EFFECTS OF HIGH INTEREST WRITING PROMPTS FOR STUDENTS WITH

LEARNING DISABILITIES

By

Kelsey Chlarson

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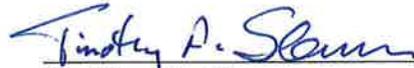
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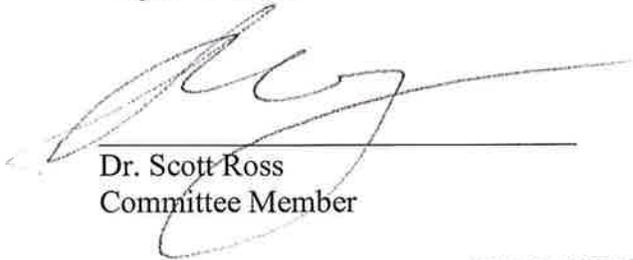
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MASTER OF SCIENCE

in

Special Education

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ABSTRACT

Effects of High Interest Writing Prompts on Performance of Students with Learning
Disabilities

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Often described as passive learners, students with learning disabilities (LD)
sometimes approach writing as a negative and burdensome task. Their reaction may infer
that writing requires processes that they find difficult. The purpose of this study is to
examine the extent to which high interest narrative writing prompts for 12 to 13-year old
students in special education increase accuracy and total words written (TWW) in a 3 min
timed writing sample compared to low interest writing prompts. High interest writing
prompts are "story starter topics" chosen by each participant as preferred ones for writing
tasks. Participants will be three individuals from a sixth and seventh grade special
education language arts class who have been classified with LD. Initially, participants
will select high and low interest writing topics using stimulus preference assessment
procedures. Given 40 potential writing topics, individual participants will select their 10
highest and lowest topics of interest. Participants will complete between 20 and 30, 3-
min timed writing samples based on high and low interest narrative writing prompts.
High- and low-interest topics will be counterbalanced. Percent accuracy, TWW, and
correct writing sequences (CWS) will be recorded by the researcher. Using a multi-

element design, the researcher anticipates that high interest writing samples will produce

higher accuracy and more volume in comparison to low interest writing samples. If these

results are obtained, the information will be used to construct writing lessons for sixth

and seventh grade students with LD.

(45 pages)

Introduction

Learning and practicing writing skills are a complex processes. In describing writing, Graham et al. (1993) describes three processes: declarative, procedural, and conditional knowledge of writing. Declarative knowledge addresses *what* good writing is and *what* good writers do. Procedural knowledge describes *how* to plan, revise, and edit written text. Conditional knowledge establishes knowing *when* and *where* to apply procedures for planning and writing (Graham et al., 1993). Students with LD may experience difficulty with one or more of these processes. These students can benefit from instructional methods of teaching writing, because these methods allow for opportunities for strategies used resulting in final written products that are logical and organized (Baker, Gersten, & Graham, 2003). There is a clear rationale for the need to improve students' writing performance by establishing the importance of writing, identifying some of the difficulties that poor writers encounter, and determining what skills are crucial for enhancing writing performance, and exploring to find effective ways to teach writing skills.

Today, educators are finding various ways to implement and include literacy in the curriculum for students with LD (Baker et al., 2003). There is not only a need to understand the writing challenges students with LD face, but also to find ways to help them become more successful. This is especially true in the area of writing. In order to help students with LD become more successful writers, it is important to understand what topics are associated with better writing and produce a higher volume of total words written in order to provide instruction that will enable them to improve their writing.

Importance of Writing

In many societies, writing is an essential tool for communication, learning, and self-expression (Graham, 2006). Through writing, individuals are able to maintain personal links with friends, family, and colleagues from a distance (Graham, 2006). Writing also makes it possible to collect and convey information with accuracy and detail. Individuals can further record their ideas, reflect on their thoughts, or extend their knowledge on a topic through the use of writing. The National Commission on Writing for America's Families, Schools, and Colleges (2004) described writing as a threshold skill for employment and promotion and indicated that people who cannot write well are less likely to be hired, retained, and/or promoted.

Writing is also important in academic settings. Writing skills are often needed for demonstrating learning (e.g., responding to exam items) and progress in school depends on developing an adequate degree of writing proficiency and fluency. Writing is the primary medium by which teachers evaluate students' performance (Graham & Harris, 1988). It also provides a flexible tool for assessing students' knowledge and academic competence in class and on high-stakes educational assessments (Graham & Harris, 1988). For some children, writing presents an alternative medium for expressing thoughts and ideas that they might be unable or unwilling to express in a different way. Persistent writing problems, therefore, make it difficult for students to reach their educational, occupational, and personal potential (Graham, 2006).

Concerns about the writing achievement of students in U.S. schools have been present for many years and continue to persist. According to the Utah Criterion-Referenced Tests (CRT) (2008-2009), many students experience difficulties mastering writing. Utah has defined proficiency levels for all Core CRTs. Four levels are defined:

Level 1: Minimal, Level 2: Partial, Level 3: Sufficient, Level 4: Substantial. The descriptors for each level and correspondence with federal proficiency levels are outlined in Table 1.

Table 1

Utah Student Achievement Level Matched to Federal Levels

Level	Descriptor	Federal Levels
Level 4: Substantial	A student scoring at this level is proficient on measured standards and objectives of the Core Curriculum in this subject. The student's performance indicates substantial understanding and application of key curriculum concepts.	Advanced
Level 3: Sufficient	A student scoring at this level is proficient on the measured standards and objectives of the Core Curriculum in this subject. The student's performance indicates sufficient understanding and application of key curriculum concepts.	Proficient
Level 2: Partial	A student scoring at this level is not yet proficient on measured standards and objectives of the Core Curriculum in this subject. The student's performance indicates partial understanding and application of key curriculum concepts.	Basic
Level 1: Minimal	A student scoring at this level is not yet proficient on measured standards and objectives of the Core Curriculum in this subject. The student's performance indicates minimal understanding and application of key curriculum concepts.	

