WRITE to the POINT!

TEACHER'S MANUAL

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TEACHING SUGGESTIONS

In any school, the most demanding teaching assignment is composition. Aside from the typically overwhelming reading load that comes with the job, the major difficulty is that writing is a skill that must be practiced and developed. Your students arrive that first day of class with individual differences, aptitudes, and attitudes that could mystify the most talented and organized of teachers. A course outline that worked beautifully with last year's class may be a dismal failure with your newest group of students.

In spite of the fact that lesson plans are best left in the hands of the individual classroom teacher or a departmental committee that knows the needs of the students involved, the overworked teacher of composition may appreciate a few concise suggestions.

Application and Sequence

Write to the Point! is recommended as the basis for a one-semester, college preparatory composition course, or for the composition portion of a full-year, advanced language arts course.

It may be used in the order you find most effective, but the author's intention is that the first four chapters should serve as a foundation for the rest of the text. Studying each chapter in order will be appropriate for most students, but if special circumstances suggest another approach, trust your own training, experience, and professional judgment.

Many teachers of college preparatory composition courses would save a unit on persuasive writing for the end of the course, the theory being that the student could then put to use all the forms—definition, classification, comparison and contrast, cause and effect—that have been practiced earlier. This text, however, is based on two premises: (1) in the sense that writers want readers to share their opinions, almost all essay writing is persuasive, and (2) students will develop strength in their writing from the sense of structure and discipline learned in persuasive writing. The text then builds on that discipline and structure with additional forms and specific purposes.

Whatever the specific writing task, when the writer creates a thesis and selects and organizes information to support that thesis, his or her writing has a built-in advantage—purpose and organization.

Structure of the Student's Text

Write to the Point! contains several features to help students develop and master writing skills.

- The Checklist for Writers is used at key points in the text to highlight essential information. When appropriate, the Checklist simplifies, organizes, and stresses ideas that the students can use to develop essential skills. For instance, one Checklist presents questions the writer can answer to develop effective description. At other times, it provides students with step-by-step guides to lead them through various writing tasks. An example is the Checklist that leads the student writer through three steps to writing an introduction.

- The Section Summaries condense pages of material into one or two paragraphs that can be used to easily review basic concepts. The summaries will help students retain what they have learned, and you can use them to point out the most essential information of each section.
- Student-written compositions are used to model every major writing assignment, and discussion questions lead students through an analysis of each of those compositions. The questions point out strengths and weaknesses in the essays, and invite students to consider alternative approaches that could have been used.

Schedule

The amount of time you devote to each chapter of *Write to the Point!* will depend on the needs of your class and the amount of supplementary material you choose to bring into the class. A tentative schedule for a one semester course might look like this:

Chapter 1.	The Persuasive Edge	3 weeks
2.	The Alpha and the Omega	
3.	Improvement Is the New Goal	
4.	Finding Your Writing Voice	
5.	Cause and Effect	2 weeks
6.	Definition	〃
7.	The Classification Essay	〃
8.	Comparison and Contrast	〃
9.	The Inductive Argument	〃
10.	Refutation	〃
11.	The Research Paper	3 weeks
Total		**18 weeks**

Of course, many variations are possible. Depending on your class, you may decide to spend two weeks or four weeks on Chapters 1 through 4. The research paper may require four weeks of class time. The number of days spent on Chapters 5 through 10 can be adjusted to accommodate whatever changes you think necessary. The time periods suggested, however, have been tested and found reasonable for most students.

The student is asked to write a major essay at the end of Chapter 2 and for each of Chapters 5 through 10. The following sample schedule, adjusted to meet the needs of your class, could be used with each of those chapters.

Day 1. Begin new unit with introductory discussion, assignment of vocabulary list, and reading.

2. Discussion, vocabulary, and activities.

3. Discussion, vocabulary, and activities.

4. Essay assignment and brainstorming activities.

5. Students write a thesis statement, an outline, and a plan for development of essay. Share and discuss in class.

6. Teacher returns essays from previous chapter and discusses them privately with students. Students make necessary revisions.

