With **300** strategies

JENNIFER SERRAVALLO

The Writing Strategies Book

YOUR EVERYTHING GUIDE TO DEVELOPING SKILLED WRITERS

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For Lucy and Carl.
I'm a writer and a
teacher of writing
because of you.

Contents

Goal 3 — 90 — Generating and Collecting Ideas

Goal 4 — 132 — Focus/Meaning

Goal 5
162

Organization and Structure

Goal 6
208

Elaboration

Goal 7
258

Word Choice

Goal 8
294

Conventions: Spelling and Letter Formation

Goal 9 — 320 — Conventions: Grammar and Punctuation

Goal 10 — 360 — Collaborating with Writing Partners and Clubs

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A Very Brief Introduction to Principles, Research, and Theory, and How to Use This Book

The idea for a book of writing strategies exists many times over. This one is possible only because of the great books that have come before it. There are books suggesting writing strategies meant for professional writers and college students, such as those by Noah Lukeman, Roy Peter Clark, and Janet Burroway, among others. There are countless examples of excellent compilations of writing strategies in books written for teachers of writing, such as Fletcher and Portalupi's Craft Lessons Series, Barry Lane's *After "The End"* (1993), Carl Anderson's Strategic Writing Conferences series (2008–2009), Donald Graves' many books, Katie Wood Ray's *Wondrous Words* (1999) and other titles, Katherine Bomer's books, Georgia Heard's books, Nancie Atwell's *In the Middle* (2014) and other resources, Lucy Calkins' Units of Study series, and many more. My aim in this book is to offer my favorite, most useful collection of strategies that span all aspects of the writing process, all genres and modes of writing, and that will work well with students in grades K–8. I want to offer you a little bit of everything. I streamlined the language and examples, and I present the strategies in a format that is organized so that the busy teacher can find

just the right strategy at just the right moment. Of course, you'll elaborate on the streamlined language and make it your own.

But wait—before you dive in, I'm so glad you're taking the time to spend a few moments with this "Getting Started" introduction. In this introduction, you'll gain a helpful overview of the thinking that undergirds this book's ideas as well as an overview of its organization. You'll learn about strategies and all the aspects that I chose to include to elaborate on them—mentor texts, prompts, lesson language, teaching tips, and more. You'll learn how to navigate the pages of the book so you can find what you're looking for quickly and easily, for this is not a read-every-single-page kind of book (unless you want it to be). You'll get a quick crash course on some important terminology and concepts that will help you use this book to its fullest—thoughts about writing as a process, and modes and genres of writing, for example. And finally, you'll learn how to adapt what's in the book to fit your students' writing time in the classroom, no matter what form that time takes.

Navigating the Book

You're holding a book that's more than 400 pages, but I want to tell you that once you understand how it is organized and how to navigate its pages, you will be able to find what you're looking for in a minute or two.

When I began work on this book, on the heels of its sister *The Reading Strategies Book* (Serravallo 2015a), I thought long and hard about how to organize the chapters. I considered organizing the book by stages in the writing process, because I believe so strongly in teaching writers not only how to write strong pieces but also how to work through a process to develop the ideas within them. When looking for helpful writing strategies, many writers and writing teachers might think, "Where am I in the development of my piece?" and perhaps want to search for ideas that would support their work during that phase. But then, I thought, "Aren't there strategies that fit in multiple points across the process?" Does a writer only think about spelling when editing? No, of course not. Does a writer only consider the lead of a piece when drafting? No, it could also be in planning or revision. When does a story writer add in dialogue? It could be thought about during planning, but could be written during drafting or revision. And so, I scrapped the idea to organize by process. (But don't worry—every strategy still has a process recommendation alongside it in the margins—read more about process beginning on page 9.)

