis Thomas, *The Lives of a Cell: Notes of a Biology Watcher*. New York: Bantam Books, 1975, p. 12. Used with permission.

Commentary

Lewis Thomas, a biologist by training, is a writer by talent. Using the techniques of observational writing, he succinctly describes the activities on an anthill, carefully selecting details, focusing action, and clearly defining the scene. He is the observer, writing cleanly and without pretense about nature and using vivid images with commonplace vocabulary devoid of technical jargon. Mr. Thomas moves beyond observation when he judges that the mass of ants becomes "an intelligence, a kind of live computer with crawling bits for its wits."

Example Without Commentary: From Annie Dillard's *Teaching a Stone to Talk*

I was sitting with ship's naturalist Soames Summerhays on a sand beach under cliffs on uninhabited Hood Island. The white beach was a havoc of lava boulders black as clinkers, sleek with spray, and lambent as brass in the sinking sun. To our left a dozen sea lions were body-surfing in the long green combers that rose, translucent, half a mile offshore. When the combers broke, the shoreline boulders rolled. I could feel the roar in the rough rock on which I sat; I could hear the grate inside each long backsweeping sea, the rumble of a rolled million rocks muffled in splashes and the seethe before the next wave's heave.

To our right, a sea lion slipped from the ocean. It was a young bull; in another few years he would be dangerous, bellowing at intruders and biting off great dirty chunks of the ones he caught. Now this young bull, which weighed maybe 120 pounds, sprawled silhouetted in the late light, slick as a drop of quicksilver, his glistening whiskers radii of gold like any crown. He hauled his packed bulk toward us up the long beach; he flung himself with an enormous surge of fur- and muscle onto the boulder where I sat. "Soames," I said—very quietly, "he's here because we're here, isn't he?" The naturalist nodded. I felt water drip on my elbow behind me, then the fragile scrape of whiskers, and finally the wet warmth and weight of a muzzle, as the creature settled to sleep on my arm. I was catching on to sea lions.

Walk into the water. Instantly sea lions surround you, even if none has been in sight. To say that they come to play with you is not especially anthropomorphic. Animals play. The bull sea lions are off patrolling their territorial shores; these are the cows and young, which range freely. A five-foot sea lion peers intently into your face, then urges her muzzle gently against your underwater mask and searches your eyes without blinking. Next she rolls upside down and slides along the length of your floating body, rolls again, and casts a long glance back at your eyes. You are, I believe, supposed to follow, and think up something clever in return. You can play games with sea lions in the water using shells or bits of leaf, if you are willing. You can spin on your vertical axis and a sea lion will swim circles around you, keeping her face always six inches from yours, as though she were tethered. You can make a game of touching their back flippers, say, and the sea lions will understand at once; somersaulting conveniently before your clumsy hands, they will give you an excellent field of back flippers.

And when you leave the water, they follow. They don't want you to go. They porpoise to the shore, popping their heads up when they lose you and casting about, then speeding to your side and emitting a choked series of vocal notes. If you won't relent, they disappear, barking; but if you sit on the beach with so much as a foot in the water, two or three will station with you, floating on their backs and saying, Urr.[5]

Readings in Observational Writing

Magazines and newspapers are rich sources of examples of observational writing. Since observational writing is in essence a recreation of what the writer sees, hears, and perhaps feels, profiles, travelogues, and feature stories often include eyewitness accounts and observed incidents.

Many scientists and social scientists employ the techniques of observational writing in their work; that is, they describe the complex activities of an anthill, note the familial behavior of gorillas, observe the problem-solving techniques of students in kindergarten, and watch leaders dominate a group.

Literary works are often wholly or partially personal observations. Poems, essays, and sections of stories and novels rely on close observations and selective presentations of the writers' perceptions.

Sources of observational writing are included in the following list.

Coffin, Robert. "Christmas in Maine," in *Lost Paradise: A Boyhood on a Maine Coast Farm.* Saint Clair Shores, Michigan: Scholarly, 1971.

Crews, Harry. *A Childhood: The Biography of a Place.* New York: William Morrow & Co., 1983.

[5]Annie Dillard, "Life on the Rocks: The Galapagos," in *Teaching a Stone to Talk: Expeditions and Encounters.* New York: Harper and Row Publishers, Inc., 1982, pp. 115-17. Used with permission.

Eyewitness to History. Edited by John Carey. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988.

Guthrie, Woody. "Soldiers in the Dust,' in *Bound for Glory*. New York: New American Library, 1984.

Kingston, Maxine Hong. *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts*. New York: Random House, Inc., 1977.

Knowles, John. *A Separate Peace*. New York: Bantam Books, Inc., 1980.

Lee, Harper. *To Kill a Mockingbird*. New York: Warner Books, Inc., 1982.

Leffland, Ella. *Rumors of Peace* New York: Harper & Row Publishers, Inc., 1985 (many short descriptions of places throughout the book [San Francisco Wharf, fishing places] and descriptions of people [Mr. Nagai, Helen Maria]).

Mowat, Farley. *Never Cry Wolf*. Mattituck, N.Y.: Amereon, Ltd., 1963.

Sullivan, Mark. "The Farm," in *The Education of an American*. New York: Johnson Reprint Corp. (reprint of 1938 edition).

Thurber, James. "The Day the Dam Broke," in *My Life and Hard Times*. New York: Harper & Row Publishers, Inc., 1973.

Zindel, Paul. *The Pigman*. New York: Bantam Books, Inc., 1968.

Rhetorical Effectiveness Scoring Guide for

Observational Writing

Prompts for observational writing ask writers to re-create the experience of observing a subject so that readers are able to perceive the subject as the writer experienced it. The observational writer writes from the periphery of observed scenes or events, assuming the stance of eyewitness rather than participant in the scene. The writer may focus, for example, on a person or a remembered situation; but the presentation of that person or experience will be that of a distanced observer, such as a journalist or an attentive naturalist.

Observational writing is a complex type of writing involving a variety of presentational strategies: factual description, narration, shifts between close-up and distant views, sensory details, concrete language. The clear presentation of the subject enables the reader to infer the meaning, impact, and importance of the experience for the writer. The best essays will exhibit and develop an internal logic and consistency that arise naturally from the writer's controlled awareness of the scene, of the purpose in writing, and of the effect on the reader.

Score Point 6—Exceptional Achievement

Identification of Subject: Writers of six-point essays clearly identify or define the subject of the observation. The subject may be anything observed by the writer, such as an activity involving people, a scene, an animal, an object, or a scientific experiment.

Context: The writer locates the subject in a specific physical or psychological context. The writer focuses the subject clearly and establishes the context as fully and precisely as necessary to orient and ground the reader.

The writer of the six-point essay does not ever allow the context to dominate the essay at the expense of the presentation of the subject but goes beyond simply pointing to the subject. Some writers may devote considerable space in the essay to establishing the context; others may focus so compellingly on the details of the scene itself that the context is only briefly mentioned. In any event, throughout the essay the writer keeps the reader sufficiently aware of the context of the scene.

Observational Stance: In six-point essays, the relationship between the writer as eyewitness and the subject is clearly established, developed, and maintained. Though not an active participant in the scene, the writer is an acute observer, and the stance—the vantage point or point of view of the observation and the voice and tone with which the writer presents the observation—is clear and strong throughout the essay. It is this assured stance that reveals authority while conveying a sense of discovery as much as any other quality that distinguishes the exceptional essay from the commendable.

Writers convey their stance by the details they select in presenting their observations to the reader as well as by the point of view, voice, and tone. The best writers might shift their point of view, moving, for example, from close-ups to distant views, to explore the scene from multiple perspectives, while retaining consistency in stance. They maintain focus by establishing and continually developing the scene, keeping close and purposeful control of their own vantage point. For six-point writers, the stance of the historian, the naturalist, the poet, and the journalist are all available ways of perceiving and ordering a scene, depending on their purpose in writing and their potential readers.

Presentation of the Experience: The six-point essay provides sufficient detail to recreate for the reader the concrete subject or situation being observed and the writer's perceptual experience of that observation. The writer enables the reader to see the scene clearly, to recognize the meaning, impact, and importance that the experience had for the writer.

Because the goal of the observational writer is to re-create the singularity of his or her perception for the reader, the success of these essays is based largely on the writer's choice of and manipulation of presentational strategies such as the following:

Factual descriptions of appearance and actions

Sensory detail

Concrete images

Dialogue or monologue

Narration

Specific actions, behavior

Shifting perspectives

Metaphoric language

Writers of six-point essays use a variety of strategies; they may present multiple aspects of the sub- ject, interweaving them, moving around the scene like a camera, assuming different vantage points to create a full, rich picture; or they may proceed more methodically through the scene, uncovering it slowly, one detail at a time. Whatever strategies the writer uses, the six-point essay writer exhibits throughout the essay a controlled awareness of the scene itself, of his or her own purposes, and of the developing effect of the essay on the reader.

Score Point 5—Commendable Achievement

Identification of Subject:. Writers of five-point essays clearly identify or define the subject of the observation.

Context:. The writer locates the subject in a specific physical context. The writer focuses the subject clearly and establishes the context fully to orient and ground the reader.

The writer of the five-point essay does not allow the context to dominate the essay at the expense of the presentation of the subject but, like the six-point essay, goes beyond simply pointing to the subject. Some writers may devote considerable space in the essay to establishing the context; others may focus on the details of the scene itself, mentioning the context only briefly. In any event, the writer keeps the reader sufficiently aware of the context of the scene.

Observational Stance: In five-point essays, the relationship between the writer as eyewitness and the subject is well-established; it may not be so fully developed and maintained as in the six-point essay, however. The sense of discovery, characteristic of the six-point essay, is usually lacking in the five-point essay.

Presentation of the Experience: The five-point essay provides sufficient detail to recreate for the reader the concrete subject or situation being observed and the writer's experience of that observation. The writer enables the reader to see the scene clearly and to recognize the meaning and importance that the experience had for the writer.

Writers of five-point essays use a number of strategies but will either use fewer strategies than the six-point essay writer or use them less effectively. The five-point essay writer exhibits throughout the essay a fairly well-controlled awareness of the scene itself, of his or her own purposes, and of the developing effect on the reader.

Score Point 4—Adequate Achievement

Identification of Subject:. Writers of four-point essays clearly identify but rarely define the subject of the observation.

Context:. The writer provides a context for the observation and goes beyond simply pointing to the subject. The writer of the four-point essay may allow the context to dominate the essay at the expense of presentation of the subject, or the context may be very scant.

Observational Stance. In four-point essays, the relationship between the writer and the subject is less clear than in the five- or six-point essay. The point of view may shift but not with the control or purpose that we see in the five- and six-point essays. Voice and tone are likely to convey a less authoritative but still assured stance.

Presentation of the Experience. The four-point essay provides some detail but it is often skimpy, unelaborated. The writer provides enough of the scene to enable the reader to see the broad strokes and some aspects in greater detail. The writer may not, however, convey the meaning or importance that the experience had for the writer.

Writers of four-point essays use several strategies, but will often use them with little elaboration. The writer of the four-point essay may show little awareness of the reader.

Score Point 3—Some Evidence of Achievement

Identification of Subject. Writers of three-point essays identify the subject of the observation but often in a very general rather than specific way.

Context. The writer may provide some context for the observation, but may allow the context to dominate the essay at the expense of the presentation of the subject or provide very minimal context. Still, the three-point essay writer goes a bit beyond simply pointing to the subject.

Observational Stance. In three-point essays, the stance is often inconsistent. The writer may point to a relationship between the writer and the subject, often tending toward an autobiographical focus. The point of view may shift but not with control or purpose. Voice and tone may be inappropriate to the content of the essay.

Presentation of the Experience. The three-point essay is characterized by generalities rather than specific details. The writer will rely on very few strategies. The writer will not convey the meaning or importance of the experience and will show little awareness of the reader.

Score Point 2—Limited Evidence of Achievement

Identification of Subject: Writers of two-point essays frequently introduce many subjects.

Context. The writer may provide minimal context for the observation; in the case of multiple subjects, context may be completely lacking.

Observational Stance. In two-point essays, the observer is usually central, often evaluative. The writer will usually focus on an autobiographical approach. Voice and tone are likely to be inappropriate to the content of the essay.

Presentation of the Experience. The two-point essay is characterized by generalities, often listed, rather than specific details. The writer will not convey the meaning or importance of the experience and will rarely show any awareness of the reader.

Score Point 1—Minimal Evidence of Achievement

Identification of Subject. Writers of one-point essays may or may not indicate a subject or subjects.

Context:. The writer will provide no context for the observation.

Observational Stance. In one-point essays, the observer is central. The subject, when discernible, may be mentioned only once or twice.

Presentation of the Experience. The one-point essay is characterized by a lack of any information about the subject or by garbled information. The writer will not convey any meaning or importance of the experience to the reader.

Grade Eight Writing Guide:

Story

Story, the only type of fiction being tested in the grade eight CAP direct writing assessment, is central to the experience of all of us and is especially appropriate to eighth-grade students. The place of fiction as literature to be enjoyed, read, and studied is secure in the English curriculum. A secure place for the writing of fiction is just as necessary. Story writing integrates elements of many of the other types of writing being taught and tested—autobiographical incident, report of information, problem solution, firsthand biography, and speculation about causes or effects are involved in the art of crafting a story. Students like stories. They like to tell stories, watch stories, and read stories. With careful guidance and focused time to plan, draft, share, and revise, students will demonstrate that they not only like to write stories but that they can write very effective, engaging stories.

Importance of Writing Stories

There are many important reasons for students to learn to write stories. For example, writing a story:

- Allows students to participate in the wide range of possibilities of human experience outside their own lives
- Engages students in close observation as they observe people, objects, and places to use in their stories
- Involves students in research as they discover the need for specific information relevant to their theme

Writing stories encourages the development of imagination and speculation—qualities that are fundamental to the human experience. Writing stories also:

- Gives students insight into the thinking and writing processes of published writers, promoting the development of active readers
- Allows students to deal with their fears by objectifying their own experiences
- Helps students develop an ear for language as they listen to and create dialogue for their characters

Writing stories helps students develop problem-solving skills as they learn to manipulate the "what-ifs" that occur to them when they try to make sense of their worlds.

Writing a story evolves from and carries on the important, basic activity that has engaged human beings throughout history—the telling of stories around a real or mythical fire.

Characteristics of the Story

The writer of the successful story draws on personal experiences as well as his or her imagination to create a fictional situation in which the elements of setting, character, and incident comprise a coherent narrative structure.

Although storytelling may be the most familiar of all forms of writing, it is also one of the most varied. Stories can be static or fast-paced, fantastic or realistic, suspenseful or flat. Stories may focus on character relationships or plot, rely heavily on setting or barely mention it, or resolve a problem or leave the reader up in the air. The hallmark of the successful story is how well the writer engages and

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holds the reader's attention and interest in the actions of fictional characters in a fictional world.

A successful story will engage readers in Coleridge's "willing suspension of disbelief" and create a plausible world that although fictional has its own system of logic. In some genres such as science fiction or fantasy, readers should be able to imagine the story as real, given the believable context of the world in which the story occurs. Whether writers depict a realistic setting or invent a fantasy world, they establish rules for the fictional world that demonstrate an internal, plausible logic within the context of the story.

The effective story writer engages the reader by establishing the situation and assumes a narrative stance or point of view at the outset. Writers establish the situation by setting the action of the story within a context so that readers understand the significance of the central action or tension of the story. Writers hold the reader's interest by creating believable characters and using appropriate narrative strategies—concrete sensory details, appropriate dialogue, and convincing action.

Writers order events in such a way as to control the movement of the story, either by using a straightforward chronological approach or by manipulating time in a way that interests readers in the development of character or plot. The best stories are marked by a dynamic, often metaphorical, use of language that generates the movement of the story from the opening situation, through specific incidents, to a closure that is appropriate to the writer's intent. The successful story writer effectively balances and unifies all narrative aspects according to the story's purpose and uses the strategies that best reflect the writer's intent in a plausible way.

Some strategies used in writing stories include the following:

- Characterization
  - Showing the character in action
  - Using appropriate speech for the character
  - Reporting what other characters say about the character
  - Revealing a character's relationships with other people
  - Presenting character changes or insights
  - Providing character motivation for behavior
- Narrative Aspects
  - Establishing the situation, building the conflict or tension of the story, and bringing the story to an effective resolution
  - Manipulation of time, straightforward chronology (episode and transition, flashback)
  - Setting and maintaining a narrative stance or point of view
  - Controlling the movement and pace of the story
  - Using dialogue effectively
  - Selecting details that are consistent with the overall intent of the story
  - Using concrete language either realistically or metaphorically to create clear, vivid images for the reader

Exemplary Student Stories

In the following exemplary story which was written by an eighth-grade student during an actual CAP test, the writer shows a remarkable degree of characterization, both of Mac, the title character, and of Grandma. Concrete details and dialogue are used effectively; and while the pacing might be improved with revision, this first draft shows a high degree of control over the form of the story.

