Strategic

WRITING

The Writing Process and Beyond in the Secondary English Classroom

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NCTE Editorial Board

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Second Edition

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Preface to the Second Edition

When NCTE Senior Editor Bonny Graham told me that I should write a preface explaining the revisions for this second edition, I realized that I had never written one of these before. I have written introductions and acknowledgments, but neither is a preface, exactly. And I'd never even thought about a preface that explains the purpose of a second edition of a book. I have strategies, though, to help me know how to write something new. That's what I've always wished for my students: that they have strategies to give them the confidence they will need to face all the different genres they will write in their lives—perhaps some we don't even know yet.

The first edition of *Strategic Writing: The Writing Process and Beyond in the Secondary English Classroom* was the story of my teaching journey, of trying to find a way to help my students become the kind of writers who have strategies and know how to use them in various situations. It was my path through trial and error in teaching junior high and high school students, seeking a way to best help them be writers for life, not just for school assignments. That was the story behind the first edition.

This revised edition is partly my continuing story, my continued journey to help student writers, and partly the story of teachers' responses to my story: what worked for them and what didn't. I'm grateful for those teachers' insights and feedback—so helpful and humbling. Their comments helped me refine my own understandings, look at my practices through others' eyes, and seek ways to improve the strategic approach to writing instruction. This revised edition is also a response to a changing climate in writing instruction: tests and standards and an emphasis on certain kinds of writing. And it's a response to the changing world of writing: the digital world is so much more present than it was more than a decade ago. New genres have emerged along with new tools for writing.

Rewriting the book has been both labor and love. When I showed an early revision to a trusted colleague, his response led to a mostly new book. I had to rethink what I was about: tone and content, voice and stance. I reenvisioned the book instead of just adding to or subtracting from it (which was kind of my original idea). That reenvisioning, starting from a blank screen, was some

of the labor. After I had the rough revision—and close to my deadline—I spent some time alone, writing in a hotel room away from what was familiar and possibly distracting. I will always remember the view from my hotel room—a harbor view in Portland, Maine; I spent some of my writing time looking out that window, thinking about the work I was doing, remembering the faces and needs of my students and the teachers I had worked with. Remembering the people involved in this work was the love part. During that intense revision time, I allowed myself to leave my room for breakfast and dinner only—lunch was pretzels and Diet Coke while I wrote so that I wouldn't be distracted. I don't address self-regulation strategies directly in this book, but I used them a lot in my own writing of it, along with many of the strategies I do write about in the book. The use of those strategies during my own writing reinforced the concepts of this book for me.

Since the first edition, the public conversation about standards and testing has pushed writing instruction into the limelight; teachers, along with a lot of other people, are thinking more about writing instruction. Almost weekly I see articles in public, not just academic, venues about how we should teach writing to achieve what we want. That attention can be good. It encourages us to pay more attention to writing instruction and what it means to develop lifelong writers. But these same influences have also pushed teachers into stressful positions. Tests and standards have put pressure on schools and administrators, pressure that gets passed along to teachers. What do we do to teach writing effectively in this climate? I hope this revised edition helps to answer that question.

So, what is different in this edition? A lot. Most of the changes were made in an effort to help teachers better understand an overall strategic approach that can counter the testing climate that pervades many schools, a strategic approach that works within a workshop model and uses the writing process as an umbrella framework.

Here are some of the major changes:

- *Explicit strategy talk:* Teachers told me they wanted a more explicit explanation of what counts as strategy and what it looks like to teach from a strategic approach. In this edition, I am much more explicit about what strategies are and how we can teach them through an overall strategic approach. In addition to putting strategies front and center, the lesson plans differentiate beween strategy, activity, and mini-lesson to further show how strategies function in an overall approach.
- *Digital tools and genres:* We use digital tools more widely now than we did a decade ago, and, as writers, we are adapting those digital tools to the strategies we use when we write. We also write in digital genres that are constant-

ly evolving. In this edition, I explain how writers can use digital strategies more effectively and share some of the digital genres my students and I have explored through a strategic approach.

- *Accessibility:* This edition is organized so that the conceptual material is accessible in early, shorter chapters. Although these chapters include examples from my own and other teachers' classrooms, they are more focused on the *what* and the *why*. I placed the *how*—teaching ideas, examples of student work, and lesson plans—in the appendixes to make it easier for you to access the things you need.

- *Grouping by types of strategies:* One way to understand a strategic approach is to group the strategies to align more with process than with rhetoric. So this revised edition has reorganized ideas to do that. For example, the chapters on audience and purpose from the first edition are combined in this edition because so many of the strategies that help writers address these rhetorical concepts overlap. On the other hand, the revision chapter is divided into two chapters, global and local, as the strategies for these different levels of revision can be quite different.

This edition still highlights student work and provides detailed lesson plans I developed in response to a strategic writing approach. It also contains numerous examples of what I call strategy practices, shorter pieces of writing that allow students to practice writing strategies in the context of writing. This edition still tries to balance my philosophy that we work in a school setting (and thus have to teach some school genres) but that we want to prepare students for writing outside of school (and thus need to have students explore genres that exist outside of school).

Nelson Mandela said, "May your choices reflect your hopes, not your fears." In this second edition of *Strategic Writing*, I believe that speaks to the changes I've made, that they are about my hopes for my students as writers, my hopes for myself as their teacher, and my hopes for readers of this book as they continue their own journeys as writing teachers.

