

To What Extent Do Teacher Directed Journal Prompts and Other Various  
Teacher Modeled Writing Exercises Affect the Writing Abilities of Ninth Grade  
Students at Superior High School?

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## ABSTRACT

A ninth-grade general education class at Superior High School, in Superior, Wisconsin, was used to discover to what extent using journal writing and other teacher modeled writing exercises affected the general writing abilities of those students. This study was conducted over a nine-week time-period, or one quarter. During the first week of the quarter *The Test of Written Language - Fourth Edition* (TOWL-4) was given to create an individual baseline for each of the 130 students. There was a specific rubric used to score the test, and on this rubric there were 32 items that were being analyzed (Contextual Conventions - 21 items and Story Composition - 11 items). The TOWL-4 was again given at the end of the quarter in order to determine any student that may have increased, decreased, or stayed the same in their score. The results indicated that on the whole students made gains. Overall, when looking at the results for Contextual Conventions, out of the 21 total items students made gains in 17 items and decreased in 4 items. When looking at the 11 items analyzed for Story Composition, students made gains in all 11 of the items.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

High school students do not have the option of being able to write well, it is a necessity for their everyday lives; good writing skills support educational and occupational success (actonline.org, 2007, p. 8). “Writing can serve as a means of access or a barrier to opportunity for students. Those who write effectively have an advantage in applying to college, seeking employment, or earning promotions. They can also use writing to think through ideas and assimilate new information” (Gere, 2010, p. 42). This suggests that students who are able to write effectively profit from this aptitude within their everyday lives. But what does that say for the remaining students? “For weaker students, writing can act as a gatekeeper because those with weak writing skills face limitations on what they can achieve in schooling and the world of work. The choices made by instructional leaders can help determine whether writing becomes a means or access or a barrier to opportunity” (Gere, 2010, p. 42). Failure to acquire strong writing abilities restricts opportunities for both postsecondary education and employment (Harris et al., 2013, p. 38). The teaching of writing has gained the attention of educational professionals, parents, and others concerned about the imperatives of a literate society. With the understanding for writing importance this in mind, not only has the School District of Superior, in Superior, Wisconsin had s an increased drive for writing literacy, but the entire nation has felt this initiative. More recently, however, †To build a foundation for college and career readiness, students need to

learn to use writing as a way of offering and supporting opinions, demonstrating understanding of the subjects they are studying, and conveying real and imagined experiences and events. To meet these goals, students must devote significant time and effort to writing, producing numerous pieces over short and extended time frames throughout the year (Evers, 2011, p. 67).

### Statement of the Problem

It is unknown the direct impact journal writing and teacher modeling can have upon a student's writing abilities. This study investigated the effect of journal writing and teacher modeling on the writing abilities of ninth grade students at Superior High School.

### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to discover if to what extent using journal writing and other teacher modeled writing exercises affected the general writing abilities of ninth grade students at Superior High School.

Across America there are students struggling as low-achieving writers in all grade levels. Unfortunately, over the past decade there has not been an improvement in the writing disparity of American students. Looking back, in *A Report to Carnegie Corporation of New York*, ~~Steve~~ Graham and ~~Dolores~~ Perin (2007) discussed the alarming results from the 2002 writing exam given by the

National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). In sum, 72% of 4<sup>th</sup> – grade students, 69% of 8<sup>th</sup> – grade students, and 77% of 12<sup>th</sup> – grade students did not meet NAEP writing proficiency goals. Based upon this data, Graham and Perin (2007) concluded that ~~These~~ results clearly demonstrate that very large numbers of adolescents need interventions to help them become better writers ~~(Graham & Perin, 2007)~~. In comparison with the 2002 results, the 2011 reports from the NAEP did not show any significant gains in writing proficiency. In fact, looking exclusively at the *Proficient* level there was only a 1% gain over the course of those nine years at the twelfth grade level, while ~~one percent~~ at the eighth grade level there was an astounding ~~7% seven percent~~ drop. In 2011, ~~24% twenty four percent~~ of students in both the eighth and twelfth grades showed performance at the *Proficient* level. The *Proficient* level, as described by the NAEP, indicates solid academic performance by the student at the grade level being assessed. This suggests these students are demonstrating their ability to achieve clear, concise writing which has purpose. Aside from the *Proficient* level, there is a *Basic* level, which signifies only partial mastery of the essential knowledge and skills students need to perform the *Proficient* level in their grade. ~~Regrettably~~ Alarmingly, 54 percent of eighth-graders and 52 percent of twelfth-graders performed at the *Basic* level in writing in 2011. Just as concerning, only three percent of eighth- and twelfth – graders in 2011 performed at the *Advanced* level. This level represents superior performance (National Center for Education Statistics). Overall, this

evidence is showing that there have not been any gains in writing over the past decade, thus, exposing a need for students to improve their writing abilities.

Through this study and the evidence on the extent to which journal writing and teacher modeling increased students writing abilities, this study can help to ~~If this study shows an increase in students writing abilities, this will~~ enlighten the educational community on an effective means by which to help students enhance their writing.

### Research Question

This study attempted to answer the following overall question: To what extent will teacher directed journal prompts and other various teacher modeled writing exercises in an English classroom at Superior High School affect writing abilities in ninth grade students as demonstrated on the Test of Written Language? ~~is there a link between teacher directed journal prompts and other various teacher modeled writing exercises in the English classroom and increases in writing abilities in ninth grade students?~~ The following areas were studied in support of the research in order to answer the overall question. (1) What is the numerical breakdown of students that decreased, stayed the same, or increased in their score as measured by the standardized test: *Test of Written Language*, over the course of a nine week quarter? ~~Will students be able to increase their writing abilities, as measured by the standardized test: *Test of Written Language*, over the course of a~~

~~ten week quarter?~~ (2) To what extent did the combination of journal writing based on teacher prompts and various teacher modeled writing exercises prove or disprove to be an effective integration of writing strategies? Is the combination of journal writing based on teacher prompts and various teacher modeled writing exercises an effective integration of writing strategies? (3) What do the answers to these questions show in terms of an increase in student writing abilities from beginning to end of the nine week quarter at the ninth grade level?

### **Nature of the Study**

This study had a focus as a quantitative research method. Quantitative research methods and measures are usually universal; data in quantitative research appears in the forms of numbers and specific measurements; research can be illustrated in the forms of tables, graphs, and pie-charts; and quantitative research can include methods that include mathematical calculations (ResearchMethodology, 2014). By using a quantitative method the researcher was able to gather concise data that showed a numerical breakdown of students' test scores and participation levels. Furthermore, this data was be able to show, through a variety of percentages, graphs, tables, and/or charts any amount of students that decreased, stayed the same, or increased in their scores as measured

by the standardized test: *Test of a Written Language* over the course of the nine week study. Through this data gathered from the standardized test, the researcher was also be able to determine effectiveness of the combined methods of journal writing based on teacher prompts and various teacher modeled writing exercises based on the numerical data and graphics.

~~The primary goal with this study will be to determine if implementing journal writing through teacher prompts, along with teacher modeled writing exercises in a ninth grade classroom will improve students' writing abilities. Throughout the country there are students struggling as writers, leaving the question of how can these students be helped to improve their abilities?~~

Once the Test of Written Language had been administered and scored, the researcher was able to commence the study's treatment. The treatment was the use of journal writing and various modeled writing assignments. Writing can be a challenging task for many children given its sequential and concurrent components such as idea generation, encoding text, and editing to produce a final copy (Dunn, 2011, p. 18). With this in mind, the researcher, who is also the classroom teacher, broke down writing tasks into journal writing assignments and modeled various writing examples to show areas of student weakness. Student weakness were first established through test scores from the TOWL-4, and then were further determined through commonly viewed concerns the teacher saw through assessing their writing. Journal writing was chosen as a writing instrument because this is a consistent and viable approach to helping students improve their writing abilities.

Incorporating a journal writing routine into the classroom is critical to developing autonomous writers (Jones, ~~J.~~ & East, ~~J.~~, 2010, p. 112). Consistent journal writing was a commitment, but can be beneficial if used appropriately. “This kind of commitment will eventually cause children to successfully communicate their ideas, motivate and challenge them to spread their wings, and help develop meaningful writing skills. Consistent journal writing sessions can engage students and inspire their development into master writers” (Jones, ~~J.~~ & East, ~~J.~~, 2010, p.113).

### Significance of the Study

“*Because Writing Matters*” ~~*Because Writing Matters*~~ makes the case that students need to write more across all content areas and that schools need to expand their writing curricula to involve students in a range of writing tasks. The challenge has been echoed at the national level by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), the American Association of School Administrators (AASA), and the National Academy of Education’s Commission of Reading: “Unfortunately, every recent analysis of writing instruction in American classrooms has reached the same conclusion: Children don’t get many opportunities to write” (The National Writing Project and Nagin, 2006, p. 3).

This research study was an attempt to impact the educational field, particularly in the discipline of writing while in an English classroom, by observing

the extent to which student writing was influenced by journal writing ~~presenting~~ the ninth grade level. This contribution was attempted through the efforts of using both original journal prompts coalesced with teacher modeled writing exercises to determine if these writing strategies were an effective means by which to develop students' understanding and proficiencies as a writer.

Unfortunately, the number of studies conducted with low-achieving writers ~~...~~remains relatively small (Graham, ~~S.~~ & Perin, ~~D.~~, 2007, p. 9); this is exactly why this study can impact the educational field, simply because there is not overwhelming amounts of data showing the impact on student writing specifically for the ninth grade level through the use of both journal writing and teacher modeled writing prompts/assignments.

### Definition of Terms

**Study of Models:** The study of models provides adolescents with good models for each type of writing that is the focus of instruction. Students are encouraged to analyze these examples and to emulate the critical elements, patterns, and forms embodied in the models in their own writing (Graham, ~~S.~~ & Perin, ~~D.~~, 20).

**Literatecy:** (1) able to read and write; (2) having or showing knowledge about a particular subject; (3) an educated person (Merriam-Webster, 2014).

~~The quality or state of being literate, especially the ability to read and write;~~ important to help function in school, on the job, and in society (ASHA, 2013).

### **Three Levels of Proficiency:**

**Advanced Level:** This level represents superior performance for the specified grade level being assessed.

**Proficient Level:** The NAEP describes the Proficient Level as a solid academic performance for the grade level being assessed ~~(National Center for Educational Statistics, 2012).~~

**Basic Level:** This level indicates partial mastery of the prerequisite skills and knowledge that are fundamental to achieve Proficient level work at the specified grade level. ~~(National Center for Educational Statistics, 2012).~~

**Authentic:** ~~on one level, "authenticity" is understood as being somehow associated with a sense of empowerment, self-actualization, and individuation, and as such, linked to larger questions of human existence and agency in the world. On a second level,~~ authenticity, on the part of teachers, is seen to ~~also~~ promote student learning in traditional subjects such as English literature, law, or physics (Kreber, ~~C.~~, Klampfleitner, ~~M.~~, McCune, ~~V.~~, Bayne, ~~S.~~, & Knottenbelt, ~~M.~~, 2007).