Mac

I had never been too fond of Grandma until Mac came along. Grandma was a packrat; she saved everything. She had pins from the 1964 Presidential elections, her Brownie pins, and loads of Tupperware she had never used. "Donald Jr., come here!" she would call to me when someone visited her. "Help me with the photo albums. Auntie Linda is coming. And I want to show them to her!" Oh no...I would think. Not the photo albums! There were 7 photo albums, each holding 750 pages of pictures. The things would weigh a ton each, and I would have to carry them because "I was a strong boy."

I had lived with Grandma since my mom and dad were killed in a car accident, and Grandpa had died 7 years ago because of cancer. So it was first the two of us—a young boy and an old lady. Grandma always called me Donald Jr., never Don or Donny, like the kids at school called me. It was always Donald Jr, Donald Jr. I didn't really pay much attention to Grandma, I mean, she was just there. I saw her about 30 minutes in the morning, and only couple of hours at night, but we had the weekends together. I would stay after school 3 hours each day for track. You see, I was the big track star of Fillmore Junior High, and I had to keep my reputation.

One day, I came home about 6:15, expecting to see the cookies and milk that were routinely on the table waiting for me. But when I came home, I just heard some low murmuring in the back bedroom. I trudged up the stairs, wondering if one of my relatives was here (hopefully not).

But what I saw was a man I had never seen before, 65-ish, with a stubbly beard and a pot belly, lying on the bed with a damp cloth on his forehead.

"Hey Grandma, who's this?" I asked.

"Donald Jr., can't you say hello anymore?"

"Hi Grandma. Who's this?" I asked.

"This is Mac Johnson."

"Mac who?"

"Mac Johnson. I was doing my daily watering and I saw this bundle on the other side of the flowerbed. I was so scared! I mean I thought the man was dead! I said 'Hello! Hello!' And he rolled over and said 'Help me, please! I was climbing my ladder over on my house next door and I fell! I've got a bad back, and I've been here probably at least 3 hours!' So, I escorted him into my guest room and here we are!"

"You found a man in the flowerbed, and you're letting him stay in our house?" I asked.

"You don't see, son," "the man answered, "I live right over in that house. I'm perfectly fine. I'll just walk over to my house and I'm sorry to have bothered you. Thank you so much, Nellie!" The man got up and started to leave.

"Wait!" I said. "I'm sorry! You can stay for as long as you want. I-I-I was just suprised to see anyone here!"

And that's how it all started. Mac said he would stay until his back was better. He had no one at his house anymore, and liked the company. After his back was better, he got cleaned up. He was actually good looking. Dignified was a word that described him. Mac was great. He took me out to the edge of Sawmill Lake and we watched the fish jump out of the water for about an hour, and then we went fishing. We didn't catch much, just a couple of 4-inch little fish that we threw back. But I loved being with Mac. He knew everything there was to know. He was the best friend I'd ever had.

We'd sit around at dusk on the swinging chair out on the front porch and he would tell me about all of his favorite things when he was a kid. He asked if I would like to go to a baseball game on Sunday. I was very excited. I had only seen a baseball game on the clunky black and white T.V. in the living room at Grandma's.

It was Sunday morning when Mac walked over to our house. I was ready—I had on my cap and Levi's and my mitt—ready to catch a ball. We drove to the city—a good 30 miles away from our house in Mac's chrysler.

It was during the ninth inning when it happened. I had been munching on all kinds of goodies—carmel apples, and peanuts, and malts. One run, and the star batter was up to bat. "Strike one," the umpire roared. Strike one? He was the best batter on the team. "Well, maybe he's holding out," I thought. And that's when it happened. A foul ball was hit right in our direction, soared in the air. A huge ho. I grabbed it and handed it to me. Mac had given me the ball. I had so much love for Mac right then, but I didn't know what to say. "Thank's Mac!" I said. We drove back around 10:00, but there were enough street lights on to see. We parked the car at the end of the street, and we sprinted as usual down the street and back to the car. No cars were ever on this street, anyway. We started to run—Mac was fast and had been a track runner. We sprinted about 50 ft. when he fell.

I found out later that evening that Mac had had a heart attack and had died. Later, in a week, I went to the cemetary and placed that ball on the grave and cried. I cried for Mac and for the friendship between an old man and a young boy that could've been.

One Student's Writing Process

Students were given the following assignment:

Pushy People

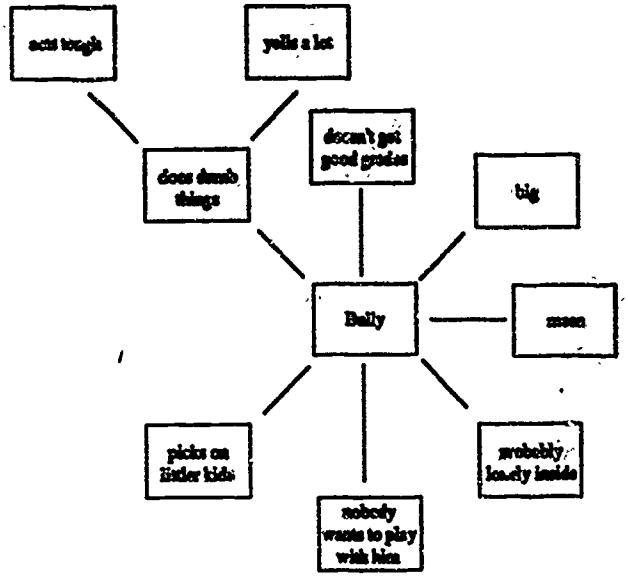
Stories for teenagers often deal with characters who push other people around in order to show how important or strong they are. Even though these people are usually insecure, they appear to be very threatening.

Write a story about such a person and his or her "victim." Use dialogue to show what they say to each other. Help the reader understand what brought these two together. Show how the story works out and who wins in the end.

A description of the student's composing process follows:

Class Preparation for Writing

Before the actual assignment was presented to the class, the class discussed their experiences with people who push others around. The discussion helped the writer choose the ideas she would use to write her story. The teacher then read the assignment aloud and presented a scheme for planning. The scheme helped the students identify the key elements contained in the directions for the assignment.



Planning Step One

As a first step in planning, the student clustered the word *bully*, rapidly recording thoughts about a bully's looks and people's feelings about self concept, actions with others, and behaviors.

Planning Step Two

The student then created a word bank for terms that focused on the bully's interaction with other people: *hate, scared, mad, laugh, bored, worried, think, little,* and *helpless.*

This step helped the student determine the vocabulary to use and, more importantly, reminded her of concepts to consider. (At this point, the student might have been asked to create a sequence of events that would reveal the character's problem with the bully, show the character involved in the problem, and finally develop a solution. The student did this creative activity in her rough draft, using the act of writing to figure out what to write.)

Planning Step Three

The teacher emphasized the use of dialogue by having students experiment with dialogue that might be used in the draft. The student's effort follows.

"Hello, how are you?," I said.
"Shut up, why do you want to know?" he said.
"I was just curious, you don't have to throw a fit. I was just trying to be nice."
"Well go be nice somewhere else, I've had enough of thoughtful, nice people like you."
"Well fine I'll just leave."
"I'm glad cause you're a jerk!"

Planning Step Four

During the final planning step the student brainstormed to create a list of possible locations where the actions of her story might take place: *baseball diamonds, school, downtown, shopping mall, walking down a street, dark alley.*

Writing the Draft

After completing the prewriting steps, the student wrote the first draft of her story. She was encouraged to write with her attention focused on the story line. At this point she worked completely alone.

Revision

The student read the first draft of her story to a classmate; after talking about the story, she asked her partner to write responses for specific story characteristics. The classmate's responses follow:

Characters: *The bully really seemed mean at first. I didn't know who the "I" of the story was for a while but I saw at the end why you didn't let on that it was a girl.*

Plot: *The ending was really good! The plot was pretty much expected until you got to the end. I liked the surprise ending.*

Dialogue: *This was the best part of the story, except for the end, of course. The dialogue was really good. I thought you really made the two characters talk the way they would in real life.*

Setting: *The setting wasn't too important. It was easy to see that it was a modern day story on a normal street and that it could be anytime.*

Overall, I would say that your story is just about done as it is. It doesn't need anything else that I can think of. Maybe some more dialogue because that is so good. I liked your story a lot. (Especially the end!)

The student revised her story a little after talking with her partner about the responses. In the final version of the story, she presents three episodes leading to a strong climax and a surprise ending. Although the punch line depends on the expectation of the audience to react in a stereotypical way, the writer clearly intends to destroy that stereotype. The final version, with commentary, follows.

The Bully

The other day as I was walking down the street, I was looking around and saw an older looking boy threatening a terrified little girl. I figured that it was none of my business, and it was probably his little sister.

[Setting identified at once; immediate choice of first-person point of view. Conflict identified.]

The next day, I was walking around a corner on a street not too far from where I had seen the boy on the previous day. Anyway, he was taking money from a little boy. As I was getting closer I could hear their conversation. The older boy was speaking harshly to the younger boy. "I told you to give me all of your money!:

[Story moves to second encounter. Dialogue works to characterize bully; marked by informal language.]

"No, I never will." the little boy said scared.

"Then, do you want me to beat it out of you? I don't think you would want me to do that would you?"

"I'm gonna tell my mommy if you don't leave me alone."

The older boy was grabbing him, "Not unless I shut you up, and make it so you can't tell your mommy."

It was then when I stepped in and stopped the older boy who was about to hit the younger one.

[Tension heightened by character's intervention. Characterization by behavior.]

"Hey, pick on someone your own size!" I yelled at him.

[Specific verb]

"You just butt out. You better watch yourself, if you don't want trouble." he said, with a sneer. By then the little boy had run off, so I walked away.

[Continued use of dialogue with colloquial speech]

That was yesterday. Well today I went to the store on my bike. When I came back someone had let all the air out of my tires. The first thing I thought of was the bully, and sure enough out of the corner of my eye, I could see him running off. I was getting furious.

[Skillful time shift. Detailed actions to characterize as well as to move action. Short sentences contribute to rapid pacing.]

I hurried to the nearest gas station and filled up my tires. I then started looking for the bully. I found him standing on the corner. He seemed to be waiting for someone. I figured that someone was me. As I approached him he sat there staring at me.

"Hey," I said to him. He just kept staring and ignoring me.

[Building suspense]

"Hey," I said again louder. Finally after what seemed like ages he spoke. "I told you to butt out, but you didn't. Now I'm gonna fix it so you can't butt into anybody else's business."

[More suspense]

"Is that so?" I said ready to fight.

"Yes, and I'm going to be nice and let you have the first punch."

[Foreshadowing of surprise ending]

"Thanks," I said as I hit him as hard as I could, and knocked him out cold.

[Delayed, sudden climax]

Pretty good for a girl.

[Surprise ending]

Response and Revision

Student revision activities can range from very informal small-group conversation (as depicted in item number one of the section "Classroom Writing Assignments") to a written analysis guided by specific criteria. The following set of guidelines illustrates this range of activities. In any one response group activity, however, students should work with only a limited number of questions, either in discussion or in written response.

- Does the story build upon some central problem or conflict? State what you think the conflict is.
- Does the action of the story build interest through several well-selected events? Write down what the events are.
- Are there surprises in the development of this story? Write down the moment(s) of greatest suspense or surprise.
- Does the story end in a satisfying, appropriate way? If not, what do you suggest?
- Do you understand the main characters? Give one or two reasons why the main characters act as they do.
- Is the point of view well chosen for this particular story?
- Point out any place in the story where you had trouble understanding shifts in time.
- Indicate where the story took place. Can you think of any way to make the place clearer to you?
- Is there enough concrete language and specific sensory detail in the story to make it believable? Write down some details that you feel are particularly good or convincing. What further details would you like to find?
- Is every element in the story necessary to its development? If not, write down any story parts that could be omitted.

Classroom Writing Assignments

Some of the suggestions below are one-period, impromptu writing assignments typical of the prompts used in the CAP writing test. Other suggestions are more fully developed, appropriate for the extended teaching unit. Because the story is a natural teaching tool in all disciplines, some suggestions are designed to be used in history or science classes. In all of the assignments, however, students are encouraged to use their knowledge and imagination as they participate in creating one of the oldest and most distinguished literary forms.

Writing a Story Step by Step

The following section includes suggestions to help students generate and refine material for the typical story—a story that involves one main character who encounters and resolves some kind of problem. The outline is appropriate for suspense, realism, fantasy, or science fiction.

Story Planning Pages

Make up a character and create a description and history for that person. Include as many of the following items as you can and add more of your own: name, names of family members, address, age, physical description, personality traits. You might include the name of your character's best friend, information about how the person feels about his or her life, or anything else that will make the character real for you, the writer.

As you think about your character, make notes about other aspects of this person's life:

- How is this person's personality or character revealed by clothing, way of talking, possessions, hobbies, and ways of spending time?
- What problem can you give your character to solve in the story? What is the cause of this problem and what other people are involved?
- How is the character going to solve this problem?
- Where does the story take place? How much time will it cover? (A short story often covers a very short period of time, perhaps a few hours or a day.)

Rough Draft And Revision

When you have finished your notes, write your first draft as quickly as possible. While you are writing think only about the story; don't worry about spelling or sentence correctness at this time.

The next step is revision. In revising your essay, you need to consider how thoroughly the story is developed, whether the development is logical, and whether the story clearly communicates your intentions to your reader.

If possible, read your story to one of your classmates, your teacher, or a family member. Ask your listener questions such as these:

- Did you believe the story?
- Did it slow down and drag anywhere?
- What would you like to know that is not the story?
- Does the dialogue sound like the characters are really talking?

After discussing the story with your partner, look carefully at your story; now is the time to try some rewriting. Check your language to see whether it conveys your meaning exactly. Check your dialogue to see whether it sounds real. Rewrite your story so that you are satisfied.

Editing

Editing is the process of checking your sentences for correctness in grammar, usage, and mechanics. It is the final stage of writing before you hand in the completed copy. Perform these steps one at a time:

- Read your story aloud to yourself. Check all end punctuation. Your voice will help you find sentence limits. Check to see that there are no sentence fragments, no sentences run together with commas, and no loosely related sentences. Tighten your writing by combining sentences or phrases where it is appropriate. Capitalize the beginning word in each sentence.
- Check the punctuation in your dialogue sections.
- Proofread for spelling, for contractions and possessives, for capitalization within your sentences. Use a dictionary to check your choices. Make corrections.
- Give your story a title that reveals something important about the story. Capitalize all important words in your title.
- Copy your story legibly or type it. (If you are working on a computer, just

print it!) Read your final copy to see that you did not leave out any words.

Suggested Writing Assignments

1. Imagined Change of Character

Imagine a character that is very different from you and other California eighth graders. You might draw your character from history (an immigrant child, pioneer girl, Neanderthal boy), from an inanimate object (a pencil, fossil rock, or child's tricycle), or from some living object (a killer whale, house plant, or lap dog). In your story convey an experience in the real world from the special point of view of the imagined character.

For example, you might write a story about a No. 2 pencil surviving the annual school achievement test, a pioneer girl's visit to Disneyland, or a lap dog being abandoned on a city street. In each case you would assume the role of the character for the purpose of the story.

2. An Historical Story

Imagine that you have studied the history of the American West. Recently, you visited the Coloma Gold Discovery State Park, where you saw the recreated Sutter Mill; the reconstructed Gold Rush buildings (store, jail, and houses); and the museum, where you inspected a gold pan, pick and shovel, firearms, hotel registers, and photographic enlargements.

Construct a story appropriate to the history of the California Mother Lode in 1850, using your general knowledge of the historic period and the specific experience of the visit to the historic site. Use characters and events appropriate to the time. You may choose as the main character a discouraged prospector, an ambitious young peddler, or a helpful storekeeper, for example.

Your plot might concern whether to continue the search for gold, return home, or abandon the search for gold in favor of some less exciting occupation, such as farming, ranching, or storekeeping.

Note: This story might be evaluated on the basis of historic accuracy, the extent to which the story appears true, creative use of detail, and on the sense of movement and suspense.

3. The "Magic Word" Story

In a story called "The Fifty-First Dragon," by Heywood Broun, the young knight Gawaine succeeds in slaying dragons because he thinks he is protected by a magic word. When the headmaster tells Gawaine, "There isn't any such thing as a magic word," Gawaine loses his confidence and, after having killed fifty dragons, is killed by the fifty-first dragon.

Imagine that you have a magic word that you think will enable you to do something very difficult, something you want to do more than anything else you can think of but have been unable to do because of certain obstacles. (You may make up a character rather than using yourself.)