Acknowledgments

I n a DVD titled *Everyday Creativity*, Dewitt Jones explains how many rolls of film—more than 400—are typically used to gather the 30 or so images used in a *National Geographic* article. Thousands more than are needed. The excess allows photographers to try out angles, to take risks. Writing—and teaching—involves taking risks too. But we often don't have the luxury of hundreds of tries. I am blessed that NCTE was willing to give me another go at this book, a chance to improve what I had tried to say in the first edition. I want to thank them—especially Bonny Graham's close reading and attention to detail—for this opportunity to try again. Bonny's help was invaluable.

Students—too many to name—and teachers have helped me write this revision. Special thanks to Sarah Johnson Plant and Joseph Wiederhold, teachers who embraced a strategic approach whole-heartedly and taught me from their examples how to share the ideas more effectively. Their questions deepened my thinking—and that's always a good thing. In the middle of the revision process, my Central Utah Writing Project codirectors and I modeled how a writing group works for our new summer fellows. I gave them my first chapter, revised, as my piece for the modeling. And I'm glad I did. Their insightful comments and questions not only show the benefit of peer feedback, but they also helped me reenvision my revision. So, thank you to Chris Crowe, Chris Thompson, and Joseph Wiederhold (again).

And always, for patience and encouragement, for foot rubs and dinner, and so much more: David.

Introduction: Where I've/We've Been and Where I'm/We're Going

Someone asked me about writing this book.

"What's it about?"

"Teaching writing."

"Oh." Then nothing. I could tell what he was thinking: *That sounds boring. Why can't you write something people will want to read—like a murder mystery or something?* After a long pause, he asked, "So, how will it be different from what's out there?"

Good question.

My idea of being a teacher of writing has changed (I hope in positive ways) since I began teaching. I've had so many ideas that didn't work the way I thought they would, ideas that others described in conferences or in publications that sounded so effective but didn't accomplish what I wanted to accomplish or didn't work the way I thought they would.

I have sometimes felt like a mountain climber, finding handholds and footholds from time to time, slipping a little, climbing little by little. I'm not at the top of the mountain yet—still finding footholds—but I've found some vistas, some places to rest and consider before I climb again. During these reflective times, I've decided on certain principles that guide the climb for the next phase. These are the principles behind the teaching practices that led to this book, what makes it different, I guess.

Overall, I want to use the writing process as a set of tools instead of the track my course runs on, a way of thinking about what writers do instead of a series of activities students associate with school writing, a way of thinking that might make school writing valuable to all the writing students might do in a lifetime. But that's what I think all teachers of writing want. How is this book (my climb) different?

First, it uses process as a strategy more than as a course structure. I acknowledge that not all writing requires the complete writing process—certainly some school writing is that kind. Personal journal entries or text messages don't nec-

essarily require revision or prewriting. Some writing is meant to show student learning—that students have done the reading or know the facts we expect them to know. Does that writing require the entire process? Because of the way I use the writing process in my classroom, my students should begin to see that elements of the process are actually strategies for improving thinking, expression, and communication, not just requirements for completion of a project. The writing process contains a set of strategies that writers should use thoughtfully to meet their writing goals.

I know that many students see the writing process as something they do for English class; they don't see it as useful to them as writers across all disciplines or in everyday life. Even preservice teachers tell me they don't see the value; many of them report that they "roughed up" drafts just to meet the requirement of multiple drafts, although some admitted to turning in two copies of the same paper and simply labeling one a "rough draft." Since they received credit—and most of them made good grades—the idea of process was not strategic. It was busywork. So, besides using the process as a strategy, I also *talk about* process as strategy so that my students will see what we do as more than a sequence of "activities."

When teachers implement the writing process in classrooms, students often do more prewriting than they did with earlier writing curricula, and that prewriting comes in many forms: freewriting, webs, cubing, clustering, heuristics. Many times, however, prewriting simply turns into a method of selecting or focusing on a topic. Less often is prewriting used as a way to come to know, to encourage curiosity, to learn to question, or to explore thinking from reading. Often the prewriting strategy doesn't really do what writers need it to do for them; it's just the one the teacher requires. My use of process as a strategy encourages a thoughtful consideration and conscious use of prewriting techniques as strategic tools that encourage inquiry as well as topic selection and focus.

Considering process as strategy, I use writing more frequently to promote learning, not just to show learning. Students need to question, to explore, and to develop thinking through a number of avenues prior to producing polished written texts that will be evaluated for their thinking and writing.

Because I consider the writing process as strategy, my approach is also different in that the assignments are a means to an end, not simply ends in themselves. They are ways to practice strategies, to consider processes and differences in products and how different products require different processes to create them. Although I expect students to produce quality products with substantive thinking, the emphasis is on the use of strategies and how being strategic can improve our writing processes as well as our written products. The focus is on transfer—

making sure students consider how their individual use of strategies might be useful to them when they write in the future and outside of class.

Because I want students to practice strategies, the writing tasks we engage in need to be interesting and unusual. Students won't get the practice they need with process strategies if they don't write—and many of the students I've taught have been so unsuccessful with more traditional writing assignments that I lose them even before I begin. I tend to ask students to write genres they see in the world around them more often than the ones they usually write in English classes. Because I take a strategic approach, though, students are able to transfer the strategies they practice in writing in response to interesting (they say "different") writing genres to other, more traditional, writing. I know this because I eventually assign a few more traditional assignments and have students apply the strategies to those, just to make sure. To begin, however, I try to make sure the writing we do is interesting and different; that's part of the rationale behind some of the more unusual strategy practice ideas I describe in this book.

