

The Writing Revolution

A GUIDE TO ADVANCING THINKING THROUGH
WRITING IN ALL SUBJECTS AND GRADES

Judith C Hochman
Natalie Wexler

FOREWORD BY Doug Lemov



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PRAISE FOR *THE WRITING REVOLUTION*

"The writing strategies discussed in this book are life-changing for students who are exposed to them. A must-read for educational leaders, teachers, and parents . . . giving students the power of the pen to write their way to a successful future."

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"Every once in a while, you find an outstanding method that is clear, makes sense, and is embraced by teachers and students alike, and what's most important, works! This is how I would describe *The Writing Revolution*. I have observed it in action, and I have been encouraging teachers to learn about it and use it. Students who are engaged in this find that not only their writing skills but also their thinking and reading skills improve as well."

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"As someone who has dedicated his life to writing and reading, I enthusiastically endorse the method so lucidly presented in *The Writing Revolution*. This book will give our nation's students a solid writing foundation because it shows teachers how to teach, not just assign, writing."

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"*The Writing Revolution* offers teachers across the content areas ground-breaking guidance on how to develop *all* students into clear, coherent young writers."

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instructional coach in the District of Columbia

“As an author, I am deeply concerned about the vast number of students who cannot express themselves with clarity in their writing. *The Writing Revolution* is grounded in research, has been proven effective by decades of classroom application, and is impeccable in its logistics.”

—**Mary Higgins Clark**, best-selling author

“*The Writing Revolution* offers a clear, practical, research-based methodology for instruction. From teacher to administrator, all educators will benefit from this book. The authors demystify the teaching of writing so that we may better fill the world with strong writers.”

—**Esther Klein Friedman**, executive director,
Literacy and Academic Intervention Services,
New York City Department of Education

“The practices and approach laid out within these covers work. We had the good fortune to discover Dr. Hochman’s approach in 1988 through our son, who was her student at Windward. Since then, we’ve taught writing using the Hochman Method to elementary school reluctant writers in Harlem, adolescents studying the trades in Vermont, community college students struggling to put words to paper, and to hundreds of teachers baffled by how to improve their students’ writing. We celebrate the arrival of this lucid guide to making every student an articulate, confident writer.”

—**David and Meredith Liben**,
Student Achievement Partners and ReadingDoneRight.org

“*The Writing Revolution* provides concrete, evidence-based strategies for building writing fluency. It’s a godsend for classroom teachers who are intent on giving their students the tools to communicate in a rich and engaging way.”

—**Barbara Davidson**, executive director,
Knowledge Matters Campaign

“*The Writing Revolution* provides an excellent framework for teaching writing to all students. Elementary, middle, high school, and college educators can improve their instruction by applying strategies set forth in this book. This book clearly demonstrates how to use spoken language to support writing, in turn, supporting critical thinking by students across *all* content areas. It’s a great tool for supporting college and career readiness standards outlined in the Common Core State Standards, a timely and important need for all educators.”

—**Anthony D. Koutsoftas**, associate professor,
Department of Speech Language Pathology,
School of Health and Medical Sciences,
Seton Hall University

The Writing Revolution

A Guide to Advancing Thinking Through Writing in All Subjects and Grades

Judith C. Hochman and Natalie Wexler

Foreword by Doug Lemov



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The faculty and staff members at New Dorp High School on Staten Island, New York, under the outstanding leadership of Deirdre DeAngelis, provided us with an unforgettable experience. When Principal DeAngelis adopted the writing method in 2008, she began a partnership between TWR and the school's faculty that proved life-changing for all of us—and for many of New Dorp's students. The school, once failing, has now been honored as a New York City Department of Education Showcase School.

