

Going Beyond the Basics

Part II, Writing and Reading

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Contents

An Introduction to Writing in the Workplace	4
Workplace Writing	6
The Connection between Workplace Writing and the GED	8
Effective Writing in the Workplace and on the GED Test	10
Know Your Audience	10
Be Concise	10
Avoid Grammatical and Punctuation Errors	10
Watch Your Words	12
Be Gender Neutral.....	13
Watch Your Style.....	14
Strategies for Incorporating Writing in the Workplace into the GED Curriculum	15
Strategy – Use Authentic Tasks (AT) in writing.....	15
Strategy – Use Authentic Materials	16
Strategy – Teach Students to Write to a Specific Audience and from a Different Perspective.....	17
Strategy – Teach Patterns of Writing	18
Strategy – Sample Lesson: Writing in the Workplace	19
Strategy – Use Graphic Organizers	20
Types of Graphic Organizers	22
Strategy – Writing Instructions	24
Strategy – Writing Practice.....	25
The Importance of Writing in the Going Beyond the Basics Classroom	26
References	27
An Introduction to Reading in the Workplace	28
Workplace Reading	34
The Connection between Workplace Reading and the GED	35
Technical Reading and the Workplace	37

Technical Reading Skills	37
Strategies for Incorporating Reading in the Workplace into the GED Curriculum	38
Strategy – Use Authentic Tasks (AT) in Reading.....	38
Strategy – Teach Students How to Expand Their Vocabulary Through the Use of Context Clues	39
Strategy – Summarizing Text	40
Strategy – Understanding Purpose for Reading and Determining what is Important	41
Strategy – Graphic Literacy.....	42
Strategy – Use Graphic Organizers	43
Strategy – Think-Alouds and Making Inferences	45
Strategy – Connecting to Text.....	46
Strategy – Sample Lesson: Summarizing Workplace Documents.....	47
The Importance of Reading in the Going Beyond the Basics Classroom.....	48
References	50
Language Arts, Writing Websites.....	53
Language Arts, Reading Websites.....	56

Chapter 3: Writing in the Workplace

“Writing – the art of communicating thoughts to the mind – is the great invention of the world....Great, very great, in enabling us to converse with the dead, the absent, and the unborn, at all distances of time and space, and great not only in its direct benefits, but its great help to all other inventions.”

Abraham Lincoln

An Introduction to Writing in the Workplace

Writing is an essential skill for everyone. To paraphrase Abraham Lincoln, writing allows people to communicate with those who have come before and those who will come after. Because of his incredible ability to communicate through writing and speaking, we can read and hear Abraham Lincoln’s words today. The writing process allows us to communicate with a grandparent or great-grandparent who was engaged in battle during world conflicts. It also allows us to write now for future generations – to be able to communicate with those who come into this world long after we are gone.

Writing is just as important in today’s workplace as it was more than 150 years ago when Abraham Lincoln spoke of the importance of writing. Today’s jobs require a unique set of skills. However, there is a standard set of skills that virtually every employer wants in an employee. At the top of that list is the ability to communicate, not just in speaking but also in writing. Job applicants who cannot convey their thoughts or ideas effectively are at a disadvantage in the workplace – whether seeking a job, trying to hold on to an existing job, or trying to move up the ladder.

In 1990, employers in North Carolina were surveyed.¹ Sixty-nine percent (69%) of employers perceived a gap between the skills they needed and what employees were able to provide. Of the surveyed employers:

- 46% believed that high school graduates have inadequate reading skills
- 52% believed that high school graduates have inadequate math skills
- 48% believed that high school graduates have inadequate thinking skills
- 51% believed that high school graduates have inadequate communication skills

In 2004, Achieve, Inc. issued a report entitled *Ready or Not: Creating a High School Diploma that Counts*. This report sought to provide information to secondary and postsecondary educational institutions to encourage a greater link between the two and to offer a starting point for restoring the value of the American high school diploma. The report outlines specific skills and concepts students should master before they graduate from high school.