Additionally, I want assignments to encourage students to write in a variety of genres for a variety of situations, to become sensitive to context as part of the thinking related to a specific writing task. Many times this means making more explicit the connections between reading and writing as students see how texts they read respond to considerations of purpose, audience, and genre—and that's an important part of this book. These connections should help students consider rhetorical choices authors make and how student writers might make similar choices when they compose. That's strategic.

And considering writers' choices requires more class talk, so sometimes classes aren't as quiet as writing classes might normally be. (Many students learn that talking is an effective strategy for them at all stages of the writing process.) Exploring the way writing fits into and impacts social situations requires discussion, negotiation, and collaboration. To develop sensitivity to the ways texts work in different contexts and to consider their own procedures and processes, students need to explore others' responses to their thinking and writing. And that involves talk.

Since classrooms can't address all the possible writing genres and contexts students will encounter, I want an approach to classroom practice that will create strategic writers who can adapt their writing to a variety of needs and situations. This does not mean I simply get a list of strategies from the back of a book like a vocabulary list and go through them in lessons one by one. To become strategic writers, students need each writing task to be a workshop, a way to practice strategies. As teachers, we can think of which strategies might be most appropriate for each writing task and then encourage students to think consciously of those strategies and of other circumstances in which those strategies

could be effective. This reflection, one that encourages transfer, helps students become writers who make writerly choices, not just in classroom writing but in writing beyond the school walls.

All of this leads to the last major difference of this book—that I try to make conscious use of all levels of knowledge: declarative, procedural, and conditional. The declarative explains and directs, while the procedural gives students practice with the strategies. The conditional helps students reflect on their use of strategies, come to know themselves better as writers, and consider how they might extend their strategy use beyond the particular writing task.

Although I provide some ideas for practicing strategies and implementing levels of knowledge, this book is really just a starting place. It's not meant to spell out everything a teacher should or could do to help students become strategic writers. I hope it works in the same way as the strategy practices I describe do for students: I hope it gives us a way to work through declarative, procedural, and conditional knowledge about teaching writing so that you can translate the ideas into the practices that work for the individual students and the needs you face in your own classroom. I hope this book invites you to engage your students in writing that is interesting and challenging. I hope, finally, that by beginning with this text and its ideas—and extending them in response to individual classroom needs—you can build a writing curriculum that develops strategic writers, ones who have developed tools that allow them to respond effectively to a wider variety of writing situations than we can possibly address in school—a world of writing.

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P.S. A few things about reading and using this book. First, about the writing process as I use it: The chapters describe process as inquiry, drafting, and revision. This is a broad generalization about the writing process that is necessary for organizing a book about it. In reality, as described in Chapter 2, the aspects of process overlap.

Each chapter begins with a personal story related to the idea of the chapter because writing (and teaching!) is personal and because stories are a powerful way to make connections to concepts. I try to make those connections for my students with my own stories and encourage you to do the same. If we talk about ourselves as writers, tell our own writing stories, I hope our students will too. And telling their own stories about writing will, I believe, develop in them a sense that they are writers. The chapters then give an overview of the concept of the chapter and some specific ways those concepts can be implemented.

Each chapter concludes with my reflection and resources readers might use for more information on the ideas discussed in the chapter. It's my wish that

not only will we help students practice habits of reflection as writers in order to develop conditional knowledge, but also that as teachers we will be more reflective about our teaching practices. My reflections, I hope, will spark that in readers. The sources will give readers the opportunity to act on issues raised in those reflections.

The appendixes contain concrete examples: strategy practices outlined in detail, full writing lessons that reflect the way I integrate the principles explained in the chapters, and student writing in response to the ideas I share. The chapters are meant as starting places for you to consider the ideas of strategic writing that you can then adapt for your own students; the practical materials are meant as scaffolding, examples of how I extended the chapter concepts in my own classroom. My intent is that both will help you begin to see a bridge between the concepts and the wide variety of ways they can be implemented in any specific classroom.

Overall, the book's organization is designed to help you find your own footholds and handholds on your journey up the mountain. Happy climbing!

Becoming Strategic

There is no master list of … strategies.

—JAMES COLLINS

W hen I was a young teen, skateboards became the "in" thing for my neighborhood. I watched the friends who got the first ones, watched them race down the hills of the subdivision shrieking and laughing, and I wanted that freedom, that speed, that wind in my face. I saved up enough money and bought myself a skateboard—chartreuse green.

The first time I tried to ride my skateboard, I crashed and scraped my knees and feet. Back then we rode barefoot to get a grip on the board—this was, after all, the olden days when skateboards first came out and weren't as fancy as they are today. No helmets or kneepads. No trick boards. The idea was to get a good long ride.

I tried again and again, without success. I always crashed. My friends told me better places to stand on the board and how to shift my weight. I tried their suggestions and a few of the strategies I thought up at night, just before sleep, as I was thinking about trying again the next day. Eventually I was able to ride down the hill, all the way, without crashing. It was just what I'd imagined (except for the serious vibrations caused by metal wheels on rough pavement). It was speed and wind and freedom—and it only took a week or so and a bunch of skin and blood to figure it out. It was wonderful!

Many years later, I am teaching junior high instead of riding my skateboard. It's the first day of school. Pencils and pens are in hands, blank paper waiting on desks. We are ready for our first writing in the course. "Write about what writing is for you." Blank looks. Puzzled expressions. Some shuffling of feet and squirming in desks. Eyes slant around the room as if to ask: What??? After a pause, I prompt them a little. "Start this way: 'To me, writing is . . .'"