The teachers and administrators of the District of Columbia Public School system, which undertook a multiyear pilot project with us beginning in 2013, taught us much about implementing the method in a large school district. We were welcomed into many wonderful classrooms and saw some amazing teaching. Every school visit was a learning experience. We would like to thank, in particular, the following district- and school-level administrators and instructional coaches for their support and encouragement: Lauren Castillo, Corinne Colgan, Kimberly Douglas, Louise Fairley, Lauren Johnson, Jessica Matthews Meth, Gwendolyn Payton, Brian Pick, Mary Anne Stinson, and Lauren Weaver.

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About the Authors

Judith C. Hochman is the founder and chief academic officer of The Writing Revolution, a not-for-profit organization. She was the superintendent of the Greenburgh Graham Union Free School District; head of The Windward School in White Plains, New York; and the founder of the Windward Teacher Training Institute. Dr. Hochman has taught in mainstream and special education settings and has master's degrees in special education and psychology as well as a doctorate of education in curriculum and instruction, all from Teachers College, Columbia University. Dr. Hochman lectures and presents workshops and courses for educational organizations, colleges and universities, and public and independent schools throughout the United States. She is the author of two books and several articles on writing instruction.

Natalie Wexler is an education journalist who serves on the board of trustees of The Writing Revolution. Her articles and essays have appeared in a number of publications, including the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, and for several years she was the education editor of Greater Greater Washington, a news website and communal blog in Washington, DC. She has also been a volunteer reading and writing tutor in high-poverty DC schools. Before turning to education journalism, Wexler worked as a lawyer, a legal historian, and a freelance writer and essayist on a number of topics. She is the author of three novels and holds a BA in English history and literature from Harvard University, an MA in English history from the University of Sussex, and a JD from the University of Pennsylvania Law School.

*To Toni-Ann Vroom and Dina Zoleo,
for believing in the method
and for being invaluable partners in bringing it to others*

Foreword

A few years ago our family spent a couple of months in London. My kids were 13, 11, and 6 at the time, and I had work there so we decided to take the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to live in one of the world's great capitals. We paid regular visits to the British Museum, combed through the food stalls at Borough Market, and traced on foot the remains of the city's medieval wall. There were day trips to Bath and Cambridge. We even had a *local*—pub, that is, which really should go without saying.

It was an incredible experience, thanks in no small part to what I learned at a lunch I had with one of the authors of this book before we left. I'd read an article about Judith Hochman's work at New Dorp High School in *The Atlantic* a year or two before, and it had stayed with me. Hochman espoused embedding writing instruction in content. She thought sentences were overlooked and rarely taught. She thought syntax—"syntactic control"—was the link to unlock the connection between better writing and better reading. She believed in the power of deliberate practice to build reading skills. Her work was technical and granular. And the results were hard to ignore. It was the kind of thing I was drawn to.

A friend had connected us and I drove down to meet her—with what soon revealed itself as typical graciousness she had invited me to her home near New York City—and the result was one of the most memorable days of my working life. I remember scratching notes furiously on page after

page of my notebook, trying to capture everything she observed—about writing, its connection to reading and thinking, and about why so many kids struggled to learn it. Over and over Hochman would hit on an idea that had been swirling in my head in inchoate wisps and put it into a clear, logical formulation of practice. Here was the idea you were fumbling with, described perfectly; here was how you'd make it work.

I couldn't write fast enough, but I remember thinking that when I got home, I would read everything she'd written. This, however, turned out to be the only disappointment. There wasn't, until now, any place where the ideas Hochman had talked about were written down in one cohesive place for a reader like me. I was left with the observations in my notebook, the hope that Hochman would someday write the book you are now holding, and her sentence-expansion activities.