In 2008-2009, the Utah State Office of Education (USOE) reported that 79% of 6th grade students were proficient. Based on the Utah Student Achievement levels 52% demonstrated substantial proficiency, 28% demonstrated sufficient proficiency, 12%

demonstrated partial proficiency, and 8% demonstrated minimal proficiency. Eighty-one percent of 7th grade students were proficient. Based on the Utah Student Achievement levels, 52% demonstrated sufficient proficiency, 29% demonstrated sufficient proficiency, 9% demonstrated partial proficiency, and 10% demonstrated minimal proficiency. Breaking the CRT tests into further demographic categories, 47.7% of students with disabilities were proficient on the Language Arts assessment. Additionally, in 2008, the Utah State Office of Education reported that of the 40,349 students who took the 6th grade Direct Writing Assessment (DWA), 66.02% were proficient. In terms of students with disabilities, 28.36% of students with disabilities were proficient. Results show that only a small percentage of students learn to write well enough to meet classroom demands. One way of addressing this issue is to provide exemplary writing instruction to all children right from the start, beginning in the primary grades. This is advantageous because it serves to maximize the writing development of children in general, minimize the number of students who develop writing problems as a result of poor instruction, and lessen the severity of difficulties experienced by children with writing disabilities (Graham & Harris, 2002).

Literature Review

      I searched multiple sources for articles relating to teaching writing to students with LD, including EBSCO Host database (ERIC and Academic Search Premier), college textbooks on instructional methods, articles by authors recommended by committee members and past professors, and reference sections from relevant articles. Based on these searches, I found hundreds of articles. Focusing my search on students with LD, I

limited my literature review to articles (Baker et al., 2003; Englert et al., 1995; Gersten & Baker, 2001; Graham et al., 1993; Graham et al., 2001; Wong, 1997).

One example of exemplary writing instruction in the early grades is the Early Literacy Project (ELP) designed by Englert et al. (1995). Englert et al. developed and tested a literacy program that included features considered to be essential to effective writing instruction. These features included (a) brainstorming strategies for preparing to write, (b) organizing strategies to relate and categorize the ideas, (c) using parallel strategies as students reading and gathering information for their writing, and (d) monitoring strategies as they clarify their thoughts and the relationships among their items of information. The study included nine participating teachers with similar teaching experience and background. All had taught for several years in resource classrooms settings serving students with mild disabilities. The students included 88 students with mild disabilities in Grades 1 through 4 from resource rooms of the participating teachers. The students differed in prior knowledge and exposure to the ELP program. The ELP instruction took place for 2 to 3 hrs each day in the resource rooms. During this time, students were involved in continuous and interactive reading and writing opportunities. The instruction was intensive, daily, and sustained over time. The program had a positive effect on the writing of students with in Grades 1 through 4, resulting in more organized text. In fact, results suggested not many programs have shown such powerful and multiple effects in these combined areas of literacy. Most interventions used with a special education population been limited to one domain: sight word recognition, oral reading fluency, or reading comprehension. ELP was immensely

successful in advancing students in the major domains of literacy often targeted in special education on students' individualized education programs (IEP).

Another method for addressing writing difficulties is to provide early supplementary writing instruction aimed at preventing or at least partially alleviating later writing difficulties (Graham, Harris, & Larson, 2001). This approach emphasizes both prevention and intervention. Early intervention programs characteristically yield more powerful benefits than efforts aimed at remediating problems in later grades (Graham et al., 2001). Intervention programs seek to accelerate the progress of struggling writers by providing them with additional instruction, either in a small group or through one-on-one tutoring. The basic goal is to help students catch up with their peers early on before their difficulties become more resolute. Graham et al. (2001) confirmed the writing problems of students with learning disabilities (LD) are not transitory difficulties that are easily fixed. Graham et al. (2001) outlined six principles thought to prevent or lessen the writing difficulties experienced by students with LD.

1. Provide effective writing instruction;

2. Tailor writing instruction to meet the individual needs of children with LD;

3. Intervene early, providing a coherent and sustained effort to improve the writing skills of children with LD;

4. Expect that each child will learn to write;

5. Identify and address academic and nonacademic roadblocks to writing and school success; and

6. Employ technological tools that improve writing performance.

The authors noted that these principles should be viewed as necessary, but not sufficient, components of an overall response.

Difficulties that Writers with LD Encounter

The writing products of students with LD do not fare well when compared to the writing produced by their grade-level peers who do not have LD (Baker et al., 2003). Students with LD in fourth, fifth, seventh, and eighth grade produce papers that are shorter, less cohesive, and more confusing than those generated by their regular classmates. They often leave out such critical parts as how the story ends or the basic premise underlying an option essay (Graham et al., 1993). Graham et al. (1993) found 10% or more of the words that they include in their compositions are misspelled, and a capitalization and punctuation error usually occurs in one third or more of their sentences.

To better understand what and how students with LD write, Graham et al. (1993) gathered data on writing and the composing processes, attitudes toward writing, and perceptions of writing capabilities of students with LD. The study included 39 students with LD. Twenty-nine of the students (21 males and eight females) were in the seventh or eighth grade, 10 of the students (seven males and three females) were in fourth and fifth grade. All of the students received resource room services and attended a single school system in a rural area in the northeast United States. Additionally, the study included 18 students (14 males and 4 females) in the seventh- or eighth-grade, and 11 students (seven males and four females) in fourth- and fifth-grade who were students achieving at grade level.

The interview procedure was administered individually to each child in a quiet room at his or her school. Examiners conducted the interviews after receiving

considerable instruction and practice in conducting them. During the interview, eight open-ended questions were asked. The first three questions assessed students' declarative knowledge of the attributes of good writing and what good and poor writers do: (a) Suppose you were asked to be the teacher for one of your classes today and that one of the students asked you, What is good writing? What would you tell that student about writing, (b) When good writers write, what kinds of things do they do? and (c) Why do you think some kids have trouble writing? The next three questions assessed students' knowledge about planning and writing: (a) Teachers often ask students to write a short paper outside of class on a famous person such as Abraham Lincoln; when you are given an assignment like this, what kinds of things do you do to help you plan and write the paper? (b) What if you were having trouble with this assignment; what kinds of things would you do? and (c) If you had to prepare your paper for somebody in ___ grade (three grades below the respondent's grade level), what kinds of special things would you do as you wrote your paper? The final two open-ended questions, assessed students' procedural knowledge about revising and editing: (a) Teachers often ask students to change their papers to make them better; if you were asked to change your paper to make it better or improve it, what kinds of changes would you make? and (b) Students were given a short text on Abraham Lincoln, accompanied by the explanation that it have been written by another student. After the paper was read aloud to each student, the respondent was asked to make suggestion on how to improve it. All the open-end questions were read aloud to the students. If the student responded "I don't know," the examiner reread the question and asked the student to think about it more. The examiners

asked follow-up questions to elicit more specific information. The scoring procedures were divided by ideas and categories.