In the area of language arts, the report recommends that students be able to:

¹ Vasu, M.L. and Frazier, A. *Workforce preparedness for economic development: Report of the 1989 North Carolina business and industry survey*. (1989). North Carolina Department of Economic and Community Development. Raleigh: NC.

- Demonstrate control of standard English through the use of grammar, punctuation, capitalization, and spelling
- Use general and specialized dictionaries, thesauruses, and glossaries (print and electronic) to determine the definition, pronunciation, etymology, spelling, and usage of words
- Recognize nuances in the meanings of words and choose words precisely to enhance communication

In the area of writing, the report recommends that students be able to:

- Plan writing by taking notes, writing informal outlines, and researching
- Select and use formal, informal, literary, or technical language appropriate for the purpose, audience, and context of the communication
- Organize ideas in writing with a thesis statement in the introduction, well-constructed paragraphs, a conclusion, and transition sentences that connect paragraphs into a coherent whole
- Draw on readers' comments regarding working drafts, revise documents to develop or support ideas more clearly, address potential objectives, ensure effective transitions between paragraphs and correct errors in logic
- Edit both one's own work and others' work for grammar, style, and tone appropriate to audience, purpose, and context
- Cite print or electronic sources properly when paraphrasing or summarizing information, quoting, or using graphics
- Determine how, when, and whether to employ technologies (such as computer software, photographs, and video) in lieu of, or in addition to, written communication
- Present written material using basic software programs (such as Word, Excel, and PowerPoint) and graphics (such as charts, ratios, and tables) to present information and ideas best understood visually
- Write an academic essay (for example, a summary, an explanation, a description, a literary analysis) where one must:
 - develop a thesis;
 - create an organizing structure appropriate to purpose, audience, and context;
 - include relevant information and exclude extraneous information; makes valid inferences;
 - support judgments with relevant and substantial evidence and well-chosen details; and
 - provide a coherent conclusion.
- Produce work-related texts (for example memos, emails, correspondence, project plans, work orders, proposals, biographies) that:
 - address audience needs, stated purpose, and context;
 - translate technical language into non-technical English;

- include relevant information and exclude extraneous information;
- use appropriate strategies, such as providing facts and details, describing or analyzing the subject, explaining benefits or limitations, comparing or contrasting, and providing a scenario to illustrate;
- anticipate potential problems, mistakes, and misunderstandings that might arise for the reader;
- create predictable structure through the use of headings, white space, and graphics, as appropriate; and
- adopt a customary format, including proper salutation, closing, and signature, when appropriate.²

Each of these skills is essential for the workplace and for success on the GED Tests. If students are to master these skills, then teachers must be able to include more authentic materials into the classroom and provide students with more opportunities to learn skills in the contexts in which they will use them, personally and in the workplace.

Workplace Writing

"We are almost always looking for writing skills when hiring, among both hourly and professional employees. It's inherent. We're looking for professionalism in every aspect."³

Employer and Survey Respondent

When developing a curriculum that meets the needs of the workplace, it is important to view the different job and worker attributes necessary for different types of careers. One of the best places to obtain this information is through the national Occupational Information Network (O*NET). O*NET identifies worker attributes and assigns them zones. Each zone indicates the types of skills and educational background necessary for specific professions. These zones go from a 1 where little or no education/ preparation is needed, up to a 5 where jobs require bachelor's degrees plus additional education or special skills. An example of a job at the 1 level is a counter/rental clerk, a pharmacy technician and bank teller are examples of level 2 jobs, and level 3 jobs include such professions as electricians and insurance sales representatives. Examples of level 4 and 5 jobs include such jobs as teachers, computer programmers, doctors, and engineers.⁴

What do all of these zones and job examples have in common? Each one requires that the employee be able to communicate effectively verbally and in writing and they all require listening, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills.