Then, I considered organizing the book by genre. Lessons to teach memoir in one chapter, fiction in another, personal narrative in another. I imagined a separate chapter for how-tos, and still another for nonfiction research reports. There would

be a section on poetry and another on essay. But then, I figured there were a number of problems with that, as well. Sometimes the lines are blurred a bit—a poem can be written to tell a story, for example, or to teach about a topic. A nonfiction piece can take a narrative form (biography) or expository (*All About Whales*) or be a hybrid of the two (historical accounts). Not to mention, there are strategies that I'd use for a variety of genres—thinking of an important place, for example, can lead me to write a story about something that happened there, or a nonfiction piece giving information about the place, or even a poem inspired by the mood of that place.

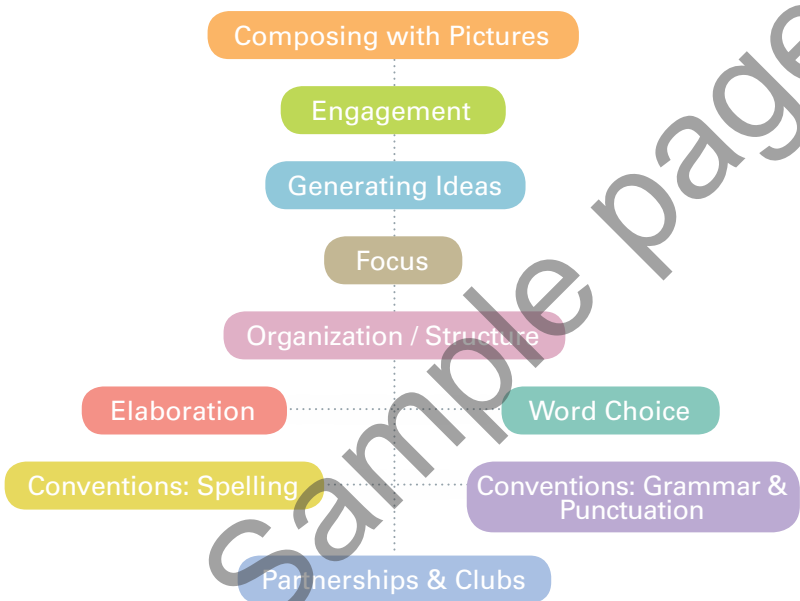
In the end, I came back to organizing the book by *goal*. It should come as no surprise, because anyone who has read something I've written or listened to a talk I've given in the last five years has heard me talk about Hattie's (2009) research into effective classroom practices and how convinced I am that helping kids to articulate clear goals for their work, and supporting them with strategies and feedback to accomplish those goals, makes a huge difference in their ability to succeed. Some of the goals are terms you may otherwise know as qualities of good writing (Anderson 2005; Calkins 1994), craft (Fletcher and Portalupi 2007; Ray 1999), or writing traits (Culham 2003, 2005) such as organization, elaboration, word choice, and conventions. Others are more about habits of writing such as writing engagement or generating ideas. Still others fall outside those two categories: composing with pictures, for example, or working with writing partners and clubs. The ten goals I've arrived at are those that I've found to be most common in supporting writers in grades K–8.

How Do I Choose Which Goal to Begin With?

Each chapter in this book focuses on one of ten possible goals. The first few pages of each chapter offer a quick overview of what the goal is and why it's important and a brief section on how to determine if it's the right fit for the student you're considering teaching it to. I can't say enough about how important it is to spend time making sure you're choosing the right goal to focus on for each writer in your classroom. Choosing an appropriate goal requires that you have a deep knowledge of your students, developed through assessments of course, but also through talking to your students and getting to know them as people. You'll likely plan to spend time observing them as they write and meeting with them in conferences to learn about their interests and hopes for their writing. You'll also likely do more formal assessments such as asking them to write "on demand" (completing a piece of writing in one sitting) and looking at those pieces for qualities of writing that you hope to teach. For more information on formative assessment, and expectations to have for writers grade-by-grade, I recommend Anderson's *Assessing Writers* (2005), Calkins' *Writing Pathways* (2014), and my Literacy Teacher's Playbook series (2013–2014).

