



W.V.C.ED • P.O. Box 5478
Louisville, KY 40255
wvanceave@wvced.com
website: wvced.com
facebook: W.V.C.ED

From The Ground Up!

Building Foundational Paragraph Skills

William Van Cleave, Educational Consultant

S.W.I.D.A. • February 22, 2020

I. Grounding Our Work In Research

- Cognitive Demands of Writing

II. Building a Solid Foundation: Paragraph Skills

- Lists & Categorization
- Graphic Organizers and Webbing
- Basic & Expanded Paragraphs

III. Revision

- Proofreading, Revision, and Editing
- Glows & Grows

IV. Word Lists for Writing

Cognitive Demands of Writing

Transcription Skills

- **Motor Component:** Whether students handwrite or type, part of the mind is engaged in letter formation.
- **Spelling:** Even if students are not penalized for spelling, they must still “work out” and spell their words so that the reader can understand the text.
- **Mechanics:** Students must adhere to the conventions of writing, not only capitals and periods, but also the structures necessary to cluster groups of words for meaning.
- **Syntax:** Students must write coherent sentences, including appropriate structure and variety.
- **Vocabulary:** Students must use words that convey their intended message and vary those words to reflect the development of their ideas.
- **Oral Language:** Students use oral language before and more often than they do written language. They must learn the differences between spoken and written communication, and they must learn to turn the ideas they speak into the ideas they write.
- **Text Structure:** Students must be able to apply a knowledge of introductory, supporting, and concluding sentences and paragraphs at an appropriate level of sophistication for their age and grade.
- **Recursive Processes:** Students must revise, edit, and proofread their work, taking into account conventions and expectations regarding idea development, structure, and conventions.
- **Content:** Topics chosen from students’ own experiences contain the most simple and direct content. Eventually, students must write on topics assigned by content-area teachers; they must also write using information retrieved from text they read.
- **Purpose & Audience:** Students must determine their purpose and intended audience. The purpose includes an understanding of the assignment as well as the style or approach the piece should take (e.g., genre). The audience includes the style of the writing (e.g., blog, letter, essay), the discipline (e.g., English, science), and the person(s) who will evaluate the writing.

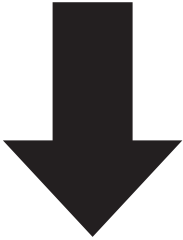
Stages of Knowledge	Idea Generation	Parts of Speech	Sentence Parts	Paragraph/ Essay Parts
Definition		learn definition	learn definition	ability to discuss
Identification		recognize in text	recognize in text	recognize in text
Create in Isolation	generate/ categorize list	provide examples in isolated sentences	provide examples in isolated sentences	create using known topic
Create in Application	generate/ categorize list for content-based assignment	use in paragraphs	use in paragraphs	create using content-based topic

To request the PPT, access this link: <https://www.wvced.com/resources/>.

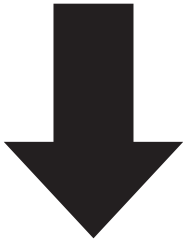
Basic Paragraph Writing - An Overview

Basic Paragraph Writing: A Step-By-Step Process

1. Identify and write the topic.



2. Generate a list of items
in support of that topic.
Select a minimum of 3 to use in
your paragraph.



3. Turn the topic into a
topic sentence.



4. Turn selected list items into
supporting sentences.



5. Reword the topic sentence
(perhaps expressing your
opinion of the topic) as the
concluding sentence.

Basic Paragraph Writing: Explanatory Notes

1. At first, topics should be of interest to the students and in areas where they have some knowledge in order to reduce cognitive overload. Once students become comfortable with the basic paragraph structure, topics can be chosen from course material and outside sources. Work with prompts is important even at this stage.

2. Regardless of the length of the assignment, students begin by generating a list. This initial idea generation frees working memory for the more complex writing tasks needed for composing. The students then select from the list at least three items that will form the content of their supporting sentences. Sometimes, lists can be stand-alone assignments. At least at first, students can generate lists together with the instructor serving as scribe.

3. Topic sentences are generally the most difficult to write. These sentences should introduce the paragraph but also engage the reader. Students sometimes find it easier to generate supporting sentences first, returning to write the topic sentence later. As students develop their skills, they need to learn different topic sentence styles; teachers should plan to continue to introduce and help students practice with different kinds of topic sentences.