It was these activities that were the gift that transformed our trip to London. Hochman had spent about 20 minutes riffing on the idea the day we met. The sentence was the building block of writing and thinking, the "complete thought," we agreed, but if you looked at the complete thoughts students produced in their writing, they were too often wooden, repetitive, inflexible. If the task of wrestling ideas into written words was to memorialize thinking, students—at least most of them—did not often have control of a sufficient number of syntactic forms and tools to capture and express complex thoughts. They could not express two ideas happening at once, with one predominating over the other. They could not express a thought interrupted by a sudden alternative thesis. Their ideas were poor on paper because their sentences could not capture, connect, and, ultimately, develop them. That last part was the most damning of all. One way to generate complex ideas is to write them into being—often slowly adding and reworking and refining, as I find myself doing now as I draft and revise this foreword for the 10th or 20th or 100th time. Because students could not say what they meant, and because, as a result, they did not practice capturing and connecting complex ideas with precision in writing, they had fewer complex ideas. Or they had ideas like the sentences they wrote: predictable, neither compound nor complex. What might have been a skein of thought was instead a litter of short broken threads, each with a subject-verb-object construction.

Hochman's solution was regular intentional exercises to expand students' syntactic range. You could ask them to practice expanding their sentences in specific and methodical ways and they'd get better at it. Crucially, she pointed out, this must be done in a content-rich environment because

“the content drives the rigor.” Sentences needed ideas pressing outward from inside them to stretch and expand their limits. Only rich content gave them a reason to seek and achieve nuance.

One example of a Hochman sentence expansion exercise was called *because, but, so*. The idea was deceptively simple: You gave students a sentence stem and then asked them to expand it three different ways—with the common conjunctions *because, but, and so*. This would help them to see each sentence as constantly expandable. And it would, as Hochman writes in this book, “prod them to think critically and deeply about the content they were studying—far more so than if you simply asked them to write a sentence in answer to an open-ended question.” It would build their ability to conjoin ideas with fluidity. It would help them to understand, through constant theme and variation, the broader concepts of subordination and coordination.

I want to pause here to digress on the seemingly underwhelming concepts of coordination and subordination. I will ask you to stifle your yawn as I acknowledge that they are easy to dismiss—ancient, faintly risible, uttered once long ago by acolytes of sentence diagramming in the era of chalk dust. They smack of grammar-for-grammar’s sake, and almost nobody cares about that. Teachers instead seek mostly to simply make sure the sentences work and dispense with the parsing of parts. It is so much simpler to tell kids to go with “sounds right” (an idea that inherently discriminates against those for whom the sounds of language are not happily ingrained by luck or privilege) or to make the odd episodic correction and not worry about the principle at work.

But coordination and subordination are in fact deeply powerful principles worth mastering. They describe the ways that ideas are connected, the nuances that yoke disparate thoughts together. It is the connections as much as the ideas that make meaning. To master conjunctions is to be able to express that two ideas are connected but that one is more important than the other, that one is dependent on the other, that one is contingent on the other, that the two ideas exist in contrast or conflict. Mastering that skill is immensely important not just to writing but to reading. Students who struggle with complex text can usually understand the words and clauses of a sentence; it is the piecing together of the interrelationships among them that most often poses the problem. They understand the first half of the sentence but miss the cue that questions its veracity in the second half. And so without mastery of the syntax of relationships—which is what coordination and subordination are—the sentence devolves—for weak readers—into meaninglessness.

For weeks I reflected on the power of these simple activities for teachers and students, but my reflections were not limited to my role as an educator. As a father I was intrigued as well, and I suppose this is the truest test of an educational idea.

Fast forward to London some months later, where I found myself for three months essentially homeschooling the Lemov children, those regular and long-suffering subjects of a thousand of their father's teaching ideas. To keep them writing and thinking I had them keep journals, and in those journals I found myself using and adapting Hochman's exercises. They were the perfect tidy-wrap summation to a long day out exploring.

Here are some early *because, but, so* exercises I rediscovered a few weeks ago in my then-11-year-old daughter's journal.

I gave her the sentence stem: "The Great Fire of London burned 4/5 of the city . . ."

She wrote:

The Great Fire of London burned 4/5 of the city, because at the time, citizens didn't have the knowledge or equipment to stop the fire before it spread.

The Great Fire of London burned 4/5 of the city, but London survived and thrived.

The Great Fire of London burned 4/5 of the city, so many people had to live in temporary homes until the city was rebuilt.