**TOWL-4:** *Test of Written Language – Fourth Edition* by ~~Donald D.~~ Hammill and (2009).

**Scoring Criteria:** Contextual Conventions (21 items scored and totaled)  
Composition (11 items scored and totaled)

**Raw Score:** The totaled score a student receives in each scoring category,  
Contextual Conventions and Composition.

(Hammill and Larsen, 2009)

**Commented [CJ1]:**

**Commented [CJ2]:** Would I only have this cited once... since all of these terms came from the same source? Or should I have a source for each level?

### **Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations**

It may be assumed that students wrote to the best of their ability while responding to the standardized test: *Test of Written Language*. Furthermore, it can be assumed that students put in their best effort during each writing assignment throughout the quarter, whether it was a journal entry or a teacher modeled writing exercise.

The teacher was also the researcher, so this study is considered to have been a study of convenience as the teacher's students were the ones involved in the study.

It can be assumed that the teacher gave equivalent and uniform instruction during each of the five sections of ninth grade students that participated in the study. Additionally, it can be ~~presumed~~assumed the teacher did not miss any significant days of school or instructional time.

Finally, the teacher models played a significant role in the process throughout the study, so the results could have be affected by the strength of the models themselves.

### **Limitations**

## **Delimitations**

### **Conclusion**

Overall, the focus of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness of two combined writing strategies for ninth grade students at Superior High School. The conducted research study and accompanied literature review was conducted in an effort to determine the extent in which ~~support the value of~~ using both journal prompts and teacher modeled writing exercises would ~~with-increase~~ing students' writing abilities. It is imperative that not only ninth grade English teachers take an interest in writing strategies to improve students writing abilities, but teachers in all disciplines.

The next section, the Literature Review, provides information focused on the importance of writing, teacher modeling, journal writing, the classroom teacher as a writer, and student interest, as well as authentic writing. This information is rooted in extensive research and incorporates several studies that help to indicate and show not only the importance of these areas, but also what this looks like in a classroom.

## CHAPTER II LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this study will be to investigate the effect of journal writing and teacher modeling on the writing abilities of ninth grade students at Superior High School.

Throughout the study the researcher will be analyzing the use of journal writing and teacher modeling, along with any connections towards students' interest/motivation and authentic writing in correlation with completing their writing tasks.

### **Why Writing is Important**

“We know that writing plays a key role in learning, as students use writing to gather and organize knowledge and to explore and refine their ideas. We also know that writing is the primary means by which students demonstrate their knowledge in today’s classrooms and that both writing about text read and teaching writing have a positive impact on reading outcomes” (Harris et al., 2013, pp. 538). Although it is clear that writing is a significant concern within the

educational field, it is important to understand why this initiative has gained such momentum. Effective writing skills are important in all stages of life from early education to future employment. Inadequate writing skills, therefore, could inhibit achievement across the curriculum and in future careers, while proficient writing skills help students convey ideas, deliver instructions, analyze information, and motivate others (The National Writing Project & Carl Nagin, 2006, p. 3).

There is a need to have effective abilities in writing, not only in the school setting, but in everyday life. Most contexts of life (school, the workplace, and the community) call for some level of writing skill, and each context makes overlapping, but not identical, demands. Proficient writers can adapt their writing flexibility to the context in which it takes place (Graham & Perin, 2007). The future of writing could be thought to lie within the teachers helping students in every class harness their writing abilities.

At the end of the day it is imperative that every teacher, no matter what their content area, appreciates how important writing truly is for every student because the concern for successful writing shouldn't just fall under the English content area. "Writing in its many forms is the signature means of communication in the 21st century. This simple truth heightens the urgency to help all of our nation's students become strong writers and effective communicators" (National Writing Project, 2008).

### Teacher Modeled Writing

Teacher modeled writing involves a teacher being an active writer for students to witness what is involved in creating a well-written document. Teachers use a think aloud strategy as they model what they, the writer, are thinking throughout the process of composition. Modeling may consist of topic, skill, function, organization, or type of writing the teacher wishes to convey to the students. The art of teaching is knowing how much modeling is required to achieve your particular goal (Dye, 2011). Sylvia Read did extensive research and created a model for writing, and wrote the article, “*A Model for Scaffolding Writing Instruction: IMSCI*”. IMSCI is an acronym for the series of steps Read created based on the concept of scaffolding, which stands for: Inquiry, Modeling, Shared writing, Collaborative writing, and Independent writing. In her instruction on how to ‘Take Action’, she details, “Model for students how to write in the genre, mode, or form. Actively modeling and thinking aloud in front of students allows them to understand the complexity of the writing process.” (Read, 2010).

Regardless of the content area, teacher modeling can be utilized in a variety of means by which to aid students in making gains in their learning. In the classroom any time a teacher demonstrates an idea, procedure, example, or concept for students, that teacher is modeling. Specifically in an English classroom, modeling is an effective teaching strategy that can directly influence students’ writing abilities. When students emulate good writing, it is reflected in their own writing. From a study written by Dunn, “Mark interviewed, observed, and reviewed

documents of general and special education teachers so as to define their beliefs about best practices for writing-skills instruction” (Dunn, 2011), and educators are able to gain insight from their findings. “Helen, an elementary literacy and assessment specialist, commented, ‘In teaching writing I use the *I do, We do, You do* sequence.’ I observed Helen initially work through each step of the mnemonic by verbalizing all of her thoughts and making all of her notes and text visible to the students. The students then worked through a second example with the teacher’s help. Finally, the students employed the strategy on their own with teacher feedback” (Dunn, 2011).

Some tasks are so complex, that each specific step within the task needs to be modeled. Think about how many steps it requires to write a paragraph. The students need to gather information on a specific topic, organize the information, introduce the topic, offer supporting details, and finally bring the topic to a conclusion. (Dye, 2011). Students at every level and ability have the need to improve their writing, even with regards to paragraph writing. In every classroom there is a range of abilities, ranging from proficient, fluent writers to struggling or reluctant writers. “Struggling writers often need the teacher’s provision of modeling and extra examples as well as mini-lessons which focus on areas of students’ need. Seeing models of good writing in others’ prose can then help children apply these practices in their own text” (Dunn, 2011, p. 18). Modeling not only can provide specific examples of the how-to-process of writing, but it can lead to questions, class discussions, and a deeper understanding. Thus, modeling

throughout the entire processes of writing can assist students in all aspects of composition while creating discussions to further aid their understanding. Dunn (2011) interviewed, observed, and reviewed documents of general and special education teachers in order to investigate beliefs about best practices for writing-skills instruction. This qualitative study provides a rich description of what teachers considered as good practices to promote students' writing-skills development (Dunn, 2011, p.19). Of those teachers involved in the study, one key practice/strategy idea suggested to improve student writing was teacher modeling. Bill, one of the teachers involved, stated, "The kids may want to replicate. It's okay to show skills, what a proficient paper is, or some interesting points on a paper" (Dunn, 2011, p. 23). Thus, modeling can be a beneficial strategy in the writing process.

In conclusion, when supporting students in the writing process, they will rely on what is being modeled for them as the basis of their understanding and essentially mimic what they see in their own writing. Gallagher believes modeling is the key to improving students' conceptual grasp. "I am the best writer in the room, and as such, I need to show them how I grapple with this mysterious process we call writing. Students must see the process to understand the process" (Rebora, 2012). It is clear that the teacher in the classroom should be the expert on the topic of writing and thus needs to be an active participant for the students by modeling what they know and how to create a well written piece. Seeing models of good

writing in others' prose can then help children apply these practices in their own writing (Dunn, 2011, p. 18).

### **Classroom Teacher as a Writer**

In the ideal classroom, the teacher is a writer him/herself. By this, the teacher is a practicing writer who shares their writing – particularly when it's in draft form (Whitaker, 2014). Imagine a physical education class for example; the teacher cannot teach the students how to throw a football without demonstrating the correct and proper form. An art teacher cannot expect students to create a piece of pottery without showing them the proper steps. So the same must be done in every content area. In the English classroom, the teacher cannot expect students to master writing without being given proper demonstrations and teaching by an educated, practicing writer.

The type of writing that teachers do varies—lesson planning, creating lists, and writing to friends are most frequently cited (Brooks, 2007, p. 176). Less common writing instances might include journals, novels, stories, or articles. But nonetheless, students need to have their teacher to look up to as an experienced writer and as an important person in their abilities to learn the writing process. “Modeling is a concept often recommended in writing instruction, but it is worth considering how demonstration, or the use of models, might best support student

writers. Where might teachers find models of good writing? Gallagher (2011) argued that teachers must become mentors – teachers are ‘the best writer in [their own] classrooms,’ and ‘our children need to stand next to us and see how we write.’” (Benko, 2012). All the while, a teacher being a writer themselves, they remember and realize the process it truly takes to create a piece of writing.

In a study involving teachers, Brooks (2007) found that some participants felt that “they experienced the struggles and joys of composing and revising, which, in turn, not only taught them to be more empathetic to the experiences of their students, but also ‘humanized’ them to their students” (p.178). This is an important function of a teacher as a writer because it is imperative that teachers remember the struggles, the process, and the time it truly takes to create pieces of writing. In general, when a teacher can empathize with the students, the students are in a more comfortable working environment where they feel safe and comfortable to write. A teacher might minimize students’ frustration by taking a collaborative approach to instruction; the critical point is that a teacher’s stance can assist students’ performances by creating an atmosphere wherein students feel both motivated and supported (Benko, 2012). Due to this notion, it is important that classroom teachers are seen as example writers to help make students more comfortable and confident in their writing process.

Another benefit of a teacher creating a piece of writing is the process of students analyzing and studying what, how, and why they wrote what they did. As students study teacher responses, this can create discussion opportunities about

goals and strategies, which fosters genuine conversation and learning. Students need to tap the motivational resources within themselves and the support that is available in the instructional environment (Lam & Law, 2007, p. 145). Thus meaning, the teacher modeling their writing can spark interest within the students, which could lead to meaningful discussions, learning, questions, and understanding.