The attitude scale consisted of six items: (a) "I like to write," (b) "I would rather read than write," (c) "I do writing on my own outside of school," (d) "I avoid writing whenever I can," (e) "I would rather write than do math problems," (f) "Writing is a waste of time." Each statement was read aloud and students were asked to indicate agreement on a Likert-type scale. Points on the scale ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). The self-efficacy measure included 10 efficacy statements, and the student was asked to indicate agreement with each item on a 5-point scale (identical to the one used on the attitude measure). Each statement was read aloud and students were asked to be honest and mark privately their responses. Interviews were first scored by the administering examiner and scored a second time by a graduate student unfamiliar with the study. Mean proportions are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2

Mean Proportions for Responses

Question	Learning disabilities		Normal achievement	
	Young Ss	Older Ss	Young Ss	Older Ss
1. What is good writing?				
A. Production responses	.52	.44	.48	.23
B. Substantive responses	.29	.43	.49	.76
2. What do good writers do?				
A. Production responses	.43	.31	.23	.08
B. Substantive responses	.46	.58	.74	.92
3. Why do kids have trouble writing?				
A. Production responses	.47	.33	.33	.02
B. Substantive responses	.15	.04	.29	.34
C. Motivation responses	.20	.41	.29	.45
D. Ability responses	.16	.20	.08	.17
4. How do you plan and write your paper?				
A. Substantive responses	.82	.92	.97	.99

5. What do you do if you have trouble planning and writing your paper?				
A. Substantive responses	.11	.23	.48	.32
B. Seeking assistance	.87	.64	.44	.61
6. What do you do to prepare a paper for a younger child?				
A. Production responses	.49	.29	.27	.20
B. Substantive responses	.29	.60	.70	.78
7. How do you change your paper to make it better?				
A. Mechanical responses	.49	.65	.48	.31
B. Substantive responses	.51	.35	.52	.69
8. What changes would you make in this student's paper?				
A. Mechanical responses	.34	.40	.50	.28
B. Substantive responses	.66	.60	.50	.72

Table 2 presents the mean proportion by group for each category included in the statistical analyses for each of the open-ended questions. Given these findings, Graham et al. concluded that normally achieving students have a conceptually more mature knowledge base about writing and the writing process than students with LD. Students with LD were generally positive about their ability to compose written products, although they viewed it less favorably than their regular achieving grade level peers. It is possible that the type of writing instruction that students with LD receive in school is, in part, responsible for their knowledge base. It was noted by several authors that special education teachers place too much emphasis on the development of mechanical skills (Graham, et al., 1993).

Compared to the texts of their more accomplished peers, papers written by struggling writers are shorter, more poorly organized, and weaker in overall quality (Graham & Harris, 1988). In addition, these students' compositions typically contain more irrelevant information and more mechanical and grammatical errors that render their texts less readable (Graham & Harris, 1988). The skills with which struggling

writers lack experience tend to compromise their ability to execute and regulate the processes underlying proficient composition, especially planning and revising.

Motivational factors play an important role in the writing outcomes of students with and without LD. If a student perceives her skills as minimal, the writing product is likely to be poor. The teacher, in turn, provides corrective feedback. A cycle emerges and the student loses confidence, seeks to avoid or "get through" the writing task, and learns little from the writing experience. Students need writing lessons on topics that will pique their interest and provide motivation. Identifying instructional adaptations that are readily integrated into practice will assist in helping teachers, special educators, and other education professionals maximize the writing potential of grade school children and youth.

Gersten and Baker (2001) conducted a meta-analysis of 13 intervention studies with students with LD to determine what impact writing interventions have on these students and to identify instructional components associated with the best writing outcomes for them. A common goal in these studies was to teach students with LD how to organize writing tasks, generate ideas about the writing topics, and produce final written products that were coherent and organized. Gersten and Baker reported overall weighted effect sizes ranging from .41 to 1.17 with an aggregate effect size of .81, which represents a large effect favoring the selected interventions across different measures of writing including standardized writing tests, quality ratings of student papers, and scores on trait and genre structure rubrics. In their sample of studies, larger effect sizes were associated with true experiments in comparison with quasi-experimental studies, whereas smaller effect sizes favoring the treatment group were found when a control group

received some form of writing instruction rather than simply engaged in writing practice. Contrary to findings reported in most meta-analytic studies, MacArthur, Graham, Schwartz, and Schafer (1995), effect sizes were greater when outcomes were assessed with standardized tests than when evaluated with experimental measures. This finding suggests that observed gains in writing performance following an intervention were not restricted to measures that closely matched the intervention limitations. Writing strategy interventions were found to yield large gains in writing performance, however they produced weaker effects on students' writing knowledge, self-efficacy beliefs, and attitudes about writing, effect sizes ranged from .40 to .64 (Gersten & Baker, 2001). In addition, Gersten and Baker reported that generalization and maintenance of treatment effects were inconsistent across studies. The majority of students appeared to have difficulty transferring what they learned to novel situations and the impact of writing interventions noticeably diminished over time.

In the meta-analysis of single-subject designs, Gersten and Baker (2001) examined writing intervention for students with learning disabilities who participated in studies. They also found evidence of positive effects on students' sense of efficacy, that is, their sense of being able to write. Although the number of reviewed studies is not extremely large ($N = 13$) the quality of the research is solid enough to allow inferences to be made about the improvement of classroom practice. Most important, the meta-analysis highlights a range of research-based instructional approaches that educators should use when teaching written expression to students with learning disabilities.

Gersten and Baker (2001) reported the interventions in each study included several similar components. Components that appeared to be associated with strong

positive writing outcomes included: (a) explicit teaching of the critical steps in the writing process, (b) explicit teaching of the conventions of a writing genre, (c) guided feedback through peer collaboration and teacher conferencing, (d) use of procedural facilitators (e.g., graphic organizers, "planning think sheet"), and (e) the use of self regulation statements and questions.

An ultimate goal in writing instruction is for students with LD to have strategies and processes that can be implemented in both general and special education settings that facilitate improved writing outcomes. Gersten and Baker (2001) identify potential key elements of writing instruction interventions and areas that need additional research. There are numerous writing strategy interventions (Englert et al., 1991; Graham & Harris, 1997) that have been successful in helping struggling writers. However maintaining and generalizing the strategies they acquire requires further investigation.