Write a short story following this general sequence:

- You (or your made-up character) face the challenge of overcoming an obstacle.
- Somehow (you decide how) you obtain a magic word. With the aid of your magic word, you manage to do whatever it was you set out to do.
- Afterwards, you discover that your word is not magic in a real-world (literal) sense.
- What happens? What do you think or how do you feel about this revelation?

4. A "Be the Thing" Story (Science)

After you have studied the hydrologic cycle and have discovered how water is naturally distilled and transported from ocean to cloud to rain to river, write a story in which you become the water molecule on its cyclical journey back to where it started. Tell the story of the journey with appropriate events and details drawn from your knowledge of the water cycle.

Note: Other "Be the Thing" topics might include a child's toy on a wagon to Oregon in 1845, Columbus's astrolabe on the journey of discovery, an almond from blossom to holiday dinner, or the first week of a newly minted quarter.

5. Becoming Invisible

Pretend that you wake up one morning and find that you have become invisible.

Write a story about what you do to survive, to avoid the dangers of everyday life. Do you ever find a way to return to your visible state?

6. Imagined Change of Surroundings

Imagine a story in which a contemporary character is transferred into some new, unusual setting—historical, geographical, or fantasized. In this new setting the character must work out an adjustment to the new, unfamiliar circum-

stances by confronting and resolving some significant, dramatic conflict.

Examples for this kind of story include a character transported through a looking glass, like Alice in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, by Lewis Carroll; or through a wardrobe, like the characters in C.S. Lewis' books; a character lost in the Arctic or trapped in a cave; or a character living in King Arthur's time or during an event like Gettysburg.

7. Story in Response to a Poem

Poem To Be Read At 3 A.M.

Excepting the diner
On the outskirts
The town of Ladora
At 3 A.M.
Was dark but
For my headlights
And up in
One second-story room
A single light
Where someone
Was sick or
Perhaps reading
As I drove past
At seventy
Not thinking
This poem
Is for whoever
Had the light on.[1]

—Donald Justice

Write a story in which your main character is the person awake at 3 A.M. with the light on. A car speeds through town. Let your readers know why the light is on and what the main character is doing like at such an hour.

The CAP Writing Prompt Format

The writing prompts used by the California Assessment Program and included as examples in the CAP writing guides are organized into two sections: the writing situation and directions for writing. The writing situation contains prewriting information and directives designed to motivate student thinking about the assignment. Students are given background information about the topic and are prepared for the specific assignment that follows in the directions for writing section. In that section, students are given specific instructions regarding the assignment's intent, topic, and audience, as well as other directions to keep in mind when responding to prompts.

When constructing prompts for stories, teachers should help students distinguish between the recounting of an autobiographical incident and the telling of a story with an established situation, character development, and the buildup and resolution of conflict or tension. Students need to be taught that even though they may draw on personal experience for the basic plot line of a story, they may reshape that experience in any way they want to create a fictional work, a story.

Examples of CAP Prompts for Story

Responsibility

Writing Situation: Your class has decided to write stories about characters who show particular qualities that you admire. Your stories will be collected and exchanged for stories written by another class. You have selected the quality of responsibility. Think about how an event or series of events may create a situation showing a character acting responsibly. In a story you want to let your readers know something about where the story is taking place, what your main character is like, and how that person acts.

Directions for Writing: Write a fictional story about a character in a situation that demands responsibility. Help your readers understand the situation and the main character well enough to know how and why that character succeeds or fails in showing responsibility. Include details that will let your readers see the situation, the characters, and the events that happen.

Escape from the South

Writing Situation: Historical fiction is based on the facts of some historical setting or incident. Your history teacher has asked the class to write a historical fiction story using what you have learned about the lives of people in the South in the period after the Civil War.

Directions for Writing: Write a historical fiction story about a slave who attempts to escape from the South and the conflicts he or she has to meet during the attempt. You may want to use some of the information you have learned about the abolitionists and the Underground Railroad as you tell the story of a fictional character from this time in history.

[1]Donald Justice, *Night Light*. Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1981, p. 29. Used with permission.

Additional Exemplary Student Stories

The following stories represent exceptionally outstanding achievement for stories written during the time allotted in the CAP test. These stories, all first drafts, were selected to show a range of strategies employed by eighth-grade writers. The writer of "The Rag Doll Necklace" shows a subtle use of an inanimate object elevated to the role of symbol in a story that is clearly influenced by the student's reading, probably *The Diary of Anne Frank*. Such influences are natural to young writers and show the power of good reading on students' writing.

The Rag Doll Necklace

The sun rose like a wailing ghost over the Amsterdam skyline. Leah turned to her mother.

"Mama," she said, "where are we going?"

"To a land of happiness and sunshine" her mother replied. Mrs. Langmann knew this was wrong; but how could she escape it. She knew that in a few days their bodies would be unrecognizable mounds of ash; yet she did not want to tell her daughter the truth. She remembered how hard it was when the Gestapo called for her husband. She recalled his words:

"There is no reason to be sad; if I die—I die; and I want there to be no tears shed over me."

"Mama," Leah's voice broke the silence, "will there be other children to play with?"

Mrs. Langmann broke down in tears. "My child, the time has come," she whispered "to give you this," and with that she undid her rag-doll necklace. "Here Leah, I want you to remember me, but not like this."

"Oh, thank you Mama," she said, "I love it." Leah pranced around the room with joy. Mrs. Langmann felt something that she hadn't felt for a long time reach across her face: a smile. She jumped up and put a record on the Victrola. Shouts of joy echoed everywhere.

"Here," she said let me put it on you." She took special care and made sure that it was in place.

"Come on Mama," Leah said "let's go to the park."

Just then a knock rang through the house.

"Mrs. Claudia Langmann," the voice yelled, "open this door." The Victrola needle scratched and Claudia clinched Leah's small hand in her fist as they walked to the door. Rivers of tears flowed down her face.

"I love you darling," Mrs. Langmann whispered in Leah's ear. The white light was so beautiful.

Now, on the snowy ground lies a gift, a last piece of hope, a rag-doll necklace that a mother gave to her child. The wind has whistled through your trees once too often, monster. Push the bush aside and read the sign.

"Auschwitz!!!" Do not forget this name; do not forget the child; do not forget the mother; do not forget this time nor this crime.

The writer of "Thank You, God" uses the concrete language of specific detail to involve the reader in this compelling story of a young girl who has lived most of her life in an orphanage.

"Thank You, God"

I lived in an orphanage. My parents had died a long time ago, so long I couldn't remember their faces at all; all I could see of my parent's features were my mother's silky blonde hair and my father's tall, angular frame. My aunt had unceremoniously dumped me in this poor excuse of an orphanage, and I had never forgiven her for that.

My birthday was coming tomorrow. Of course I didn't expect anything; with no parents or caring relatives, how could I receive anything? I would be fourteen tomorrow. I had been in this orphanage for two years; it was the fifth orphanage so far in my life, so I wasn't emotionally attached to anyone.

I walked along the grey sidewalk, the cold, biting wind blowing into my frostbitten skin, seeping through my thin, moth-eaten coat. I huddled in the outgrown jacket, stuffing my numb hands into the pockets. I was despondent. I usually didn't think about my past, but the bone-chilling wind swept with it memories of my early childhood. I felt so alone, so shriveled up inside. Nobody loved me, no one had the least ounce of emotion for me. I had considered suicide before, but had always pushed the thought from my mind, wanting to prove to my aunt and those who deserted me that I could be a success, no matter what they thought.

I looked up suddenly. Martha, the head of the orphanage, was puffing up to me, her plump cheeks flushed from the cold.

"Daphne! Daphne, wait for me, please!" She stopped walking, out of breath.

I halted reluctantly, not wanting to be disturbed but wanting to hurt Martha's feelings.

"Yes, Martha?" I asked softly.

"Let me catch my breath for a sec," she huffed, and leaned on my shoulder, breathing hard. After a few minutes, she brightened, her auburn curls bouncing, her warm brown eyes sparkling mischievously.

"Lord, but you are thin!" Martha exclaimed, feeling my somewhat bony shoulder with a large, beefy hand. "Remind me to give you seconds at dinner."

"Well, Martha?" I queried, slightly irritated. "I'll get more, I promise. Now what did you come here for?"

"Can we go back to the care center first?" Martha insisted on calling the orphanage a care center. She said "orphanage" made her think of poor, helpless waifs, while her "children" were strong and well-fed, with the exception of me in her eyes.

"Sure!" I said, not imperceptible to the cold harshness of the November wind.

We walked back in silence, each of us thinking our own separate thoughts. I was finally aware of the freezing wind that blasted in my ears, chilling me to the very marrow of my bones.

When we reached the orphanage door, she turned to me and said happily, "I have some wonderful news for you, Daphne! There's an old man here. Well, not that old, but old. He says he's been looking for a girl to adopt. He doesn't want a baby, so I think you'd be perfect!"

She opened the door and flew in, beckoning to me. "C'mon girl, he won't be here forever! He wants to see you right now! He's in the lounge."

Martha opened the lounge door and motioned to me. "Well?" she asked expectantly. "Aren't you going in?"

Tentatively, I walked into the lounge. Feeling like a deer trapped by a lion. My pupils adjusted to the firelight, and I saw an elderly man, about 70, who must have been a heartthrob in his prime. His kind blue eyes sparkled knowingly as he motioned to me.

"Sit down, Daphne. I won't bite, believe me." His voice had a soothing effect on my nerves, and I relaxed, slowly but surely. "I just want to ask you a few minor questions."

I settled down in my armchair, a little wary.

All that watchfulness disappeared as he asked me my age, my family, and all the required questions. At the end of his mildly inquisitive interview, I looked into his deep eyes, and somehow, I knew he would adopt me.

"I'm going to adopt you as my daughter, Daphne."

Those cherished words floated out of his mouth like pearls, and I grabbed them eagerly.

"Really?" I asked incredulously.

"Really," he said, smiling.

"Thank you, God," I murmured, the funny thing being I wasn't the least bit religious. "Thank you."

The author of "Milo" shows a fine control of pacing. He slows the tempo while creating an atmosphere in which the narrator demonstrates his courage in the face of a commonplace fear.

Milo

Milo stepped from the train onto the narrow station platform. As the steam bellowing from the bowels of the engine disappated into the chilling night air, he cautiously veiwed the lone station. A oil lamp was burning inside, casting eerie shadows into the midnight fog. Picking up his bag, he pushed open the door and was greeted by a rush of warm air. Milo carefully laid down his bag and proceeded to ring the bell. Slowly, a back door opened from another room, and emerged the figure of an older man.

"Can I help you son?" the man questioned.

Milo, releived by the apparent friendlyness of the man, replied "Yes, I'm on my way into Violet to visit my grand-aunt and was wondering if you could point me in right direction."

"It chore is far to go on foot son, especially on a night as cold and dark as this un." The man paused, took a breath, and continued, "But, if you plan on going, it's about 9 miles down the road. Sure you don't want to wait till morning?"

"No, I think I can manage. Thank You."

"Sure. You just take care son."

Milo pushed open the door and pulled his jacket tight around him. He went down the few steps to the ground, and started down the lonely road. It was a cold Louisiana night and Milo began to question whether he should go on or not. He gathered up his courage, and started increasing his speed. It seemed as though the farther he went, the denser the foliage got. In the pitch blackness, he could make out knarled cypress trees and exotic shapes lurking to his sides. Cold gusts of misty wind blew at him and with each gust, the journey became darker. The shale road glistened in the moonlight which had filtered through the boughs of the ancient trees.

It seemed to Milo, that he had been traveling for hours, and that he should be able to see signs of inhabitants. But, no. All he saw was a narrowing road. Several more minutes brought him to a clearing. He set down his bags, and looked at his surroundings, bathed in moonlight. It was then that he saw it. An old, abandoned farmhouse, nestled in the foliage. The biting winds were making Milo wheeze, and he felt that he must try and seek refuge there. Milo, now trembling, mustered up all the courage that his young body had, and plodded through the wet, knee-high grass toward the house. Upon reaching the flimsy porch he felt as if he must run away. Yet, he had made up his mind to seek refuge, and he had every intention of doing so. Slowly, he put his trembling foot onto the rickety porch. Then, he lifted his body onto it. It seemed sturdy. Now, more scared than ever, the biting wind forced him to

open the door and stay the night. The rusty hinges reluctantly opened the door. Milo stepped into what appeared to be a kitchen. The moonbeams filtered through the cieling just as they had along the road. Somehow, they made Milo feel safe. Cautiously, he set down his bag on the floor and then himself. He had conquered his fear—or, at least he felt he had. It wasn't long before he dozed off into a deep sleep.

Early the next morning, Milo awakened. At first he hadn't an idea of where he was. And then, he remembered the dreadful night before. Quickly, he picked up his bag and left the house. Once, he got back on the road he realized that Violet was only around the next bend. But, he hadn't known that the night before, when a courageous boy didn't let his fears get the best of him.

Essays Written for the CAP Writing Assessment

The following first-draft stories, written for the grade eight CAP test, have been graded according to the rhetorical effectiveness scoring guide for story, which is included at the end of this guide. The stories have been graded high, mid-level, and low achievement.

High Achievement

This one day started just as hundreds before it had. The cold light of the autumn sun slipped through the small, barred window, and fell on the bleak prison walls. The clamor of the prisoners awakening drifted through the halls, and the pungent odor of cafeteria food penetrated every nook and cranny. Yet through this hububb, Rubert Jones slept soundly.

"Hey! Yo! Wake up in there!" A jailer beat upon the cell bars, rudely awakening Rupert. "It's time to get up, and if ya don't, you ain't going nowhere."

The jailer was in an extremely bad mood. He did not like his job, or any of the prisoners. He especially did not like the idea of letting criminals back onto the streets. This opposition to parole stemmed from the fact that his youngest daughter had been killed by a man in this very jail. Every day when John, for that was the jailer's name, walked by this man's cell he had a terrible longing to bash the man's face in. John had just passed the murderer's cell, and he was taking his anger and hatred out on Rupert.

"I can't believe that the authorities are lettin' you ou' of this rat hole. No kid of mine is goin' out after dark if you is out there. You nasty, conniving scum, you is just a waiting to get out there and hurt someone. The law system in this country is goin' downhill if they let scum like you back on the streets." Having said his say, John turned on his heel, and stomped back down the hall.

But John's criticism's had fallen on empty ears. Many years ago, Rupert had learned to tune out someone who was talking, and he utilized this power whenever it was necessary. Instead of thinking of the jailer's harsh words, Rupert was day dreaming about what he would do as soon as he was released from the prison. He was just imagining himself taking a huge bite out of a juicy, delicious hamburger, when his reverie was shattered by the clanking of the jailer's keys in the cell door's lock. Rupert slowly stood up, and meandered down the hall to the cafeteria.

Rupert was an incredibly large man. He was not at all obese, but he was big boned, and he stood at 6' 5". His face showed a hard and weathered look that came from ten years in jail. He was tough and seemingly mean, and he was disliked by all of his fellow criminals.

As Rupert masticated his breakfast, he hardly noticed the gooey substance that he was shoveling into his mouth. He was once again caught up in his dream about the outside world. After ten years of jail for robbing a bank, Rupert knew that he was going to go straight and enjoy life for what it was.

After breakfast Rupert went back to his cell. Each minute seemed like hours. Finally, exactly at noon, the jailer's keys once again clanked in his lock. But this was the very last time he would hear that sound.

As he was escorted out of the jail, Rubert looked around himself in untarnished ecstacy. Then, right outside the gate someone rushed to meet him. It was his mother, Alycia Jones. He grabbed her in a giant bear hug, lifting her right off the ground. And then, the hard and weathered face broke. Rupert stood there under a flaming autumn tree, hugging his mother with tears rolling down his face.

The situation in the high achievement story is revealed through the description of the prison and through shifting the point of view between the two main characters. The characterization of the two main characters is dramatically shown through the dialogue of John, the jailor, and the reflections of Rupert, the prisoner. The pacing of the story is extremely effective; everything builds to the final resolution. The writer's use of sensory description helps the reader fully experience the story. Even the setting contributes to the effectiveness of the story: it begins in "the cold light of autumn sun" and ends "under a flaming tree."

Mid-Level Achievement

"The Quiter"

One day Greg went down to the ball field to play some baseball with his friends. But as he strolled through the long grass he found that he didn't want to play. But the day before he had promise. So he walked on slowly to the ballfield. Greg was a little late at the ball park and was ferious when he was picked last.

Greg slowly walked over to his team. Sam, the coach, said, "Well hotshot I guess you are up first." Then slowly a smile crept over Greg's face. He was actually going to be first. Greg walked up to the plate put the bat on his shoulder and waited. As the ball was thrown he noticed the sun beating down and how hot it was. He watched the ball coming, coming. He swung....." strike 1," yelled the umpire.

Greg was amazed, he had actually missed. This time he was determined to hit the ball. He lifted the bat to his shoulder again. He watched the ball flowing towards him. He closed his eyes and swung....." strike 2" cried the umpire again. Sweat began to roll down his face. If he missed this time he would be out.