The ten goals for teaching writing are arranged in a sort of loose hierarchy. Think of it not as a hierarchy of most important to least, or from simplest to most sophisticated. Instead, this is a hierarchy of *action*. For example, if I notice a child could use support in two areas—say, structure and elaboration—I'm inclined to start at the one that's closest to the top (structure) and work my way down (elaboration). Think of that example. Why teach a child to fill her page with details if the details are disorganized and it will make the writing difficult to follow? The hierarchy is largely influenced by my studies with Carl Anderson and his book *Assessing Writers* (2005).

Determining Where to Start: A Hierarchy of Possible Writing Goals



The first goal is composing with pictures. It's a goal centered around teaching children to use sketches and illustrations to tell stories, teach, and/or persuade. The idea behind this first goal is that even before children are able to write conventionally with words, they can compose pieces of work using what they *can* do—draw pictures. Also, as children get older, using pictures as a way to practice qualities of good writing, and as a way to plan their writing, has lots of value. Teachers may therefore find this is a helpful goal to focus on for young writers, and also for more experienced writers who would benefit from focusing on the pictures they draw alongside the words they write.

Engagement comes next because unless students see themselves as writers, have the stamina to sit and write, and want to write, it'll be hard to focus on qualities. They've got to practice to improve.

Generating ideas is a goal that's close to the top of the list because it's crucial to help children come up with their own topics and ideas for their writing. An inability to do so could also be a root cause of disengagement with writing. Although there are certainly instances where students will need to write from a prompt, I would argue it shouldn't be all they do. This chapter will help you create writers who have a never-ending bank of things to write about.

Focus is the next goal category because when a writer sets out to write a piece, there should be something that helps it to be cohesive. It could be an idea, it could be a thesis statement, it could be a focus on a period of time (as is sometimes the case with some stories). But it can't be wandering all over the place. Without focus, it's hard to know what details to add and what to take away, and it's hard to have a purpose or meaning behind the writing.

Next: structure. A piece needs to be organized so that a reader is able to follow the story, the argument, or the categories of what's being taught. Having a clear structure, and having solid parts within that structure (lead, middle, ending, for example), helps a writer to know how to use detail effectively.

The next two goals—elaboration and word choice—appear side by side on the hierarchy. Each goal will help writers fill out the structure they've created. Elaboration is about helping children to add the right amount and the right types of details to connect to the meaning, genre, and structure of their piece. Word choice is about the careful decisions a writer makes on the word level. The two goals are closely related, but when working with students you'll probably find it more effective to work on one at a time.

The next two goals are about conventions—one on spelling and one on grammar. These live side by side in the hierarchy as well. They are toward the bottom of the hierarchy not because I think they are less important, but because I'm more apt to help a student with one of the other goals before these if the others aren't solid. Students will have more energy for editing their spelling, or considering their punctuation choices, or looking over their piece to correct dangling modifiers if they care about what they wrote and there are sufficient, well-organized details included in the piece.

The final goal focuses on partnerships and writing clubs. This is one that you'll likely weave throughout your whole year for every student, if you choose to get partnerships and writing clubs up and running (and I hope you do!). And there may be some students who would benefit from a particular, personalized focus on how to collaborate within a group.

Just as I feel sure enough that this hierarchy is largely what drives my decision making when I work with student writers, I'd be lying if I said there aren't exceptions. Perhaps, for instance, the reason a student's writing volume is low is because she doesn't have any ideas. Well, in that case, I'd start with the goal on generating strategies. Or maybe a student needs help with structuring his writing, but there are so few details that there isn't much to put a structure around. In that case, I might help him brainstorm what else he could say, and then we could go back to organize it.

Some of you may be noticing the absence of the words *voice* and *craft*. Although you won't see these two terms as the titles of chapters or as goals, the lessons within many of the chapters will help your writers to create pieces with voice and craft. A writer's voice is communicated through many aspects of writing including syntax decisions (which would fall under the punctuation and grammar goal) or the vocabulary she chooses to use (which falls under the word choice goal). A writer makes craft decisions at many points of the process and in many aspects of the piece, including the details she chooses to include (this is included in the elaboration chapter) and how the piece flows (organization and structure). In a way, to me it seems like writing well is all about craft and voice, and so you'll see those words mentioned again and again throughout many chapters.