² The American Diploma Project. (2004). *Ready or not: Creating a high school diploma that counts*. Washington, DC: Achieve, Inc. <http://www.achieve.org/node/552>.

³ College Board. *Writing: a ticket to work...or a ticket out. A report of The National Commission on Writing for America's Families, Schools, and Colleges. (September 2004)*. http://www.writingcommission.org/prod_downloads/writingcom/writing-ticket-to-work.pdf.

⁴ O*NET. U. S. Department of Labor Employment and Training Administration: <http://www.onetcenter.org/>.

Workplace writing is specific to the needs of a person's job. In some cases, the employee's need to write is minimal and confined to recording phone messages and writing short notes to other employees. In many cases, employees are expected to be able to write memos, explain and justify the need for changes in procedure or policy, justify expenditures, or write an email to a client to confirm an order. Whatever the need, the emphasis is on producing a written product that accurately and effectively communicates ideas to individuals within the organization or to those who are outside the organization.

Workplace writing provides information and has a specific purpose and form unlike academic writing which is expected to convey knowledge and an understanding of content and process enabling the writer to explore new areas of thought. Workplace writing is designed to complete a work-related task.

Workplace writing usually requires action, follow-up, discussion, or input from a specific audience, such as fellow employees, customers, or supervisors. As a result, it must be clear, concise, and accurate. It must also be well organized so that the audience (reader) does not have to struggle to understand what is being said or asked. Workplace writing should be:

- Clear – easy to understand by the audience
- Accurate – factual, correct, and free of bias
- Correct – grammatically and technically
- Comprehensive – includes all of the information the audience needs
- Concise – does not have a lot of excess verbiage
- Accessible – is organized and has appropriate headings, subheadings, etc.

These are the same characteristics that should be found in most writing that adults use in everyday life. If a parent has to write a note to a teacher, then the note needs to be:

- Clear so that the teacher (reader) can understand what the parent is trying to say
- Accurate so that there is no false information nor does the writing imply a particular view of things
- Correct so that the teacher (reader) doesn't have trouble reading and understanding it
- Comprehensive so that it covers everything that the teacher needs to know about the situation
- Concise so that it can be read within a few minutes and doesn't cause the reader to get bogged down in minute details or "flowery" language that is unnecessary
- Accessible and organized in a manner that makes it easier for the reader to follow and understand

These same aspects are needed on the GED essay with one exception. The GED essay is not based on facts, but rather on the opinion or input of the writer. In the case of a topic which is unfamiliar to the writer, the writer is not expected to know facts about the topic and is not assessed based on the accuracy or inaccuracy of those facts.

The Connection between Workplace Writing and the GED

Workplace writing and the GED essay are similar in nature. Both convey specific information about a specific subject (topic). Each is written to convey information to a specific audience (the reader) and for a specific purpose. Expository and workplace writing explain or reveal knowledge/information. However, expository writing, such as that done for the GED essay, does not expect a response or action from the reader.

Many students in adult education programs ask "why" they need to know specific information. In this case, the question is often "Why do I need to know about grammar or essay writing?". The answer is quite simple. Long after students leave the GED classroom, they will be a part of the workforce. Whether as employers or employees, they will communicate with others – people, businesses, and government entities. Those who understand and can apply the basics of good communication will be a step ahead of those who cannot. In the case of the potential employee, good grammar and concise writing may mean the difference between obtaining a job or being shown the door. In the case of an employer, good grammar and effective writing skills may mean the difference between the status quo and making a business grow.

Learning how to construct sentences and paragraphs provides the foundation for writing effective letters, essays, and reports.⁵ From doctors to lawyers, police officers to retail sales workers, and bank tellers to hotel desk clerks, all employees must be able to write effectively.

Workplace writing conveys specific information about a specific subject to a specific audience for a specific purpose. Workplace writing is meant to be practical and to enable the audience to understand a subject and/or carry out a specific task.