He slowly raised his bat to his shoulder. "Oh, please God let me hit this ball?" cried Greg. The pitcher threw the ball. Greg stared at it moving slowly. The sun was hot, the bat felt heavy, Greg knew he would miss it again. The ball came closer he prayed with all his heart. He swung with ease...crack the ball flew. He dashed for first base, straight ahead. He looked up the ball was being thrown. He knew he had to dive. He dove wondering if he would make it. He felt his foot touch the plate. As the dust finally cleared he was laying on the ground panting. The boy who stood above him had the ball and was also sweating.

"Had I made it or what," thought Greg.

As if the answer to his question the umpire cried "Your out."

"I quit," cried Greg after him as he ran home. He quite every time he was out for weeks to come. Finally the other boys wouldn't let him play with them anymore.

Greg was upset after a few weeks and decided he wouldn't quit arymore. He went down to the ball park noticing how blue the sky was. But when he got there and stood in line nobody picked him. "Let me play, please," cried Greg. "I won't quit again—I promise."

"Oh all right," cried Sam. "But this is your last chance to play. If you quit you will never play again."

Greg walked up to the plate anxious to hit the ba. . But poor Greg struck out at home. To everybody's amazement Greg did not quit. For the rest of the day, the boys waited for him to quit.

But Greg never quit once. In fact he never hit the ball in the whole game. From that day on Greg never quit a game he was playing.

The writer of the mid-level achievement story establishes the situation effectively. The reader begins the story with high interest and expectations. The setting is well developed, and the character is quickly established as a "quitter." In the second half of the story, however, the writer fails to live up to expectations. The last half of the story is mostly summary in contrast to the slow buildup of the beginning. The character undergoes a definite change in the story, but the motivation for change is not sufficiently developed. Although the writer uses details in the first half of the story, in the second half he only reports and summarizes the action. Dialogue is minimal in the second half of the story. This is a story by a young writer of promise who will profit from classroom instruction and opportunities to write many stories.

Low Achievement

Untitled

When the California Gold Rush started in 1850 a man named Hermon C. Fresh went to California to try to get enough gold to by a farm. He left on a Sunday after church. Hermon's family wished him luck, said good bye, and gave him hugs and kisses. Hermon arrived in California by Saturday.

Hermon was not welcomed to alot of the minds, so he decided to start digging his own. A week later Hermon had a under ground mind about as biggest a lake. Hermon still didn't find any gold. Hermon quit looking for gold and went to get some fresh air. When he got outside Hermon found he was surrounded by some mind robbers. There were 5 that he could see, but he new there were more behind the trees. One of the robbers took Hermon in the cave tied him up and went out side and threw a peace of Dinamit in and blew up the cave with Hermon in it. Hermon was lucky the door to the cave was the only part that blew up. What the robbers didn't know was they left the tools with Hermon. Hermon crowled to his pick and cut the ropes. Hermon got his pick and started to brack the rocks in the entrance. When Hermon got out he said, "Revenge".

Hermon walked to the nerest town and bought a gun and bullets. Then he went to a Soloon and saw the robbers who left him to die. He went over to them and shot all of the them in the back and killed them. Then the Sharif walked in and saw 5 dead guys and took hermons gun and said I'm gonna

hang you in 24 hours. That night Hermon couldn't sleep. The next morning Hermon was brought up on a platform and Hung.

In this low-achievement story the setting is vague; the conflict is simply a series of predicaments; the characters exist only as props to the plot; and the ending is arbitrary. The story is flat, with no sense of pacing and no real dialogue. It is more a summary rather than a story. This student will profit from a number of classroom assignments in which various aspects of stories are discussed, written, and shared.

Example of Published Student Stories

"The Martyrdom of Frank," by Randall Peterson, demonstrates the high quality of writing we can expect from our most capable eighth-grade students when they have been instructed in the characteristics of a story and have had many classroom opportunities to write and share their stories with their classmates.

The Martyrdom of Frank[2]

All heads lurched forward as the bus driver threw the bus into a higher gear. The babbling voices of kids mingled together into a high-pitched, indiscernible muddle of sounds. Tangled locks of hair were all that were visible over the tall backs of the seats.

The bus squeaked to a halt in front of a flat-roofed building. Most of the bricks were beginning to crack and chip away. The walls were discolored in vertical stripes. Years of rainfall had left its mark as it trickled off the roof.

Streaming out of the bus, the kids headed to their respective classrooms. The only fifth-graders to ride that bus, Sean and Aaron, were reminiscing about a football game they had played that weekend.

Sean wore perfectly fitting, fashionable clothes. His wardrobe consisted of a variety of name brands selected with impeccable taste, but they were usually rashly donned and colors often clashed. Spots of dry mud were caked on his knees. Aaron's clothes, though not as attractive or popular, were always cleaned and pressed and complemented each other. His hair, short and blond, was always neatly arranged on his head.

Once inside their room, Aaron and Sean passed Frank's desk. After a quick surveillance they determined that Frank was not in sight. Sean grabbed Frank's math book and dropped it into the garbage can. The whole class watched as Frank returned and began searching frantically for it. Bursts of uncontrollable laughter escaped, and Frank discontinued his search, realizing that he was being mocked.

Frank was the mechanism through which the fifth-graders released their frustrations. He was tall and gangling. Upon a small nose perched glasses with wide plastic frames. The lenses, thick and strong, shrank the area around his eyes and gave his head the appearance of an hourglass. Upon his head rested a divot of red hair.

The day proceeded in a similar manner. When adding fractions became dull, Aaron would lean and mock, "Frankie, how often do you wash your hair?" in a tone as if he were addressing a two-year-old. Muffled giggles were prevalent around him and he sank lower into his seat.

During a particularly long lecture about adverbs, Sean would twist his face into a weird expression. He would take his right arm, stretch it over the crown of his head, and scratch behind his left ear with it. The class, realizing that this was one of Sean's more polished imitations of Frank, exploded into a half-checked snicker. This continued until a stern glance from the teacher brought it all to a halt.

Frank's eyes never left his scuffed cowboy boots. Weeks of torment had subjugated his dignity. His self-esteem was dead.

On the way home from the bus stop, Aaron and Sean practiced their daily ritual of hurling stones at various types of birds. Aaron successfully provoked a mother robin to flee from its nest to the security of a tall willow.

As was customary, Sean went home with Aaron. After extracting some tantalizing morsels of food from the refrigerator, they slumped into some well worn beanbags. Between segments of Heathcliff, Aaron lifted the lid off of his brother's gerbil cage. The smell of fresh cedar wafted into the room. Catching the spry resident was a difficult task. Only after cedar chips and sunflower seeds were strewn all over did Aaron pin the gerbil's tail to the bottom of the cage.

"Watch this!" exclaimed Aaron. He held the struggling creature upside down and let go, giving him a little spin. The gerbil plummetted down, turning over and over. It reached the beanbag and landed perfectly, feet down. A faint thud was emitted as a small crater formed around the trembling creature. Sean laughed gleefully at the rare spectacle.

The trick was repeated several more times before Sean was convinced that it wasn't just luck.

[2]Randall Peterson. "The Martyrdom of Frank," in *Active Voices II: A Writer's Reader*. Compiled by James Moffett and Phyllis Tashlik. Portsmouth, N.H.: Boynton/Cook Publishers, Inc., 1987, pp. 162–64. Used with permission.

Sean flipped the pet over in his hands to examine its soft white underside. The fragile creature twisted around and squirmed to be free of his inverted position and the hot anaconda hands.

The two boys faced each other and placed the gerbil between them. When it darted toward the safety of the bookshelf, they would roll it back into the middle. The undaunted rodent made many more futile attempts. Exhausted, it crouched, tense and trembling. Sean nudged it in the side with his finger. It lashed out.

Sean expelled a cry of pain. He lifted his hand. From it a brown figure dangled. He shook his arm violently, but the limp body wouldn't release its deathgrip. With one rapid movement, he flung the creature off. It glided through the air, collided with the oak paneling, and dropped to the ground. The little creature didn't land on its feet this time, however, but rather on its back.

The drooping body lay motionless, its life gone. Deep red blood boiled out of Sean's fingers, but all eyes remained on the still form. The two boys sat in silent reverence, struck with the gravity of their actions. The gerbil was dead.

The next morning was brisk and cheerful, but Sean and Aaron were silent and solemn as they trudged to the bus stop. The chirping birds perched on a fencepost were left alone today, for the two boys finally realized—life is fragile. They had bought themselves pleasure at the cost of a life.

The clamor on the bus did much to revive the boys' spirits, and they were soon busy rehashing tales of last weekend's football game. Sean began explaining how Aaron had caught a kick-off and returned it eighty yards to score the winning touchdown.

As the two boys bounded down the school bus stairs, they could see Frank leaning against the slide. His orange, unkempt hair seemed almost aflame as the morning sun streamed through it. A pile of books rested in the glistening, dew-covered grass. Upon this foundation perched a brown paper lunchbag, its contents overflowing.

The two friends glanced at each other, knowing what the other was thinking. A grin spread across their faces as they broke into a trot. When they closed in on him, Frank tensed like an animal.

When Sean reached Frank, Aaron was already far ahead of him. Sean's laces met the lunch, sending it flying toward Aaron. It spun end over end and was almost to Aaron's arms when the brown protective covering was rent to pieces. Sandwiches, cookies, and fruit in cellophane bags were scattered in a cluttered array. Frank collapsed in a sobbing pile, just one more gerbil in Sean's life.

Sean and Aaron gazed at each other, bewildered and disgusted. They were shocked that anyone could be so maudlin and react so strongly to a little game or joke. Obviously, all the fears and emotions of the previous night had long since been forgotten.

—Randall Peterson

Readings in Story

Reading a variety of stories is good preparation for the writing of stories. It is important for students to have access to the many kinds of stories—from myth, fable and tale to science fiction and fantasy, realism, historical fiction, and mystery. Students can learn the art of writing stories from reading both quick-paced fiction written for adolescents and realistic fiction written for adults. Eighth-grade students often look backward to children's stories, which can be excellent models, and look also to challenging adult stories.

Rather than list individual stories appropriate for eighth graders, teachers should review the selections in the eighth-grade literature anthologies, in published story collections such as those referred to in *Recommended Readings in Literature* (Annotated Edition. Sacramento: California Department of Education, 1988) and in national publications such as *Voice*, *Literary Cavalcade*, (Scholastic Magazines) and *Read* (Xerox Publications). Stories written by students from grades seven through nine appear on pages 138–204 of *Active Voices II: A Writer's Reader*, compiled by James Moffett and Phyllis Tashlik (Portsmouth, N.H.: Boynton/Cook, Publishers, Inc., 1987).

Rhetorical Effectiveness Scoring Guide for

Story

The writer of the successful story draws on personal experience as well as imagination to create a fictional situation in which the elements of setting, character, and incident comprise a coherent narrative structure.

Although storytelling is perhaps the most familiar of all forms of writing, it is also one of the most varied. Stories can be static or fast-paced, fantastic or realistic, suspenseful or reflective. Stories may focus on character relationships or plot, rely heavily on setting or barely mention it, resolve a problem, or leave the reader up in the air. The hallmark of the successful story is how well the writer engages and holds the reader's attention and interest in the development of a fictional world. The writer of a successful story will engage readers in Coleridge's "willing suspension of disbelief" and create a plausible world that, although fictional, has its own system of logic. In some genres, such as science fiction or fantasy, readers are willing to imagine the story as real, given the believable context of the world in which the story occurs. Whether writers depict a realistic setting or invent a fantasy world, they establish rules for that world that demonstrate an internal, plausible logic within the context of the story.

The effective story writer engages the reader by establishing the story situation and assuming a narrative stance or point of view at the outset. Writers establish the situation by setting the action of the story within a context so that readers understand the significance of the central action or tension of the story. The writer holds the reader's interest by creating believable characters and using appropriate narrative strategies—specific sensory details, appropriate dialogue, and convincing action. Writers order events in such a way as to control the movement of the story, either by using a straightforward chronological approach or by manipulating time in a way that intrigues readers in the development of character or plot. The best stories are marked by a dynamic use of language that delineates character and impels the movement of the story from the opening situation, through specific incidents, to a closure that is appropriate to the writer's intent. Successful story writers effectively balance and unify all of the narrative aspects according to the story's purpose, using a form that reflects the writer's intent in a plausible way.

Score Point 6—Exceptional Achievement

Situation. Writers establish the situation by setting the action of the story within a context so that readers understand the significance of the central action of the story. Such things as setting and main characters are firmly established; a conflict or tension engages readers and enables them to participate fully in the developmental action of the story. The story moves compellingly through a series of events or through character change to a logical, satisfying resolution. The ending, on reflection, is seen to be inevitable; it is integral to the story.

Characterization. Writers develop complex central characters rather than stereotypes. The central characters' appearance, speech, thoughts, emotions and actions enable readers to accept them as believable within the context of the story.

In a six-point story writers use most of the following strategies to develop characterization:

- Showing the character in action
- Using dialogue to reveal how the character talks
- Letting the reader "overhear" the character's inner thoughts
- Reporting what other characters say about the character
- Noting how others react to the actions or speech of the character
- Telling readers directly about the character's appearance, personality, or behavior
- Showing a character's emotional responses to situations
- Revealing a character's relationships with other people
- Presenting character changes or insights developed as a consequence of their actions
- Providing character motivation for behavior or decisions affecting the resolution of conflict or tension

Narrative Aspects and Strategies. Writers frame stories by the effective use of time and place. They establish a narrative stance or point of view from which the story is told; and they maintain a readable pace by balancing narrative summaries, dramatized incidents, and descriptions. Writers order events in such a way as to control the movement of the story, either by using a straightforward chronological approach or by manipulating time in a way that intrigues readers in the development of character or plot.

Strategies for pacing include:

- Straightforward chronology
- Stream of consciousness
- Episodes and transitions
- Flashbacks
- Foreshadowing
- Withholding information to establish suspense

Writers select the kinds of details that help readers imagine the sensory world in which the story occurs. Details are significant in rendering characters, in creating a believable fictional world, and in developing the story line. Writers of six-point stories use details with discretion; each detail adds significantly to the reader's perception. Details are precise and concrete and often developed by analogy or metaphor. Details of action in the story will be marked by effective use of words relating to movement.

In addition to selecting appropriate and specific details, writers use dialogue when appropriate to reveal character, move action along, or establish the context of the situation. Dialogue is skillfully incorporated so that readers seem to be hearing a real conversation.

In a six-point story writers effectively unify all of the narrative aspects according to the story's purpose. Whether writers depict a realistic setting or invent a fantasy world, they establish rules for that world that demonstrate an internal, plausible logic within the story's context. Through precise word choice and fluent sentence manipulation, these writers achieve an overall balance and stylistic unity that distinguish the exceptional story.

Score Point 5—Commendable Achievement

Situation. Writers establish the situation by placing the action of the story within a specific context. Such things as setting, main characters, and conflict or tension are firmly established. The story holds readers' interest through a series of events or through character change. Although the five-point story has a definite ending, it may not seem as inevitable as the ending of a six-point story.

Characterization. The central characters are well developed and not stereotyped. Characters are highly motivated and seem believable within the context of the story. In a five-point story writers use several strategies to present the character.

Narrative Aspects and Strategies. Writers establish and maintain a point of view. Word choice is appropriate but may not be as imaginative as the word choice in a six-point story. Sentence patterns are varied and appropriate. Writers pace their stories well, but the pace may not be as smoothly manipulated as the pace in a six-point story. Writers use details effectively to help the reader visualize the story. Dialogue is well integrated into the story

Score Point 4—Adequate Achievement

Situation. Writers establish the situation by placing the action of the story within a context. The context may not be as clear as the conflict in a five- or six-point story. Such things as setting, main characters, and conflict or tension are somewhat developed. The conflict or tension may not be as well developed as it is in a five- or six-point story, but the story generally holds the readers' interest through a series of events or through character change. The four-point story has a definite ending, but the ending may seem hurried or contrived.

Characterization. The central characters are usually well developed. Some characters may verge on stereotypes. Characters seem motivated and are believable within the context of the story. Writers generally use several strategies to present characters.

Narrative Aspects and Strategies. Writers generally establish and maintain a point of view, but there may be an occasional shift. Word choice is adequate. Sentence patterns are usually varied. Writers have problems focusing on central incidents. They may lose readers' interest by summarizing too much of the story. Details are not as precise and well chosen as the details in five- or six-point stories although sections with strong visual language may be included. Dialogue, while usually present, may be indirect, stilted, or ineffective.