After a visit to the Museum of Natural History she wrote for the sentence stem, "The length of T-Rex's arms is surprising . . .":

The length of T-Rex's arms is surprising, but this may have been a mid-evolutionary stage and had they lived for another million years their arms might have disappeared altogether.

A few weeks later I gave her this sentence stem: "Farleigh Hungerford Castle is now in ruins . . ."

She wrote:

Farleigh Hungerford Castle is now in ruins because of weathering and age.

Farleigh Hungerford Castle is now in ruins, but it is arguably even more interesting now (while in ruins) than ever before.

Farleigh Hungerford Castle is now in ruins, so you are able to use some imagination when envisioning the castle at its peak.

We made these exercises a part of our daily lives, and as we did so their confidence and the range of syntactical forms my kids used in expanding their sentences grew, as did the ideas they developed and encoded in memory.

Another sentence-expansion activity Hochman proposed to me in her living room—and describes at long last in this outstanding book—is deliberate practice using appositives, brief, sometimes parenthetical phrases that, like the phrase you are reading, rename or elaborate on a noun in a sentence, and which can be surprisingly complex. Mastering this idea enables students to expand ideas within a sentence, adding detail, specificity, or nuance in a manner that subordinates the additional information to the overall idea of the sentence. With appositives mastered, students can link more things into the dance of interrelationships within a sentence, reducing the redundancy and disconnectedness of multiple repetitive sentences, and the Lemov kids reflected on their travels through the music of appositives as well.

After a visit to Cambridge and its historic university I asked them to use Hochman's appositive exercise with the sentence: "In Cambridge the 'backs' are in fact the 'fronts.'" You may not understand that sentence at all—it refers to the fact that when you punt down the River Cam, you face what are called the backs of the historic colleges, but this name is ironic because the buildings were mostly built to be seen from the river sides—the backs. My daughter's sentence expansion captures this with a smooth elegance that supersedes the laborious description you just read. She wrote:

In Cambridge, a small town with a world-renowned university, the backs, the sides of the colleges that face away from the street and therefore onto the river, are in fact the elaborate entrances, the fronts.

I put the appositives she added in italics. Note here a few things that are interesting about this sentence from a teaching and learning perspective:

1. It includes three different appositives, which my daughter used to expand her description of Cambridge, turning it from a sentence whose meaning was locked in code—what the "backs" and "fronts" meant is very specific to Cambridge—and unlocked it for readers less familiar with the subject. This form of explication is common to papers written in academic discourse and is a key academic skill. But even so the three appositives are surprisingly complex.
2. The second appositive, which explains what the phrase "the backs" means, is in fact a compound appositive. First she includes the idea

that the backs are the sides of Cambridge's colleges that face away from the street. The phrase stands up as an appositive by itself, but then she adds—via subordination—a second appositive explaining that the backs are also the sides of the buildings that face the river. Necessity is the mother of invention. In her effort to explain what she knows and enrich the sentence sufficiently she's expanded her range, experimenting with a doubly complex form of appositive.

3. The third example is even more interesting. In it, my daughter has reversed the common order of appositive formation. Usually the noun in a sentence is followed by an appositive phrase that expands on it. But here she has instead put the appositive in front of the noun: the sides of the colleges that face away from the street and therefore onto the river, are in fact *the elaborate entrances, the fronts*. She has flipped the form and is again experimenting with her growing proficiency. No grammar lesson in the world could socialize her to understand and apply compound appositives and inverted appositives, but there she was within just a few weeks crafting carefully wrought sentences.

As our time in London went on I began experimenting with new sentence-expansion activities, and they became a bit of an adventure for my kids—could they express an idea that mattered and also meet the challenges of construction I set for them?

Could they, after visiting Kew Gardens, write a sentence about medicinal plants, starting with *surprisingly* and another sentence using the word *medicinal* and some form of the word *extract* (i.e., extracting, extraction)? Could they write a one-sentence description of the view from Primrose Hill starting *standing atop* but *not* using the name Primrose Hill?