7, 8, 9. Writing laboratory. First draft will be due on day 7 or 8. Teacher will be conducting informal conferences with students. Students should be exploring ideas, sketching, planning, drafting, reading, reflecting, revising, and sharing with other students. The number of days devoted to these activities can be adjusted to meet the needs of your class, but three seems minimal.

10. Unit test. Final copy of essay will be due on the following day.

Grades

Assigning grades is never easy, and when you are dealing with material as subjective as a student's writing, the responsibility becomes even more onerous. Students will appreciate it, and your job will be easier, if you tell them ahead of time how grades will be assigned. Grades will probably result from evaluation of essays, quizzes, unit tests, homework assignments, class participation, and the use of independent work time in class. Consider the following scale as a starting point, and adjust it to fit your own situation.

Major essays	approximately 60%
Quizzes, tests, and homework	approximately 25%
Class participation and use of independent work time	approximately 15%

Evaluation of Essays

Evaluation of major essays will be easier and more productive if you develop an evaluation sheet that allows you to judge each essay on specific criteria as well as make marginal comments to the student.

The following sample evaluation sheets can be adapted to your own requirements. You may choose to use ideas from several to create the evaluation sheet that works best for you and your class.

Sample Evaluation Sheet 1

Student _____

Assignment _____

Date _____

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Unsatisfactory
Organization					
Purpose					
Material					
Expression					
Mechanics					

Final Score _____

Sample Evaluation Sheet 2

Student _____

Assignment _____

Date _____

	5	4	3	2	1
Introduction					
Thesis					
Topic sentences					
Conclusion					
Persuasiveness					
Expression					
Organization					
Sentence variety					
Mechanics					

Total Evaluation _____

Sample Evaluation Sheet 3

Student _____

Assignment _____

Date _____

Above Average ..... Needs Improvement

	5	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**
Introduction					
Thesis					
Support 1					
Support 2					
Support 3					
Additional Support?					
Conclusion					
Organization					

Comments:

Total Points Received _____

Sample Evaluation Sheet 4

Student _____ Assignment _____ Date _____

1. Purpose (10%) Your Points _____
- A. Clear, well-narrowed thesis
- B. Language, tone appropriate
- C. Body of essay stays on topic
- D. Body of essay fully develops thesis
- E. Shows awareness of reader

2. Supporting Evidence (30%) Your Points _____
- A. Topic sentences clearly stated
- B. Topic sentences clearly related to thesis
- C. Use concrete details (quantity, quality)
- D. Complete explanations
- E. Independent ideas

3. Organization (15%) Your Points _____
- A. Effective introduction
- B. Well structured paragraphs
- C. Logical progression of ideas
- D. Clear transitions
- E. Effective conclusion

4. Expression (15%) Your Points _____
- A. Concise language
- B. Logical, unambiguous sentences
- C. Variety of sentence structures
- D. Accurate and appropriate word choice
- E. Appropriate level of formality

5. Writing Process (15%) Your Points _____
- A. Exploring ideas
- B. Outlining, note taking, planning
- C. Time spent drafting
- D. Revising at all levels (words, sentences, paragraphs)
- E. Sees revising as ongoing process

6. Mechanics and Usage (15%) Your Points _____

One error per 100 words is the minimum standard. In practice this means there will be a 1% penalty for each error.

Total points possible _____
Total points earned _____
Points deducted for lateness _____

Final Score _____

Reducing the Paper Load

As a typical English teacher, you probably meet with 125 or more students every day. Each time your classes hand in a major essay, you face an unenviable task. Giving the work of each of those 125 students just ten minutes of your time, you will need almost 21 hours to evaluate their writing—unless you add a ten-minute break for a cup of coffee.