4. Students develop each selected list item into a sentence. Sentence variety is key in creating an interesting piece of writing. Students should check frequently to see that their supporting sentences connect back to the topic. Transition words are unnecessary for short paragraphs; end punctuation serves as the transition between sentences.

5. The concluding sentence wraps up the paragraph. Learning a variety of styles is useful. Too often, students simply repeat the topic sentence at the end of their paragraphs. Try telling students to *rephrase* or *reword* (rather than *restate*) the topic sentence. Questions such as “How do I feel about the topic?” or “What’s my opinion?” may help students construct this tricky sentence.

Generating Lists

List-Generating Activities...

- encourage students to generate ideas
- help students learn to group, identifying similarities/differences
- prepare for everything from a paragraph to a longer essay
- serve as non-threatening tasks (as spelling does not count and syntax is not required)
- allow students to know early on whether they have enough information to generate a paragraph

Recommendations:

Never let a student write even a paragraph without generating a list first. Any writing assignment longer than a few sentences can and should begin with a list. Instructors can scribe for group list-generating activities or ask students to make a list with a partner or independently. Typically, timed lists cause unnecessary anxiety; instead, assign a specific quantity, often 5, 10, or 15. Generating lists makes an excellent bell ringer activity, and students can log their lists in a special section of their binders.

Some Suggested Topics:

(Slashes represent separate list topic ideas.)

about the senses:

- things that are _____ (any color)
- things that are bright
- foods that taste bad/good
- things that make loud noises
- places where you should whisper/shout
- things that are shorter/taller than you are
- fruits/vegetables/dairy products/sweets
- things that are cold/hot
- things that are rough/smooth/soft/hard
- foods that taste sweet/bitter
- things that smell good/bad
- things that can/cannot fit in your pocket
- things that keep you warm/cool
- breakfast/lunch/dinner foods

other list topic suggestions:

- drinks
- things you can do with a potato
- rooms in a house/mansion/castle
- sports
- things to do on a sunny/rainy day
- places you'd like to visit/vacation
- things you'd buy if you had \$1,000,000
- famous people (living/dead) you'd like to meet
- favorite books/movies/stories/T.V. shows
- favorite actors/athletes/musicians
- things to do in _____ (town/city)
- insects/mammals/amphibians/reptiles/birds/fish
- colleges/camps you'd like to attend
- things that plug in or require electricity
- things I do before going to school/bed
- important inventions
- favorite restaurants
- musical instruments
- tools
- vehicles on land/in the air/for water
- bodies of water
- things you'd want on a deserted island
- places you would not like to visit/vacation
- people you admire
- things you can do in less than a minute
- characters in _____
- favorite places to eat
- zoo/farm/jungle animals
- good/bad animals for pets
- jobs you'd like to try for a day/week/year
- modes of transportation
- favorite video games
- things to take in your tote bag on a plane
- things to take camping/to the beach
- things that cost more than \$ _____

Categorizing

Categorizing Activities...

- encourage students to discover and understand connections between pieces of information
- help students learn to group and organize, identifying similarities/differences
- prepare for all types of writing, particularly longer pieces
- allow students to know early on whether they have enough information in each category to create a supporting paragraph or sub-section of a paper

Recommendations:

Categorizing items on a list is a cognitive activity to be practiced at all grade levels. Sometimes, students will first generate a list and then begin to see similarities and differences between items on that list, creating categories to group similar items. At other times, students will see categories early on in the list-generating stage and list items under each category as they go. Either approach works. Categorization is essential for students who are writing longer, multi-paragraph pieces because it guides them as to which items go into which paragraphs/sections of their paper.

Some Sample Categorizing Activities:

I. Create topic headings (categories) for the following lists:

_____	_____	_____	_____
cow	chair	milk	police officer
chicken	couch	water	teacher
sheep	bed	orange juice	chef
horse	table	soft drink	flight attendant

II. Sort the following items into their appropriate categories:

brushing teeth	grading papers	reading a good book
supervising recess	showering	washing the dishes
going for a swim	eating dessert	leading a class discussion

necessities/routine	job	leisure
---------------------	-----	---------

_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

III. Strike through the one item in each list that does not belong. For most, there is more than one possible answer. Be ready to defend your answer.