Some students—the ones who want to be good students or those who see themselves as writers—pause only a moment before they begin to write. Many of the rest pause longer before, reluctantly and slowly, they put pencil to paper. It is, after all, the first day of the course. What are you going to do? I watch the pace, and, when most of the pencils have stopped moving, usually in about three minutes, I suggest students finish the sentence they are on and pause for now. The room reeks with relief: first hurdle behind us.

In the future we will share our informal daily writing, but for this first task, I want something else, so I pull out stacks of magazines, paper, scissors, and glue sticks and give directions for the next part of the process.

"Now, look for pictures of things that represent what writing is to you. When you have several, create a collage with your pictures." The mood in the class bumps up. They like this. They can chat and flip pages, cut and glue. They know collages. Even if this one isn't exactly an "introduce yourself to the class" kind of collage, it's still fun.

When the collages are complete (sometimes in the first class period, sometimes by the next one), I ask students to write again, this time using ideas from the collage as the basis for their response to "To me, writing is . . ." I encourage them to develop the ideas from the collage, not simply list the images, as a way to expand and explain their thoughts. All of the students can write now—and many write more than a page about what writing is to them. Here is part of what Jack wrote in response to the after-collage prompt:

> Writing to me is like the picture I chose of a football player carrying a football, because you can only go so far before you get stopped or make a touchdown. Writing is like carrying the ball and getting knocked down because when you are starting to write and you get writer's cramp or you just can't find the right word for how you're trying to explain something, it's frustrating, just like getting stuffed when you have the ball. Writing can also feel like making a touchdown. For example, when you have a good idea, you just keep on writing and going without stopping until you finish your story, or make the touchdown.

We finish our first strategy practice by reflecting about this experience, comparing and contrasting the first and final writing experiences. In this reflection, students consistently comment on both the process (particularly how much easier the second writing was) and the product (usually how much more interesting the second writing was).

This is our introduction to writing strategies and how they can help writers develop more effective writing processes as well as (potentially) improving the product of those processes.

Writing Strategies

With this initial experience, students begin to see how a strategy (in this case, using images to develop writing) can help them when writing is challenging. We discuss how writers often write without consciously using strategies—and how those writing situations differ from ones in which we might need to use writing strategies with intention. All writers write in some genres without much of a challenge at all (text messages, for my students, for example; shopping lists for me); writing in those genres and those situations feels automatic in many ways. But sometimes, when we get stopped or blocked, when a writing task is harder or unfamiliar, we might need something—some process or tool—to help us. I clarify this concept about the value of strategy with a short activity.

I give students a grid (see Figure 1.1) and ask them to count the total number of squares in the figure. After a few minutes, I ask students for their number and how they arrived at it. The most important factor is *how* students got their answers—and there is always a variety of methods.

I had a strategy—a way to solve the problem—when I first tried this: I drew a line around each square as I saw it. It took forever, and I still missed some. My husband used a different strategy and came up with a different number. We were both convinced we were right. Even if we had come up with the correct answer—and we both could have as it wasn't our strategies that were the problem—our daughter had a better strategy, and her answer was both correct
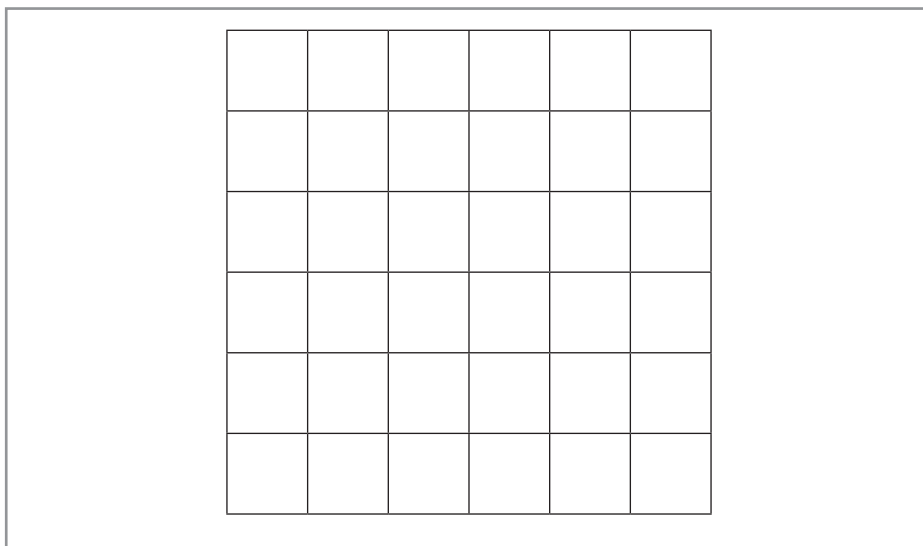

Figure 1.1. Gridded square.

and fast. She simply counted the number of squares on each side of the figure and then squared that number and every number below it down to one. Thus, a square with six smaller squares on each side would add 36+25+16+9+4+1 to equal 91. The point, I tell students, is that we could get the right answer any number of ways, but the way my daughter did it accomplished the task more efficiently and effectively; my system could get the right answer, but it took longer and allowed more room for mistakes. That is being strategic: overcoming a challenge with an appropriate and effective strategy.

I ask students to consider ways they use strategies in their daily lives, much like I did when I wanted to learn how to skateboard. They can give me many examples: The way they drive home is strategic because they consider traffic and stop signs and other factors, including the shortest distance (although that isn't always the way they get there because of other factors). They use strategies in all kinds of games and sports. They have strategies to get out of chores at home, to figure out the best way to get their math homework done in German class without the teacher catching on, to figure the best way to convince their dad to let them take his car to the dance.