In this sense our time in London was an exploration of the power of several themes that you will find constantly referred to in this book. Hochman and Wexler's study of these themes will be immensely useful to you as an educator, I believe.

The first theme is the idea that if we want students to be great writers we have to be willing to sometimes teach writing through intentional exercises. Writing responds to deliberate practice, and this concept is demonstrably different from mere repetition of an activity, which, as Hochman explains, is how many schools attempt to teach writing. Let me restate that in the plainest terms: Merely repeating an activity is insufficient to get you better at it. This is why you are still as poor a driver today as you were when you were 24. You drive to work every morning without intentional focus on a specific aspect of your craft. You don't get feedback. You don't

even know what the skills of driving are really. And so you never get better. You get worse, in fact.

Research—particularly that of psychologist Anders Ericsson—tells us that for practice to improve skills, it has to have a specific and focused goal and must gradually link together a series of smaller goals to create linked skills. It must also be structured in awareness of cognitive load theory—it has to be difficult, to pose a real challenge but not be so difficult that learners engage in random, non-productive guessing to solve problems and not so difficult that the brain shuts down. As cognitive scientist Daniel Willingham points out, the brain learns best when it is challenged in a manageable amount. Finally deliberate practice requires all-in focus, and that is maximized in a short and intense burst. This book's proposal of sequences of adaptable high-quality exercises that can allow for deliberate practice should be adopted immediately by nearly every school.

Second is the idea that writing, thinking, and reading are indelibly linked. They are the three tasks of idea formation and so there is far-reaching power for all of these domains in focusing on the craft of formation. "I write," Joan Didion famously observed, "to know what I think." Related then is the idea that revision is not especially separable from writing. This much I know as a professional writer: As soon as this sentence emerges on your laptop screen you are planning its revision, and helping students to master this hidden phase of writing is necessary to ensuring that students develop refined ideas, not just hasty first-blush ones. This book's study of revision's wherefores and whys will be invaluable to schools.

Third is the idea that there is a scope and sequence to all this. The numinous task of writing can in fact be taught step-by-step with a bit of intentionality if you have Hochman's wisdom and knowledge to guide you. Now you don't have to invent it. The tasks and activities are outlined and organized for you here. You can move directly to execution.

Fourth is the idea of *embedded in content*. Writing is a learning activity as much or more than a discrete subject. It operates in synergy with ideas—the need to express them is after all the reason for being for what is otherwise an unnatural and artificial activity. This book will help you to make every classroom in your school "writing intensive" and therefore learning intensive. If I could wave a magic wand over America's schools and cause one change that would drive the most demonstrable improvement to learning and achievement I would almost certainly wave that wand and conjure up small bursts of intense, reflective, high-quality writing in every class period or every hour across America's schools.

Perhaps last is my own lesson from London. That writing, when taught well, is a joy. You build something real and enduring every time, and this is a source of pleasure. As is the unexpected form it takes. Successful writing gives its practitioner the mystery and satisfaction of constant invention and construction. When you look at the page and wonder, “Now where did that idea come from?” you know you are doing it right; you know your mastery of the craft itself is now guiding you. In that sense this is a magical book, one that can help you achieve a sea change in the minds of the students in your classrooms.

Doug Lemov

Doug Lemov trains educators at Uncommon Schools, the nonprofit school management organization he helped found. He has also authored *Teach Like a Champion* (now in its 2.0 version) and has coauthored the companion *Field Guide*, *Reading Reconsidered*, and *Practice Perfect*.

Throughout the book we've included student writing samples. Some of these samples are from actual students (under pseudonyms or first names only), and others were created by The Writing Revolution staff members. Some educator and student names have been changed, and in other cases, and where noted, we've used real names with the individual's blessing. Some anecdotes and classroom examples, although based on actual experience, incorporate invented characters and events.