- A. flashlight, lamp, car, remote control, iPod, calculator, watch
- B. *science focus*: chicken, eagle, buzzard, wren, lion, quail, dodo bird
- C. *history focus*: FDR, JFK, RFK, LBJ, Dwight D. Eisenhower, Barack Obama
- D. *English focus*: *To Kill a Mockingbird*, "The Raven," *Hamlet*, *Charlotte's Web*, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, *Black Boy*

Listing and Categorizing For Multi-Paragraph Writing

Procedure:

1. Choose a topic.
2. Gather thoughts/facts on this topic in word/phrase form.
3. Read over your list of thoughts/facts, clustering similar items and deciding upon major categories.
 - Some of the items already on your list may serve as categories though you may need to add categories as well.
 - Eliminate items that are irrelevant; combine items that are redundant.
 - Verify that you have enough items to support the existence of each category.
4. Sequence categories logically. These will become your body paragraphs or major subheadings.

Note: Sometimes, information on a topic is obtained in category form, eliminating #3.

A Few Examples:

1. Dolphin
 - Gather facts from several sources.
 - Read over the facts you gathered.
 - Decide upon categories (e.g., habitat, diet, body structure, communication)
 - Cluster items from your list into your established categories.
 - Eliminate any facts that do not fit into categories. Combine redundant facts. For categories that do not have enough information, either eliminate the category or gather more facts to add to that category.
2. Abraham Lincoln
 - Gather facts from several sources.
 - Read over the facts you gathered.
 - Decide upon categories (e.g., childhood, pre-presidency, presidency, legacy)
 - Cluster items from your list into your established categories.
 - Eliminate any facts that do not fit into categories. Combine redundant facts. For categories that do not have enough information, either eliminate the category or gather more facts to add to that category.

Developing Topic & Concluding Sentences

General Thoughts

If students are in a rut concerning topic and/or concluding sentences, generate several different versions for the same paragraph to show them that variety is possible. At worst you've given them "multiple choice" options. At best you've shown them a way out of their rut so they can generate their own with better structure and more variety.

Topic Sentences

Probably the most difficult component of a paragraph is the topic sentence. Students must be able to do the following simultaneously:

- understand the overall topic
- verbalize it in a complete sentence that engages the reader
- prepare the reader for the rest of the paragraph
- use an appropriate style for the particular assignment

Initially, students who struggle with topic sentences can begin with "There are..." That will usually lead to an acceptable (if not wonderful) topic sentence.

Here are some activities to assist students with generating topic sentences:

- You provide items, and students generate categories into which they fit.
- You provide titles, and students turn them into sentences.
- You provide supporting sentences (see examples on following page), and students generate topic sentences to introduce those supporting sentences.

Concluding Sentences

Concluding sentences also prove challenging for students. They must be able to do the following simultaneously:

- reword or rephrase the overall topic stated in the topic sentence
- provide a reaction or response to the topic

Initially, students who struggle with concluding sentences can begin with "In conclusion" or "To conclude." That will usually lead to an acceptable (if not wonderful) concluding sentence. Since "restate" often leads to a verbatim copy of the topic sentence, use the words *reword* and *rephrase* to teach students about concluding sentences.

Here are some activities to assist students with generating concluding sentences:

- You provide topic and supporting sentences, and students generate concluding sentences to wrap up the paragraph.

Paragraph Development Exercises

The following exercises are designed to reinforce the basic paragraph format and give students practice with the individual elements, especially those that may prove more difficult, such as writing topic sentences. They are presented in increasing difficulty. Some students may need to spend a great deal of time on each of the elements of the paragraph while others will internalize the structure more easily.

Basic Paragraph Structure

Topic Sentence
Supporting Sentence
Supporting Sentence
Supporting Sentence
Concluding Sentence

I. Write supporting sentences for the following topic sentences:

I have several favorite foods.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

The beach provides the opportunity for a number of great activities.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

II. Write a concluding sentence for the following supporting sentences:

1. Drinking lemonade, ice tea, and other cold drinks is one way to stay cool.
 2. Turning on a fan or air conditioner drops the temperature in my house.
 3. Going for a quick swim in the mid afternoon cools me down for the rest of the day.
- C.S. _____

III. Write a topic sentence for each set of supporting sentences:

- T.S. _____
1. I love to play frisbee in the soft, green grass of the park.
 2. There is a playground that my little brother loves near the frisbee field.
 3. At the entrance of the park, they have grills where we sometimes barbecue.
- C.S. The park is probably my favorite place on the weekends.