Score Point 3—Some Evidence of Achievement

Situation. Writers may fail to establish the situation by ineffectively placing the action of the story within a context. Such things as setting, main characters, and conflict or tension may be introduced; however, three-point stories frequently lack one of those elements. The story may contain sections that the reader finds interesting, but in

general the story does not sustain the reader's interest. Writers often include an ending to the story; the ending, however, is nearly always contrived and not the natural outcome of the story.

Characterization. The central characters are rarely well developed. They are often stereotypes, lacking in motivation for their actions. Relationships between characters may be unclear, or they may be stated rather than developed.

Narrative Aspects and Strategies. Writers establish a point of view, but there may be unexplained shifts. Word choice tends to be pedestrian. Sentence patterns may be monotonous. Problems with pacing become serious with three-point stories. Effective details may be ineffectively presented; they may be listed, or modifiers may be overused. Dialogue is usually either absent or excessive.

Score Point 2—Limited Evidence of Achievement

Situation. Writers present ineffective, minimal context for the situation. Setting is usually absent, and conflict or tension may be vague. If present the ending is of the sort ". . . and then I woke up."

Characterization. The central characters are unrealized. Characters may be defined only by names. Inconsistency of characters may confuse readers.

Narrative Aspects and Strategies. Writers usually establish a point of view. Word choice is flat. Sentence patterns are simple and repetitive—the ". . . and then" variety. There is no sense of pacing present in the story: the story is usually a flat summary of events. Details are often lacking. Dialogue is either absent or excessive.

Score Point 1—Minimal Evidence of Achievement

Situation. The situation may be confusing to readers. Writer fails to establish any context. Setting is usually absent, main characters may not even be named, and conflict or tensions are usually absent. One-point papers may just stop.

Characterization. Characters are unrealized. Readers may not even know who the characters are.

Narrative Aspects and Strategies. Readers may have difficulty determining a point of view. Word choice may be inappropriate and confuse readers. Vocabulary is simplistic. Simple sentence patterns are used. Stories may be undeveloped or may only ramble from incident to incident. No sense of pacing present in story, and story has few details. The dialogue, if present in the story, is predominantly "I said . . . she said."

Story Strategies

Strategies for characterization include:

- Showing the character in action
- Using dialogue to reveal how the character talks
- Letting the reader "overhear" the character's inner thoughts
- Reporting what other characters say about the character
- Noting how others react to the actions or speech of the character
- Telling readers directly about the character's appearance, personality, or behavior
- Showing a character's emotional responses to situations
- Revealing a character's relationships with other people
- Presenting character changes or insights developed as a consequence of their actions
- Providing character motivation for behavior or decisions affecting the resolution of conflict or tension

Strategies for pacing include:

- Straightforward chronology
- Stream of consciousness
- Episode and transition
- Flashbacks
- Foreshadowing
- Withholding information to establish suspense

Grade Eight Writing Guide:

Speculation About Causes and Effects

Speculation about causes or effects requires writers to speculate or conjecture about what may cause or result from a situation, event, or trend. Writers are encouraged to use "what-if" patterns of thinking, both playfully and seriously. In developing this type of essay, writers predict consequences and elaborate on the plausibility of their speculations.

Speculation about causes or effects is related to problem solution in that both contain elaborations on possibilities. To the extent that speculation about causes or effects attempts to persuade, it may be related both to problem solution, an essay in which the writer argues for one or more solutions, and to evaluation, an essay in which the writer may elaborate persuasively to support his or her judgment.

In speculation about causes and effects, the writer may use strategies central to autobiographical incident and story when using such storytelling devices as narrating a scenario to describe causes or effects.

Importance of Speculation About Causes and Effects

Seeing multiple perspectives, considering possibilities, and making plausible predictions are within the domain of speculation about causes or effects. That type of writing is commonly required in nearly all areas of the curriculum. In history–social science, for example, students may be required to speculate on what might have happened in American history had Abraham Lincoln not been assassinated.

Often in journalistic writing, writers speculate about what will follow from a disaster such as an earthquake. This speculation invites creative, critical thinking.

Speculating seriously about the causes or effects of phenomena or events also assists in the maturation process. Speculation helps students avoid rash decisions, hasty conclusions, wrong accusations, and snap judgments. The open-ended aspect of speculation about causes or effects is important in encouraging students to explore possibilities, stretch their imaginations, and follow their ideas as far as they can.

Characteristics of Speculation About Causes and Effects

Speculation about causes or effects requires the writer to predict possible causes or outcomes of a given situation. The range of speculation can extend from a fanciful guess about a fantastic situation to a prediction arising from acquired information or personal knowledge about the real world.

Presenting the Situation

Writers show a clear understanding of the situation to be speculated about and describe the situation in a way that the reader can clearly understand. The situation is usually presented in the introductory paragraph of an essay or at the beginning of a narrative, although some writers will devise more intricate ways of revealing the situation.

Speculation

Writers can choose to present their predictions about causes or outcomes in a variety of ways.

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University of California, San Diego

- Writers may present effects from the initial situation and demonstrate a broad base of knowledge associated with the situation.
- Writers may attempt to show a plausible relationship between the situation and its possible causes or effects. Conjectures may stem from historical facts, opinions of experts, common beliefs, scientific facts, eyewitness reports, information found in the plot of a story or in statistics.
- Writers may speculate using their own original ideas as they consider the possible "what-if" effects of a situation.

Elaboration

Writers elaborate by choosing details relevant to the causes or effects. They provide sufficient elaboration to convince the reader that the predictions are valid within the framework of the writer's own boundaries. For example, in dealing with fantasy, the writer establishes the framework within which speculations are valid.

Organization

Writers organize the information to give the paper coherence. Possible approaches include the following:

- A list of causes or effects within categories
- An elaboration of one or more causes or effects according to importance—from least to most important, from small issues to large issues, from personal to societal, or from concrete to abstract
- A scenario predicting causes or effects in story form
- A repeated word or phrase used to tie the essay together

Exemplary Student Essay

This essay represents a typical student's response to an assignment about having her dreams come true. The writing process she used is presented in the next section.

My One Dream

The one dream I would like to have come true is one I have had for years. I have always dreamed of being a famous actress. You are probably saying, "Don't we all?" But I am very serious about my acting.

[Presenting the situation]

It would be very exciting working alongside some of the most famous people in show-business. My favorite actress and biggest idol is Nia Peeples who stars in the television series "Fame." She's beautiful and very talented. I've always dreamed of working with her or at least meeting her. I've written her many letters complimenting her on her wonderful acting on "Fame."

[Elaborated effect ("meeting/working with idol")]

I would be privileged to go to all those expensive restaurants, going to those fabulous celebrity parties, eating the delicious foods that I never dreamed of eating. I would also live in a luxurious home with terrific built-ins. I would live in this home with probably a roommate since I'm not planning to get married and settle down for a while to come.

[List of benefits ("expensive restaurants, fabulous celebrity parties, luxurious home")]

But I know that being an actress is not all fun. There's a lot of disadvantages too. Being a performer takes a lot of hard work and very long hours. Sometimes it would mean less time to spend with my friends and family. Celebrities never have a life of their own. The press is harrassing them 24 hours a day, seven days a week. It's hard to lead a normal life when you can't even go to a fast-food restaurant without being bothered by people.

[Disadvantages contrasted with advantages]

However I believe fans make a celebrity a celebrity and I would always remember that when asked to sign an autograph. I would never forget my friends either. When I'm up there on the stage performing, I'd remember that when I was struggling to make it, they were always behind me, pushing me to do my best. They never lost faith in me and I'd always stay loyal to them. So you see, being a famous actress has its ups and downs just like any other dream anyone might have. But I'm never going to give up. Someday, somehow my dream will come true, even if I have to work my buns off for it.

[Elaborated description; writer used several strategies to present her information in a logical manner. After considering the positive and negative effects of her dream, she concludes with idealism and practicality.]

One Student's Writing Process

Students first were given part one of the writing assignment:

Think of a dream that you have for the future. Imagine what would happen if the dream came true. Consider all kinds of possible effects. For instance, you might dream of winning the lottery but then find that all that money could change your life for the worse as well as the better. You might dream of becoming a famous athlete but find that the constant practice and conditioning it takes keep you from doing some other activities you really enjoy.

Then the class engaged in the following activities:

- Clustered as many dreams as they could think of in three or four minutes
- Chose one dream and mapped problems and rewards that the dream could offer
- Shared problems and rewards and added them to the original cluster

Part two of the assignment followed the clustering, mapping, and sharing:

Write an essay for your English teacher in which you tell about a dream you have for the future. Describe the dream and then explain in detail what you think would happen if that dream came true. Examine the effects of the dream carefully to show that you understand the bad as well as the good effects that might result from the dream's fulfillment.

The class then looked at part two and noted the signal words used: *write for your teacher* (audience), *describe* (do more than name), *explain in detail the effects* (do more than just list), *show bad as well as good effects*.

A description of one student's writing process from that point on follows.

After clustering, mapping, and talking, she made a working list of the effects of her dream:

- Dream—that I was a famous actress
- Effects—working with my idol, Nia Peeples; going to celebrity parties; living in luxury

She then wrote a first draft in about 40 minutes. Her first draft follows.

Draft

My One Dream

The one dream I would like to have come true is one I have had for years. I have always dreamed of being a famous actress. You are probably saying, "Don't we all?" But I am very serious about my acting.

It would be fun to work alongside some of the most famous people in show business. My favorite actress and biggest idol is Nia Peeples who stars in the T.V. series "Fame." She's very beautiful and very talented. I would be privledged to go to all those celeberty parties and to live in a luxurious home. I could go into a store and if I like something, I wouldn't have to think twice about buying it.

But I also know that with the good has to come the bad. It's not exactly easy being an actor or actress. It's a lot of hard work and long hours and sometimes it would mean missing out on spending time with my friends. But I would never let acting change me. I would still be loyal to my old friends and never forget that before I became famous and was struggling to make it, they stayed with me and had faith in me, always encouraging me to try.

So I suppose being a famous actress has its ups and downs just like any other dream anyone might have. But I won't give up. Someday, somehow my dream will come true, even if I have to work my buns off for it.

Peer Response

A day or two after writing the draft, the student met with a small peer-response group. The group used a response guide to comment on her draft. The comments from students are in italics.

Directions: Working and talking together as a group (including the writer), make a chart listing the effects the writer has proposed and the details included to explain the effects.

- Content: *Famous actress*
  - Effect 1: *work alongside most famous people*
    Details: *favorite actress, description of actress, the TV show*
  - Effect 2: *Good*
    Details: *loyal to friends, never leave friends*
  - Effect 3: *Bad*
    Details: *loss of time, hard work*
  - Closure: *Good*
- Questions/Suggestions
  - What area needs more information? *What kind of hard times. Why won't you think twice before buying things.*
  - What caused confusion? *When you jumped from Nia Peeples to parties.*
  - What would you add? *More advantages and more disadvantages to make a paragraph for each.*

- Revision
  After talking with her response group and going over their suggestions, the student made a more extensive map of what she could include in her next version. Her final draft is the exemplary essay in the previous section.

Response and Revision

Working with partners or in small groups, writers can learn from their real readers how their writing affects others. The following suggestions may be helpful to teachers in designing guides for students to use both in discussion and in preparing written responses. Teachers or students may select questions appropriate to their purposes for specific assignments or stages in an assignment.

Questions for responding to a paper about speculation about causes or effects follow:

- *Presenting the situation*
  - How did the writer describe the event he or she is speculating about? Is it enough for you to understand what happened?
  - List one or two of the writer's most precise words.
  - Is there anything about the event you want to understand more clearly? Ask the writer a question.
- *Speculations*
  - What types of information does the writer base speculation upon?
    - Historical facts
    - Opinion of experts
    - Common beliefs accepted as true
    - Scientific facts
    - Eyewitness reports
    - Ideas from a story
    - Personal knowledge
  - Do the effects seem logical to you? Explain your response to the writer.
- *Organization*
  - Is the paper organized so that the ideas flow smoothly and logically? If not, how can the writer make the organization better?
- *Elaborating effects*
  - What effects seemed the most convincing to you? Why do you say that?
  - List some of the details that you found interesting.
- *Coming to closure*
  - Did the writer draw conclusions, present problems with possible solutions, or make evaluations?
  - Was the ending satisfactory to you? Do you have any suggestions for improving the ending?

Classroom Writing Assignments

The suggested writing assignments that follow cover a variety of topics; each topic requires students to speculate on the possible effects resulting from a particular cause. Topics are arranged by content area.

Literature/Language Arts

Teachers can use the following topics to create writing assignments within the context of their present curriculum:

- Look at key words in the opening paragraphs of a story and predict the conflict and plot.
- Look at the way a main character moves and speaks, notice what other characters say about him in the first scene of a play, and predict what the character will be like in the rest of the play.
- Create a sequel to a story and explain why it would be a logical follow-through.
- If we jumble literary characters or authors, strange things might occur. What would change if Edgar Allan Poe had written *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty?*
- Put a character from one story into the plot of another story and predict his actions and reactions.
- Change the setting of a story and predict the changes that occur.
- Choose a character you have read about who had to make an important decision. Consider the choices the character has and speculate about how the story would change if he or she made a different decision.
- If you could create one new class for your school, what would you create? If this new course were offered, what kind of curriculum would it offer and why would it benefit you and other students?

Science

- Think of an invention that could significantly change the way we live and think. Perhaps headphones could read other people's mind waves, or glasses could see through walls, or a flying backpack could transport people wherever they wanted to go in a matter of seconds. Describe the changes that would occur as a result of one of those inventions.
- Describe the effects of a major earthquake on your area of California.
- Study the planets and describe what adjustments would be necessary to survive on a given planet.
- What would happen if our average age were extended to 150 years?

History–Social Science

- How would life be different if cars were outlawed?
- Consider the consequences of a change that will occur in our society in the future. It could be a change in our type of government, in travel to outer space, or in the transportation we use. Decide on one significant change, describe it, and explain what would happen as a result of it.
- How would your life be different if California did not have compulsory education to the age of eighteen?

The CAP Writing Prompt Format

The writing prompts used by the California Assessment Program and included as examples in the CAP writing guides are organized into two sections: the writing situation and directions for writing. The writing situation contains prewriting information and directives designed to motivate student thinking about the assignment. Students are given background about the topic and are prepared for the specific assignment that follows in the directions for writing. Here, students are given instructions regarding the assignment intent, topic, audience, and other directions to keep in mind when responding to prompts. Examples follow.

History–Social Science

Change

Writing Situation: Write an essay for your history–social science teacher in which you discuss a change that might happen in the future. The change might be in the way people eat or dress or spend their free time, in our type of government, or in travel to outer space. Imagine whatever kind of change you want to.

Directions for Writing: Write an essay in which you describe a change and say what you think might happen as a result of it. Make your results seem possible or reasonable. Your teacher will be looking for answers to these two questions: (1) What is the change? and (2) What happened as a result of the change?

Language Arts

Wishes

Writing Situation: Make up a wish that you would like to come true. Imagine what would happen if the wish came true. Try to imagine the range of things that might happen. For instance, you might wish for a pet, but then you might find that feeding it and cleaning up after it are things you don't like to do. You might want to play on a team, but then you find that the practice keeps you from doing some other activities you really enjoy.

Directions for Writing: Write an essay for your English teacher in which you tell about a wish that you would like to come true. Say what the wish is and then describe in detail what you think might happen if that wish came true.

History–Social Science or Language Arts

Darkness

Writing Situation: Imagine that a giant comet smashes into the moon, exploding it into zillions of fragments. These fragments form a blanket around the earth and cause total darkness. As a result, many changes occur in everyday life.

Think of some possible changes and list or cluster them in the space provided.

Directions for Writing: Describe some of the changes that could result from the darkness and discuss the effects they would have on everyday life. Those changes and their effects should seem possible so that your readers will think they could really happen.

Speculation About Causes

When the CAP writing assessment was planned in 1984, the advisory committee recommended assessing students' ability to write essays speculating about *effects* in grade eight and to write essays speculating about *causes* in grade twelve. The committee acknowledged that speculating about causes in some writing situations can be more demanding and more likely to invite careless reasoning than speculating about effects. By 1987, however, after considerable field testing of effects and causes prompts at both grade eight and grade twelve, the advisory committee concluded that the writing situations and composing requirements of these two kinds of speculative argument are more alike than different. Consequently, speculating about both effects and causes will be assessed at both grade levels.

An essay in which the writer speculates about effects includes conjecture about the results or consequences of an event or phenomenon. In contrast, an essay in which the writer speculates about causes includes elaborate explanations of how something came about. Writing situations for both cause and effect require writers to conjecture persuasively for a possible, probable, or plausible explanation. Since the causes or effects are not known and widely agreed on, writers must speculate or conjecture about them. Writers who collect and report established causes or effects of something are writing a report of information, a form of expository writing not requiring speculation and argument.

The following writing situations, phrased in the CAP prompt format, require speculation about causes.