Introduction

How to Lead a Writing Revolution in Your Classroom—and Why You Need One

When Monica entered high school, her writing skills were minimal. After repeating first grade and getting more than 100 hours of tutoring in elementary school, she'd managed to learn to read well enough to get by, and she was comfortable with math. But writing seemed beyond her reach.

During her freshman year at New Dorp, a historically low-performing high school on Staten Island, Monica's history teacher asked her to write an essay on Alexander the Great. "I think Alexander the Great was one of the best military leaders," Monica wrote. Her entire response consisted of six simple sentences, one of which didn't make sense.

An actual essay, Monica said later, "wasn't going to happen. It was like, well, I got a sentence down. What now?"

Monica's mother, who had spent many frustrating years trying to help her daughter improve her academic performance, was equally skeptical about Monica's ability to write an essay. "It just didn't seem like something Monica could ever do."¹

Unfortunately, Monica is far from alone. Across the country—and especially in schools serving students from low-income families and English language learners—countless students have similar problems expressing themselves clearly and coherently in writing. On nationwide tests, only about 25% of students are able to score at a proficient level in writing.²

And yet expository writing—the kind of writing that explains and informs—is essential for success in school and the workplace. Students

who can't write at a competent level struggle in college. With the advent of e-mail and the Internet, an increasing number of jobs require solid writing skills. That's true even of many jobs—such as being a paramedic—that people may not think of as involving writing. No matter what path students choose in life, the ability to communicate their thoughts in writing in a way that others can easily understand is crucial.

The Problem: Assigning Writing but Not Teaching It

The problem is not that students like Monica are incapable of learning to write well. Rather, the problem is that American schools haven't been teaching students how to write. Teachers may have assigned writing, but they haven't explicitly taught it in a careful sequence of logical steps, beginning at the sentence level.

That's not the fault of the teachers: In the vast majority of cases, their training didn't include instruction in how to teach writing. The assumption has been that if students read enough, they'll simply pick up writing skills, through a kind of osmosis. But writing is the hardest thing we ask students to do, and the evidence is clear that very few students become good writers on their own. Many students—even at the college level—have difficulty constructing a coherent sentence, let alone a fluid, cohesive **essay**. If you're reading this book, chances are that at least some of your students, and perhaps most, fall into that category.

To be effective, writing instruction should start in elementary school. But when students do get a chance to write in elementary school, they're often encouraged to write at length too soon, sometimes at a furious pace. They don't learn how to construct interesting and grammatically correct sentences first, and they aren't encouraged to plan or outline before they write. The idea is that later on they'll refine their writing, under the teacher's guidance, bringing coherence and—perhaps—correct grammar and punctuation to what they've produced. But after getting feedback, students may be reluctant to rewrite a multipage essay that they've already worked on for hours. And teachers, confronted by page after page of incoherent, error-riddled writing, may not know where to begin.

When students get to middle school or high school, it's assumed that they've already learned the basics of writing. As many secondary teachers know, that assumption has little to do with reality. But rather than beginning with teaching the fundamental skills their students lack—by, say, guiding students through the process of writing well-crafted

sentences—teachers feel pressured to have their students meet grade-level expectations and produce multi-paragraph essays.

High school teachers are also likely to ask students to write analytically about the content of the courses they're taking. But many students have written nothing except narratives in elementary and middle school, often about their personal experiences. That kind of writing doesn't prepare them for the demands of high school, college, or the workforce.

In recent years, with the advent of the Common Core and the revamping of many states' standards, teachers at almost all grade levels have been expected to have students write not just narratives but also informative and argumentative essays. But there's been little reliable guidance on how to teach students those skills.³ The writing standards tell teachers where their students should end up. But what teachers need is a road map that tells them how to get there.

The Writing Revolution (TWR) offers just such a road map. It provides a clear, coherent, evidence-based method of instruction that you can use no matter what subject or grade level you teach. The method has demonstrated, over and over, that it can turn weak writers like Monica into strong ones by focusing students' writing practice on specific techniques that match their needs and providing them with prompt and clear feedback. Insurmountable as the writing challenges faced by many students may seem, TWR can make a dramatic difference.