Students must also master other aspects of writing mechanics, such as capitalization, punctuations, and sentence construction. When faced with the task of composing an essay, students who have not obtained fluent transcription skills often become laboriously consumed with handwriting, grammar, and/or spelling as they struggle to get their writing "onto paper". Gersten and Baker (2001) recommended that future research examine the effectiveness of a combination of writing strategy instruction and the components of a strong writing program with particular emphasis on instruction that provides students with learning disabilities writing strategies that can be maintained and produce subsequent successful learning outcomes.

Baker, Gersten, and Graham (2003) suggest that most classroom teachers implement few, if any, adaptations. They suggest researchers should examine why

teachers fail to adapt to meet the needs of struggling writers, how they can effectively incorporate meaningful adaptations, and which adaptations are likely to be parsimonious with process-writing instruction and still reap the greatest benefits for students. Past writing instruction research has revealed some important findings about what works for students, especially those who perform least well in writing. In light of that knowledge, one issue that needs to be addressed is the how instruction being given in our classrooms is effecting writing for academic success. In terms of higher-level writing tasks, struggling writers often lack strategies for generating and discarding ideas based on the constraints of writing. Struggling writers have difficulty sustaining their thinking about a topic when retrieving ideas from memory, which makes it difficult for them to generate appropriate ideas for the topic (Graham & Harris, 2002).

Hubbard (2011) offered students in a seventh- and eighth-grade language arts class the option of writing an article for *Voices from the Middle* as an alternative assignment. The peers were assigned to write a two page literary letter to another peer informing their audience of a book they had read and enjoyed. The substitute assignment was to write an article articulating what works for them in the classroom as readers and writers (Hubbard, 2011). Three students, Noah, Tobin, and Jill, took on the challenge of naming their perspective regarding what teachers can do to promote a love of reading and writing. There was some commonality in the structures and experiences the three students chose to write about, however their individual preferences as readers and writers are evident.

Noah's article describes the importance of teachers of "getting to know people our age," giving students "room to breathe" in their studies, and "giving time where time is

due" for independent reading (Hubbard, 2011). Most notably, Noah reflects: "Although it might seem like a really small thing, allowing students the opportunity to take their learning at least partially into their own hands and have a say in what or how they are going to learn not only reveals what is the most relevant or interesting learning to them, but also brings a sense of pride in the education they are receiving."

Tobin notes that variety is essential to maintaining a sense of energy and challenge around writing tasks (Hubbard, 2011). Astutely, Tobin looks beyond the language arts classroom and acknowledges that reading and writing are not discipline-specific skills, but are central to the learning that takes place across the curriculum.

Jill, focused her article on the viewpoint that in elementary school, students are taught the basics; commas, periods, complete sentences, nouns, verbs. In middle school, students learn how to write, edit, and go deeper into information. In middle school students are expected to sharpen their reading and writing abilities prior to the high school level. Jill communicated that each student and teacher does things differently. Some classes look more at the creative side of writing, some the more logical side. Some make things fun by having interesting sentences to work with, and some just give you the simplest possible (Hubbard, 2011). The three middle school students, who wrote their responses took the opportunity to thoughtfully brainstorm, consider and write about literacy needs of students at the middle school level.

Genre-Specific Strategies for Enhancing Writing

Prior research, specifically Graham and Harris' (1993), called for interventions involving more genre-specific writing strategies. Wong (1997) designed and developed genre-specific strategies based on several factors. These factors included the students'

need to grasp the relevance and importance of planning and revising and the cognitive processes involved. Wong (1997) selected three genres for instruction: reportive essay, persuasive opinion, and compare-and-contrast. The characteristics of students who participated are displayed in Table 3.

Table 3

Student Characteristics in Intervention Studies

	Study I (1994)		Study II (1996)		Study III (1997)	
	Trained	Untrained	Trained	Untrained	Trained	Untrained
Male	15	8	13	11	13	-
Female	3	5	5	9	8	-
Total	18	13	18	20	-	-
Students with LD	15	13	14	15	14	-
Low achievers	-	-	4	5	7	-
ESL	2	-	-	-	-	-
Language delay	1	-	-	-	-	-

During the instruction of the genre-specific strategies, computers with word processing software played an essential role. Students were taught to write using word processing, based on the rationale that their motivation to learn and sustain the writing task would drop if they had to write and revise with pen and paper (Wong, 1997).

During the planning phase, Wong (1997) explained the writing process to the students, emphasizing the recursive nature of the various stages of planning, writing, and revising. The author then demonstrated the procedure of planning by thinking aloud her thoughts in formulating the writing plan (Wong, 1997). Depending on the specific genre,

Wong would demonstrate think-aloud planning for the students. Throughout the writing process, students received assistance from members of the intervention team in articulating their communicative intent and ideas, structuring sentences, choosing appropriate words, and spelling. The dependent measures in the three studies were the instructional foci, the foci of each genre are summarized in Table 5.

Table 5

Instructional Foci per Genre

	Genres		
	Reportive Essays	Opinion Essays	Compare-and-Contrast Essays
Instructional Foci			
General (applies to all genres)	• Clarity	• Clarity	• Clarity
Genre-specific	• Thematic salience	• Cogency of arguments presented • Organization of arguments presented	• Appropriateness of ideas that target either a comparison or a contrast • Organization of ideas

The results from the three-year writing interventions study clearly indicated that students improved significantly in the quality of their compositions. Their gains from pretest to posttest on target dependent measures in each intervention were statistically significant with large effect sizes. Wong (1997) gave three reasons that contributed to the success of the interventions.

1. Genre-specific strategies. The significant results emphasize that each strategy characterizes one appropriate way of instructing adolescents with LD and low achievers to write one particular genre.

2. Focused and intensive nature of the writing instruction requiring the intervention team to always stayed on target likely contributing to the success of the writing interventions.

3. Use of interactive dialogues in conferences between students and intervention researchers that contributed much to the writing enhancement.

Purpose Statement and Research Questions

Research on writing problems of students with LD have been well documented and described. The purpose of this study is to examine high interest writing of middle school students with LD. The research question is to what extent will high interest narrative writing prompts for 12 to 13-year old students in a special education writing class increase the total words written and percent accuracy in a 3-min timed writing sample as compared to low interest narrative writing prompts.