Writers also use strategies to accomplish writing goals. Collins notes that even copying is a strategy many students use as a default (116); when they don't know how to do something or don't have the time or inclination, they find another way, one they think will help them accomplish their goal. Default strategies aren't usually effective, but they allow writers to simulate the goal.

Some of my junior high students, for example, use a default strategy when they don't know how to conclude a piece of writing: they just write "The End." In much the same way, when I'm hanging a picture, if I can't find the hammer, I might use any weighty instrument (the bottom of a saucepan?) to pound in the nail. These actions are default strategies—not usually the most effective ones, but ways to accomplish a goal nonetheless. The point is that I want students to consider themselves already as strategy users so that the move into writing strategies connects to their lives in general. And I want them to consider how using productive strategies, rather than less effective ones, matters. Especially in writing.

The grid activity with its discussion helps students see strategies as tools, as options or choices they have at their disposal. In writing we may not use every one every time we write, but they are useful as a toolbox, a set of golf clubs, a whole palette of paint colors. Whatever the metaphor, students need to see that strategies in writing are options they can draw from to adapt for a variety of different writing situations in which they might be needed.

When I first begin to talk to my students about being strategic writers, I ask them what strategies they already have in place. Their responses show, first, an

unclear idea of what writing strategies are and, second, a limited repertoire. "I work hard," writes one student, and I wonder if he could learn to work smarter with strategies. "Ryming [sic]," writes another. As a strategy?! "I write about what I'm interested in," writes a third. When I prompt them, some say they use spell-check or ask their parents or friends to read their papers. That's about the extent of what I can draw from them, even with prompting.

A colleague who teaches writing strategies recorded interviews with students about their writing processes: those who did not have an understanding of strategies for writing, even when prompted, would only repeat: "I would ask my teacher/parent/friend what to do." Whatever the stumbling block—

- What do you do when you have a writing assignment but don't have any idea what to write about?
- What do you do when you have an idea for writing but don't know how to start?
- What do you do when you have written part of a draft and get blocked?

—the answer was always the same: "I would ask someone." Although that's a good strategy, it's only one.

Students who had a background with the concept of writing strategies answered the questions very differently: they would freewrite for a while, or listen to music, or change locations for writing, or review a mentor text. They had a variety of strategies to turn to when writing was challenging.

I am sure that students probably have more strategies in place than the ones they can articulate; however, since conscious understanding is important in using strategies effectively—not in every case but when they are needed—not knowing what strategies they already have means they have little or no control over actually using such strategies successfully and consistently. And not understanding what it means to be a strategic writer means they might never pay attention to the strategies they have available for producing writing in a range of situations.

In our class, we explore many writing strategies that will provide students with tools to help them develop as writers. I make sure they understand that writers don't always use the same tools or in the same way, but that they need a wide variety of strategies to help them address the multiplicity of challenges a writer might face. For that reason, we will practice strategies and reflect on them so we can make sure we understand how the strategy works for us—or could work when it is needed. In addition, I encourage students to pay attention to the strategies they may develop for themselves or the ways they make others' strategies work for them.

I want students to know that our writing practices are meant to provide opportunities for them to try out strategies and figure out how to fit them to their own needs. For example, one interesting insight I gained from students' reflections about their collage writing is that while I used the collage to develop ideas for writing, many students found that it helped them with organization. That had not been a factor for me. And some students didn't feel that the strategy improved the product or eased the process for them at all—also an aspect of strategies: sometimes we use them more than at other times. These are important understandings to gain.

As we engage in strategy practices, I want students to understand that writing strategies share these characteristics:

- They are usually associated with process. That is, they are tools writers use during inquiry, prewriting, drafting, revising, and publishing of writing to help them accomplish their writing tasks.
- They are transferable. That is, they can be applied to more than one writing task or situation and do *not* belong to a specific writing product or genre.
- They are adaptable. That is, the way the strategy is used may be altered for different writers or by the same writer for different tasks. Writers make strategies their own when they adapt them for their own purposes.
- They are able to be used independently. That is, even though the teacher may support the practice of a new strategy in a classroom environment, eventually writers should be able to use the strategy on their own.

Strategy? Skill? Activity?

For teachers to implement a strategic writing approach, some terms need to be defined—and clarifying terms can get complicated. Sometimes I hear a teacher use *strategy* to describe a textual characteristic: an engaging hook is a *strategy* for an argumentative essay. Sometimes I hear the term used to describe a particular skill with writing: it is a *strategy* to have a topic sentence at the start of every paragraph. I understand the confusion, to an extent. A general definition of strategy could involve the plan, the tool, and the skill to use the tool to accomplish the plan. Confusing!

An Internet search for "distinguishing skills from strategies," for example, is fraught with contradictions. Some sources say skills are automatic, and strategies are the practices that get to automaticity (Afflerbach, Person, and Paris).

Some correlate strategies with processes and skills with knowledge ("Skills vs. Strategies"). Wiggins distinguishes strategies from tactics—strategies as the goals, and tactics as the methods used to arrive at those goals. I see lists of skills versus strategies published by districts and schools—so many that my head spins, partly because I can't tell why some things are in one category and some are in the other, and some are in both!