Whyte, Lazarte, Thompson, Ellis, Muse, & Talbot (2007) conducted research on 35 teachers, both National Writing Project teachers and comparison teachers, to examine to what extent their personal writing was associated with their students' achievement in writing. This study tested a claim that has defined the National Writing Project's model for professional development for 30 years: that teachers of writing should write (Whyte et al., 2007, p. 5). In the end, the implications of this study were two-fold. First, the patterns of association in these data among NWP affiliation, teachers' writing, and their students' achievement were consistent with the NWP's assertion that NWP teachers' actual practice of writing and oral presentation of writing lead to benefits for their students. Another implication asserts the findings relate to previous empirical research in that teachers' successful implementation of nonroutine methods (including teaching writing) may depend on modeling and high-quality feedback following as well as during intensive professional development (Whyte et al., 2007, p. 12). In the end, this research supports the notion that writing as a teacher and modeling that writing can positively impact students' writing achievement.

### **Journal Writing**

Journal writing has numerous definitions. It can entail students copying information from the board, free writing on any topic, and/or formally writing in response to a given prompt (Jones & East, 2010, p. 113). Journals provide students with a safe place to write their thoughts, discover themselves as writers, write freely, and simply document happenings. Journal writing can be utilized as an avenue for learning, especially about writing. In a study performed by Barscher, Lalwer, Ramirez, and Schinault, there was an attempt to increase writing skills in low achieving writers. “The routine of journal writing was the biggest influence on student improvement. Students became more focused on the task at hand, and grew into the emotional commitment of expressing their feelings which raised the quality of the accomplished work” (Bartscher et al, 2001). Journaling is a task that can be applied in a variety of means within the classroom, and especially in how often it is employed. A teacher may find the use for a daily journal, sporadically throughout the week, or just randomly throughout the month/quarter.

### **Journal Writing to Improve Student Writing**

Writing is a vital tool and, with the proper motivating guidance, students will become successful writers. When teacher create an environment that promotes self-efficacy, students develop into autonomous writers (Lambirth & Gooch, 2006, p.146). That being said, if teachers help students believe in their own abilities when writing they can develop into independent writers. Journal writing may be the avenue that teachers should consider when wanting to improve students' writing abilities.

Jill Jones and Jill East conducted a study which concluded that the practice of daily journal writing in one primary classroom demonstrated that this endeavor has the potential to increase students' writing confidence and control over written language. When the classroom teacher immersed the students in an enriched writing environment, the students' achievement was spectacular. By creating a rich writing environment, teachers can reap the benefits by producing talented writers who have improved spelling and reading abilities (Jones & East, 2010, p. 121).

From this example, it is evident that consistent journal writing can not only improve students' confidence towards writing, but also their actual writing abilities. It seems that the environment the teacher and students create in which the students write in plays a role in their efforts, abilities, and outcomes in writing. Teachers and students must be actively involved for the journal writing sessions to prosper. This student-teacher interaction motivates students to succeed. When teachers, children, and others work together to inspire, entice, and support developing writers, children write well (Lambirth & Gooch, 2006, p. 146). This

kind of commitment will eventually cause children to successfully communicate their ideas, motivate and challenge them to spread their wings, and help develop meaningful writing skills. Consistent journal writing sessions can engage students and inspire their development into master writers (Jones & East, 2010).

### **Student Interest**

In any subject, but especially in regards to reading and writing, student interest plays a significant role in student participation and effort. Interest for writing affects the ways that students approach writing and the results they achieve (Lipstein & Renninger, 2007, p. 79). “Although interest plays a large role in motivation and confidence, we need a clear understanding of how teachers and classroom practices can influence students’ interest for the act of writing. Lipstein and Renninger studied the perceptions of 178 students in grades 7, 8, and 9 to develop this understanding” (Lipstein & Renninger, 2007, p. 79).

Lipstein and Renninger (2007) found that when they talked to students, they expressed that interest for writing matters and, more importantly for teachers, that student interest is directly influenced by writing experiences in the classroom. The research further indicated through the data and their experiences suggested that if we as educators can bring an understanding of interest to our teaching of writing and create writing experiences that meet the wants and needs of student writers, then we can make a difference. Lipstein and Renninger’s data and interviews showed that students made it clear that if a writing experience is to help them develop a deeper interest for writing, it must feel like an opportunity that meets

their wants *and* needs (82). Therefore, this study indicates that student interest can impact the achievement of students' writing, which consequently is pertinent to this study and to the extent in which interest can impact these students.

Journals are an avenue that can provide students with choice, self-selection, and an opportunity to write about what is of interest to them. When students exercise their powers of choice, they take control over the decisions regarding their writing. Once students begin to take pride or ownership of their writing there is a correlation to their effort, which is an area Lipstein and Renninger are well versed in. Research on writing and motivation indicates that students who have an interest for writing are more likely to set effective goals, make use of helpful strategies, and seek feedback as they work with writing tasks (Lipstein & Renninger, 2007, p. 79). That being said, teachers need to ensure students are making connections and are finding ways to be interested in the writing. Through student interest, teachers can help students be more motivated, thus giving them better opportunity to be successful and become engaged. "To help students become critical thinkers willing to set aside their own personal views and become open to others, teachers must first provide a means and motivation for discourse in the classroom. Journal writing is a means to accomplish this goal, and it can be structured in such a way that students not only have a voice but also take responsibility for their own learning" (Smith et al., 2007, p. 44).

In a field study conducted by Lam and Law (2007) it was found that when the teachers adopted more motivating teaching strategies, the students were more

motivated. When the students were more motivated, they, in turn, had better performance in writing. The study investigated the relationship among instructional practices, motivation, and writing practices. Through Lam and Law's (2007) results, it showed that students will be motivated when their teachers provide them with challenging tasks, ensure real-life significance in their learning activities, stimulate their curiosity, grant them autonomy, recognize their effort, and give them useful feedback for improvement. Furthermore, they show that when students are motivated, they will have better writing performance. This information is helpful to educators who are eager to enhance student motivation in writing.

### **Authentic Writing**

Creating authentic writing assignments, in which students are able to make connections with their prior knowledge or within their daily lives, will better allow for greater participation and comprehension. Gallagher (2012), a teaching veteran of 25-years, argues that writing instruction needs to be reoriented around two interlocking premises. First, teachers should emphasize the "real-world" purposes of writing by giving students assignments that engage their intellects and demonstrate the value of thoughtful composition. Second, they need to provide students with authentic modeling of how this kind of writing is done (Rebora, 2012). This would indicate that not only do teachers need to make writing feel relevant

and relatable for students, but in the process they need to show authentic writing by modeling their own writing.

Smith, Rook, and Smith (2007) conducted a study in which they “examined the use of cognitive, affective, and metacognitive questioning strategies in a 9th grade world history class as a means to increase student engagement and academic success. Through the use of structured journal questions over a 12-week period, students who responded only to text-related questions showed no benefit compared to students who did not participate in journal questions at all. Students who responded to metacognitive and affective questions in addition to text-related questions demonstrated better retention of content material as evidenced by course grades at the end of the study. These results suggest that students who respond to questions designed to promote thinking as well as personal connections, experience a positive effect on achievement” (43). Essentially, journals were used in correspondence with specific questioning strategies in order to increase student comprehension, but most importantly increase the level of student interest. Students who completed the additional metacognitive and affective questions demonstrated an increase in both comprehension and overall course grade. The results of this study revealed that students who responded to journal questions that promote thinking and also make personal connections to the content being studied experienced comparatively positive effects in achievement in world history (Smith et al., 2007, p. 46).

Furthermore, as students are making new and old connections they can be inspired to discuss their findings and share with their peers. Discussions are an excellent opportunity for students of all abilities in the classroom to ascertain knowledge, comprehension, and new skills within writing. When teachers encourage students to discuss their writing it helps to make an authentic feel to the material. Not only are students able to witness other students writing, but they are able to learn and grow from the discussions that happen.

### **Conclusion**

This section has displayed the importance of the elements of writing, teacher modeling, journal writing, the classroom teacher as a writer, student interest, and authentic writing. This study focuses and takes an in-depth look at how each of these factors can be influential for a student and their success as a writer. All of these elements will be put into action during this study and the results of this work will be analyzed by looking at the affect they have on student writing.

### CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to discover the extent in which using journal writing and other teacher modeled writing exercises affected the writing abilities of ninth grade students at Superior High school. The teaching method that occurred in each of the five class sections was the combined use of journal prompts with teacher modeled writing exercises. The students' writing abilities, as measured by the standardized test: *Test of Written Language – Fourth Edition (TOWL-4)* (Hammill and Larsen, 2009) was assessed at the beginning and at the conclusion of the nine week study. The researcher attempted to answer the following overall question: Is there a link between teacher directed journal prompts (and other various teacher modeled writing exercises in the English classroom) and increases in writing abilities in ninth grade students?

#### **Design**

Quantitative research methods describe and measure the level of occurrences between two or more events, basically answering the question “How many?” (ResearchMethodology, 2014). This study was designed to answer three main

questions: (1) What is the numerical breakdown of students that decreased, stayed the same, or increased in their score as measured by the standardized test: *Test of Written Language*, over the course of a nine week quarter? (2) To what extent did the combination of journal writing based on teacher prompts and various teacher modeled writing exercises prove or disprove to be an effective integration of writing strategies as measured by the pre-test and post-test of the standardized test: *Test of Written Language*? (3) What do the answers to these questions show in terms of student writing abilities from beginning to end of the nine week quarter? All of these questions will be answered in a universal manner; they have specific measurements, can be illustrated in the form of visual graphics, and can be calculated mathematically.

This study used a quasi-experimental, nonequivalent group design with a pre- and post-test measurement. A quasi-experimental design is similar to an experimental design, but is lacking an important component – random assignment. Due to the fact that the class sections of students was not be created through random assignment, this was also considered a nonequivalent group design. It was considered nonequivalent because the student classes being analyzed could not be deemed as equivalent since there was no way to show or prove that they could be equivalent. Lastly, the study used the *TOWL-4* as a pre- and post-test measurement in order to analyze student’s writing abilities at the beginning and end of the nine week study.

The quantitative, quasi-experimental approach was chosen because quantitative data was needed in order to complete the study and effectively answer the research questions. Through numerical data this study was able to show what the results were for all three questions after the nine week study has concluded.

### **Participants**

This study was completed at Superior High School, located in Northwestern Wisconsin. This school district has nine schools, serving nearly 5,000 students, and is the twenty third largest school district in Wisconsin. The high school has a student population of about 1,500 students and serves grades nine through twelve.

The population specifically of the ninth grade students at Superior High School was roughly 400 students at the time of the study. The sample used in this study was comprised of five sections of ninth grade English classes, which roughly equals 130 students. Each class size averaged around 25 students. The selection of participants was not chosen by the researcher, but was based on the class schedules the students had. This is considered to be a population of convenience for the researcher.