Expanded Paragraph Writing - An Overview

Expanding Paragraphs: A Step-By-Step Process

1. Identify and write the topic.



2. Generate a list of items in support of that topic. Select a minimum of 3 to use in your paragraph.



3. Turn the topic into a topic sentence.



4. Turn selected list items into supporting sentences.



5. Generate detail sentences to elaborate upon each supporting sentence.



6. Reword the topic sentence (perhaps expressing your opinion of the topic) as the concluding sentence.

Expanding Paragraphs: Explanatory Notes

1. At first topics should be in areas where the student has some knowledge in order to reduce cognitive overload. Eventually, content should be taken from course material and outside sources.

2. No matter the length of the writing task, the student begins the assignment by generating a list of at least ten ideas.

3. Students sometimes continue to find it easier to generate supporting sentences first, returning to write the topic sentence after they've gotten the supporting information down. Teachers should continue to introduce and help students practice with different kinds of topic sentences. These sentences should introduce the paragraph but also engage the reader.

4. Students then develop each selected list item into a sentence. Once again, sentence variety will be key in providing an engaging piece.

5. Students then generate detail sentences to elaborate upon each supporting sentence. At first a single detail sentence for each supporting sentence may prove challenging enough, but eventually students will generate two detail sentences for each supporting sentence. A five sentence basic paragraph becomes an 11 sentence expanded paragraph, with two detail sentences following each supporting sentence. Writers more comfortable with the process will be able to write a supporting sentence and its details, moving between steps #4 and #5, before taking on the next supporting sentence, repeating the process.

6. The concluding sentence brings the paragraph to a close. Once again, learning a variety of styles will be useful to the student. Continue to help students expand their options. Students may find it beneficial to think about how they *feel* or their *opinion* about the topic to avoid repeating the topic sentence.

Expanding Paragraphs & Using Transition Words

Once you have practiced writing basic paragraphs and are comfortable with their format, it is time to expand. Take a 5 sentence, basic paragraph and add detail sentences to each supporting sentence. If you add one detail to each supporting sentence, your 5 sentence paragraph will become 8 sentences; if you add two details to each supporting sentence, your 5 sentence paragraph will become 11 sentences!

Expanded Paragraph:

Topic Sentence
Supporting Sentence
 2 detail sentences
Supporting Sentence
 2 detail sentences
Supporting Sentence
 2 detail sentences
Concluding Sentence

Add detail sentences for each supporting sentence:

T.S. On a rainy day, there are several things I enjoy doing.

1. Going to the theater to catch a movie or two is a great way to pass the time.

2. I love having some extra time to play video games.

3. Usually, I have a great book to read.

C.S. Some people find rainy days depressing, but every once in a while they can be great.

Add detail sentences for each supporting sentence:

There are several jobs I would like to try. First, I think it would be interesting to work as an architect.

Next, working in an ice cream parlor would be enjoyable. _____

Finally, I think I would enjoy being a teacher. _____

I think it would be interesting to try each of these jobs before choosing a full-time career.

Name: _____ Date: _____

Instructor: _____ Grade: _____

Template A
Basic Paragraph

Topic _____

- List of 10 Things**
- | | |
|----------|-----------|
| 1. _____ | 6. _____ |
| 2. _____ | 7. _____ |
| 3. _____ | 8. _____ |
| 4. _____ | 9. _____ |
| 5. _____ | 10. _____ |

Star the 3 items you like best. Each will become a supporting sentence.