In Steve Graham and Dolores Perin's *Writing Next* report, the use of writing strategies was found to be the most significant teaching approach for improving student writing. The research studies Graham and Perin analyzed for that report identified three broad categories of strategies for writing: (1) cognitive learning strategies that encourage general learning and content knowledge; (2) writing strategies that connect specifically to writing tasks; and (3) self-regulatory strategies that help writers stay with and proceed through a task. All three relate to writing, although writing strategies are more like the strategies addressed in this book. That being said, as an example, I will show how these three categories of strategies thread together, how it's difficult to separate them completely. When I realized that this section about what I mean by *strategy* and how it differs from *skill* or from others' concept of the word needed to be revised, I went through a process that involved using several strategies:

- *When I had collected several sources from reliable references, I took notes and annotated them, identifying key passages as well as places where I agreed or disagreed with the authors. I wrote questions in margins.* These activities constitute a writing strategy in that I was using writing to learn, making sense of my inquiry, but these actions are made possible by cognitive learning strategies that helped me identify key threads and main ideas or arguments being made by the different authors I was reading.

- *Next I handwrote an outline of the way I thought my ideas meshed with those of my sources—or, rather, I* started *to write an outline. It ended up being a blend of outline, chart, and freewrite to help me find my way into the argument I was making.* Using writing to learn (in all three ways—outlining, charting, and freewriting) is a writing strategy. My own experience helped me know when to use which form of writing-to-learn for the different ideas as they developed in my thinking, an example of cognitive learning strategies.

- *Finally, I found where I wanted to include the material in the chapter and began drafting.* This was partly self-regulatory—I had to tell myself I had conducted enough inquiry to do the hard part of actually putting sentences and ideas into the document, but it is also a writing strategy. Fletcher

(*How*) talks about the gap between ideas and actual writing. His advice? "Write one word. Then another" (40). He also advises another strategy: "Read your way back into an unfinished piece" (43). Both of these are writing strategies that have an element of self-regulation to them.

So it's hard to separate completely what research shows are different kinds of strategies we use when we write. For the purposes of this book, however, I use *writing strategies* to mean primarily those tools writers use to create a piece of writing, the ones most linked to the writing strategies category in the *Writing Next* research (Graham and Perin), even though I am aware that cognitive and self-regulatory strategies might be woven into them.

Teaching a Writing Strategies Approach

When we teach writing strategies, we make use of all the beneficial practices associated with the writing process. In fact, because strategies are strongly associated with the process of writing, we could consider the writing process itself as a kind of strategy. Certainly the writing process is a tool, adapted by individual writers to meet the needs of different writing tasks at different times. We don't always prewrite or revise, but sometimes—when the task requires it—we do. That means we could use aspects of the process as umbrella strategies, and I want my students to think of that. But to get to that point, students first need to stop thinking of prewriting and drafting and revising and editing as *products* the teacher requires—as *products* they create after the paper is done, in some cases, just to get the points the teacher would give for the *process*. They need to stop thinking of the writing process as something that we only *do* in English classes. Instead, students need to be encouraged to think of the process as a choice, a tool that helps them in their writing tasks.

One way I help students consider process more like a strategy is by my adaptation of Maxwell and Meiser's Levels of Writing (213–15):

- Level 1 (L1): This is writing that goes through only an abbreviated process (maybe little or no prewriting, little or no revision), that is meant for a limited audience (yourself or the teacher, for example), or that is unlikely to be graded. The purpose of L1 writing is often to explore ideas or express feelings and ideas informally. In the world, L1 writes might be text messages or social media posts; in school, these might be exit cards or writer's notebook entries. This writing is mostly spontaneous.

- Level 2 (L2): This is writing that usually involves either more prewriting or revision than L1 writing. L2 writing has a wider audience (might be shared with peers or the whole class) and is often used for purposes including informing, interpreting, or evaluating. In class, it might be writing that is scored for more than just participation because it is intended to have a little more thought and polish than L1 writing. In the world, L2 writing might be emails to teachers or employers, for example; in school, it might be test answers or end-of-quarter reflections.

- Level 3 (L3): This is writing that goes through most or all of the writing process, that may have a wider audience (published in some way, online or shared widely in school), and that may be evaluated for many factors including polished language and conventions. Many purposes can be accomplished with L3 writing, as this is considered the most formal writing situation.

Talking about writing levels helps students consider process as a tool they use to accomplish different goals related to purpose, audience, and genre, not something that is just *done* for English classes.

An important element of teaching strategies and the writing process as strategic involves my understanding (as a teacher) of levels of knowledge: declarative, procedural, and conditional. With this understanding, I am better able to help my students see how the writing process can be strategically employed and how the strategies we practice might be useful to them as writers. To summarize these levels:

- Declarative knowledge is knowledge *about* something. Knowing that a story usually has a title or knowing that making a list could help me generate ideas—these are examples of declarative knowledge.

- Procedural knowledge is knowledge of *how to do* something. Actually *writing* a title on the cover page or *making* a list about all the ways the new Star Wars movie is better than the old ones represents procedural knowledge.

- Conditional knowledge is knowledge about *when*. Knowing when to use a title page or knowing when making a list could benefit me in another writing situation is conditional knowledge.

In some ways, thinking about levels of knowledge is evident in our learning outside of school and writing. Think of learning to drive, for example. To begin, we need declarative knowledge—which is the gas pedal and which is the brake?

That's important knowledge to have! But as we learn to drive, we need practice using those pedals beyond simply identifying them. We learn to speed up and slow down with those pedals, and we learn more nuanced ways of using them too. For example, we learn to slow down (let up on the gas or tap the brake) as we enter a turn but then, partway through, as we are coming out of the turn, to give more gas. Only practice driving can teach us these nuances of using the two pedals effectively. And the way we develop those nuances is through reflection (sometimes consciously and sometimes not), by watching the effects of different choices made during a variety of turns. Think of a novice driver, for example, who speeds up going into a turn. As a parent, I suspect my urgent tone—"Brake! Brake!"—might have encouraged my child to reflect more consciously on the speed sequence for taking a turn. And reflection will help drivers know what adjustments to make when a turn is sharper or more sweeping.