### **Instrumentation**

Throughout this study there were two, consistent teacher led writing strategies: journal writing and various modeled writing exercises. Journal writing

was utilized as a means of having students write and to provide ample practice for the writing strategies they are learning. As mentioned previously, Jones and East (2007) conducted a study using journal writing; the results of this showed that consistent journal writing can improve students' writing and their confidence in their writing. This same idea for determining improvement with journal writing occurred throughout the conduction of this study. Every two weeks the journals were collected and graded. Through this consistent grading practice the researcher was able to determine areas that were in need of improvement as well as areas that had been successful or mastered. As far as the journal topics were concerned, these were specific prompts that the researcher gave to all students, one to two times per week, over the course of the nine week quarter. The various modeled writing exercises provided the majority of the practice students received during the writing instruction. The specifics of what writing instruction needed to be taught was based upon student needs as based on information gained from the standardized test *Test of Written Language – Fourth Edition*, which was the dependent variable for the study.

In order to complete this study it was necessary to assess the writing abilities of the students. The *Test of Written Language – Fourth Edition (TOWL-4)* was used as a pre- and post-test measure in this study. It was originally created by Hammill and Larsen in 1978, while the fourth edition was revamped in 2009. There are six sections the test is analyzing; although these indicate several elements in student performance, this study is only interested in section five which emphasizes

“contextual conventions” and “story composition”. The other sections were not going to be analyzed for this study because they are too broad, too difficult to score without bias, or they simply didn’t apply to this study’s focus. Under section five there are 32 total items which are factored into the scoring criteria (21 under contextual conventions and 11 under story composition), and for each item there is a specific criterion, thus making this scoring rubric very clear cut. Due to the specific and rigid criterion of the rubric, there was little to no room for biased evaluation from the researcher while scoring the tests. The reliability of administering the assessment is very high due to the specific administration instructions handout that is provided with the testing packet. The scoring follows the same fashion of reliability as it is explained the administrator, or researcher in this situation, would score the test according to the standard procedures given in the testing packet.

### **Procedure**

Before beginning a study that involves high school students and their education, the researcher presented their ideas and sought approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Wisconsin-Superior. Once this is received, the researcher talked with their principal to get the school approval. Once all approval was received the researcher began the process of the study.

During the first week of the study the *TOWL-4* was administered to all students in each of the researcher's five sections of ninth grade English. This provided the researcher with the initial assessment of all students' writing abilities at the beginning of the study. The scores were then documented into a spreadsheet. The scoring indicated and identified specific areas the bulk of students were struggling with in their own writing at that point. This information then aided the researcher in the planning of what writing strategies needed to be modeled and worked on throughout the nine week period.

Throughout the nine weeks the researcher worked with all students focusing on specified writing elements based on information gained from the initial assessment. Teacher modeled examples and writing exercises provided students with the basis for their learning and practice. These examples and assignments will fit in with the content and curriculum being taught, as to promote authentic writing and show purpose towards their writing. The journal prompts also provided additional writing practice and gave students more relatable topics to their daily lives. Again, this promoted student interest through authentic and relevant prompts. Throughout the grading process, the teacher created rubrics for all prompts and assignments, thus giving a consistent approach to the grading process.

At the end of the ninth week, before the grading quarter ends, the students again took the *TOWL-4*. This provided the researcher with a post-assessment to accurately measure any decreases, gains, or unchanged scores students may have

made over the nine week period. The researcher again scored each test based on the specific scoring criteria.

### **Analysis**

The first step in the analysis was to score each individual student's pre-assessment test. There was a specific form, or rubric, in which to record all answers that were tallied up to give the researcher a raw score for each individual (see Appendix C). The benefit of this pre-made rubric was that there was little room for any bias or favoritism to particular students because this rubric was very specific. When using the rubric the researcher had specific guidelines to follow and was only grading based upon those elements in the rubric, and not personal opinion on the piece of writing.

The results for each student were scored before the journal prompts and teacher models began. Each of the 32 graded items from the rubric were turned into graphs and diagrams, so the results could easily be concluded. Once the pre-assessment numbers were tallied and the graphs/diagrams had been made, the researcher was then able to analyze the numbers. The researcher then looked at the results and saw if there are any outliers. These outliers were evaluated and the researcher determined that these were all within reason and they weren't worth noting.

Through this evaluation the researcher was then able to gauge what areas were of greatest weakness for the greater part of the students. Those areas included: Contextual Conventions (Items:4, 9, 10, 12, 13, 14, 18, and 19) and Story Composition (Items: 1, 4, 7, and 8). Through this data the researcher was able to cater the journal prompts and modeled writing assignments to tailor to these areas of greatest need.

At the end of the nine weeks, the same process was used during the post-assessment to tally and analyze each student's score. The two scores from the pre- and post-test served as the foundation of the research to prove the gains students had made in their writing abilities, or indicated any decreases or lack of changes that occurred as well.

There were several different graphs made to analyze and visually show the data. Bar graphs were used to compare both the pre- and post-test scores; these are graphs to represent the number of students who saw increased scores, students whose scores remained the same, and also students who saw a decrease in their score. See Table 5 for group scores of pre- and post-test data for Contextual Conventions and Table 6 for group scores of pre- and post-test data for Story Composition. Finally there are also analysis breakdowns for each of the 32 scoring criteria items; these graphs show each item and where students increased, stayed the same, or decreased in their abilities. These four bar graphs show specific numbers and percentages of what areas of student's writing were affected throughout the study. Reference Table 1 and Table 2 to see results for the pre- and

post-test results for all 21 of the Contextual Convention items. Reference Table 3 and Table 4 to see results for the pre- and post-test results for all 11 of the Story Composition items.

#### CHAPTER 4 RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to determine to what extent do teacher directed journal prompts and other various teacher modeled writing exercises in an English classroom at Superior High School affect writing abilities in ninth grade students as demonstrated on the *Test of Written Language*. The following areas were studied in support of the research in order to answer the overall question. (1) What is the numerical breakdown of students that decreased, stayed the same, or increased in their score as measured by the standardized test: *Test of Written Language*, over the course of a nine week (2) To what extent did the combination of journal writing based on teacher prompts and various teacher modeled writing exercises prove or disprove to be an effective integration of writing strategies? Is the combination of journal writing based on teacher prompts and various teacher modeled writing exercises an effective integration of writing strategies? (3) What do the answers to these questions show in terms of an increase in student writing abilities from beginning to end of the nine week quarter at the ninth grade level?

*Research question 1: What is the numerical breakdown of students that decreased, stayed the same, or increased in their score as measured by the standardized test: Test of Written Language, over the course of the nine week quarter.*

In the first week of the nine week quarter all students, in each of the five ninth grade sections, participated in a writing assessment called the *Test of Written Language*. The students were shown the example picture (Appendix B) while being read the specific administrator's testing directions (Appendix A). The administrator then projected the students' pre-assessment picture (Appendix D) and then gave them the class hour to complete their assessment. The researcher had students print their assessments once they had finished and collected them. The researcher, who is also the classroom teacher, scored all 130 of the students' assessments.

The assessments were scored based on the *Test of Written Language* scoring rubric, specifically Section 5: Story Scoring (Appendix C). Under section five there are 32 total items which are factored into the scoring criteria (21 under Contextual Conventions and 11 under Story Composition). The results varied from student to student. The breakdown for each of the 32 items is illustrated through four tables. Table 1 shows Contextual Conventions items 1-10, Table 2 shows Contextual Conventions 11-21, Table 3 shows Story Composition 1-5, and Table 4 shows Story Composition 6-11. Table 5 illustrates the number of students that fell into the groups compiled of their total scores for Contextual Conventions. This table shows the groups for both the pre-test results alongside the post-test results. Table 6 illustrates the number of students that fell into the groups compiled of their total