Beyond Writing: How Writing Instruction Improves Students' Reading, Speaking, and Thinking

As important as it is for students to learn to write well, it's not the only reason to teach writing. When teachers embed explicit writing instruction in the content of the curriculum—no matter the subject area—they see their students' academic abilities blossom. When students have the opportunity to learn TWR strategies and practice them through carefully scaffolded activities, they become better at understanding what they read, expressing themselves orally, and thinking critically.

Explicit writing instruction will help you and your students in the following ways:

- *Identifying comprehension gaps.* When you ask your students to write about what they're learning, you may uncover significant gaps in their

knowledge and comprehension—before it's too late to do anything about them.

- *Boosting reading comprehension.* When students learn to use more sophisticated syntax in their own writing, they become better able to understand it when they encounter it in their reading.⁴
- *Enhancing speaking abilities.* As students begin to use more complex terms and sentence constructions in their written language, they begin to incorporate those features into their spoken language as well.
- *Improving organizational and study skills.* TWR activities teach students to paraphrase, take notes, summarize, and make **outlines**. These techniques help them absorb and retain crucial information.
- *Developing analytical capabilities.* The process of writing requires even young students to organize their ideas and sequence information. As they move through the grades they have to sift through a mass of material, deciding for themselves what's important, which facts and ideas are connected to one another, and how to organize their thoughts into a logical progression. When done in a systematic and sequenced way, teaching students to write is equivalent to teaching them how to think.

A Brief History: The Origins of The Writing Revolution

TWR's model, also known as the *Hochman Method*, is now being implemented at a broad range of schools, spanning all grade levels. Teachers from around the country—in fact, from around the world—have been using the method for 25 years, learning it through teacher-training courses held in or near New York City. More recently, TWR has partnered with schools and school districts in New York, Washington, DC, Louisiana, Texas, and elsewhere to provide more intensive and hands-on training and coaching.

But how did this method originate? Years ago, like most classroom teachers, I would assign writing activities that focused on my students' perceptions and feelings: a visit to an imaginary country, a meaningful moment in their lives. My undergraduate and graduate training hadn't included any preparation for teaching writing, as far as I can recall, nor had I been assigned to read any research on effective writing instruction. (Although this book has two authors, the pronoun *I* refers to Judith Hochman.)

Later, as an administrator, I observed many lessons in a similar vein. In the higher grades, when teachers assigned compositions, they assumed that students would intuitively know how to sequence and organize information, relate it to a reader with clarity and coherence, and develop sound introductions and conclusions. The results consistently and dramatically disproved these assumptions.

I was struck by the difference in how we taught writing as opposed to reading. When I taught reading, I didn't just give my students a book and say, "Read this." I used a well-researched method, providing explicit instruction in decoding and using carefully sequenced activities that scaffolded skills until students read fluently and accurately. But when it came to writing, arguably a far more difficult task, I had no way to give students the tools they needed. If their writing fell short, as it often did, we simply told them to "make it better" or "add more details." Clearly, that wasn't enough.

I tried consulting the research, but at the time academic researchers were paying far more attention to reading than writing. So I began to experiment. I was fortunate to be at Windward, an independent school for students with learning and language disabilities in first grade through high school. The Windward staff members and I were able to try varying approaches to writing instruction.

We stopped teaching the mechanics of writing in isolation as a set of rules and definitions. Instead we asked students to write about the content they were learning and then used their writing to give specific guidance. The feedback might be, "use an appositive in your topic sentence," "put your strongest argument last," "use transitions when presenting your points," or "try starting your thesis statement with a subordinating conjunction." Because we had explicitly taught them how to do these things, they were able to respond.

As we saw that these techniques were working for our students, we noticed that researchers who were looking into best practices for teaching writing were finding evidence that supported what we were doing. And our techniques weren't just turning our students into better writers. We also saw improvements in their analytical thinking, reading comprehension, and oral communication.