Methods

Participants

Three individuals from a sixth and seventh grade special education language arts class will receive parent permission to participate in the research. All participants will be classified with LD specifically in reading and writing. Each of the three students will receive 90 min of special education reading and language arts instruction each day. Andrea (Grade 7, Ukrainian), in addition to special education services, previously received supplemental instruction in language arts through an English as a Second

Language (ESL) class; Russian was her native language. Andrea will also receive speech-language therapy as a related service. James (Grade 7, Caucasian) was diagnosed with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) in addition to LD, and takes medication to manage activity level and attention associated with ADHD. He also will receive speech-language therapy as a related service. Nick (Grade 7, Caucasian) will receive special education services in reading, language arts, and math. The full-scale IQ scores for the three students are James 97, Nick 96, and Andrea 62. In addition, each student had obtained a Written Expression composite score of 86 or less on the Woodcock Johnson Test of Achievement – III (WJ-III) (a standardized test with a mean = 100, SD=15) administered as part of the special education qualification process.

Informed Consent

An informed consent form for parents to give their permission for their children to participate in the study will be developed using Utah State University's (USU) Institutional Review Board (IRB) guidelines for such forms. All potential participants will be given a letter of explanation and Informed Consent Form (see Appendix A). The letter will indicate that (a) the study would examine writing prompts to increase the number of correct writing sequences in a 3-min timed writing sample, (b) the students were not required to participate, and, (c) if they did participate, parents could withdraw the students from the study at any time without penalty. All students' parents will sign the consent form and participate fully.

Setting

The proposed study will be conducted in a public school of approximately 700 students, located in a large district in northern Utah. The study will take place in a

resource language arts classroom. Weekly writing curriculum-based measurements (CBM) will be used by the resource teacher and the procedures for administering the CBM are well established. Distractions will be minimized by placing a "Testing – Do Not Disturb" sign on the door to the classroom. The participants will be closely monitored to ensure they produce the best writing sample possible.

Materials

Before testing the participants, the teacher will gather a set of high interest narrative writing prompts and a set of low interest narrative writing prompts that give students something to write about, lined paper for participant responses, pencils, and a stopwatch.

Dependent Variables

Total words written (TWW). TWW (see examples in Table 6) is defined as the sum of the total number of words. A word is any letter or group of letters separated by a space, even if the word is misspelled or is a nonsense word. TWW will be determined by summing all words written in a 3-min session.

Accuracy. In 3-min timed writing, participants will produce a writing sample following spelling, grammar, and punctuation rules. Accuracy will be determined by dividing the number of correct writing sequences (CWS) by the TWW. A CWS (see examples in Table 6) is defined as two adjacent writing units (words and punctuation) that are correct within the context of what is written. A word is, any letter or group of letters separated by a space is defined as a word, even if the word is misspelled or is a nonsense word. The examiner will place a caret "^" between words that are (a) mechanically (spelled correctly, appropriate capitalization), (b) semantically, and (c)

syntactically correct. Sum the number of carets "^" s, this is recorded as CWS. A CWS is two adjacent writing units (words and punctuation) that are correct within the context of what is written. Rules for scoring CWS in writing samples and an example of a scored writing sample can be found in Appendix B and C respectively.

Table 6

CWS and TWW

TWW: The sum of the total number of words.	CWS: Two adjacent writing units (words and punctuation) that are correct within the context of what is written.
• A word is any letter or group of letters separated by a space is defined as a word, even if the word is misspelled or is a nonsense word. Examples: • It is spring break. **TWW = 4** • It is spring breck. **TWW = 4** • I tride a cupcack. **TWW = 4** • I tride cupcack. **TWW = 3**	• A caret "^" is used to mark each unit of the correct writing sequence. There is an implied space at the beginning of the first sentence. Examples: • ^The^sky^was^blue.^ **CWS = 5** • ^All^of^the^kids^started^to^laugh.^ **CWS = 8** • ^All^of^the^kids^started^to_laghf. _ **CWS = 6** • ^The^sky^was^blue.^ ^It^was^pretty.^ **CWS = 9** • ^The^sky^was^blue.^ it was^pretty **CWS = 6**

Reliability of Dependent Measures

Obtaining accurate participant writing results should not depend on who assesses the students. Scoring TWW and CWS can be subjective and not always perfectly reliable. Therefore, to determine reliability of scoring across examiners, obtaining inter-scorer agreement will be completed periodically. Two examiners will independently

score a sample of three writings. Prior to the study, the researcher will train the second examiner by presenting three writing passages, explain the definitions of CWS and TWW, and describe the scoring procedures. To score a passage the examiner will underline in pencil or pen the words that are produced in the sample. This score is recorded as TWW.

Formula for calculating inter-scorer agreement:

Agreements/(Agreements + Disagreements) x 100

Example:

For two examiners who scored John as 50 TWW and 48 TWW, their Inter-Scorer agreement would be 96% as follows:

- They agreed that John wrote 48 TWW

- They disagreed on 2 TWW

- Agreements (48)/Agreements + Disagreements (48 + 2) = 48/50 = .96

- .96 x 100 = 96%

Inter-scorer agreement will be computed for both TWW and CWS.

Prompt Selection Procedure

Before testing the participants, the teacher will gather a deck of 40 cards with one writing prompt on each card. See writing prompts in Appendix B. The teacher will read aloud each of the 40 writing prompts. On the table in front of the participant three categories will be displayed, "prompts you would like to write about," "prompts you would NOT like to write about," and "neutral." Participants will be instructed to place the cards in the corresponding categories. Initially, the participants will be allowed to place each card in their selected category. At the conclusion of this process, the

participants will be probed until 10 cards are placed in the "prompts you would like to write about" category and 10 cards can be placed in the "prompts you would NOT like to write about" category. The 10 cards in the "prompts you would like to write about" category will be noted and categorized as high interest. The 10 cards in the "prompts you would NOT like to write about" category will be noted and categorized as low interest. Following this procedure, the teacher will ask the participants to rank the high interest and low interest prompts in descending order as "Top 10" and "Bottom 10". The prompts will be ranked from one to 10 with the highest being ranked "1" and the lowest ranked "10".

Independent Variable

High interest writing prompt. Participants will be presented with a high interest writing prompt selected by the researcher. A high interest writing prompt will be randomly selected by the teacher from the 10 prompts selected by the participant as high interest. Although the prompt will be randomly selected, it will be removed from future selection opportunity. Removal will insure that participants do not write about the same topic in multiple writing sessions.

Low interest writing prompt. Participants will be presented with a low interest writing prompt selected by the researcher. The writing prompt will be one of the 10 topics that individual participants selected as low interest. Selection procedures will be the same as high interest prompt selection.