TABLE 2

### Contextual Conventions Scoring Rubric Results (Items 11-21)

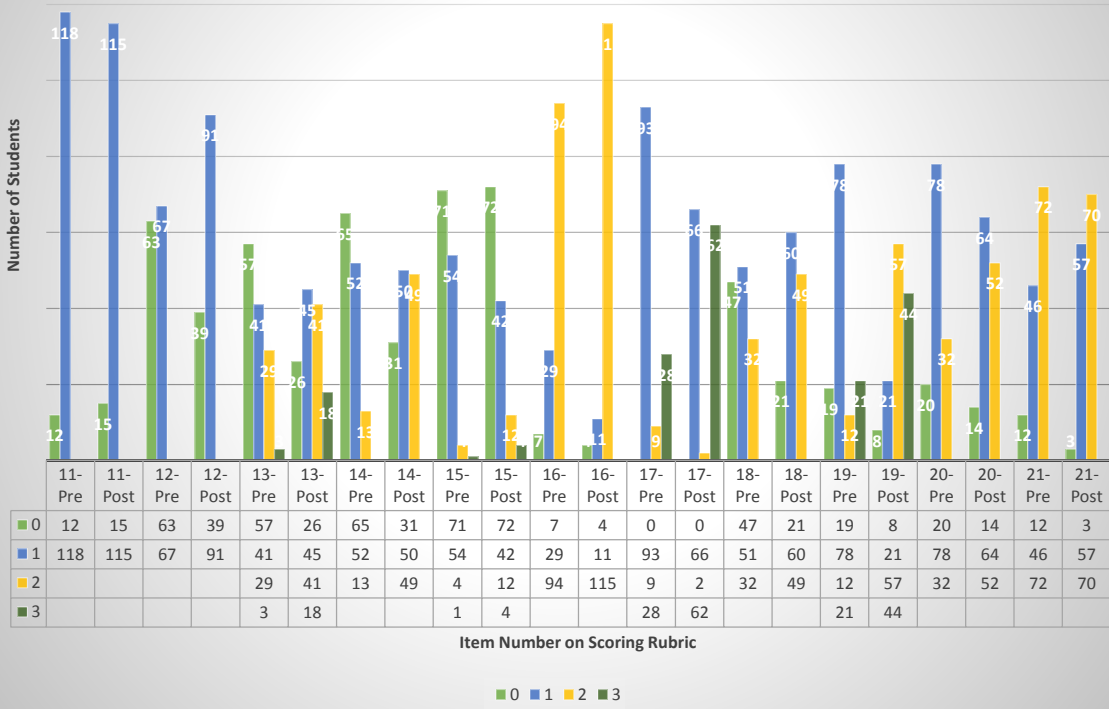


TABLE 3

### Story Composition Scoring Rubric Results (Items 1-5)

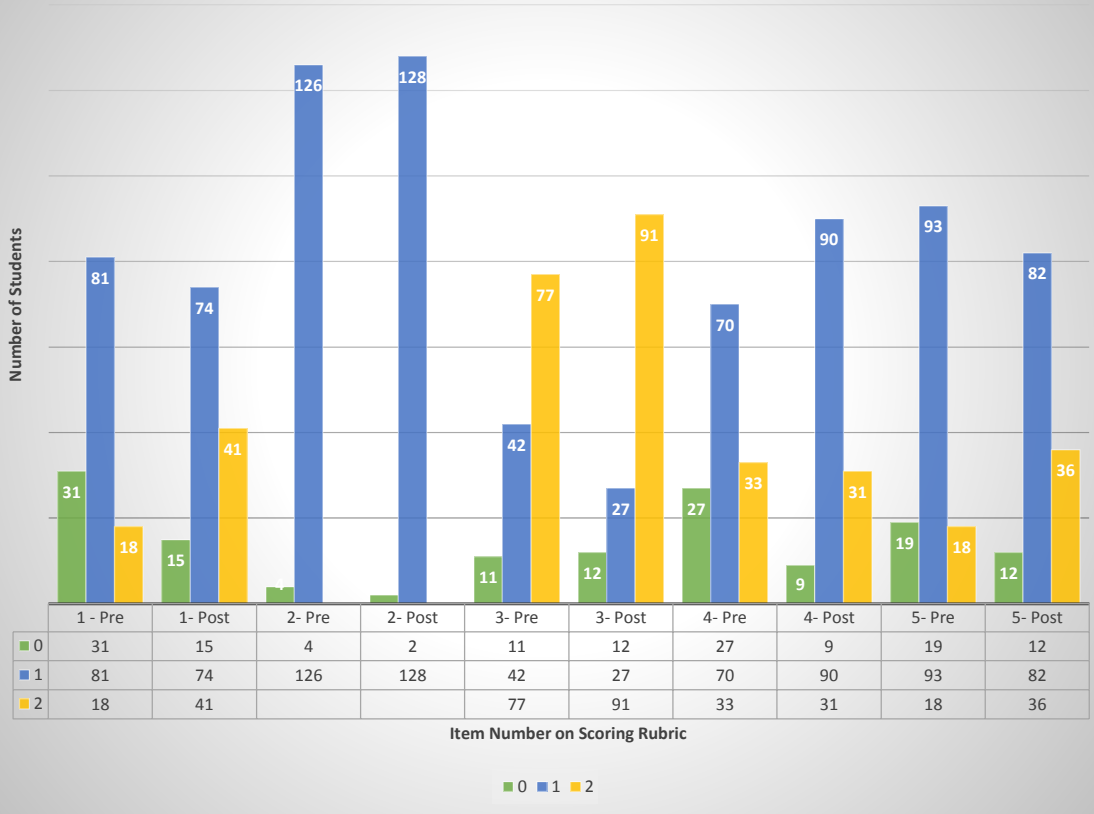


TABLE 4

### Story Composition Scoring Rubric Results (Items 6-11)

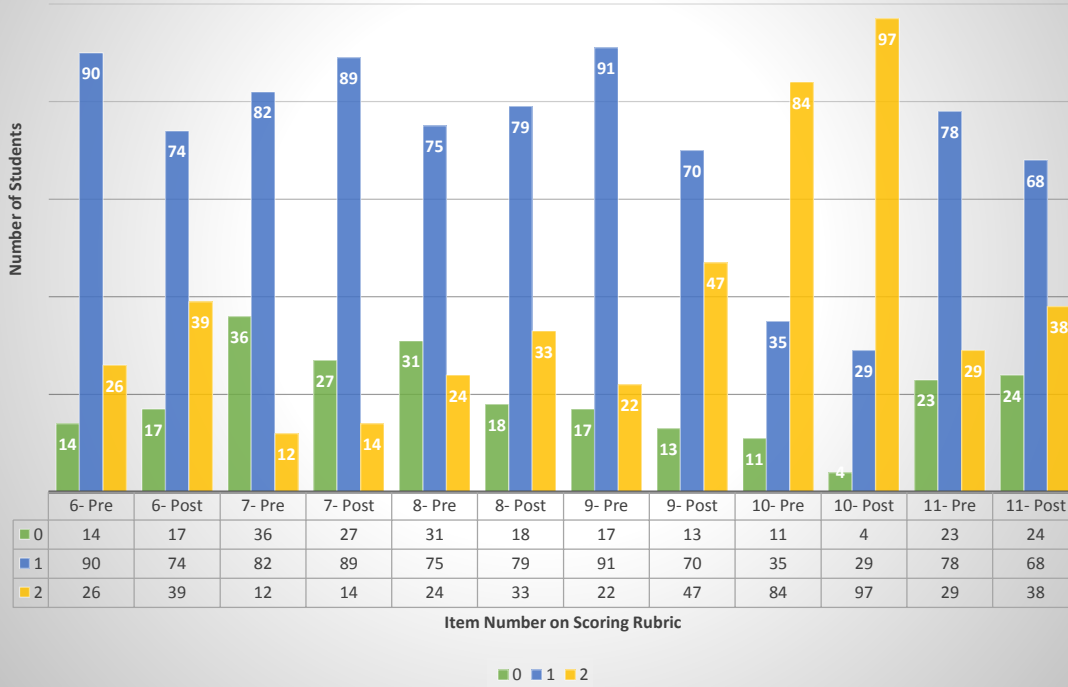
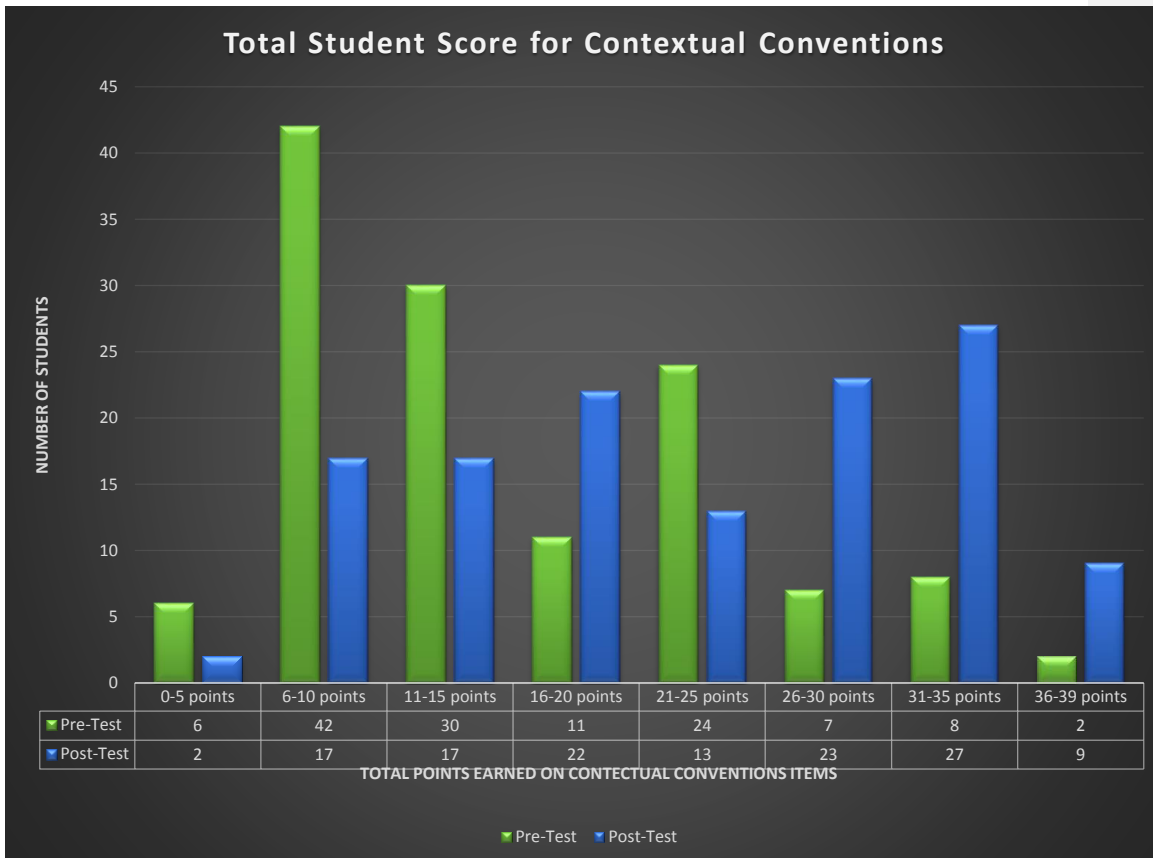


TABLE 5 - Total Student Score for Contextual Conventions

**This graph shows:**

77 students stayed or moved (61 stayed the same and 16 switched -10 went up/6went down)

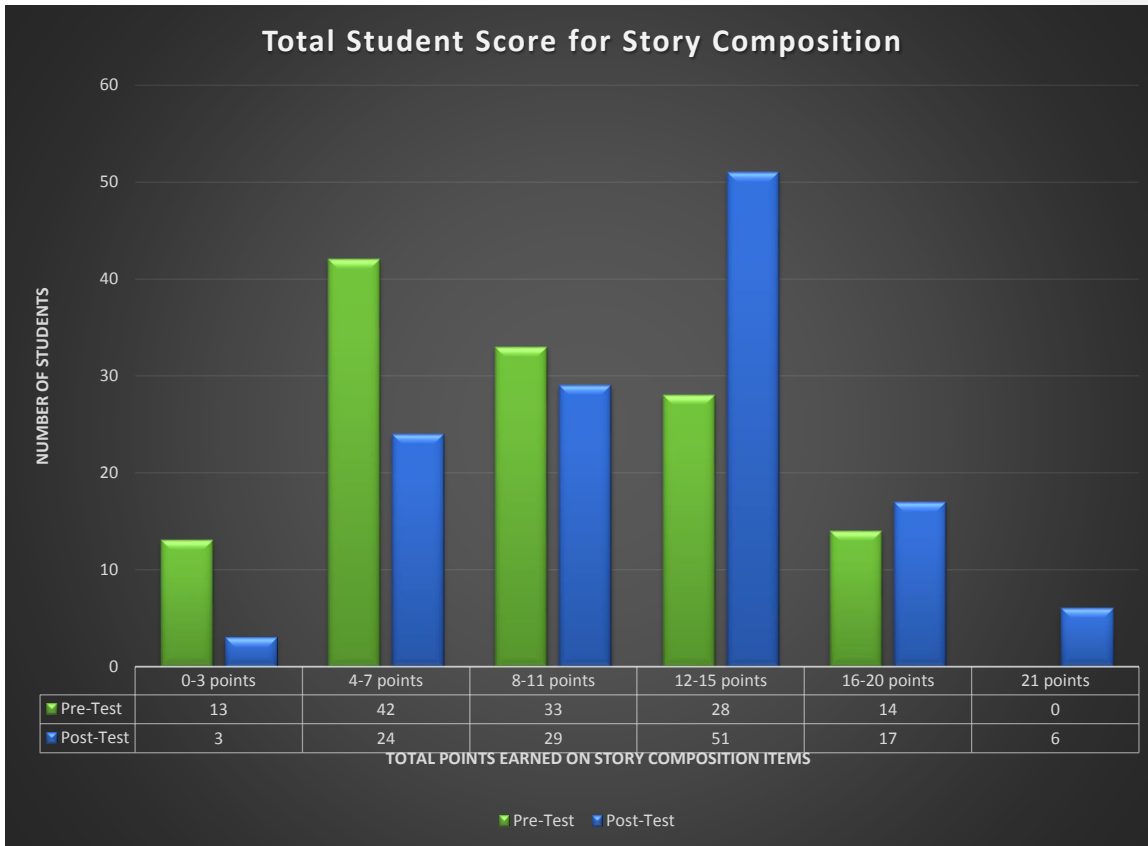
53 completely moved categories (49 went up – 4 went down)