Fads

Writing Situation: You may have noticed a fad of some sort at your school. A fad is a custom or style that people are interested in for a short time. Many fads have to do with appearance (clothing, jewelry, or hair styles) or with speech (certain words or phrases that everyone uses). Perhaps you can think of other kinds of fads.

Directions for Writing: Choose a fad you have observed at your school. Write an essay in which you describe this fad and analyze what caused it. In deciding on the causes, do not be satisfied with the most obvious cause because fads usually have several causes. You are writing this essay for your English teacher, who might enjoy learning about a current fad at your school and what caused it. Your purpose is to convince your teacher that your proposed causes may actually explain why the fad appeared.

A Change

Writing Situation: All of us have seen people change in important ways. There is a reason (or perhaps several reasons) why each change occurred. Think of someone you know who has changed. Consider also *why* this person changed.

Directions for Writing: Write an essay in which you describe a change in someone you know. Explain why this change occurred. Write this essay for readers who do not know the person. Be sure to give specific examples of the person's appearance or actions that support your description of the change and why it happened.

Unpredictable Characters

Writing Situation: Characters in stories and novels often act in unpredictable ways. Their actions surprise the other characters in the story—and perhaps surprise you as well. From your reading select one character who acted in a very unpredictable way at one point in a short story or novel.

Directions for Writing: Write an essay in which you describe the unpredictable thing the character did. Make clear how this action was unusual. Explain what you think caused the character to behave in such a way. Support your proposed causes with specific details from the story. Try to convince your readers that you have a reasonable explanation for the character's unpredictable behavior.

Additional Exemplary Student Essays

In the following student essay the writer ties ideas together in a general to specific pattern—from family and friends to self. This essay is a first draft written in one class period to a prompt requiring students to speculate about the effects of an invention permitting people to read each other's thoughts. With time for revision the student might be encouraged to elaborate on some of the generalizations.

Headphones

When Alfred Gerhardt's computerized headphones are commonly used throughout the world, they will bring about great changes in our lives. People will be able to read the mind waves of others; this new invention will change our everyday lives.

Parents think they know what their children are thinking but they really don't. Some children pretend to like school but really they hate it underneath. Sometimes parents who are having marriage problems think their children don't know what is going on, but really the kids do. If they get these headphones, parents will know what the child is thinking. It may come as a surprise and bring the problems out in the open where they can be solved.

This not only might happen to families, but to friends too. Very few people will have secrets, so everybody who has headphones will know what's going on in your life if you think about it. Nobody will be able to lie, so most people will try to be truthful.

These new headphones might also help us understand ourselves better. Maybe if a person sleeps with them on, he could find out what he dreams about and solve some of his problems.

Although we would have to get used to not having very much privacy, headphones that could read the mind waves of others could prove to bring many interesting changes.

For the writer's next draft, she might consider how to develop paragraph four. Using the student response guide, her writing partner might ask questions such as these:

- You list one way to understand ourselves better with headphones. What are some other ways? Maybe you could use yourself more.
- Could they record our thoughts? What good would it do to have our thoughts recorded? Give an example.
- What are some other ways it could help us?
- What if we knew other people's thoughts about us? How could that affect us?

"Brain-Wave Readers" is another example of a first draft. The writer has categorized the effects of brain-wave readers (BWRs) according to who would buy them: parents, businesses, and government. She expands somewhat on the first two categories and lists various ways the third category could use the BWRs.

Brain-Wave Readers

The first Brain-Wave Readers, or BWR's as they are commonly referred to, have been on sale to the public for a month. So far millions of them have been ordered. Parents are buying them to use to keep track of where their kids go on the weekend. Instead of staying up and going through the trouble of asking their kids where they have been, now all the parents do is mention Friday night and listen in on the headphones to all the thoughts that that reference triggered. Bosses use them to tell when employees are not paying full attention to their jobs. When the thought coming from a particular worker starts to slow, the boss knows who he has to check up on. But by far the largest buyer of BWR's has been the government. There are no more lengthy interrogations, no more trials even, now that it can read the minds of suspected criminals. More advanced models are programmed to monitor the unconscious messages in the brain during questioning to make the results even more revealing. BWR's are also used to monitor government employees and even the general public to find spies and people who have "dangerous thoughts," a broad term encompassing not only traitors and criminals, but anyone who has thoughts contrary to government policy. As a result of the introduction of BWR's, people all across the country and in other nations have begun to regulate and suppress their own thoughts.

Although the student has written only one paragraph, revising and expanding her essay would not be difficult. She could develop each area by describing the kind of monitoring system used in private homes and in larger industry or by adding "showing" details, such as examples of teenage mind-waves or workers' thoughts slowing.

Essays Written for the CAP Assessment

The following essays were written as part of the CAP writing field test. They represent a range of high, medium, and low scores. "Blackout" is an excellent essay. The writer has chosen to use a narrative format and adopts the persona of a "histo-robot" to speculate on the possible effects of a blanket of darkness covering the earth.

High Achievement

Blackout

I am writing about a cosmic accident that blocked out the sun. The year is 3854 A.D. on the planet Earth. My code is F3-Hst. I am a histo-robot for the American Historians' Club. It happened

about 500 years ago but the exact date is not known because all records of that era were lost. Most scientists think the sun was blocked out when two planets collided and the fragments formed a huge asteroid belt orbiting directly between Earth and the sun. However, the darkness did not come suddenly. It probably took at least 20 years for the screen to come together enough to block the sun's light out completely.

As Earth became darker every year, people slowly lost their sight. But, as sight was lost, the other senses became much keener in both animals and people. The plants have died out except those which grow on the ocean floor, such as kelp. Th plants have become the staple of man's diet toda in place of the plants on land. The heat from the sun is not blocked by the asteroid belt so huge heat collectors receive and store the heat during the day and release it at night to keep the cities warm.

Archeologists have discovered preserved bodies of ancient people. These people had bodies much like the humans of today except that they had slightly lesser cranial capacity and on the average were larger in body size than the modern human who is usually five feet and six inches in height. The people of today also have more highly developed senses of touch, hearing, and smell, as I mentioned before.

Most of mankind is resigned to the fact that they will never know the beauty of the world their ancestors once lived in. The people love to hear about the many plants and flowers of ancient times. The effects of the cosmic cloud have changed the human race forever but there was some good in the accident, too. The accident gave man a challenge and without that, we would still be in the Stone Age.

Commentary

The first paragraph presents the situation ("a cosmic accident that blocked out the sun").

To elaborate the effects, the writer has woven together scientific facts: "Plants have died out except for those which grow on the ocean floor, such as kelp"; expert's opinions: "Archeologists have discovered"; and historical facts: "People slowly lost their sight." As an authority figure, the "histo-robot" presents a believable commentary on past occurrences, which in reality are the writer's speculation about effects in the form of a scenario.

The closure has elements of evaluation and philosophical speculation, "The accident gave man a challenge and without that, we would still be in the Stone Age."

Mid-Level Achievement

Darkness

If ever a comet smashed into the moon and it broke it into little pieces and covered the earth, we would be in big trouble.

Every one all around the world would probably panic. I would think that the president would take immediate action. He would probably launch a ship into space or something.

Almost everything on our planet needs light. If there was no light then plants would not grow. I'm sure people need natural light too. If plants didnt grow, and we survived without light what about cows from where we get food, they would not have grass to eat, and they would starve. There could even possably be a baby boom again.

Scientists would be busy at work inventing lights that perhaps could work the same way the sun does to help grow plants.

With every thing pitch black every one would be using up all the energy to.

I'm sure this will never happen, but I'm not an expert to say. But in all the thousands of years the planets have been around nothing like that has ever happened.

But I thought that there was a force field around the earth that burns any thing up that touches it.

Commentary

The writer of the essay "Darkness" describes the situation very briefly. One sentence sets forth the situation. Various vague psychological effects and government reactions are guessed at. The writer becomes more specific as he discusses the effects of darkness on life forms, and he also refers to the reactions of scientists. He organizes his material about the effects into categories but only elaborates a reference to the food chain. He does not come to closure, however. He refers only to his own lack of knowledge and suggests that this situation is impossible. The writer's attempts at elaboration and organization help in the classification of this paper as average.

Low Achievement

We don't have any electricity and it's very cold. The plants are hard to grow now. It rains more now than usual. Sometimes meteors fall threw the Earths apnonsphere and hits the ground some people are killed when this happens. Some people are left homeless. The oceans are wild now than ever there are lots of huricans every where. We have to save

food for just incase something happens. It is very sad living in this darkness.

Commentary

In this essay the writer begins abruptly. The proposed effects of some cataclysmic occurrence are listed—no electricity, very cold, hard to grow plants, and it rains more than usual. The listing of effects, however, is a type of elaborating; the writer provides some evidence that life now is very different and that the outlook is bleak.

Published Example of Speculation About Causes or Effects

In the following essay the writer makes effective use of speculation about effects strategies. The essay was published in *The Planetary Report.*

The Three Tragedies of Challenger[1]

The tragedy of January 28, 1986, has touched the American soul more deeply than anything since the John F. Kennedy assassination—Why? Why should there be such a tremendous grief and outpouring over the death of seven of us when death is such a common occurrence in all walks of life?

The reason is that we have all identified so deeply with those attractive and adventuresome individuals who are our surrogates in space. They represented all of us reaching out to push back the frontiers of adventure and exploration.

For that reason, their deaths will not and should not be in vain—we should continue to send out representatives to explore space on our behalf. We should continue to send them in a public and visible way so that, indeed, all of us may participate vicariously. We should continue to fly the space shuttle for that purpose as soon as the cause of the explosion has been identified and corrected.

However, there is a second tragedy unfolding, not nearly so visible to the American people but just as profound in its implications. The shuttle had been designed not only to carry humans to and from Earth orbit, but it also incorporated a new and unproven concept in space flight. The shuttle was to carry automated payloads intended for distant orbits, to service the military, to launch commercial communication satellites and to carry out the diverse activities of scientists.

As a consequence, NASA has eliminated all expendable launch vehicles which have traditionally been the means of launching automated (and usually expendable) payloads. Now that the shuttle fleet is grounded, all US space activities are likewise grounded.

The implications are disheartening. Not only is the orderly continuation of military surveillance and other functions disrupted, not only is our ability to ferry commercial communications satellites suspended, but our dwindling planetary exploration effort has been dealt a stupendous blow with a year or more further delay of our principal new planetary mission—the Galileo orbiter and probe to the planet Jupiter.

The third tragedy—yet to happen—looms when the budgetary implications of these delays and reprogramming efforts for both the manned and unmanned programs go to Congress for approval.

The timing couldn't be worse. The Gramm-Rudman (deficit control) bill represents an abdication by both the Administration and the Congress from making judicious adjustments in various federal programs, as now needed because of the Challenger tragedy.

Somehow we must collectively find the political wisdom and capability to respond to the Challenger setback. We must provide timely, efficient and flexible transport to orbit for the full range of automated activities which are essential to both our present and future.

And we must look beyond the shuttle and even the space station to where the manned endeavor of exploration truly leads.

The President can and should set the goal of Americans (we hope in collaboration with others) reaching the surface of Mars sometime after the turn of the century as a culmination of our steps into space and as the final tribute to the seven Challenger crew members.

—Bruce C. Murray

Bruce Murray uses the first tragedy (the deaths of the Challenger crew) to set up the situation. The second and third tragedies are his proposed effects from that situation. Murray uses the word "tragedy" to tie his conjectures about what might happen to the space program into a coherent essay.

Readings in Speculation About Causes or Effects

Essays in which writers speculate about causes or effects occur daily in newspapers and magazines. A few examples follow:

- Editorials caution against the dire effects of a proposed law.

[1]Bruce C. Murray, "The Three Tragedies of Challenger," in *The Planetary Report* (March/April, 1986). Used with permission.

- Sports columns forecast Super Bowl winners before the first game of the season is played.
- Movie reviews predict a film's popularity before audiences have seen it.

Those common kinds of speculative writing are easily available for classroom use. Writers of speculative fiction (science fiction/fantasy) rely on "what-if's" (altering our reality and predicting the effects) as important plot devices. The following literary works are a few of the many that contain speculation about causes or effects:

Crichton, Michael. *Andromeda Strain*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1969.

Heinlein, Robert A. *Farnham's Freehold*. New York: Ace Books, 1987.

Herbert, Frank. *Dune*. New York: The Putnam Publishing Group, 1984.

*Irving, Washington. *Rip Van Winkle*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1963.

Le Guin, Ursula K. *The Wizard of Earthsea*. New York: Bantam Books, Inc., 1975.

*Poe, Edgar Allan. "The Tell Tale Heart," in *Great Short Works of Edgar Allan Poe*. New York: Harper and Row Publishers, Inc., 1970.

Swift, Jonathan. *Gulliver's Travels*. New York: Airmont Publishing Co., Inc., 1964.

Twain, Mark. *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*. New York: Bantam Books, Inc., 1985.

*Wells, H. G. *War of the Worlds*. New York: Airmont Publishing Co., Inc., 1964.

Wilhelm, Kate. *Where Late the Sweet Birds Sang*. New York: Pocket Books, Inc., 1981.

*Titles indicated with an asterisk are included in *Recommended Readings in Literature* (Annotated edition). Sacramento: California State Department of Education, 1988.

Rhetorical Effectiveness Scoring Guide for

Speculation About Causes and Effects

Prompts for speculation require writers to present one of two kinds of speculative argument:

1. Writers speculate or conjecture about the causes of a given situation, event, or trend.
2. Writers speculate or predict possible effects (outcomes or consequences) of a given event or phenomenon.

These requirements make speculation essentially persuasive, requiring systematically developed arguments carefully grounded in a precisely defined situation. Students use "what if" patterns of thinking to propose causes and/or to predict consequences, and then they attempt to convince readers to take seriously their proposed causes or effects.

They elaborate on these causes or effects, developing and linking them to convince the reader of the plausibility of the argument.

Writers focus their essays by maintaining a close relationship between the situation and the speculation: the causes or effects all seem relevant to the situation. Writers organize speculative essays by presenting the situation coherently, showing their own clear understanding of it, and then shrewdly presenting plausible causes or effects that might be associated with that situation. For these conjectures to be convincing, writers must support them with carefully chosen detail . They may mention several possible causes or effects, developing or linking them; or they may mention only one, building it fully and examining it from a variety of perspectives. In any event, throughout the essay the reader is continually aware of the link between the situation and the proposed causes or effects.

Speculation is a complex type of writing, potentially involving imaginative, inventive argument developed by such strategies as definition, description, narration, and explanation. The essay may present a factual assessment arising from knowledge of the real world; or it may present a fanciful guess about a fantastic situation. In either case, the writer's success depends on inventing plausible causes or effects and arguing them both imaginatively and logically. The best essays will exhibit and develop internal logic and consistency that is directly suited to the situation, whether "real world" or fantasy.

Score Point 6—Exceptional Achievement

A six-point essay engages the reader immediately. It seems purposeful. The writer seems aware of readers' questions and needs throughout the essay. The essay seems to be not just written but written to particular readers. The writer convinces the readers of the plausibility of the speculation.

A six-point essay demonstrates qualities all readers admire: conviction, enthusiasm, freshness. A six-point essay may demonstrate the writer's integration or immersion of self into the speculation. These essays may use an unconventional rhetorical approach. A six-point essay may take chances and succeed.

Presenting the Situation. The six-point essay writer clearly defines, identifies, or describes the situation to be speculated about. Though it does not dominate the essay at the expense of speculation, the situation is nevertheless presented fully and precisely. The writer limits the occasion appropriately, focusing reader attention on just those aspects of the situation that the writer will speculate about. Although this information usually comes at the beginning of the essay, some writers may devise other ways of revealing the situation. Whether it arises from fact or from fantasy, the presentation of the situation grounds and focuses the entire essay.

Writers of six-point essays may describe or detail the situation that is established in the prompt, or they might create the situation by using narrative or anecdotal techniques. In either case, they will use concrete language, rich in sensory detail.

The writer of the six-point essay acknowledges readers' concerns. For real-world situations, the six-point writer acknowledges the reader's experience or familiarity with a situation and, using narrative or descriptive strategies, builds on this awareness to focus reader attention on a comparable situation. For fantasy situations, the writer acknowledges reader concerns and questions about the occasion and uses narrative or descriptive techniques to create a logical, if fanciful, situation.

Whether the essay arises from a factual assessment of a real situation or from a fanciful guess about a fanciful situation, the writer consistently demonstrates broad knowledge and clear under-

standing of the situation. In this way, the writer establishes authority.

Logic and Relevance of Causes or Effects. In the six-point essay, the proposed causes or effects are clearly related to the particular situation that the writer has defined. Writers use imaginative, inventive argument to convince readers of the logic of their speculations. The best writers are clearly considering possibilities and are seeing multiple perspectives. They are stretching their imaginations to follow their ideas as far as they can; and they are maintaining focus by establishing and continually developing the close relationship between the particular situation and the causes or effects that might arise from it.