Add the hours necessary for checking daily assignments, reading journals, correcting tests, and trying to keep up with professional reading, and you have what seems like an impossible job. If you are going to survive, you need to be as efficient as possible. Here are some suggestions for giving yourself the time to evaluate papers thoroughly when it is necessary.

1. You do not have to read everything each student writes. Much of a student's work is preliminary and is not intended to be read by you or anyone else. You may be able to help at several points in the writing process, but the student does not need your reaction to every step. And, at some times, peer reaction may be both more effective and more efficient.

2. Use student revision groups. Besides giving you more time, peer revision offers several advantages to the student writer. For too many students, the teacher is the only audience they have ever written for and, as a teacher, you are not a typical audience. The opinions of their peers are very important to students; as a result, the writer who is going to be critiqued is highly motivated.

   Peer revision also offers benefits to those students reading others' work. They will see several different ways an assignment can be handled and are certain to exchange methods for developing ideas and dealing with organization. Here are some suggestions for organizing student revision groups.

   a. Limit the groups to three or four students.

   b. Demonstrate the kinds of response students should give each other. It may be worthwhile to lead a class discussion on the kinds of response that students think they would find most helpful.

   c. All students must be treated with respect. The way you model the demonstration of proper responses will go a long way toward avoiding problems.

   d. As students become more comfortable with the idea of sharing their work with others, they will conduct their own informal peer revision conferences. Encourage the practice. If students form their own groups, the results will almost always be positive.

   e. Unless a group of students does not work well together, maintain the same groups through several writing assignments so they become more comfortable with each other. If some groups do not work well together, rearrange them. Some groups may have too great a variety of writers, and some groups just waste time. Either situation justifies a change.

3. You do not have to evaluate all writing the same way. For example, if the purpose of an assignment is for students to write an essay in which they develop and explain their own views about an abstract idea, you might restrict your comments to how well a student uses different methods of definition.

4. You can do much of the reading in class before the papers are completed. If you conduct your class as a writing laboratory or workshop, you will already be very familiar with the students' work and, while the essays you are evaluating will be much more polished, you will be able to read and comment quickly and effectively.

5. You can preface your evaluation with a student's self-evaluation. This is not self-evaluation in the sense that the student determines his or her own grade, but a method of letting you know where the student is most likely to need direction. Prepare a form that is appropriate for the assignment. Questions such as the following ask the student to make specific comments about his or her paper.

   a. What do you think are the strongest points of this paper? Why? What part do you like best? Why?

   b. Where do you still feel dissatisfied about this paper? Why? What part gave you the most difficulty? Why?

   c. Would you like me to make suggestions for rewording any part of this paper? If so, circle that section and write "RW?" in the margin.

   d. In the process of writing, you probably considered putting some things into this paper and later changed your mind. What did you leave out? Why?

   e. What did you learn from writing this paper? Indicate anything new you tried to accomplish with this assignment.

6. You can use student proofreading groups. Having students proofread each others' papers offers several advantages besides reducing the time you need to point out mechanical problems. You may have heard yourself say, "I never learned _____ so well as when I had to teach it." By encouraging students to explain the errors they find, you put them in the role of teacher, and they will remember the ideas they discuss. Students will get into arguments and raise questions of usage that never arise when they depend on the teacher to find usage problems. Have students use the proofreading symbols at the end of *Write to the Point!*

7. You can schedule a conference with each student. Strictly speaking, this may not save you a lot of time, but it won't take longer than writing comments on the paper. And it will be much more effective because you can ask questions of the student and discuss the essay rather than just react to it.

   Your own schedule will determine how easily and how often you can schedule conferences with each student, but it is very important that the student have a chance to discuss his or her work with you. Even if you have to use class time to do so, try to schedule several conferences during the year.

The First Day

You have undoubtedly found that classes do not get off to a good start when you plan a long lecture for the first day. There is always enough official, beginning-of-the-semester busywork to fill fifteen or twenty minutes of class time. That comes very close to filling the average student's listening quota for one class period. Use the remaining time for an activity that engages the students' minds and teaches them a useful skill.

