

Writing Frames

What is it?

A collection of customizable writing frames that can be used to assess and extend student learning

What are the benefits of using this tool?

With the Common Core State Standards' emphasis on writing, it's more important than ever to get students writing on a daily basis. This tool makes that easier to do by presenting a collection of writing frames and prompts to choose from. Teachers from all grade levels and content areas can use these frames and prompts to

- get a reading on students' understanding of key content at any time in a learning sequence;
- assess a wide range of critical thinking skills, (especially by rotating through the various frames throughout the year); and
- build students' competence in producing the kinds of writing required on standardized assessment tests (e.g., comparison pieces, arguments, summaries).

What are the basic steps?

1. Identify the content knowledge/skills you want to assess. Then think about the kind of assessment you're looking to do. (Do you want to do a quick check for understanding in the middle of a lesson? Evaluate big-picture understanding at the end of a unit? Something else?)
2. Decide which of the writing frames in Figure 3 (p. 175) best meets your needs. Pick one of the corresponding writing prompts and customize it to fit your content area and goals.
Another option: Create (or have students create) a prompt for the selected frame from scratch.
3. Present the writing prompt to students and help them determine what it's asking them to do. For example, are they being asked to make a comparison? Summarize data? Argue a position?
4. Tell students how and when to respond. Should they tackle the writing prompt with a partner? On their own? During class? For homework? Is there a time limit? Do they need to polish their writing?
Note: The length and format of students' responses will depend on the writing prompt you select.
5. Discuss the criteria for success. Make it clear that a high-quality response should demonstrate students' knowledge of the content *and* their command of the relevant thinking and writing skills.
6. Review students' responses to determine whether there are any aspects of the content material or thinking/writing skills that you should review or reteach.

How is this tool used in the classroom?

- ✓ To assess students' grasp of key content
- ✓ To develop critical thinking and writing skills

Writing frames can be used in many different ways and for different purposes:

- *They can be used to deepen and check students' grasp of critical content at any point in the instructional process* (start, middle, or end of a lesson/unit).
- *They can be used for both formative and summative purposes.* Use them to check for understanding mid-lesson and adjust instruction accordingly or to evaluate learning at the end of a unit.
- *They can be used to develop specific kinds of thinking and writing skills.* To do this, select a frame that matches a skill you're trying to develop and use that frame repeatedly. To develop students' comparative writing skills, for example, you could use the *Compare & Contrast* frame to design a series of writing tasks.
- *They can be used to differentiate assessment and boost student engagement.* To do this, simply give students a choice about how to demonstrate their learning. Options include giving them a choice of prompts to respond to, giving them a sample prompt and letting them customize it by filling in the blanks, giving them a writing frame and letting them generate their own prompts, or letting them choose a frame and prompt on their own.
- *They can be used to target Common Core State Standards.* Taken together, the thirteen frames can be used to address Writing Anchor Standard 10 (write routinely for a wide range of tasks). Taken individually, they can be used to target other standards as well. For example:
 - Try the *Interpret/Analyze* frame for Reading Anchor Standard 3 (analyze how and why individuals, events, and ideas develop and interact over the course of a text).
 - Try the *Explain* frame for Writing Anchor Standard 2 (write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately).
 - Try the *Evaluate* or *Validate* frames for Reading Anchor Standard 8 (evaluate the argument and claims in a text, including the validity of the reasoning as well as the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence), Writing Anchor Standard 8 (assess the credibility and accuracy of print and digital sources), or Standard 3 from the Standards for Mathematical Practice (construct viable arguments and critique the reasoning of others).

Teacher Talk

- ➔ Prepare students to be successful by teaching and modeling the thinking and writing skills that each writing frame requires. (“To write a compare and contrast essay, we’d begin by...”) Continue the teaching and modeling process until students are capable of crafting quality responses on their own.
- ➔ To see examples of math-specific writing prompts, check out *Math Tools, Grades 3–12: 60+ Ways to Build Mathematical Practices, Differentiate Instruction, and Increase Student Engagement* (Silver, Brunsting, Walsh, & Thomas, 2012).

Figure 3: Writing Frames to Choose From: Thirteen CREATIVE IDEAS

FRAMES	WRITING PROMPTS ASK STUDENTS TO...
C ompare & contrast	<p><i>Compare and/or contrast two or more items using specific criteria. For example:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compare and contrast these two items using the following criteria... • Are ___ and ___ more alike or more different? Support your answer using specific examples. • Which of these items are most similar? Which are most different? Explain your reasoning.
R elate personally	<p><i>Connect with the content on a personal level. For example:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How would you feel/what would you do if you were in ___'s shoes? • How is this relevant to your life? • Have you (or someone you know) ever seen/felt/experienced ___? What was it like?
E valuate	<p><i>Assess or judge something using specific criteria. For example:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which idea/strategy/solution/product/model is best? What criteria did you use to make your decision? • Did this person/character make the right decision? Why? • Does this work satisfy the assessment criteria we discussed? Why or why not? Be specific.
A ssociate	<p><i>Generate associations or explain how given items/ideas are connected. For example:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What comes to mind when I say ___? What comes to mind when you see/hear/taste/touch/smell ___? • In what way are ___ and ___ connected in your mind? • How is ___ like a ___?
T race/sequence	<p><i>Arrange and present information in order. For example:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trace the development of ___ (an event, character, argument, idea, invention, etc.). • Trace the sequence of events leading up to ___. • Describe the sequence of steps you used to ___.
I nterpret/analyze	<p><i>Interpret or analyze information. For example:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What can you conclude from this data? Why? • What is the meaning of this passage/parable/image/law/quotation/dream? Why do you think so? • What point or message is this artist/writer/speaker trying to convey? Why do you think so?
V alidate	<p><i>Validate (or evaluate the validity of) a conclusion, statement, source, etc. For example:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do you know that ___ is the case? Describe your evidence. • How did you check the validity/reliability of your information? Explain. • Is this a valid ___ (argument, solution, conclusion, criticism, model)? Why or why not?
E xplain	<p><i>Explain what, why, or how. For example:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you know about ___? Write an explanatory paragraph. • Why ___? • How ___? How could you explain ___?
I dentify & describe	<p><i>Describe an object, observation, individual, or event. For example:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify the properties or components of ___ (e.g., properties of a mineral, components of a computer). • Describe what you observed. What did you see, hear, touch, taste, or smell? • Describe who/how/what happened ___. (Example: Describe what Ping chooses to do and why.)
D efine	<p><i>Demonstrate their understanding of a critical term or concept. For example:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Define the following concept or term in your own words: ___. • What are the defining characteristics of a ___? (Example: What are the critical attributes of a reptile?) • What makes a ___ a ___? (Example: What makes a sonnet a sonnet?)
E xplore possibilities	<p><i>Explore alternatives, possibilities, and "what if" scenarios. For example:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is another way of ___? What is another explanation for ___? How many possible ways can you ___? • What if ___? What might be the consequences if ___? (Example: What if the decimal point didn't exist?) • Why or how might ___? (Example: How might we design a more efficient computer program?)
A rgue a position	<p><i>Take a position and provide evidence to support it. For example:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State your position on ___ and provide evidence to support it. • Do you agree or disagree with ___? Explain your answer using specific evidence, examples, or details. • The reason why ___ is ___. (Example: Babe Ruth is the greatest baseball player of all time because...)
S ummarize	<p><i>Briefly recap what they have observed, heard, or experienced. For example:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To summarize, what I read/heard/learned was ___. • The most important point or takeaway message was ___. • Draw a picture that summarizes what you learned. Then explain your drawing.