Because speculation is essentially a persuasive type of writing, the best writers will be continually aware of readers' needs. They might refer to the readers directly, trying to enlist their support; or they might directly acknowledge the readers' possible questions or objections to postulated speculations. Throughout the essay, the six-point essay writer seems to understand fully that particular readers must be convinced that their speculations are plausible and are appropriate to the situation they have defined.

In proposing appropriate causes or effects, writers may employ some of the following strategies:

1. "What-if" patterns of thinking to pose causes and effects and to show the relationship between these conjectures and the situation
2. Building a succession of causes or effects, each changing the complexion of the whole
3. Showing a direct and logical connection between the speculated cause or effect and the situation: how the causes logically create the situation or how the effects arise as a natural consequence of it
4. Controlling organizational sequences, such as the following: movement from least to most important cause or effect; from small to large issues; from concrete to abstract; from personal to societal causes or effects

The six-point essay writer establishes, maintains, and develops a plausible relationship between the situation and each of the proposed causes or effects. The speculation is linked naturally to the situation. Transitions are of particular importance in these essays, keeping the reader grounded both in the relationship between the situation and the proposed causes or effects and in the logical development and progression of the speculation itself. Through these transitions the writer carries the reader along with the methodological development of the argument. Throughout the essay, the six-point essay writer weaves together facts, opinions, and projections to create and develop convincing reasons for the proposed speculations.

An occasional writer may present only a narrative (a story scenario) which is so fully developed and effective that readers are convinced of the logic and relevance of the argument through the narrative's implications.

Elaboration of Argument. The six-point essay provides substantial elaboration, convincing the reader that the writer's conjectures are valid for the situation. These writers elaborate their speculated causes and effects with carefully chosen evidence that is logically and fully developed. Such evidence is chosen because it is relevant and convincing. It is developed fully with precise, explicit detail to convince the reader of both the logic and the authenticity of the proposed cause or effect.

Some strategies writers may use to develop their arguments are the following:

1. Citing of facts, opinions, projections, and personal experiences or observations (anecdotes) to explain or validate a cause or effect
2. Elaborating on possibilities arising from proposed causes or effects, showing possible "domino effects" that might determine the direction of a developing situation
3. Giving specific examples of comparable causes or effects that have arisen in analogous situations

Writers may mention several possible causes or effects, developing and linking them; or they may mention only one, building it fully and examining it closely from a variety of perspectives. In any event, the six-point essay writer must make a full and convincing argument for at least one postulated cause or effect.

Score Point 5—Commendable Achievement

Presenting the Situation. As in the six-point essay, the situation is clearly defined but with less elaboration. The situation does not dominate the essay at the expense of speculation. The five-point essay relies on a narrower range of strategies for presenting the situation. The five-point essay writer will limit and focus the occasion, though possibly with less reach than the six-point writer. The language will lack only the vividness and impact of

the six-point essay. In the five-point as in the six-point essay, the writer's knowledge and understanding of the situation is clear throughout, and a sense of confidence and authority is maintained.

Logic and Relevance of Causes or Effects. As in the six-point essay, the writer proposes causes or effects that are linked naturally to the defined situation. The writer conjectures persuasively for possible, probable, or plausible causes or effects. The speculations are serious and logical, lacking only the freshness and imagination that is characteristic of the six-point essay. The writer reaches beyond obvious statements about possible causes and effects to speculations that are not entirely predictable.

The writer of the five-point essay has a consistent awareness of audience and keeps the reader grounded in both the situation and the speculations. The five-point essay reveals direction and purpose and develops the relationship between the occasion and the speculations, though the writer may not maintain focus on this relationship as consistently as in the six-point paper. The five-point paper may lack the clarity of focus, the continuity, or the growing insight and fullness of the six-point essay. The speculations will be insightful but not as probing as in a six-point essay.

Elaboration of Argument. As in the six-point essay, the writer engages in extended, thoughtful speculation, using effective arguments to convince the reader of the logic and validity of the speculations. The writer chooses evidence that is relevant and convincing; the supporting evidence will be more predictable than in the six-point essay. The writer may mention several possible causes or effects, or may concentrate only on one; however, the supporting details, though relevant and convincing, will not be as richly developed.

Score Point 4—Adequate Achievement

Presenting the Situation. The writer of the four-point essay presents the situation but with less assuredness than is evidenced in five- or six-point papers. It may not be as clearly focused, or it may lack the detail or specificity of the five- or six-point essays. The writer may, for instance, simply paraphrase the prompt rather than define a focused situation linked to it. On the other hand, the situation may tend to dominate the four-point essay, though these writers do offer some explicit speculation. The presentation of the situation will be adequate to orient readers to the proposed causes or effects.

Logic and Relevance of Causes or Effects. The four-point essay writer establishes a connection between the situation and the postulated causes or effects but may not maintain this connection as explicitly or effectively as in the five- and six-point essays. The proposed causes or effects may be logical but predictable. They will arise from or be appropriate to the situation; but they may seem tangential, not grounded as firmly in the situation. Acknowledgment of readers is not as evident as in the five- and six-point essays, and the speculations may be disconnected. A four-point essay may be characterized by thoughtfulness rather than inventiveness.

Elaboration of Argument. The writer of the four-point essay offers less persuasive evidence for the validity of the proposed causes or effects. The essay exhibits some internal logic and an overall sense of organization; but it may not show a consistent relationship between the situation and the effects or causes. There may be some irrelevant details. The writer exhibits both an understanding of the situation and an exploration of possible causes or effects; but the development and explanations of the speculations may seem somewhat thin.

Score Point 3—Some Evidence of Achievement

Presenting the Situation. The writer presents a situation, but it may either be brief or dominate the essay. There is limited use of strategies characterized by commonplace language. The writer may simply paraphrase the prompt rather than define the situation. The writer may not clearly establish the boundaries of the situation or may not seem to fully understand it. The writer may not acknowledge readers.

Logic and Relevance of Causes or Effects. Though the speculations in the three-point essay will be at least tangentially relevant, the writer may tend to list a series of causes or effects rather than develop them or ground them in the situation. On the other hand, there may be only one minimally developed cause or effect mentioned. These essays may have a meandering quality rather than the purposeful, logical movement of a persuasive argument. The speculations may seem obvious, superficial or predictable. There may appear to be little conscious awareness of the reader and little effort to convince a reader by developing a logical cause-effect relationship.

Elaboration of Argument. Elaboration in the three-point essay is limited, perhaps to a brief explanation of one cause or effect or to a listing of

several, with minimal development. These essays lack consistency in development of detail. Though they may provide rudimentary connections between the situation and the speculations, the sequence and organizational pattern may be unclear.

The essay may seem generally competent and the speculations may be interesting; but the writer has not yet learned that speculation is persuasive and requires systematically developed arguments carefully grounded in a precisely defined situation.

Score Point 2—Little Evidence of Achievement

Presenting the Occasion. The writer exhibits only minimal understanding of the situation. These essays may begin abruptly. The writer may attempt to construct a situation but, because of omissions, erratic jumps in time or place, or breakdowns in cohesion, will not establish focus. In some two-point essays, the situation will dominate the essay. Other two-point essays will provide no occasion, beginning abruptly with a list of causes or effects.

Logic and Relevance of Causes or Effects. If there is a situation, the speculations may be either brief or meandering and unfocused. There will be little connection between the situation and the speculations, and little evidence of any logical organization. Some of the proposed causes or effects may seem illogical or unrelated to the situation.

Elaboration of Argument. There will be little elaboration in the two-point essay, often merely listing. Some details may be irrelevant and unconnected to either the situation or the speculations. These essays may tend to be quite brief, as there will usually be little development either of the situation or of the causes or effects; or they may be extended generalized ramblings, with little grounding at all in either a situation or in "what-if" conjecturing. The two-point essay may merely list causes or effects without support or argument. The two-point essay contains little or no argument or effort to persuade the reader.

Score Point 1—Minimal Evidence of Achievement

Presenting the Situation. If there is a situation, it will be very brief and devoid of specificity or concreteness. The one-point essay may point vaguely to a situation without focusing or establishing its boundaries.

Logic and Relevance of Causes or Effects. If there are speculations, they will be brief and superficial attempts at prediction rather than considered explorations of possibilities. There will be no evidence of a logical connection between the situation and the causes or effects. The proposed causes or effects, if any, may be difficult to identify or understand.

Elaboration of Argument. There will be little or no elaboration of either the situation or of the causes or effects. Speculations, if presented at all, are not argued. There is rarely any sense of the reader. The one-point essay is usually brief and is often not coherent.

Score Point 0—Inappropriate Response

Off Topic

Students With Special Needs

The California Assessment Program (CAP) historically has tested all students except those enrolled in special day classes or centers or who are identified as non-English speaking (NES). Strictly defined, that means that special education students officially participating in regular classes and counted for enrollment in the grade level tested are to participate in the CAP testing program, including students in pull-out-type programs such as the Resource Specialist Program (RSP).

Language classifications used by CAP fall into four categories: English only, fluent-English speaking (FES), limited-English proficient (LEP), and non-English speaking (NES). (See the glossary in the Staff Development Section for exact definitions of these terms.) Only the last category (NES) is exempt from CAP testing; that holds true for the writing assessment, which was introduced at grade eight during the spring of 1987.

Students with learning problems or language limitations may need special assistance as they develop skills targeted in the CAP writing assessment. To help them become successful writers, teachers may need to modify the classroom assignments suggested in the CAP writing guides, clarify process descriptions, or increase practice sessions. This section of the *Writing Assessment Handbook* is directed toward teachers and others responsible for this sometimes difficult but important task. The following suggestions may be helpful as districts and school staffs prepare to review current writing programs.

Writing in a New Language

Students in language acquisition programs, such as bilingual education and English-as-a-second-language (ESL), progress through stages of development that are similar to but not exactly like those of native English-speaking students. At the beginning their understanding of English may be limited to associations with firsthand experience. In time they begin to create simple English necessary for inclusion in school activities or communicating basic needs. Later, they use English to interact meaningfully with others. They become able to use language for making generalizations and for analyzing situations and textbooks. Finally, the ability to use English for clarifying concepts and abstract problem solving evolves.

The communicative competence of LES, LEP, or ESL students in English improves as they strive to understand the messages of others and actively create their own in increasingly more complex situations. Experience shows that exposure to comprehensible English and practice in negotiating meaning through teacher encouragement, supportive risk taking, and guidance can improve language ability.

NES or LEP students will vary in their ability to use standard American edited English structures and forms in constructing their messages. The language of these students in their messages is not incorrect. It is not a random selection of words, sentence structures, or imperfect attempts at adult English. The language is legitimate and follows a coherent code or rules consistent with the student's present proficiency level. We need to remember that students may be doing as well as their prevailing English abilities permit. ESL research tells us that improvement in grammar and usage is facilitated not by isolated study as provided in many workbook exercises or pattern drills. It occurs through the active attempt to generate the language needed to communicate a response to meaningful situations.

Writing assignments can provide a basis for needed experimentations with communication. The assignments set up a situation that has to be understood by students and, most importantly, is tied to their experience. Students are asked to construct a written response that communicates ideas, information, opinions, images, and so forth, to a reader. This recorded language then can be examined, rethought, adjusted, revised, expanded, or otherwise changed to reflect an improvement in written communication. For an LEP student, this mediation can facilitate the development of English writing abilities. In time and as a result of teacher guidance, the ability to communicate in English will change, improve, and become more fluid.

Teaching LEP Students to Write

The following suggestions can make the writing experience positive for both the teacher and the student with limited-English proficiency:

1. Make the writing situation understandable.
   - Help students read the writing prompt.

     Introduce the assignments orally.

     Use visuals when possible.

     Allow students to refer to their native language and English dictionaries when unclear about intent or meaning of unfamiliar terms. (See section on reading a writing prompt.)
   - Simplify the language of the writing assignment when necessary and avoid the following:

     Uncommon terminology

     Idiomatic expressions or figurative language

     Conceptually dense sentences

     Distant or ambiguous pronoun reference

     Difficult syntactic structures, such as conditionals and the passive voice

     Ambiguous statements or unclear directives

     Vocabulary with double meanings
   - Determine whether the student has sufficient background knowledge to comprehend the topic of the assignment. Use discovery questions and strategies such as the following to help students recall prior knowledge and orient their thinking:

     What do you know about . . . ?

     Have you ever . . . (done anything like this) before?

     Have you ever read about something like this?

     This topic is like . . . (something previously experienced or studied).

     What do you think about . . . ? What is your opinion?

     Imagine yourself in this situation. Where would you be? Who would be with you? What would you be doing? What results or outcomes would be expected?

     If the student is unable to respond to these, the topic may not be well enough understood to serve as the subject for a writing assignment. When this happens, teachers need either to provide experiences necessary for a response or change the subject of the writing assignment to one that serves the same purpose but that is more accessible.
   - Examine both published and student writings that exemplify the type of writing you are teaching to ensure the following:

     The example is understandable (readable but not watered down or devoid of content).

     Characteristics of a type of discourse are clear to the student.

     Individual or pairs of students have opportunities to discuss and identify the rhetorical features of an example of writing.
   - Focus on the meaningful use of English and avoid attention to form and accuracy. Do not focus unnecessary attention, time, and effort on:

     Spelling

     Syntactic errors

     Grammar instruction

     Rules of punctuation
   - Preview the lesson in the student's native language in certain situations to help trigger recall of experience or knowledge or better understanding of the intent of a lesson. This procedure should be used sparingly and only when necessary to help students comprehend a lesson or get involved in it.
2. Guide students through a response to a writing assignment.
   - Use the writing assignments from the CAP writing guides that have prewriting assistance built into them. Follow their suggestions for prewriting.

     Use prewriting discussions to help students recall prior knowledge related to the topic, clarify intent of the writing exercise, and examine models of specific discourse.

     Teach the three strategies of brainstorming (useful in generating content), "clustering" (helpful in interpreting this content), and "mapping" (which helps organize ideas) to LEP students. Allow students to compose orally before developing their first written draft.

- Have students write out a complete first draft of their ideas. Expect this first written draft to reflect the student's current level of language functioning.
- Guide students through the Response Guide (sometimes called Revision Guide or Student Workshop) as they review their own first draft and those of others. They should be allowed to review the writing of more proficient writers as well as receive responses from them about their papers. Be specific in pointing out successful incorporation of characteristics of specific kinds of writing by students.
- Be selective during editing to choose the convention or mechanical problem that most interferes with communication. Focus on the identification and correction of one major editing concern at a time. Do not attempt to focus on all concerns within one assignment.
- Carefully monitor LEP students at each step of the process. Make sure that they understand the reason for certain procedures and are aware of the outcomes expected.

3. Be cognizant of students' needs during the writing process.
   - Be patient. Fewer assignments, carefully planned from prewriting through revision, are more productive than many done poorly.
   - Provide repeated experiences with the same type of discourse. One experience may not be sufficient for the student to accomplish independence.
   - Encourage students to write in their native language. The understanding that may result will conceptually guide a similar composing experience in English. Students who are skillful writers in their native language can be expected to acquire English composing skills more easily than others who do not read or write in their native language.
   - Avoid spending too much time having students study grammar, spelling, punctuation, paragraphing, and so forth, in isolation. This time is better spent helping students apply such information in the course of clarifying the message they are writing.
   - Expect gradual improvement, not immediate perfection, to result from this practice. Only after much practice, many opportunities to use English meaningfully, exposure to an accepting environment, and so forth, will proficiency come.
   - Respect the student's current level of ability to communicate in English.
4. Above all, provide assistance and guidance directed toward composing activities.
   - Focus on meaningful communication.
   - Help students generate ideas to be expressed, experiment with present language to communicate to an identified audience, and learn from feedback how to make the written message clearer.
   - Help the LEP students communicate as well as they can in each writing assignment.
   - Be realistic with expectations and allow the students time to improve gradually in the ability to compose thoughts and communicate them in English.

Helping the Less-prepared Student

Students in remedial or other special assistance programs are by definition atypical. They may have disrupted educational histories, an insufficient knowledge base, slower learning rates, lower cognitive abilities, or (for some other reason) a pattern of limited academic success. Compared with higher achieving students, they often have shorter attention spans, are less willing to tackle new assignments, are more dependent on teachers for guidance and instruction, are slower to catch on to or comprehend lessons, and will require more practice before independence is possible. Yet, while not immediately proficient, once a procedure is learned, these students tend to be more dependent on it than would be true of their more capable peers. The "power" paragraph/essay is one such example. When overtaught, this formula-type procedure results in the belief by many less-prepared students that all writing is composed in this fashion. They will tend to use the technique as it was practiced, and are frequently unable to reinterpret this formula in new but related situations that do not warrant its application.