Procedures

Sessions will be scheduled so that participants are exposed to equal numbers of high- and low-interest writing prompts. The order of the first week's sessions will be

randomly selected. Sessions will be counterbalanced over a 2-week period so that the

same number of high- and low-interest sessions are held. For example, if the first week's

sessions are High (Monday), Low (Tuesday), Low (Wednesday), High (Thursday) and

Low (Friday), the second week's sessions will be Low (Monday), High (Tuesday), High

(Wednesday), Low (Thursday) and High (Friday). Participants will not be told what topic

is selected prior to the session. Procedures for conducting sessions are described below:

1. Daily starter topic will be selected by the researcher for individual participants.

2. Participants will be provided with a pencil and a sheet of lined paper.

3. Directions and writing prompt will be given to the participant by the researcher:

> You are going to write a story. First, I will read a sentence, and then you
> will write a story about what happens next. You will have 1 min to think
> about what you will write, and 3 min to write your story. Remember to do
> your best work. If you don't know how to spell a word, you should
> guess. Are there any questions? (Pause). Put your pencils down and listen.
> For the next minute, think about ... (insert writing prompt).

4. After reading the story starter, the researcher will begin timer and allow 1 min for
students to "think." (Students will be monitored so that they do not begin writing.)
After 30 s, the researcher will say: "You should be thinking about (insert writing
prompt)."

5. At the end of 1 min, the researcher will say: "Now begin writing." Restart timer
for 3 min.

6. The researcher will monitor participants' participation. If individual participants
pause for 10 s or say they are done before the 3 min, the researcher will move

close to them and say: "Keep writing the best story you can." This prompt can be repeated to participants if they pause again.

7. At the end of 3 min, the researcher will say: "Stop. Put your pencils down."

8. The researcher will collect writing samples.

Analysis of Writing Samples

Accuracy. Writing samples will be analyzed and graphed for TWW, CWS and percent correct. The graph will display CWS divided by TWW to show percent correct in, low-interest writing and high-interest writing sessions. Writing samples will be analyzed for individual participants.

Experimental Design

A multi-element design (Cooper, Heron, & Heward, 2007) will be used to compare the effectiveness of the high interest and low interest writing prompts. Over the course of the study, participants will engage in 3-min timed writing samples in about 10 high interest and 10 low interest writing sessions. If high interest writing prompts produce higher percent accuracy than low interest writing prompts, data paths will separate in a non-overlapping fashion. The multi-element design was selected because it allows for rapid alternation of elements (in this case, high and low-interest writing prompts) and differentiation of effects across two conditions. No baseline phase will precede the alternating sessions. A multiple baseline design was not selected because a baseline condition of low-interest writing prompts was not realistic. A withdrawal design was not selected because percent accuracy on writing was not predicted by the researcher to decrease in a second baseline phase.
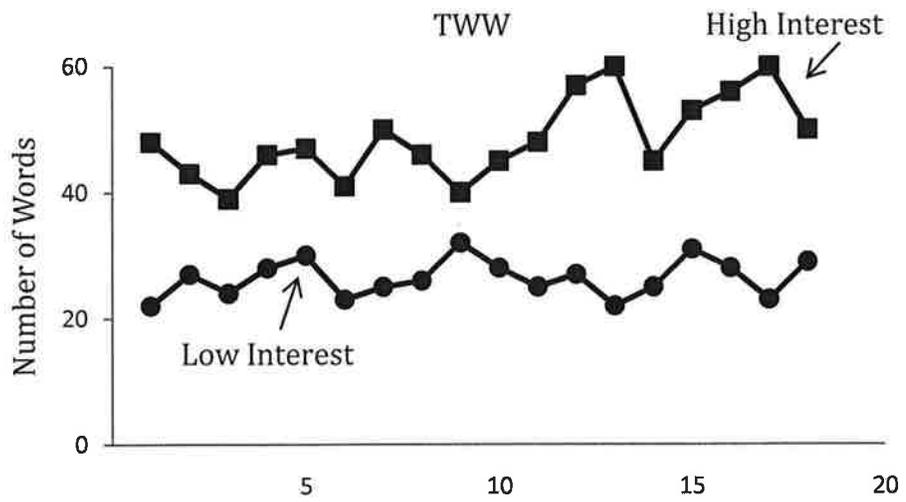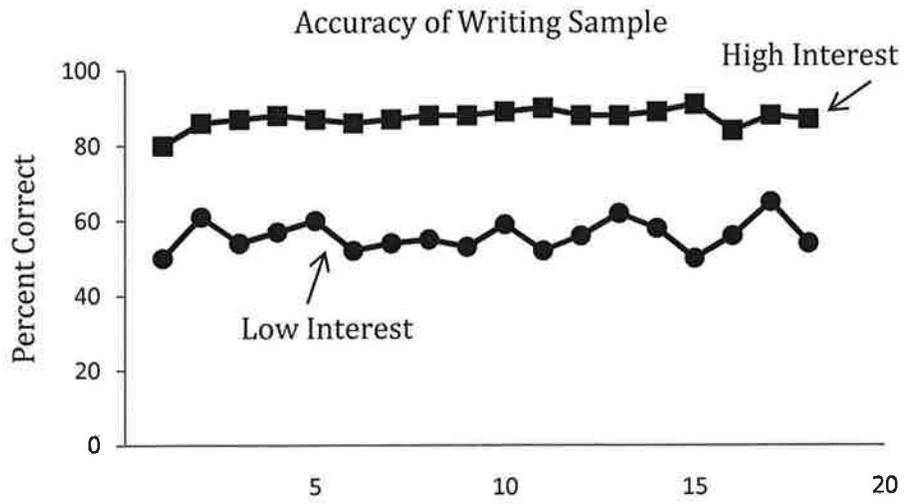
Anticipated Results

Data on student writing performance will include scores on TWW, CWS, and accuracy. The researcher anticipates that effects of the intervention will produce increased TWW and CWS in a 3-min timed writing sample for all participants. As expected, all three students will demonstrate increases in these measures after choosing writing prompts of high interest on subsequent probes.

Experimental Control

Experimental control is necessary to support the conclusion that the independent variables (IV) within a study influenced the dependent variables (DV) within the study and that changes in the dependent variable were not due to extraneous variables. Within this study, experimental control is expected for the initial writing prompts as they will be teacher selected. As expected, all three students will demonstrate increases in TWW and CWS after choosing writing prompts of high interest compared to writing prompts of low interest. As such, experimental control is demonstrated.