Topic Sentence _____

Supporting Sentence 1 _____

Supporting Sentence 2 _____

Supporting Sentence 3 _____

Concluding Sentence _____

Name: _____

Date: _____

Template B
Expanded Paragraph-8

Instructor: _____

Grade: _____

Title _____

Topic Sentence _____

Supporting Sentence 1 _____

Detail Sentence _____

Supporting Sentence 2 _____

Detail Sentence _____

Supporting Sentence 3 _____

Detail Sentence _____

Concluding Sentence _____

Name: _____ Date: _____

Instructor: _____ Grade: _____

Template C2
Expanded Paragraph-11

Title

Topic Sentence

Supporting Sentence 1

Detail Sentences 1 & 2

Supporting Sentence 2

Detail Sentences 1 & 2

Supporting Sentence 3

Detail Sentences 1 & 2

Concluding Sentence

Three Lenses: Proofreading, Editing, & Revising

Revision, from the Latin parts -vis-, to look/see, and re-, back, literally means to look back, in this case at your text. It involves a recurrent process of writing and rewriting, typically with audience in mind. Paying attention to overall argument, the logical flow of your ideas, and the quality of your evidence are all components of revision. Research indicates that revision should be done before editing or proofreading where possible though students who struggle with writing may have difficulty overlooking small, proofreading-style mistakes in trying to revise. In essence, they can't see the forest for the trees. Revision involves big-picture thinking about a piece of writing.

Considerations when revising:

- Does my hook grab the reader's attention?
- Do I have a clear thesis, claim, or focus that establishes the big idea(s) of my paper?
- Does my conclusion wrap things up both efficiently and effectively?
- Do my paragraphs all support the thesis, claim, or focus I have established?
- Are there adequate transitions between ideas?
- Are ideas in a logical order that will make sense to the reader?
- Have I provided adequate support for each of my ideas?

Editing is typically (and logically) done once the writer has already revised. It involves improving what is already on the paper. In the editing stage, the writer/reader addresses the overall quality of the writing, including language use and expression. Ideally, a well edited paper will be sharp and focused, consistent in style and tone, and varied in terms of vocabulary and sentence structure. In essence, the writing will appear natural.

Considerations when editing:

- Wording, including unnecessary words, word choice, and awkward wording
- Sentence variety within paragraphs
- Reordering sentences
- Adding or improving transitions

Proofreading is "cleaning up" your paper. You've already written it, and you've done it in an effective way. Now, you need to polish and catch those surface errors. Typical strategies include reading it aloud or having a friend/teacher read it aloud to you; reading it backwards, sentence by sentence; and asking someone to proofread your paper for you, once you've made a preliminary attempt.

Considerations when proofreading:

- Spelling: Are words spelled correctly?
- Punctuation: Are end punctuation, commas, and advanced punctuation correct?
- Have you correctly chosen homonyms and homophones?
- Have you been consistent in your grammar? (e.g., Oxford comma)
- Have you been consistent in your formatting? (e.g., font, pagination, indentations)

Three Lenses: Proofreading, Editing, & Revising

This is a spring writing sample written by a 3rd grade student. He was given a prompt that told him his principal would be inviting someone famous to his school to speak. He was asked to suggest a good person and explain why that person would make a good choice. He had 5 minutes to plan and 25 minutes to write.

	Aarben - #9
if he was alive ✓	I think that Leonardo da Vinci would be a good guest. If he was alive, he would
• How he	have a great influence on us because
how he	he could teach us some of his techniques,
would help	tell us what he did and how he did it.
why I think	I think this because he would be a very
So ✓	inspiring figure. He could also display his
	pieces of art for us.
	He could tell us about when he was
	a boy and tell us how he became
	a famous artist. The main point is Leonardo da Vinci
	would be a good guest. He was famous
	for his art: sculptures, paintings, and drawings.

Signal Words for Reading, Writing & Notetaking

Direction Change & Contrast: A change in ideas to follow.

alternatively
 although
 as opposed to
 at the same time
 but
 conversely
 despite (the fact that)
 different from
 even so
 even though
 for all that
 however
 in contrast
 in spite of (the fact that)
 instead
 nevertheless
 nonetheless
 notwithstanding
 on the contrary
 on the other hand
 or
 otherwise
 rather
 still
 though
 unlike
 whereas
 while
 yet



Addition: Similar ideas, additional support, or evidence to follow.

additionally
 again
 also
 and
 another
 as an example
 as well
 because
 besides (that)
 equally important
 following this further
 for example
 for instance
 for one thing
 further
 furthermore
 in addition
 in light of the...it is easy to see
 in particular
 in the same vein
 in the same way
 just as
 likewise
 more (than that)
 moreover
 namely
 next
 other
 pursuing this further
 similarly
 specifically
 then
 to illustrate



Conclusion, Summary & Emphasis: Conclusion, summary, or emphasis to follow.