Brainstorming is an exceptionally effective method for stimulating creative thinking and producing new ideas. Your students should be given two or three practice sessions sometime during the first few weeks of class. The first day of class would be a good opportunity to start.

Since this is very likely an early experience with brainstorming, limit discussion to factual topics so that there is no temptation to get sidetracked by differences of opinion. Pick one of the following topics and ask the students to suggest everything they can think of that would be appropriate material for:

- Describing baseball—"What aspects of the game should be included in a complete description of baseball?"
- Describing a current event—"What significant facts should be mentioned if you want someone to understand _____?"
- Describing the uses to which the United States government puts tax money—"What programs, activities, and needs do our tax dollars support?"

For this activity, you should act as recorder, but have the students jot down the information for themselves so they will have a record if you run out of time or space. At the chalkboard or on an overhead projector, write down everything mentioned, even suggestions that you recognize as weak ones. Poor ideas may lead to worthwhile ones if the mind is allowed to roam freely. Make the point that, when brainstorming, one delays judgments until after all the possibilities have been exhausted.

When students have suggested all they can, ask them to suggest ways to group the material you have recorded. Do not settle for the first arrangement, even though it will likely be a reasonable one. The point is to examine different options so students can make the best choices. Continue to act as recorder, arranging and rearranging the notes. Also, if students come up with additional ideas, be sure to add these to the original list.

As the third step, ask students to write a one-sentence statement of the main point they would want to make if they actually wrote a paper on this topic. Each student should draft his or her own sentence. Read several of them aloud. Choose one, or combine the best elements of several statements, and write the resulting sentence on the chalkboard.

You may want to finish by discussing which items from the original list the students might want to drop after considering their statement of the main point. Because the students may later think of new relationships that could suggest additional possibilities, even the rejected ideas should not be erased. Cross them out, but do not erase anything.

Students will recognize the value of letting their minds soar. Throughout the course, take time for brainstorming when the opportunity arises. There will be many occasions when students need the advantage of free association to fill the gaps in their thinking. "Let's see if we can think of some ideas that would help Jenni with her essay" will not only help Jenni but also give the class valuable practice in producing useful ideas.

Outside Reading

Students can learn a good deal about writing when they read articles of opinion from current newspapers and magazines. Also, if you set up a schedule requiring one outside reading per week, by the time they need a research topic or are looking for opinions to refute at the end of Chapter 10, students will have plenty of material to draw from.

It is also a good idea to focus the students' reading by having them choose, at the beginning of the semester, several general topics for investigation. For instance, a student may decide that he or she wants to learn what professional writers are saying about an international question, the Supreme Court, or new uses of computers in education. The student's list might expand later, but developing a specific reading plan will help keep the assignment from becoming a random, last-minute chore completed sloppily. You may want to make one of the first homework assignments a list of five or six topics each student wants to read about during the semester. The following form can be used to keep track of progress.

Outside Reading Plan

NAME _____ DATE _____

	Title	**Magazine**	**Date**
Topic 1: _____			
1st article:			
2nd article:			
3nd article:			
Topic 2: _____			
1st article:			
2nd article:			
3nd article:			
Topic 3: _____			
1st article:			
2nd article:			
3nd article:			

Topic 4: _____

1st article:
2nd article:
3nd article:

Topic 5: _____

1st article:
2nd article:
3nd article:

Make the form as long as you like.

Show students how to use the *Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature* to find articles on their topics. Assign a specific time each week when the assignment will be due, and supply students with a form like the following.

OUTSIDE READING

NAME _____

DATE _____

1. Magazine
2. Title of article
3. Author
4. Number of pages
5. Publication date
6. Subject

Answer all questions in full sentences.

1. What is the author's opinion about the subject? Be specific.

2. What arguments, or reasons, did the author use to try to persuade the reader to his or her point of view?