Stayed the Same = 61 students (46.9%)

Dropped = 10 students (7.7%)

Went Up =59 (45.4%)

TABLE 6 – Total Student Score for Story Composition

**This graph shows:**

64 students completely moved categories (61 went up – 3 went down)

66 students stayed or switched categories (54 stayed the same and 12 switched-8 up/4 down)

Stayed the same = 54 students (41.5%)

Dropped = 7 students (5.4%)

Went up = 69 students (53.1%)

*Research Question 2: To what extent did the combination of journal writing based on teacher prompts and various teacher modeled writing exercises prove or disprove to be an effective integration of writing strategies? Is the combination of journal writing based on teacher prompts and various teacher modeled writing exercises an effective integration of writing strategies?*

When looking at the results from the pre-test and the post-test it is clear that students made significant gains in their writing abilities. Out of the 32 items that were scored between the contextual conventions and the story composition students made gains in 28 of them.

Below details each of the 32 items and the overall percentage of change, whether positive or negative, from pre-test to post-test. It is broken down by the two categories on the rubric: Contextual Conventions and Story Composition. There is a percentage highlighted in either yellow or red following the description of each numbered item. Numbers highlighted in yellow indicate the percentage of students who increased their score, while numbers highlighted in red indicate the percentage of students who decreased their score.

#### Contextual Conventions

1. Sentences begin with a capital letter (3.8%)
2. Paragraphs (clearly indicates paragraphs with indentations/spaces) (32%)
3. Uses quotation marks (4.6%)
4. Uses comma to set off a direct quote (6.9%)
5. Correctly uses an apostrophe at least once (- 0.7%)
6. Uses a question mark (- 3.1%)
7. Uses an exclamation point (2.3%)
8. Capitalizes proper nouns including those in the title (1.5%)
9. Number of non-duplicated misspelled words (50%)

10. Uses asterisk, ellipse, hyphen, parentheses, brackets (- 2.3%)
11. Fragmentary sentence-usually a sentence without both a subject and a verb (- 2.3%)
12. Run-on/Rambling Sentences (18.5%)
13. Compound sentences (23.8%)
14. Uses coordinating conjunctions other than and when forming compound sentences; count each conjunction only once. (27.7%)
15. Introductory phrases and clauses (8.5%)
16. Noun-Verb disagreement (16.2%)
17. Sentences in paragraph(s) (26.2%)
18. Sentence composition (20%)
19. Number of correctly spelled words having seven or more letters (47.7%)
20. Number of words with 3 syllables or more that are spelled correctly (15.4%)
21. Uses *a* and *an* appropriately (6.9%)

#### Story Composition

1. Story beginning (17.7%)
2. Definitely refers to a specific event occurring before/after the picture (1.5%)
3. Story sequence (10.8%)
4. Plot (15.4%)
5. Characters show feelings/emotions (13.8%)
6. Story action or energy level (10%)
7. Story ending (6.9%)
8. Writing style (10%)
9. Story (19.2%)
10. Story vocabulary (10%)
11. Overall vocabulary used in story (6.9%)

Overall, when looking at the results for Contextual Conventions, out of the 21 total items students made gains in 17 items and decreased in 4 items. When looking at the 11 items analyzed for Story Composition, students made gains in all 11 of the items.

*Research Question 3: What do the answers to these questions show in terms of ~~an~~ increase in student writing abilities from beginning to end of the nine week quarter at the ninth grade level?*

Through analyzing the numbers it is evident that every student made gains in at least one category, some just made more significant gains than others. The tables and numbers show clear-cut evidence that proves on average students improved on their writing abilities during the nine weeks. Overall, these answers are showing that all students made improvements on their writing from the beginning of the nine weeks when they took the pre-test to the end when they took their post-test.

## **CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSION**

The purpose of this study was to determine the extent to which teacher directed journal prompts and other various teacher modeled writing exercises in an English classroom at Superior High School affect writing abilities in ninth grade students as demonstrated on the *Test of Written Language*.

### **Summary of the Study**

This study was conducted during the first quarter of the 2014-2015 school year, which was a nine week period. At the beginning of the first week students took the pre-test of *Test of Written Language* to create a baseline for individual student abilities. Throughout the nine week period students participated in numerous teacher directed journal prompts, as well as frequent teacher modeled writing exercises which varied in their topics and purpose. At the end of the nine week period the students took the post-test of *Test of Written Language*. Both the Pre and Post Tests were evaluated using Section 5: Story Scoring Rubric. This rubric had 32 items which evaluated student writing. These items were broken up into two categories: Contextual Conventions (21 items) and Story Composition (11 items).

This study was conducted with 130 ninth grade students at Superior High School. All students were on the teacher's class rosters. The classroom teacher was also the researcher conducting this study.

### **Implications from the Data**

*Research Question 1: What is the numerical breakdown of students that decreased, stayed the same, or increased in their score as measured by the standardized test: Test of Written Language, over the course of the nine week quarter?*

Results indicated that out of the 130 students participating in the study, 61 students stayed the same, 10 students went down, and 59 students went up in their group scores for Contextual Conventions; while 54 students stayed the same, 7 students went down, and 69 students went up in their group scores for Story Composition. These scores reveal that 45.4% of students increased their Contextual Conventions and 53.1% of students increased their Story Composition scores. The researcher based the results primarily on the "group" scores the students received in both of these categories (see tables 5 and 6).

Although the researcher chose to analyze the data by the group scores in both Contextual Conventions and Story Composition, there is further results that need to be mentioned. If all 21 of the items would have been individually analyzed, on the whole, the researcher would have been able to say there was a 100% student improvement. Meaning that every student made improvements somewhere from pre-test to post-test. Reference Appendix F to see the individual results for each of the 130 students.

There are several factors that could have played a role in student results for pre-test and post-test data. One factor is the simple fact that when students took the pre-test they were coming off of a two and a half month summer break, so their initial attempt may not have been an accurate assessment of their skills. Another factor is that there is no feasible way to determine student effort. This means that on either test it is uncertain if the results were based on their 100% best effort, thus giving both pre-test and post-test data debatable results. So in the end, when comparing pre and post test data, it is uncertain if those results are completely accurate. The simple fact being, it is disputable how many students truly decreased, stayed the same, or increase their score. If this study were to be duplicated, the researcher should include a method of triangulation in order to address the confounding results that this study presented.

For this study the researcher was also the classroom teacher. That being said, there was not only the mindset of the specific research being conducted, but also the teacher lens of how students were responding and working throughout this nine week period. Although the research does indicate vast improvement, the teacher's view can also attest to an increase in student's writing abilities. There were assignments that didn't fall into the category of the research that showed improvement on student's basic writing capabilities; such as their improved sentence structure, vocabulary choice, completion of thoughts, organization, and overall clarity of the concept. Another area noticed through the teacher lens, was simply the participation level and interest students had during modeled writing exercises or assignments. It seemed as though when students were able to see the writing process and end result it not only gave them a better understanding of the task, but it also motivated them. It can only be

assumed that this increase in participation level was due to the fact that they had greater understanding and felt more comfortable with the task expected of them.

*Research Question 2: To what extent did the combination of journal writing based on teacher prompts and various teacher modeled writing exercises prove or disprove to be an effective integration of writing strategies? Is the combination of journal writing based on teacher prompts and various teacher modeled writing exercises an effective integration of writing strategies?*

The data clearly shows overall improvement in 28 of the 32 items scored on the rubric. The improvement is debatable if the increases happened because students weren't back in the swing of school work yet when they took the pre-test, if there was a lack of effort, or if the journal prompts and writing exercises truly were an effective strategy. What was proven was that for the seven contextual convention items and the five story composition items that showed significant gains there was a direct correlation to journal writing and other teacher modeled writing exercises that worked on those specific areas. Throughout the short story unit the teacher gave assignments that correlate to these increases, such as writing assignments, grammar work (nouns/pronouns), and sentence structure work.

Looking specifically at the data breakdown it is clear to see some connections to journal prompts and the teacher modeled writing. Under contextual conventions, there were seven items that showed significant gains. The items were:

2. Paragraphs (clearly indicates paragraphs with indentations/spaces) (32%)
9. Number of non-duplicated misspelled words (50%)
12. Run-on/Rambling Sentences (18.5%)
13. Compound sentences (23.8%)

- 14. Uses coordinating conjunctions other than and when forming compound sentences; count each conjunction only once. (27.7%)
- 17. Sentences in paragraph(s) (26.3%)
- 19. Number of correctly spelled words having seven or more letters (47.7%)

Journal writing based on teacher prompts can likely be credited for increasing scores for items 2, 9, 17, and 19. When students participated in journal writing, the teacher would have clearly written directions, a prompt, along with a modeled example for expectations up on the white board. As a result of journal writing procedures students gained direct instruction and practice for ideal paragraph structure, an opportunity to use new vocabulary/express ideas or thoughts, practice with introductory phrases/clauses, understanding sentence expectations in a paragraph, and even word processing their journals to help with spelling errors.

Through a variety of other teacher modeled writing exercises, such as grammar work, sentence structure, and vocabulary, these are believed to have given improvement to items 12, 13, 14, and 19. Some specific teacher modeled and student practice exercises that helped students include: sentence structure, grammatical work in regards to proper sentence structure, sentence combining, use of a conjunction/colon/semi-colon, and extensive vocabulary work (adding vocabulary and practice with the words in proper context).