Teachers who want to develop strategic writers know the differences between these three kinds of knowledge in the writing classroom, and they know that to help students become strategic writers, students will need to work at all levels. Teachers may use declarative knowledge to explain, but they also need to have students practice—actually write and use strategies—to gain procedural knowledge. And, after they've used a strategy, students need to reflect on their experience—either through writing or talk—to explore what worked, what didn't, and why. What could they adapt for future writing? Hillocks's research suggests that many teachers spend the most time at the declarative level (*Ways* 28), talking *to* students about the importance of using a mentor text to guide organization, for example, but maybe less time actually helping students imitate a variety of mentor text options for that organization. And fewer still move into the conditional knowledge level of having students reflect on the value of choosing an organizational pattern from a mentor text in future writing situations.

Reflection is an essential aspect of developing as a writer. Carl Nagin asserts this in *Because Writing Matters:* "To develop as writers, students also need the opportunity to articulate their own awareness and understanding of their process in learning to write. Research has shown the importance of such metacognitive thinking in becoming a better writer" (82). Kathleen Blake Yancey also makes the connection between competence and reflection when she recognizes reflection as "growth of consciousness" and cites Pianko: "The ability to reflect on what is being written seems to be the essence of the difference between able and not so able writers from their initial writing experience onward" (4). I want my students to become able writers, so reflection is a necessity.

But reflection is both a difficult and a neglected aspect of teaching writing strategies. As Nokes and Dole note, "Because strategy use is often demanding,

students are not likely to engage in a strategy unless they are convinced that it will help them succeed" (167). It's challenging sometimes for students to see the value of going back to think about a strategy once it has been used—done its job—and the writing is completed. It's up to us to help students see how strategies benefit them as writers and how they might use a strategy in another writing situation—and this is the direct function of reflection, conditional knowledge. Thus, reflection also requires instruction and practice. As John Dewey notes: "While we cannot learn or be taught to think, we do have to learn how to think well, especially how to acquire the general habit of reflecting" (140). This is what I hope my repeated use of reflective questioning helps students develop.

It's a slow process, though.

I want to emphasize this:

- Reflection is essential.
- And developing reflective ways of thinking in students takes time and effort.

Because I want my students to develop reflective habits—and because it isn't easy for some students to do so without repeated practice—I ask reflective questions all the time, particularly at the end of strategy practices we do in class: What did we just do? How did it help you? How might you use it in other writing situations? This talk helps all of us see our writing strategies as transferable—and it emphasizes a way of thinking. It helps students see that a strategy might do one thing for them but something else for another student. Or it helps them understand that even if a particular strategy didn't help them much, others found it useful, emphasizing the idea that strategies are adaptable and unique to each writer and, sometimes, each writing situation.

Additionally, my students write individual reflections all through the course. Particularly when a writing assignment is turned in, I have students respond to reflective questions unique to the writing we've just completed and the particular strategies we practiced. The questions, ones that look both backward and forward, are adaptations of the following general patterns:

1. What strategies did you use on this writing assignment that worked well for you? Consider strategies of inquiry, drafting, and revision in your answer.

2. Why do you think they worked well? In other words, what did the strategy do for you that improved your ability to write or your writing?

3. Under what conditions could/will you use this strategy again?

At the end of each quarter, we also reflect on the strategies we've practiced that quarter. I list all of the strategies we practiced during that time and ask students to identify their top three, reflecting on why they were helpful and how they might be useful in future writing situations. An example of the prompt for this reflection in found is Appendix 1. This reflection is one more way to remind students of the strategies they know and their growth as strategic writers.

Because of the nature of strategic writing instruction, with an emphasis on adapting to writers' needs and a variety of writing situations, teachers need to think very deliberately about instruction. That means we too—not just our students—need to be reflective. It means considering what outcomes we want from each writing task and how to make those outcomes meaningful in students' lives beyond the immediate assignment. In other words, teaching students to *use* writing strategies isn't enough. We have to ensure that students think of them as strategies, as tools that can help them accomplish their goals as writers now and in the future, in other writing tasks and contexts. Our planning and clarity about how our plans fit our goals can make a big difference in student writing development.

For example, sometimes the difference between an activity and a strategy practice or a skill mini-lesson might not be clear. All are important parts of teaching writing, but they serve different purposes. *Activities* are useful to help students learn a concept or engage with a writing task (some activities in this book include the gumdrop activity in Appendix 2 or the defining activity at the beginning of the lesson plan in Appendix 3). Hillocks encourages the use of gateway activities, for example, "to involve students in appropriate strategies of inquiry and ways of generating discourse features" (*Teaching* 149). *Skill mini-lessons* help students review and improve their abilities to create effective sentence boundaries or craft meaningful dialogue, for example.

But *strategy practices* are something different. Strategy practices have as their goal the transfer of individualized ways of approaching a writing task. In strategy practices, students try out strategies in the context of actual writing, working through what might (on its surface) look like an activity or lesson—making a collage, for example—but that functions as (and should be understood as) a transferable practice that could move a writer toward a goal. In the lesson plans included in the appendixes, these different aspects of teaching are noted, all essential to effective overall instruction.