accordingly*
 after all
 all in all
 as a result*
 because*
 certainly
 clearly, then*
 consequently*
 finally
 for the reason (that)*
 generally
 hence*
 in a word
 in any event
 in brief
 in conclusion
 in fact
 in final analysis
 in final consideration
 in general
 in short
 in sum
 in summary
 in the end
 indeed
 last
 lastly
 naturally
 of course
 on account of*
 on the whole
 since*
 so*
 therefore*
 thus*
 to be sure
 to conclude
 to sum up
 to summarize
 truly



Sequence & Time:

after
 afterwards
 always
 as long as
 as soon as
 at first
 at last
 at length
 before
 before long
 currently

during
 earlier
 eventually
 finally
 first... second...
 third
 following
 immediately
 in the first place
 in the meantime
 later
 meanwhile
 never
 next

now
 presently
 recently
 shortly
 simultaneously
 sometimes
 soon
 so far
 subsequently
 then
 this time
 when
 whenever
 while

(* indicates cause and effect)

Note: The bent arrow signifies a change in direction while the two straight arrows represent words that continue in the same direction. The arrow on the right crosses a line to indicate an end point.

© 2013 W.V.C.ED • wvced.com
 Permission granted to copy for student use.

Recommended Resources

Writing Matters Approach developed by William Van Cleave (available at wvced.com):

- Binder Inserts.* (several different styles for students at different grade levels, emphasizing quick and easy access to word lists and rules for sentence and essay construction)
- Grammar Dice.* (grammar/sentence generating dice activities)
- GrammarBuilder Concept Cards.* (concept cards including parts of speech and sentence parts for student and instructor use)
- Sentence Sense.* (workbook series for student practice in sentence skill development)
- Sentence Stretches I & II.* (sentence expansion card games)
- Sentence Templates and Writing Expansion posters.
- Words at Work I & II.* (grammar/sentence construction card games)
- Writing Skills Concept Charts. (with co-author Heather Redenbach) (8.5x11 visuals for parts of speech and sentence parts)
- Writing Skills Sorters.* (grammar/sentence sorting activity packs)

Writing tools that complement the Writing Matters approach (available by wvced.com):

- Educational Fontware.* (dual platform CD with all the major handwriting fonts; includes link letter, a revolutionary feature that allows you to link cursive letters together when creating customized handwriting sheets)
- Handwriting paper. (different kinds of handwriting practice paper with different line spacings and other features)
- Killgallon, Don & Jenny. *Sentence Composing & Grammar* series (6 books - sentence combining and other sentence building skills)
- King, Diana. *Learning Cursive - Elementary Level* (left- & right-handed versions).
- King, Diana. *Learning Print.* (new print workbook for instructing elementary students)
- Padgett, Patricia. *Writing Adventures 1 & 2.* (workbooks involving sentence and paragraph writing)
- Pencil Grips. (assorted pencil grips to improve or correct pencil grasp)
- Tactile Surfaces for Writing. (Brain Freeze, Gel Board, and Smart Sand)

Other useful tools:

- Graham, Steve, Charles A. MacArthur, and Jill Fitzgerald. *Best Practices in Writing Instruction.* guilford.com. (teacher resource)
- Hochman, Judith and Natalie Wexler. *The Writing Revolution.* wiley.com. (teacher resource)
- Jennings, Terrill M. & Charles W. Haynes. *From Talking to Writing: Strategies for Supporting Narrative and Expository Writing.* www.landmarkoutreach.org. (teacher resource)
- King, Diana. *Cursive Writing Skills* (Left and Right Handed). epsbooks.com. (remedial workbooks)
- King, Diana. *Keyboarding Skills.* epsbooks.com. (student book)
- King, Diana. *Writing Skills, Books A, One, Two, and Three.* epsbooks.com. (workbooks involving grammar and sentence and paragraph construction)
- King, Diana. *Writing Skills - Teacher's Manual.* epsbooks.com. (teacher resource)
- MacArthur, Charles A., Steve Graham, & Jill Fitzgerald. *Handbook of Writing Research, Second Edition.* guilford.com. (teacher resource)
- Mather, Nancy, Barbara J. Wendling, and Rhia Roberts. *Writing Assessment and Instruction for Students with Learning Disabilities.* josseybass.com. (teacher resource)
- Schuster, Edgar. *Sentence Mastery, Levels A, B, and C.* phoenixlearningresources.com. (workbooks focusing on sentence combining skills)