Although there were some remarkable and impressive student increases, there were also some decreases that occurred. There were four items that showed student decrease. These include:

- 5. Correctly uses an apostrophe (- 0.7%)

6. Uses a question mark (- 3.1%)
10. Uses asterisk, ellipse, hyphen, parentheses, brackets (- 2.3%)
11. Fragmentary sentence – usually a sentence without both a subject and a verb (- 2.3%)

When looking at the possible reasons that students decreased in these areas, there is actually a silver lining that might indicate there wasn't a decrease in ability for three of these items. Items 5, 6, and 10 were scoring students simply on their use of those punctuations. Students received a point if they used them, whether they were used correctly or not, or they received a zero if they didn't include them in their writing. So what these three items were evaluating was only based on their use, not their ability to use them correctly. So what this shows is simply that there were some students who didn't use an apostrophe, a question mark, asterisk, ellipse, hyphen, parentheses, or brackets while writing their assessment.

The last item that decreased was item 11, which examined sentence fragments. This item showed a 2.3% decrease, which equates to three students. The way this item was scored was based on whether a student had any sentence fragments in their writing, so they got a zero if there was even one fragment and a one if there were no fragments. This scoring relies solely on the researcher's scoring and their ability to catch every mistake. So this leaves the door open for a possible error in scoring even on the pre-test or post-test.

Looking next at the story composition scores, out of the eleven items that were scored students showed increase in all eleven. There were four items that

showed significant gains (defined as more than a 10% gain). The items with significant gains were:

1. Story beginning (17.7%)
4. Plot (storyline) (15.4%)
5. Characters showing feelings/emotions (13.8%)
9. Story is ... (immature, straightforward, or engaging) (19.2%)

Journal writing, specifically entries where students were telling a story or describing an event, was specifically intended to help students gain a better understanding for these items, and may correlate with their improved writing abilities. Through the teacher modeled examples the teacher was able to reference specific areas of the writing, such as the beginning, how the story flowed, establishing characters, and the overall writing style. By identifying specific parts of the writing, the students would be able to visually see and be directed to those given aspects, thus having the opportunity to emulate those quality aspects in their own writing.

Through a variety of other teacher modeled reading and writing assignments students were able to further their understanding of all items, but specifically the four items that saw the greatest increase. During the nine week quarter the teacher was teaching the short story unit. Through activities such as writing their own fairy tale and short story, as well as reading numerous short stories, students were able to work with numerous elements of writing. One potential positive influence with regards to the short story unit was the numerous stories the teacher modeled, students read, evaluated, and analyzed. Through this work students were able to see published, quality story structure. By being exposed to and working

with numerous examples, students had the opportunity to learn from them and were encouraged to emulate similar quality in their writing.

*Research Question 3: What do the answers to these questions show in terms of an increase in student writing abilities from beginning to end of the nine week quarter at the ninth grade level?*

Although student scores varied from student to student, it was shown that every student made improvements in their scores, even if it was only in a couple items. It can be debated whether or not the researchers teaching methods with journal prompts and modeled writing instruction was the sole explanation for student improvement. Even through the debate, it is clear that these methods undoubtedly supported student learning, primarily in their writing abilities.

In the end, one of the greatest benefits this study proved was its ability to be flexible for the benefit of the students. Through the use of teacher modeled writing and other various teacher modeled writing activities the teacher was able to cater what specific areas students were working on, thus giving them a greater opportunity to increase their writing skills in those areas.

### **Recommendations**

The resulting data from implementing teacher directed journal prompts and other various teacher modeled writing exercises showed a 100% student increase in at least one of

the scored items, and an overall student increase of 45.4% in contextual conventions and 53.1% in story composition. Although there were a few decreases, the researcher believes these teaching methods are completely worth-while and those decreases aren't necessarily in direct correlation with the teaching methods. Further research is needed to solidify these results and that these methods work in the general education classroom for all students. Possible suggestions for future research in accordance with this study include:

1. Studies conducted over a greater length of time, even an entire school year.
2. Studies that factor into their results students who receive special education services and see any correlation in that data.
3. Studies that use a greater variety of topics, since this one had a majority linking to the short story unit.

### **Final Summary**

The present study focused on increasing the writing abilities of ninth grade students in an English classroom. This study specifically focused on the use of teacher directed journal prompts and other various teacher modeled writing exercises. The *Test of Written Language* was administered to the students as a pre-test and a post-test at the beginning and end of the nine week quarter. Throughout the nine weeks the researcher, who was also the classroom teacher, provided numerous teacher directed journal prompts and countless teacher modeled writing exercises. Through these writing assignments the researcher was able to hone in on specific areas that were weaknesses for the majority of students, thus hoping to increase their abilities. At the conclusion of the nine week the researcher gave the post-test, which gave the

final results. In the end, students were able to show an increase in 28 out of the 32 scored items. In conclusion, when analyzing all of the data it can be determined that the methods were successful in increasing students writing abilities.

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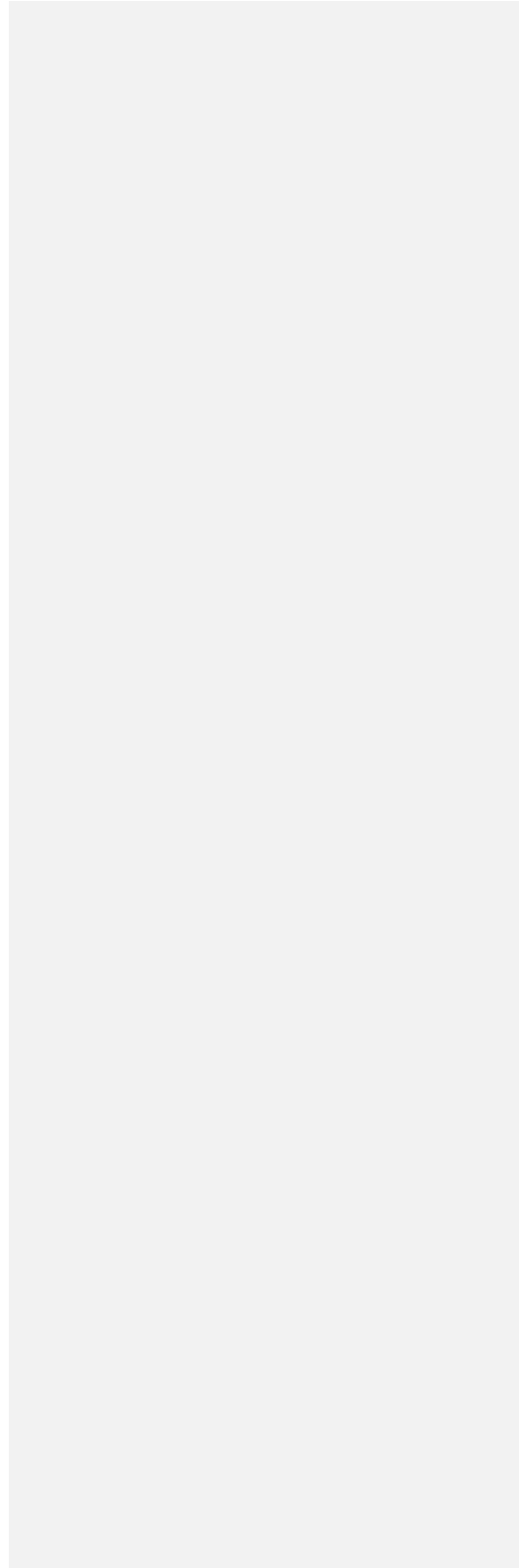
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# APPENDIX



## Appendix A

### Instructions for Administering the Test of Written Language – Fourth Edition (TOWL-4)



## 3.

## Specific Administration Instructions

Specific instructions for administering and scoring the complete TOWL-4 are presented in this chapter. Always begin testing by eliciting the student's spontaneously written story. The story will be evaluated later using criteria found in the Record/Story Scoring Form; these criteria will be used to score Subtests 6 and 7 of the TOWL-4. When the student has finished writing the story, administer and score Subtests 1 through 5 (i.e., the contrived subtests) according to the standard procedures given in this chapter.

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### Obtaining the Story

Begin testing by saying: *In a few moments I am going to ask you to write a story. Before you write your story, I want to give you an idea of what a good story is. I will read you an example of a good story that was written by another student. Look at the picture I am holding. (Refer to the sample picture) This story is titled "The Surprise Party."*

Sara and her brother, Joe, decided to throw a fabulous surprise party for their mother's birthday. Sara told Joe to make some food while she decorated the living room. He didn't know much about cooking, but he figured he would just make it up as he went along. While Joe was cooking, he dropped some eggs on the floor. Before he could clean them up, he noticed the spaghetti was boiling over! Joe panicked and hollered for his sister.

Before Sara could get to the kitchen, she heard Joe screaming, "Help me, Sara!" Water overflowed from the sink, smoke poured from the stovetop, and the place was a mess. Joe pointed at the clock and yelled that it was after 6:00. Mom and Dad would be home any second! As they hurried to clean up the disaster, Mom and Dad walked in the front door. When she saw the huge mess, Mom was so angry, she looked like a thunderstorm.

Dad joked that the kitchen looked like a hurricane had hit it. Sara explained that she and Joe had wanted to do something nice for their mother on her birthday. Joe gave Mom a big hug and told her how much he loved her.

Mom replied, "I love you, too. You meant well, and that's what matters."

"What really matters is that you clean up the kitchen," Dad joked. This time, everyone laughed, and then they all cleaned up the mess together.

The story I just told you has a clear beginning, a middle, and an ending. The story has a title, the people in the story have names and show emotions, and their actions are interesting. Now, I want you to write a story about another picture that I am going to show you. Try to make your story as interesting as you can.

Give the student the appropriate Student Response Booklet (Form A or Form B) and a piece of (lined) scratch paper, then say: **Open your booklet to page 2.** Show the student the appropriate Picture Card and lay it on the desk or table in front of the student. The Picture Card should correspond to the picture on page 2

## Appendix A Continued

of the Student Response Book. Say: I want you to write a story about this picture. Before you start, take time to plan your story. Make an outline on the scratch paper I have given you. This will help you plan and write your story. You will have 5 minutes to plan before you start writing your actual story. Begin your outline now.

After 5 minutes have elapsed, say: You will have 15 minutes to write your story. Use your imagination to make your story as interesting as you can. Also, use paragraphs, good spelling, and the right punctuation to make your story the best it can be. Remember to write neatly. Pause, then say: Begin writing now.