Ultimately, being intentional about writing instruction doesn't necessarily mean stopping what we've done before. Instead, it means being more thoughtful about what we've done before and possibly taking a different perspective on it. The specific processes that help us narrow or focus a topic or come up with

a question we want to research—these could be considered strategies. What does brainstorming really do for a writer? When might it be an effective strategy? When might another tool make a better strategy to accomplish the writer's goals? These are questions both teachers and students need to ask themselves in order to develop an overall strategic approach and to develop writing strategies that move writers through the writing process in the various writing tasks they'll encounter.

The number of strategies has no bounds; there isn't a book or list somewhere, though I've been asked that several times. The range of strategies is set by what works for writers in a variety of writing situations. That said, writers tend to favor some strategies over others, a factor we discuss in class. But all writers might need new strategies from time to time, not familiar or favorite ones, that will help them move past a writing challenge. I know publishing writers who regularly seek new strategies. If they don't currently have a strategy to solve the writing problem facing them or to move them toward a writing goal, they talk to other writers or think about the problem or play around with possible strategies until they find what helps them resolve the problem or meet a goal. Many say they don't usually use the strategy again—they used it just that once, to help them move forward. Our students need to learn this perspective. Certainly we need to teach them some strategies, some specific ways to solve issues of process, but we also need to teach them to become strategic themselves by giving them chances to choose the strategies that work best for them at different stages of the process and by encouraging them to discover or invent strategies that will help them meet their writing goals.

Jim Burke, in his summary of effective literacy instruction, notes that "children do not develop composing strategies from red ink corrections (*nor from just writing*)" (199, emphasis added). We've all heard the first part of his statement; few may have considered the second: just doing something doesn't automatically make us better at it, especially if we do whatever it is under duress or unwillingly or without concern for effectiveness, the way too many students approach writing. I think of my own children when it was their turn to do the dishes or when they were told to clean their rooms. Though they may have done both chores many times, simple repetition didn't always make them better at either of them. But repetition combined with instruction or direction or modeling or scaffolding can help. And that's what strategic writing should encourage—not just doing the assigned writing but practicing it with strategies and then considering the effectiveness of those strategies. Strategic writing means teaching writing rather than simply assigning it.

Reflection

10/31: Sometimes I wonder if what I'm trying to do really matters to my students. Are they becoming more strategic as writers? Or am I just doing the same things as all the teachers who've come before me? Today, it seemed like maybe something is getting through. We were reading a student sample of the reversal essay they are working on, noticing what the writer did that they might do in their own writing. As we read, Jack said, "That's a good strategy." I asked him what he was referring to. "This part, here. Where he asks two questions and then goes on to answer them. That's a good strategy because it made me want to know the answer too, so I kept reading. I'm going to try that." Then he went back to his reading as though nothing momentous has happened. For me, though, it was a big deal. He was thinking about the mentor text as providing possibilities for his own writing, about textual characteristics writers use to create effects!

On the other hand, Alec is still not doing anything. The other day, when I had given time to write in class, he was drawing a cartoon figure. I asked him what he was working on. He said it was a strategy. I asked him how it helped him write more effectively, and he said it was his writing mascot. "See? I put it under the paper I'm writing on and it inspires me." Sure. He was using the idea of strategy to avoid doing any writing! Using my own tool against me—and against himself. What can I do to make a difference, to make more of a difference to these students who don't write and who don't want to write? How can I help them see strategies as ways to accomplish goals when they don't even set writing goals?

Additional Resources

Collins, James L. *Strategies for Struggling Writers*. New York: Guilford Press, 1998. Print.

Dean, Deborah. *What Works in Writing Instruction: Research and Practices*. Urbana, IL: NCTE, 2010. Print.

Graham, Steve, and Dolores Perin. *Writing Next: Effective Strategies to Improve Writing of Adolescents in Middle and High Schools: A Report to Carnegie Corporation of New York*. Washington, DC: Alliance for Excellent Education, 2007. Print.

Yancey, Kathleen Blake. *Reflection in the Writing Classroom*. Logan: Utah State UP, 1998. Print.

Deborah Dean is back with a significantly reenvisioned and revised edition of her popular *Strategic Writing.* After working with high school teachers who implemented the approach detailed in the first edition, Dean has refined, reorganized, and updated the material to better support classroom teachers dedicated to teaching not just the process of writing but also the strategies of writing that help students develop the ability to write effectively throughout their lives.

Most of the changes were prompted by the desire to help teachers better understand an overall strategic approach that can counter the testing climate that pervades many schools. This approach works within a workshop model and uses the writing process as an umbrella framework. In addition to providing engaging and practical classroom activities, this new edition offers (1) explicit strategy talk, with lesson plans that differentiate between strategy, activity, and mini-lesson to further demonstrate how all three function in a strategic approach; (2) a focus on digital tools and genres, which have proliferated in the last ten years; (3) a more accessible organization, with the conceptual material in early, short chapters and the teaching ideas, examples of student work, and lesson plans in appendixes; and (4) grouping by types of strategies for better alignment with process than with rhetoric.

As always, Dean considers students' out-of-school as well as in-school writing tasks, preparing them for a world in which writing is a critical skill, whether for school, work, information, or self-expression.

A former secondary English teacher, **Deborah Dean** is currently a professor of English at Brigham Young University, where she teaches preservice and practicing teachers about writing instruction. She is the author of *Strategic Writing: The Writing Process and Beyond in the Secondary Classroom*; *Genre Theory: Teaching, Writing, and Being*; and *What Works in Writing Instruction: Research and Practices,* as well as coauthor of *Revision Decisions: Talking through Sentences and Beyond.*