Seeing such dramatic gains in students who had been functioning poorly in mainstream classes, we decided to share what we were learning with teachers who, like myself, had no proper training in writing instruction. To that end, we founded the Windward Teacher Training Institute.

At first, those who came to the Windward institute were largely special education teachers and tutors, speech and language therapists, and teachers of students learning English as a second language. But as students at Windward benefited from the remediation they received and reentered mainstream schools, teachers at those schools began to notice their excellent writing skills. As a result, teachers of general education classes began enrolling at the institute to learn about the method.

Then, in 2012, an article appeared in *The Atlantic* magazine about how the method we developed at Windward had produced dramatic results at a low-performing public high school with 3,000 students on Staten Island—New Dorp, where Monica started as a freshman in 2009. The article detailed the New Dorp faculty members' discovery that many of their students didn't know how to construct sentences using conjunctions such as *but* and *so*—not to mention words such as *although* and *despite*. The principal of New Dorp, Deirdre DeAngelis, heard about Windward from a friend, went to visit, and decided she wanted to bring that approach to writing instruction to her school.

After New Dorp had been implementing what was then known as the Hochman Method for a couple of years, the article reported, pass rates on state exams that included essay questions rose sharply—in the case of English, from 67% to 89%—as did the graduation rate, from 63% to near 80%. The article spurred a tremendous amount of interest in the method, and in response I founded a nonprofit that used the title of *The Atlantic* article: The Writing Revolution.

Currently most of the requests we get for training, either through our courses or school partnerships, come from mainstream teachers. Most teach in schools primarily serving low-income students, some with high proportions of English language learners and students with learning disabilities. Many of these teachers have found that their students benefit greatly from TWR's explicit, scaffolded writing instructions, just as students at Windward have. But the method—and the principles that underlie it—can benefit any student in any school.

What Makes The Writing Revolution Revolutionary: Deliberate Practice

TWR is as much a method of teaching content as it is a method of teaching writing. There's no separate writing block and no separate writing curriculum. Instead, teachers of all subjects adapt TWR's strategies and

activities to their preexisting curriculum and weave them into their content instruction.

But perhaps what's most revolutionary about TWR's method is that it takes the mystery out of learning to write well. In other approaches to writing instruction, a teacher might give students a description of the elements of a good paragraph or essay, or perhaps present a model piece of writing and have them try to emulate it. But for many students, that's not enough. They may be able to read and appreciate writing that flows well and uses varied sentence structure, but that doesn't mean they can figure out how to write that way themselves. For them, the techniques of good writing are a secret code they just can't crack.

TWR's method lets them in on the secret. It breaks the writing process down into manageable chunks and then has students practice the chunks they need, repeatedly, while also learning content. For example, if you want your students to make their sentences more informative and varied, you won't just ask them to do that and leave it up to them to figure out how. Instead, you'll introduce them to specific ways of creating more complex sentences—for example, by using appositives. But you won't just give them the definition of an appositive—"a noun or noun phrase placed next to another noun to explain it more fully"—and ask them to start using appositives in their writing.

Instead, you'll show them examples of appositives and then have them underline appositives in sentences you provide. For example, you might give them "George Washington, the first president of the United States, is often called the father of our country." In that sentence, they would underline "the first president of the United States." Then you'll give them a list of nouns—related to the content they've been studying—along with a list of appositives, and ask them to make the appropriate matches. After that, students will add appositives to sentences you provide or construct sentences around appositives you give them. After a while, you'll ask your students to create their own sentences using appositives—and eventually, they'll simply do that spontaneously.

This kind of practice—*deliberate practice*, as some cognitive scientists call it⁵—is quite different from having students practice writing by giving them, say, half an hour to write and simply turning them loose. Merely doing the same thing over and over is unlikely to improve their performance. To make their writing better, they need a series of exercises that specifically target the skills they haven't yet mastered, while building on the skills they already have, in a gradual, step-by-step process. They also