High Interest Writing Prompts

All data presented here are hypothetical. As shown in Figure 1, the researcher anticipates that participant-selected high-interest writing prompts will correlate with an increased TWW and CWS during treatment. Throughout treatment, James' accuracy will significantly improve ranging from 80-89% correct.
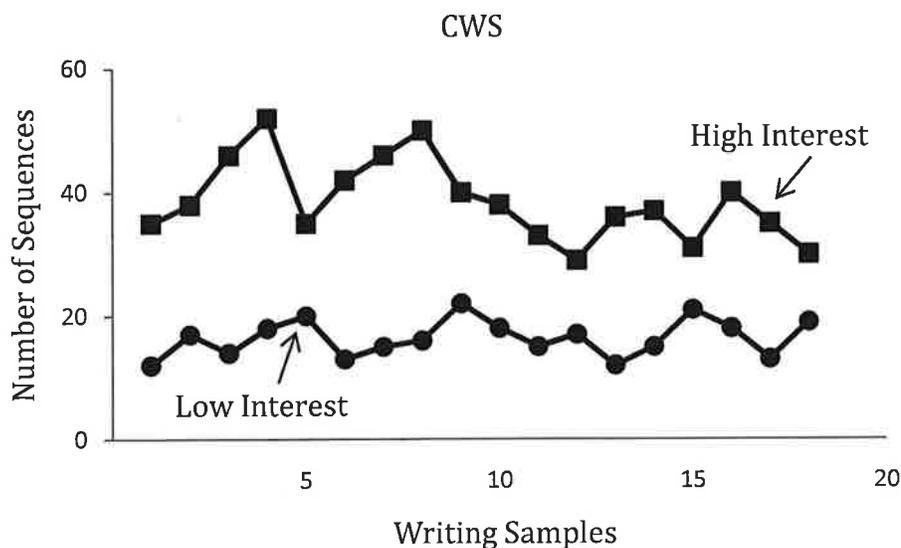
Accuracy of Writing Sample

TWW

Figure 1. Hypothetical data on James' writing accuracy, TWW, and CWS.

Discussion

Given these anticipated results, I would conclude that participants in this study will produce positive results on student writing performance through the use of high interest writing prompts. This intervention has not previously been used in research for instructing students with their writing. Previous research demonstrating a number of writing strategy interventions, for example Gersten and Baker (2001), used (a) explicit teaching of the critical steps in the writing process, (b) explicit teaching of the conventions of a writing genre, (c) guided feedback through peer collaboration and teacher conferencing, (d) use of procedural facilitators (e.g., graphic organizers, "planning think sheet"), and (e) the use of self regulation statements and questions, have been successful in helping struggling writers. Findings from this study will contribute to the literature by showing that teachers who use thought-provoking, high-interest writing prompts to catch participants' attention will obtain improved writing performance.

Participants will score higher accuracy on high-interest writing prompts than prompts selected by teachers.

Alternative Findings

Although the researcher anticipates a positive correlation between high-interest writing prompts and writing accuracy, there may be no such relationship when the project is completed. If high interest writing prompts alone do not increase the accuracy of participants writing samples, it may be explained by the type of writing prompt the participant selected. Involving participants in selecting their own writing prompts engages them in a process that will help them develop ideas and content for a particular writing task. The goal of four different writing prompt genres is provided in Table 7 Writing genres (2011).

Table 7

Writing Prompt Genres

Genre	Goal
Descriptive	To describe a person, place or thing in vivid detail.
Expository	To give information such as an explanation or directions.
Narrative	To tell a story of an experience, event, or sequence of events while holding the reader's interest.
Persuasive	To give an opinion in an attempt to convince the reader that this point of view is valid or tries to persuade the reader to take a specific action.

Narrative writing involves the production of stories or personal essays. Practice with these forms helps writers to develop a skill for spontaneous and colloquial language. On the opposite side, many students have been taught strategies to be used in narrative writing. Descriptive and persuasive writing can benefit from these strategies. For

example, there must be an effective ordering of events when relating an incident as part of a report.

Persuasive writing contributes to an awareness of the world as the writer creates, manipulates, and interprets reality. This writing, whether fact or fiction, requires close observation of people, objects, and places. Further, this type of writing fosters creativity, imagination, and speculation by allowing the writer to express thoughts and then stand back, as a more detached observer might, and grasp more fully what is being felt and why.

Depending on the type of prompt selected by the participant, strengths and limitations depending on knowledge of the different types of writing, all with different aims and meanings, will help or hinder the participant. Participants who know the different types of writing may recognize them and thus help them to understand the direction their writing should take.

Limitation

One potential limitation of this study may be the procedure in which participants select the prompt. There will 40 writing prompts from which participants may choose. The researcher deems necessary to provide some boundaries and direction while presenting writing prompts that keep the participants excited about writing and therefore improving their writing skills. To avoid this limitation, future research should include allowing the participants to select the writing prompt from a larger selection size.

Implications

When students are provided with a writing prompt they find interesting, they are required to identify their content knowledge about the new topic, generate ideas related to

this topic, and organize these ideas logically. The implications of this study may be to increase motivation of these participants to produce writing, and to increase accuracy in writing products. Writing requires knowledge about various topics and demands a lot of creativity and organization of the content. Students who lack writing proficiency encounter many problems when to trying produce a writing sample on a topic they find to be at a low interest level. Therefore most students find writing to be very boring and tedious. A topic that is forcefully written produces ideas and thoughts are vaguely presented, the content is not appropriately paragraphed, and there is no appropriate link between each statement and paragraph. This results in students scoring lower percentage accuracy.

In many classrooms, students often express they do not like to write. Subsequent to a writing assignment or task, many students moan, "How long does it have to be?" "I have nothing to write about." "My life is boring." The comments of students convince other students (perhaps the teacher as well) that writing is going to be a dreaded activity. Yet writing is a means for students to demonstrate what they know and a way to help them understand what they know. High interest writing prompts may serve as a valuable tool in classroom settings to increase higher accuracy writing samples. By utilizing prompts that the students find interesting, savvy teachers in the field will help them cultivate broader writing skills. Depending on the results of this study, future research should first teach participants the different writing genres before selecting their own writing prompts. The methods used to select each high interest writing prompt warrant further investigation to ensure effectiveness. A particular component that requires more investigation is the limited amount of time allotted for the writing sample along with the

lack of allocation of time for participants to revise their own writing. Thus, further

research involving revision practice using students' own writing is necessary.

