
Introduction

This book focuses on teaching writing to visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learners, who usually are not natural writers. Research has established that students of all ages construct knowledge in a variety of ways, based in large part on how their brains process stimuli. The ways that students' minds work also influence how—and how well—they learn to write. Teachers who understand that students respond in different ways to various types of stimuli can differentiate writing instruction according to students' preferred learning styles and thus increase students' success.

Some students process stimuli most effectively using linguistic cues. These students often are early readers and, later on, can be the natural writers in the class, those students who acquire writing competence seemingly without much effort. Other students rely on logical or mathematical cues to discern information and construct understandings. These students also may be able to acquire writing skills with relative ease. Students whose minds work in these linguistic and logical ways generally have the easiest time in school, particularly in academic classes, for the simple reason that most academic teaching is based on using linguistic and logical-mathematical stimuli that match these learning styles.

However, many students do not construct knowledge most effectively in these ways. Visual learners respond most strongly not to information that they read or hear, but to information that they see, such as pictures and patterns. Auditory learners respond to information that they hear, such as spoken language, music, and rhythms. And kinesthetic learners learn most easily through movement and physical activity.

All of that said, of course, no student uses only one mode of response—or learning style—to the exclusion of all others. But from students' early grades onward, teachers can observe how they learn most easily and effectively by noticing students' dominant learning styles, if any. They can observe whether students learn better from reading (linguistic), looking at pictures (visual), listening (auditory), or doing physical activities (kinesthetic). Observant teachers often notice that their visual, auditory, and kinesthetic students

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struggle with learning how to express ideas and concepts in writing. These learners can be “picture smart,” “music smart,” and “body smart,” but they may be challenged in the classroom because instruction and assessment are structured in ways that require performance tasks and reward evidence that learners are “word smart” and “number smart.”

My purpose in this book is to offer a useful instructional perspective and practical strategies that teachers can use to help their visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learners become effective writers. The visual and performing arts draw heavily on these modes of learning and so, for the sake of convenience, I occasionally use the term *artistic mind* in this book to characterize, collectively, the essential mental processes that these students use to construct knowledge, including learning how to write.

Put another way: Writing is most often taught in schools as a linear process, which best suits the linguistic-logical learner. Those who approach writing with an artistic mind-set, however, often approach writing in nonlinear ways. If all learners—including those whose learning styles stress visual, auditory, and kinesthetic strengths—are to be taught to write well, then both linear and nonlinear approaches should be used. It may help to think of standard, linear writing instruction as the freeway: fast and sometimes ill suited to certain vehicles. Writing strategies for the artistic mind often need to take the back road, where there may be more to see and hear. The road will roll through hills and valleys, but the destination—the instructional goal—is the same: the development of effective writing skills.

The seeds of this book were planted by my teaching experiences that now stretch back more than three decades and have periodically germinated in articles and other publications, most notably a monograph that I wrote for Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation, *A Model for Teaching Writing: Process and Product* (1987). In that monograph I attempted to articulate in brief the need for teachers to approach the writing process as a collection of flexible, in some ways idiosyncratic processes—emphasis on the plural. Adopting this view permits teachers to see multiple pathways to writing success for students, an essential view if teachers are truly to address the learning needs of visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learners.

Books that teach writing using linear approaches are available already (see the Resources section for many excellent choices), and so this book is going to focus on nonlinear approaches to teaching writing. To be clear at the outset, this book is not about teaching creative writing, which usually means writing fiction or poetry. Nor is it about teaching personal narratives, although some are included as a basis for personal forms of non-fiction, such as personal-experience essays. This book is about essential, critical, and authentic literacy, forms of writing that demand both basic

writing competence and higher-level thinking. This book is for teachers who want to teach all of the learners in their classrooms how to:

- observe and report their observations in writing,
- synthesize diverse viewpoints in writing,
- frame logical arguments in writing.

Such writing often can and should be creatively enhanced, but that is a secondary goal that follows only after the primary goals have been achieved.

Teachers who adopt strategies that better address the learning needs of artistically minded students will find that they have expanded their repertoire of effective teaching strategies for all students. Imparting new perspectives on teaching and learning will enhance the information-processing capabilities of their word- and number-smart students as well. The strategies in this book can be used at various grades from upper elementary through high school and into college, and many of these strategies also can be adapted for very young writers or for writers with learning disabilities.

Writing is an essential life skill that all students must master to succeed in school and to perform well in their careers. Writing is a core component of cognition. Externally, writing displays the writer's thoughts and provides evidence of learning. Internally, the act of writing helps the writer to form and clarify thoughts and to engage in higher-level cognitive processes, such as analysis and synthesis. It also propels the learner toward deeper reflection about content, process, experience, and mastery.

Clearly important in the context of school success is evidence suggesting that students who write well also perform better than poor writers on other measures of academic competence (e.g., White, 1999). Thus today's high-stakes testing environment in schools further increases the need for all students to learn how to write well. Many local and state competency assessments include writing components. In 2005 the College Board began to require an essay component as part of the revised SAT I examination. That writing test takes 50 to 60 minutes and demands that students write with some complexity in order to be successful.

Teaching Writing to Visual, Auditory, and Kinesthetic Learners should be read as a starting point for expanding the writing curriculum. Incorporating nontraditional instructional strategies will help teachers address the learning needs of artistically minded students. The goal for these students—and all students—is to become effective writers.

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