When 12 minutes have lapsed, say: You have 3 minutes to finish writing your story. At the end of 15 minutes, say: Stop writing. Put your scratch paper inside your booklet. Proceed with the first subtest, Vocabulary.

### Subtest 1. Vocabulary

#### Instructions

Say, Open your booklet to page 4. I want you to read a list of words and write a sentence that uses each word. Let's do one together. Look at the practice item at the top of the page. The word is *ran*. Give the student time to write a sentence in the space provided on the response form. You could write something like, "I ran to the store" or "She ran home." Any sentence using *ran* is fine. However, if you change the word to *run* or *running*, your sentence would not be correct. You must use the word that is written.

Some words will be easy, and some words will be difficult. If you do not know a word, go on to the next word. Do not ask me to read any words to you. You must read the words yourself. Remember, write only one sentence per word, and do not change the word in any way. Begin with number 1. Monitor the student's responses and stop testing when the student misses three items in a row or completes the final item.

#### Scoring

Record a correct item as 1 and an incorrect item as 0 in the space at the left of the item number. Misspellings (e.g., *aminals* for *animals*, *dres* for *dress*), non-standard English usage (e.g., *ain't*, *didn't have no*), and problems in grammar, punctuation, and capitalization are *not* counted as errors. Furthermore, do not respond to the moral or ethical content of the sentence. On the other hand, score a sentence as incorrect if its content clearly indicates that the student does not know the meaning of the word (e.g., "I don't know what *humble* means"). If the student writes an evasive sentence that looks like an attempt to disguise the fact that he or she does not know the meaning of the word (e.g., "Look up the word *humble* in the dictionary"; "Mother knows what *humble* means"; or "*Humble* is a word"), score the item as incorrect. If the student writes a fragmentary sentence (e.g., "All aboard"), score the response as correct if it shows knowledge of the word. If the student writes a homophone for the targeted word (e.g., *sea* for *see*), score the item 0.

The basic criteria used to score the sentences are that the stimulus word is used correctly with regard to part of speech and that an appropriate meaning

**Appendix B**

Sample Picture to Use During Instructions for Administration



# Appendix C

## Test of Written Language – Fourth Edition Scoring Rubric

Section 5: Story Scoring			Section 6: Contextual Conventions			Section 7: Story Composition		
Item	Scoring Criteria	Score	Item	Scoring Criteria	Score	Item	Scoring Criteria	Score
1.	<p>1. Sentence length with lexical items</p> <p>0 = no words</p> <p>1 = 1-2 phrases or prepositional phrases</p> <p>2 = no clauses</p> <p>3 = 3-4 clauses</p> <p>4 = 5 or more clauses</p>		11.	<p>1. Use of capital letters</p> <p>0 = no capital letters</p> <p>1 = 1 capital letter</p> <p>2 = 2 capital letters</p> <p>3 = 3 capital letters</p> <p>4 = 4 or more capital letters</p>		1.	<p>1. Story beginning</p> <p>0 = no beginning</p> <p>1 = beginning</p> <p>2 = beginning with a specific event</p> <p>3 = beginning with a specific event and a character</p> <p>4 = beginning with a specific event, a character, and a setting</p>	
2.	<p>1. Paragraphs</p> <p>0 = no paragraphs</p> <p>1 = 1 paragraph</p> <p>2 = 2 paragraphs</p> <p>3 = 3 paragraphs</p> <p>4 = 4 or more paragraphs</p>		12.	<p>1. Use of punctuation</p> <p>0 = no punctuation</p> <p>1 = 1 punctuation mark</p> <p>2 = 2 punctuation marks</p> <p>3 = 3 punctuation marks</p> <p>4 = 4 or more punctuation marks</p>		2.	<p>1. Story middle</p> <p>0 = no middle</p> <p>1 = middle</p> <p>2 = middle with a specific event</p> <p>3 = middle with a specific event and a character</p> <p>4 = middle with a specific event, a character, and a setting</p>	
3.	<p>1. Use of capital letters</p> <p>0 = no capital letters</p> <p>1 = 1 capital letter</p> <p>2 = 2 capital letters</p> <p>3 = 3 capital letters</p> <p>4 = 4 or more capital letters</p>		13.	<p>1. Use of punctuation</p> <p>0 = no punctuation</p> <p>1 = 1 punctuation mark</p> <p>2 = 2 punctuation marks</p> <p>3 = 3 punctuation marks</p> <p>4 = 4 or more punctuation marks</p>		3.	<p>1. Story end</p> <p>0 = no end</p> <p>1 = end</p> <p>2 = end with a specific event</p> <p>3 = end with a specific event and a character</p> <p>4 = end with a specific event, a character, and a setting</p>	
4.	<p>1. Use of capital letters</p> <p>0 = no capital letters</p> <p>1 = 1 capital letter</p> <p>2 = 2 capital letters</p> <p>3 = 3 capital letters</p> <p>4 = 4 or more capital letters</p>		14.	<p>1. Use of punctuation</p> <p>0 = no punctuation</p> <p>1 = 1 punctuation mark</p> <p>2 = 2 punctuation marks</p> <p>3 = 3 punctuation marks</p> <p>4 = 4 or more punctuation marks</p>		4.	<p>1. Story end</p> <p>0 = no end</p> <p>1 = end</p> <p>2 = end with a specific event</p> <p>3 = end with a specific event and a character</p> <p>4 = end with a specific event, a character, and a setting</p>	
5.	<p>1. Use of capital letters</p> <p>0 = no capital letters</p> <p>1 = 1 capital letter</p> <p>2 = 2 capital letters</p> <p>3 = 3 capital letters</p> <p>4 = 4 or more capital letters</p>		15.	<p>1. Use of punctuation</p> <p>0 = no punctuation</p> <p>1 = 1 punctuation mark</p> <p>2 = 2 punctuation marks</p> <p>3 = 3 punctuation marks</p> <p>4 = 4 or more punctuation marks</p>		5.	<p>1. Story end</p> <p>0 = no end</p> <p>1 = end</p> <p>2 = end with a specific event</p> <p>3 = end with a specific event and a character</p> <p>4 = end with a specific event, a character, and a setting</p>	
6.	<p>1. Use of capital letters</p> <p>0 = no capital letters</p> <p>1 = 1 capital letter</p> <p>2 = 2 capital letters</p> <p>3 = 3 capital letters</p> <p>4 = 4 or more capital letters</p>		16.	<p>1. Use of punctuation</p> <p>0 = no punctuation</p> <p>1 = 1 punctuation mark</p> <p>2 = 2 punctuation marks</p> <p>3 = 3 punctuation marks</p> <p>4 = 4 or more punctuation marks</p>		6.	<p>1. Story end</p> <p>0 = no end</p> <p>1 = end</p> <p>2 = end with a specific event</p> <p>3 = end with a specific event and a character</p> <p>4 = end with a specific event, a character, and a setting</p>	
7.	<p>1. Use of capital letters</p> <p>0 = no capital letters</p> <p>1 = 1 capital letter</p> <p>2 = 2 capital letters</p> <p>3 = 3 capital letters</p> <p>4 = 4 or more capital letters</p>		17.	<p>1. Use of punctuation</p> <p>0 = no punctuation</p> <p>1 = 1 punctuation mark</p> <p>2 = 2 punctuation marks</p> <p>3 = 3 punctuation marks</p> <p>4 = 4 or more punctuation marks</p>		7.	<p>1. Story end</p> <p>0 = no end</p> <p>1 = end</p> <p>2 = end with a specific event</p> <p>3 = end with a specific event and a character</p> <p>4 = end with a specific event, a character, and a setting</p>	
8.	<p>1. Use of capital letters</p> <p>0 = no capital letters</p> <p>1 = 1 capital letter</p> <p>2 = 2 capital letters</p> <p>3 = 3 capital letters</p> <p>4 = 4 or more capital letters</p>		18.	<p>1. Use of punctuation</p> <p>0 = no punctuation</p> <p>1 = 1 punctuation mark</p> <p>2 = 2 punctuation marks</p> <p>3 = 3 punctuation marks</p> <p>4 = 4 or more punctuation marks</p>		8.	<p>1. Story end</p> <p>0 = no end</p> <p>1 = end</p> <p>2 = end with a specific event</p> <p>3 = end with a specific event and a character</p> <p>4 = end with a specific event, a character, and a setting</p>	
9.	<p>1. Use of capital letters</p> <p>0 = no capital letters</p> <p>1 = 1 capital letter</p> <p>2 = 2 capital letters</p> <p>3 = 3 capital letters</p> <p>4 = 4 or more capital letters</p>		19.	<p>1. Use of punctuation</p> <p>0 = no punctuation</p> <p>1 = 1 punctuation mark</p> <p>2 = 2 punctuation marks</p> <p>3 = 3 punctuation marks</p> <p>4 = 4 or more punctuation marks</p>		9.	<p>1. Story end</p> <p>0 = no end</p> <p>1 = end</p> <p>2 = end with a specific event</p> <p>3 = end with a specific event and a character</p> <p>4 = end with a specific event, a character, and a setting</p>	
10.	<p>1. Use of capital letters</p> <p>0 = no capital letters</p> <p>1 = 1 capital letter</p> <p>2 = 2 capital letters</p> <p>3 = 3 capital letters</p> <p>4 = 4 or more capital letters</p>		20.	<p>1. Use of punctuation</p> <p>0 = no punctuation</p> <p>1 = 1 punctuation mark</p> <p>2 = 2 punctuation marks</p> <p>3 = 3 punctuation marks</p> <p>4 = 4 or more punctuation marks</p>		10.	<p>1. Story end</p> <p>0 = no end</p> <p>1 = end</p> <p>2 = end with a specific event</p> <p>3 = end with a specific event and a character</p> <p>4 = end with a specific event, a character, and a setting</p>	
11.	<p>1. Use of capital letters</p> <p>0 = no capital letters</p> <p>1 = 1 capital letter</p> <p>2 = 2 capital letters</p> <p>3 = 3 capital letters</p> <p>4 = 4 or more capital letters</p>		21.	<p>1. Use of punctuation</p> <p>0 = no punctuation</p> <p>1 = 1 punctuation mark</p> <p>2 = 2 punctuation marks</p> <p>3 = 3 punctuation marks</p> <p>4 = 4 or more punctuation marks</p>		11.	<p>1. Story end</p> <p>0 = no end</p> <p>1 = end</p> <p>2 = end with a specific event</p> <p>3 = end with a specific event and a character</p> <p>4 = end with a specific event, a character, and a setting</p>	



### Appendix D

Picture Card to Use During Pre-Assessment



### Appendix E

Picture Card to Use During Post-Assessment