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Appendix B
Rules for Scoring CWS in Writing Samples

Rule 1. Pairs of Words Must Be Spelled Correctly
^All^of^the^students^started^to^write.^ **CWS** = 8
^All^of^the^kids^started^to_rite. _ **CWS** = 6

Rule 2. Words Must Be Capitalized and Punctuated Correctly with the Exception of Commas. Correct punctuation must be present at the end of the sentence. The first word of the next sentence must be capitalized and be spelled correctly for a correct writing sequence to be scored.
^The^soup^was^boiling.^ ^It^was^hot.^ **CWS** = 9
^The^soup^was^boiling.^ it was^hot **CWS** = 6

Rule 3. Words Must Be Syntactically Correct. Sentences that begin with conjunctions are considered syntactically correct.
^I^had^never^seen^the^play^before.^ **CWS** = 8
^I^never_seen^the^play^never.^ **CWS** = 6
^And^then^the^girl^gave^the^teacher^her^paper.^ **CWS** = 10

Rule 4. Words Must Be Semantically Correct
^Braxton^went^to^the^store.^ **CWS** = 6
^ Braxton^went_too_the^store.^ **CWS** = 4
^My^mom^made^the^cookies^especially^for^me.^ **CWS** = 9
^My^mom^made^the^cookies_specially_for^me.^ **CWS** = 7

Rule 5. Contractions. Apostrophes are required if the word cannot stand alone without it.
^I^went^to^John's^house.^ **CWS** = 6
^I^went^to Johns house.^ **CWS** = 4

Rule 6. Words with Reversed Letters. Words containing reversed letters are included in the total CWS count unless the reversed letter causes a word to be spelled incorrectly.
^There^was^a^bad^smell. ^ **CWS** = 6
^There^was^a^dad^smell. ^ **CWS** = 6
^The^dog^ran^in^the^yard.^ **CWS** = 7
^The bog ran^in^the^yard.^ **CWS** = 5

Rule 7. Story Titles and Endings. Words written in the title or endings that are capitalized and spelled correctly are included in the total CWS.
^The^Hot^Day^ **CWS** = 4
the Hot ^Day^ **CWS** = 2
the hot day **CWS** = 0
^The^End.^ **CWS** = 3
^The end.^ **CWS** = 2

Rule 8. Abbreviations. Commonly used abbreviations that are spelled correctly are included in the total CWS count.
^Juan^lives^on ^Hollywood ^Blvd. ^ **CWS** = 6

Rule 9. Hyphens. Hyphenated words are counted in the total CWS count as long as each morpheme separated by hyphens is spelled correctly
^My^brother-in-law^graduated^from^school.^ **CWS** = 6
^My broder-in-law graduated^from^school.^ **CWS** = 4

Rule 10. Numbers. With the exception of dates, numbers that are not spelled out are not included in the total CWS count.
3 men^ran.^ **CWS** = 2
^Three^men^ran.^ **CWS** = 4
^It^is^June^10, ^2011.^ **CWS** = 4

Rule 11. Unusual Characters. Symbols used in writing that are not spelled out are not included in the total CWS count.
^I^won^a^prize @ the^fair.^ **CWS** = 6

Appendix C
Scored Writing Sample

^ he ^was ^ jumping ^ on descs and ^ when ^ we tride to ^ get ^ him ^ he ^ would
^ climb ^ up ^ on ^ top ^ of ^ the cupberds and ^ we ^ could ^ not ^ reach ^ him^.
^ When ^ we ^ went ^ up their on ^ a Ladder he ^ would ^ jump ^ on ^ a ^ light ^.

CWS: 33
TWW: 41
$33 \div 41 = 80.4$
Accuracy: 80%

Appendix D
Narrative Writing Prompts

1. Think about your best holiday celebration ever. Tell about this celebration and why it was your favorite.
2. You spent a day with your grandmother. Tell about your day.
3. It was your birthday yesterday. How did you spend the day?
4. Describe a time when you had a fight with your best friend.
5. Write about the most memorable day of your life.
6. Write about the worst day of your life.
7. Write about the time when you went out your way to help someone in need.
8. Remember the best school assembly ever. What happened?
9. A flying saucer has been sighted over your town. You have never believed in flying saucers, but then you see it for yourself and...
10. You won a school contest that allowed you to be teacher-for-a-day. Write about your experience as the teacher.
11. One April Fool's day you played a safe but terrific joke on your best friend. Write about your April Fool's joke.
12. Imagine that as you are taking a shortcut through the woods, a tree topples pinning you underneath. Describe how you free yourself.
13. Tell about a time when you were embarrassed.
14. Imagine it is late at night, you are at home alone when the telephone rings. What happens next?
15. Describe what would be like if you could fly.
16. Think about a time you thought, "It's not fair." What happened to you that was not fair.
17. Write about a trip you have taken.
18. Think about a heroic adventures or daring rescues you have witnessed, participated in, or read about. What happened during one of these rescues?
19. Think of a day in your life when everything seemed to be going wrong. Tell about it.
20. Tell about a time when you felt proud.
21. What is one of the funniest things that has ever happened to you? Retell the event as completely as you can.
22. Recall a time when you felt really disappointed about something. Tell about this experience.
23. Think of a day in your life when everything seemed to be going in your favor. Tell about it.
24. Think about a time when you felt scared. Tell about it.
25. When you get to school, there's a sign on the door stating, "School's Closed." What do you do?
26. Tell about a time you "saved the day."
27. Suppose that one day you woke up and were 25 years old. Write about your day as a 25 year old?
28. You and a friend find an empty building and decide to make it your secret place. Tell about your secret place.

29. One day at school, your teacher comes into the classroom, places a box on the floor, and leaves the room. Suddenly, the box begins to move. Write a story about what happens next.
30. If you could become any animal, what animal would you choose to be?
31. What is the best part of your day?
32. If you could have any job/career you wanted, what would it be?
33. For a children's magazine, describe your first attempt at playing a new sport.
34. The thing that I regret most about my life is....
35. If I could accomplish one more thing, I would...
36. If I could live anywhere in the world, I would choose....
37. My favorite childhood memory is....
38. If you had to flee from your burning house, what would you choose to save?
39. If you have your driver's license where would you drive?
40. Your best friend doesn't invite you to her/his birthday party...