Teachers have found that these students need more concrete examples than their peers, longer meditation time before tackling assignments, more clarity provided with assignments, and more guidance through these tasks. These students have also been found to need additional trial runs to learn a strategy and may rely on visual or verbal reminders of procedures throughout a lesson. With so many circumstances and learning variables influencing writing instruction, it is no wonder that so many of the less able or prepared students need special assistance and guidance to learn to manage each type of writing.

Working with Remedial or Other Writers Needing Special Assistance

The suggestions included here can help students approach the writing experience with increased comfort and confidence.

1. Ease into instruction.

   Students may hesitate in responding to a new writing assignment. Acquaint students with the type of writing you will be teaching to them. During this awareness time, provide concrete reference to the characteristics of a type of writing, spend time reading model essays, and discuss evaluation criteria. A process that emphasizes multiple examples and explanations leads to greater student control and independence. Familiarize students with a new type of writing by using the following sections included in the CAP writing guides.

   - Introduce each new type of writing by discussing the *importance* of that type of thinking and composing experience. Help students realize how they will be empowered by this type of writing.
   - Enumerate the *characteristics* of the type of writing. Illustrate them through a reading and discussion of "An Example of a Published Writing."
   - Familiarize the students with the characteristics of that type of writing by having them read and discuss "An Exemplary Student Essay." The "Student Response Guide" is useful in guiding this discussion.

2. Help students experience successful completion.

   Help students experience the successful completion of writing assignments from prewriting to drafting, sharing, revision, and editing. Allow time for instruction so that students thoroughly understand what is expected of them in each step of the assignment. They need to be guided through practice of each step of the writing process before mastery and independence can be expected. All this takes time. Care must be taken to ensure that these students understand completely what is expected of them, are guided through their first attempt, and are provided with repeated experiences to ensure competence with a new type of writing before moving on to another assignment. In time and through experience, students will begin to feel comfortable enough to become more and more independent with new writing challenges.

   - Clarify the requirements of the prompt (see section on Reading Writing Prompts for suggestions). Explain or clarify any terminology that may be new or difficult for the students (see section on Vocabulary for Specific Types of Discourse).
   - Guide students through each step of the writing process:

     Prewriting. Ask students to list potential topics.

     Discuss possible topics with the teacher or peers.

     Decide on one topic.

     Discuss the intent of the assignment.

     Recall information to answer specifics of the prompt.

     Use "brainstorming," "clustering," and "mapping" to determine the content and general structure or organization of the writing.

     Drafting. Have students write a complete first draft, not to be graded but to be examined and improved in subsequent rewrites.

     Sharing. Have students share the first draft with peers or the teacher, using the "Student Revision Guide" to provide suggestions for improvement.

     Revision. Have students rewrite the draft and incorporate suggestions regarding clarity, organization, content changes, and audience considerations. (Sharing and revision steps may be repeated several times.)

Editing. Have students check sentences for correctness of grammar and conventions. This step should not be overemphasized.

3. Be judicious in providing editing feedback to students.

Isolated instruction that focuses on the formal study of English grammar and usage (seen in language arts grammar series) has been found to be too abstract and remote for application by students. Help with usage can be provided in the editing stage of the writing process and then only for the problems that most interfere with the intended communication. Selective responses that help students effect greater precision in their communication should occur not away from the students but in consultation with them.

4. Remember that success breeds success.

Nothing motivates better than progress and a sense of accomplishment associated with the writing assignment. Successes can be a source of student pride as well as an indication of the adequacy of teacher-provided instruction and guidance.

Dialects

Everyone who speaks English does so in a dialect of English. Similarly, everyone who writes English selects terminology, jargon, and expressions that represent dialect variation. Teachers with their specialized "educationese," radio announcers with speech tones reflecting the music they play, CB users with their colorful figurative expressions, farmers with their regionalized idiomatic expressions, teenage suburbanites with their specialized jargon, and others with their unique variety of language all speak or write English that helps them to communicate with others who share that language code. This language determination can indicate membership in a group as well as potentially exclude others from participation. Dialects provide speakers and writers with a shorthand method of communicating with individuals or groups sharing a similar cultural and linguistic experience. Elaboration of topics or explanations are not necessary when the language is understood and considered acceptable in a communicative situation.

Dialects of English are distinguished by differences in pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, idiomatic expression, and use of figurative language. They are embedded in tradition, systematic, rule-governed, and often regionalized, and they help a group of individuals communicate. As a rule dialects of English are largely mutually understandable and have more common concepts than identified differences. Common differences that mark idiomatic and regional expression frequently involve the use of some verb tenses and pronouns in a manner somewhat distinct from the standard literary language or speech pattern commonly called standard American English.

Standard American English is that English understood, written, and spoken by the largest number of Americans. Standard American English is considered by some as the most prestigious of the American English dialects. It is that sound of English that is least regionally identified. It includes those structures of grammar that are clearest to the largest audience. It includes vocabulary that is most commonly understood. Although most Americans consider their English standard, all speakers and writers of English possess elements of English that approach standard English. All English speakers and writers also communicate at times in ways that could be viewed as nonstandard. For example, the formal English employed in a business letter is expected to be different from that used in a friendly letter. English produced by an individual varies from one audience to another from topic to topic, and from situation to situation This is true of the most flexible of English users.

There is agreement among most linguists and educators that no one dialect of English can or perhaps should be identified as the only variety acceptable. All dialects of English serve a function, are considered appropriate under some circumstances, follow definite and determinable rules, and help the speaker and writer communicate to some degree with particular audiences. At times use of an identifiable nonstandard English dialect in writing helps provide an historical and geographical marker. At other times it marks political or social identities. Occasionally such language is used to demonstrate closeness to or familiarity with the intended reader. In some cases it is used to set the author apart from the reader. While use of a nonstandard written dialect of English is not in itself incorrect, it is generally acknowledged that some dialect varieties are more appropriate with some audiences and in some situations than are others. Most writers can identify times when a distinct type of oral and written English is not only expected but required. Even formal English, considered most standard, would be unsuitable in some contexts.

For clarity in writing, it is commonly expected that the author selects the variety of English that best communicates an intended message to an

identified audience. If the writing is to be read by a large audience, it is expected that the most common terminology, structure and syntax, pronoun reference, and so forth be selected to avoid confusion and misunderstanding. When the writing is intended for a specific reader, a more specialized and perhaps restricted language may be appropriate. Teachers show that they understand this distinction when they allow notes that students write for themselves after observing an event to be different from that writing expected in a final formal report of a field trip.

We find that younger, less mature writers do not demonstrate flexibility in adjusting their English when they begin to write in school. At first, we find most students record English that resembles their speech patterns. Later, they begin to explore more formal, textbook-like language. Eventually, they experiment with language to accomplish varying intents for differing audiences in several genres of discourse.

While younger, less mature writers seldom write purposefully in a nonschool, nonstandard dialect, many have learned to consider their English so inferior that they are reluctant to use it except with their most trusted friends. Teaching students to write with flexibility begins with teachers validating the writer's attempt at communication by accepting whatever English the writer is able to command and then requiring students to begin to write for increasingly more distant audiences. The students use new and varied types of discourse, each with an expected intent, and write on progressively more sophisticated topics. In time the writers can be expected to develop the flexibility that is prized among the most mature and successful of writers.

Skilled writers are those individuals who are capable of adjusting their English as needed to communicate successfully in different contexts. The goal in writing instruction should be to help student writers develop proficiency in selecting and writing English appropriate for communicating specific content and producing a desired effect on an identified audience.

Developing Flexibility

1. Recognize that all dialect speakers and writers communicate in a valid and acceptable language appropriate in some contexts on some topics when communicating to some audiences.
2. Avoid correction for standardization of English before discussing the essay in terms of intended audience, specificity of language to accomplish a specific purpose for the writing, and the possible need for changes in language selected for a more successful communication.
3. Ask students to identify the intended reader.
   a. Ascertain whether the essay language is appropriate for the intended reader.
   b. Have students determine whether the language of the writing should be different.
   c. Have students explore how and why the language in the writing should be changed.
      (1) What terminology could be substituted?
      (2) What grammar could be altered?
      (3) What phraseology could be clarified and how?
      (4) What figurative language and idiomatic expressions would not be understood and how to replace them with more communicative language?
      (5) What degree in specificity of content is warranted by the reader's knowledge of the topic or situation written about in the essay?
4. Help students determine the nature of other audiences for whom this writing would or would not be appropriate and why.
5. When possible, have the intended reader receive, read, and provide feedback regarding the clarity and appropriateness of the language and its tone in the writing.
6. At all times, discuss with students the appropriateness of the language used in each writing assignment (to fulfill known intents) for the identified audience.
   a. Determine the expected formality of the writing.
   b. Explore whether the message is understandable.
   c. Discuss the effects of language choice on the reader.
7. Have students rewrite the same essay for a different audience.
   a. First, have students explore how it should be different.
   b. Discuss which terminology would need to be changed and why.

c. Explore how grammar could be altered to produce varied understandings of the essay.

d. Decide what content alterations and additions would be necessary in communicating successfully to a new reader.

e. Have the new audience (reader) read the essay and provide feedback to the author as to its understandability, whether it was effective, and how it might be improved.

8. In editing, help students clarify the intended meaning in their writing.

   a. With verb tense, help students avoid confusion by ascertaining "when and how many did what."

   b. With pronoun referents, explore with students the misunderstandings that may result from distant and/or undeterminable reference

9. Allow peer response across dialects. Avoid only when having individuals from the same dialect group provide revision and editing feedback.

10. Read exemplary literature to students as models of the sound of written English they will be expected to produce.

The CAP Writing Prompt Format

The writing prompts used by the California Assessment Program and included as examples in the CAP writing guides are organized into two sections, the writing situation and directions for writing. The writing situation contains prewriting information and directives designed to motivate student thinking about the assignment. Students are given background about the topic and encouraged to discover understandings and ideas about the situation. In this section students are prepared for the specific assignment that follows in the directions for writing section. Here, students are given specific instructions regarding the assignment intent, topic, and (often) anticipated organization of content, a specification of audience, and other directions to keep in mind when they are responding to prompts.

Reading Writing Prompts

Students need assistance in reading prompts. They need to practice strategies useful in understanding and interpreting writing assignments. It may be necessary to begin with teacher-directed lessons that incorporate the suggestions that follow. The goal of such guidance would be that small groups of students eventually would be able to discuss a prompt and come to agreement about its expectations with less guidance from a teacher. Because CAP testing does not allow for discussion or questions about the writing tasks, the student must be able to determine expectations without assistance. In the following example, the writing situation and directions for writing sections are dissected to illustrate suggested strategies.

Preparing Your Cousin for School

Writing Situation: Your cousin is moving to your town. This cousin is your age and will attend your school. Your cousin's biggest concern is having to change schools.

Directions for Writing: Write your cousin a letter about your school. Tell about your school's strengths and weaknesses. Tell about things that are special in your school. You may want to offer some advice on how new students are treated. Be as honest and informative as possible. Help prepare your cousin for the change.

Questions to ask when analyzing the writing situation:

- What is the situation? What is happening?
- What do I know about this situation?
- How would I have felt (or reacted) in the same situation? Or, what is my opinion?

Through review of these questions, the student writer's thinking is oriented to the situation that prompted the writing assignment. In this example the student's attention is focused on the cousin's pending move, and the student is guided through a consideration of the problems involved in changing schools. The student writer is asked to recall any personal prior experiences related to this situation. If there are none, the student can be asked to conjecture what such an experience would be like. Finally, the student can be prompted to consider himself or herself in a similar situation, to imagine attitudes, circumstances, frame of mind, and so forth faced by the cousin. In this way the writer is taught to use the situation as a perspective for the writing task at hand.

Questions for analyzing the directions for writing:

- What is the topic? What am I expected to write about?
- Does the prompt suggest what I should include?

- For whom is it intended? What does the reader know? What does the reader need to know? What do I wish to tell the reader?
- What else should I keep in mind?
- What am I expected to do?

The writer is guided through the process of identifying the specific topic, intent, and audience in the writing assignment through the focus provided by the previous questions. In the first question the student is required to determine the specific topic. Note that while the situation (a cousin's pending move) is related to the topic (description of your school), they are not the same. This difference could easily go unnoticed by less prepared or careless readers. As with many assignments, this prompt requires the writer to consider several content points. In this prompt they include:

- Strengths and weaknesses of the school
- Things that are special in your school
- Advice on how new students are treated

These suggestions can help serve the student to organize the content in his or her essay. Although teacher-directed at first, students should later be able to assume more responsibility for coming to agreement about what they are expected to do. The recipient of the letter is identified in the prompt as the cousin. Further, although not stated, it can be assumed the cousin (potential reader) is not familiar with the writer's school. Otherwise, there would be no need for this letter. The writer needs to consider the reader's needs in making judgments about the type and quantity of information to be included in the letter. Additionally, the writer should consider what someone his or her age would like or need to know about a new school. In summarizing the task requirements, the student can demonstrate understanding of the prompt's expectations through a statement such as "I am to write a letter explaining to my cousin what to expect when he changes to my school."

These questions are useful in reading prompts. By posting them in the classroom and following them with each new writing assignment, teachers can help student writers learn to employ automatically and independently these questioning strategies in reading writing assignments.

Vocabulary for Specific Types of Writing

Each kind of writing necessitates a specific type of thinking and composing that is prompted by the vocabulary selected for writing assignments. The following partial glossary may be helpful in understanding the specific type of composing experience prompted by the directions for writing in a CAP writing assignment. While words in the glossary are presented here out of context, they should not be taught in isolation. These terms are meaningful only when used within the context of a writing assignment in which the student uses context, prior experience, and current composing activities to give definition to these words. Many of these terms need to be discussed in reference to the literature or writing models used. For example, the comparison of autobiographical writing with biographical writing can best be understood when actual writings are examined to discover the perspective of the author in relation to the subject and experiences reported. The vocabulary list is not intended for drill and practice but rather for use within the process of daily writing activities.

Analysis: Speculation About Causes or Effects

Causes: what makes something happen

Change: to make something different

Consequence: an effect or result

Convincing: believable

Effects: something brought about by some action or cause; result

Judgment: ability to decide wisely

Reasons: beliefs, motives or causes for an action

Speculate: think, ponder, form theories

Story

Character: a person in a play, story, poem, TV show, etc.

Conflict: a struggle, battle, or fight

Dialogue: a conversation

Episode: any incident or event that is part of a story

Obstacle: something that blocks progress toward a goal

Problem: a confusing or puzzling question or situation that is difficult to solve

Resolution: a solving of a problem; a solution

Report of Information

Details: small pieces of information

Experience: Knowledge or skill gained through direct activity or practice

Facts: something known with certainty

Generalization: something true in most but not in all cases; a general statement

Inform: to let know; to tell

Interpret: to explain or clarify the meaning of

Observation: what can be seen or noticed

Report: an organized telling of information

Summary: a short statement presenting the main points

Problem Solution

Argument: reasons offered for or against something

Beneficial: helpful

Cause: a person or thing that makes something happen

Convince: cause to believe; to persuade

Counterargument: statements offered against an argument

Effect: something brought about by some action or cause

Problem: a confusing situation or question difficult to solve

Reasonable: making sense; possible

Resolve: to solve or make clear

Solution: the answer to a problem

Specific: a detail or fact

Support: to help prove the truth; evidence

Autobiographical Incident

Autobiographical: writing by the person who saw or was involved in the incident

Describe: tell about

Feelings: attitudes, emotions

Incident: a single event occurring during a short period of time (like a matter of minutes, an hour, or at longest a day)

Learning: how you changed in skill or knowledge

Memorable: worth remembering

Narrative action: events in a story

Personal Experience: something that happened to you

Scene: where an event happened

Significance: importance

Firsthand Biography–Sketch

Biography: a story of a person's life written by someone other than the subject of the essay

Importance: having worth, significance, or value

Influence: to change the thoughts, nature, or behavior of another

Qualities: a personal characteristic or trait

Sketch: a brief description

Special (as in a special person): important, close, intimate

Trait: special feature, quality, or characteristic

Viewpoint: opinion or slant, point of view

Evaluation

Convince: to cause one to believe as you do

Criteria: a standard or rule by which a judgment is made

Evaluate: to judge or find the worth of

Evidence: support for a judgment

Example: a sample often used as evidence of a judgment: moral or pattern

Favorite: best-liked

Judgment: one's opinion

Proof: showing that something is true or accurate by evidence

Reasons: explanations of beliefs or actions

Specifics: details

Support: help prove the truth or correctness of

Worth: value

Observational Writing

Admired: liked or appreciated

Describe: tell about, a verbal picture

Happened: took place, occurred

Involve: include as a part

Learning: knowledge gained; information acquired; one's education, knowledge, or skill

Observe: watch, notice, see

Reaction: response, an opposing action

Witnessed: saw, observed, had personal knowledge of

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