⁵ Saffer, Nancy. *English and your career*. Occupational Outlook Quarterly, Summer 1999. Retrieved from the World Wide Web on 11/21/06 at: <http://www.bls.gov/opub/ooq/1999/Summer/art03.pdf>.

Workplace writing includes:

- letters
- presentation materials
- newsletters
- scripts
- meeting minutes
- magazine articles
- resumes and cover letters
- reports
- questionnaires, forms, and surveys
- catalogs
- operational manuals or guides
- press releases
- training materials
- advertisements
- posters, brochures
- contracts, proposals, and grants
- office procedures and policies

The GED Language Arts, Writing Test measures a student's ability to write a well-constructed essay, as well as to revise and edit samples written by someone else. Part I requires that students demonstrate revising and editing skills in organization, sentence structure, usage, and mechanics. Part II requires that students compose an essay that shows their ability to write.

Workplace writing requires that adults write well-constructed reports, memos, notes, and letters. In addition, employers and employees are expected to revise and edit their own writing and often that of others within the organization. Workplace writing also requires adherence to the rules of Edited American English (EAE).

Writing is important, whether in the workplace or on the GED Language Arts, Writing Test. The rules of English grammar remain the same. To demonstrate the importance of writing in the workplace, the GED Testing Service (GEDTS) requires that item writers use the following types of real-life text when constructing the tests:

- Workplace and community documents, which are part of the real world environment. These types of passages include such items as letters, memos, meeting notes, reports, executive summaries, applications, and similar correspondence.
- "How to" texts, which are documents that provide instructions or directions. These types of passages focus on such topics as securing a job, writing a resume, dressing for success, leasing a car, how to get to a specific location, and other tasks related to daily life.

- Informational texts, which are documents that provide an analysis of a particular topic. These passages may involve position papers, critical evaluations, and support papers on such topics as: the growing popularity of mega-malls, a review of a book or movie, or examining the needs of a local community for affordable housing.

Effective Writing in the Workplace and on the GED Test

Whether students are writing an essay, report, email, memo, or resume, there are certain strategies that they need to use in order to produce effective writing that is easy to understand and conveys what the writer wants the reader to know. The following are strategies employers recommend that writers use when developing material for the workplace.

Know Your Audience

To be an effective writer, adults need to think first and then write. Too often adults start writing, which results in an unorganized attempt to communicate that the reader cannot easily understand. Effective writers think before they put the first word on the paper. They also think about who is going to read what will be written.

Whether they use a graphic organizer or just jot down ideas on a “sticky-note,” effective writers think through what they want to communicate and to whom they are communicating.

Effective writers:

- Determine what details must be included and those that can be excluded
- Decide whether or not graphics are needed to help “explain” what is being said in the narrative or text
- Recognize that the reader has limited time and make sure that time is put to good use
- Understand that how something is written can be as important as what is written

Be Concise

Effective writers know how to say a lot in very few words. They recognize the importance of writing in a clear and concise manner and avoid wordiness and the use of unnecessary large words. They get to the point, and they stay on the point.

The strategy of being concise can be extremely helpful on the GED essay. Often, GED candidates write long rambling sentences that say the same thing repeatedly. Likewise, they use “big” words to impress, but often use them incorrectly. Rambling essays filled with “big” words make the reader work harder to understand what is trying to be said. As in the workplace, simple is better.

Too Wordy – The tornado had the effect of a destructive force on the packaging plant.

Precise and Concise – The tornado destroyed the packaging plant.

Avoid Grammatical and Punctuation Errors

“We’re goin to be late on Thrusday. Because my friend have to stop at the stor before work.”

Employees who leave notes filled with grammatical or spelling errors make poor impressions on their co-workers and/or supervisors. Employees should avoid errors in their writing, whether they are writing a simple email or preparing a report. One of the easiest ways to avoid submitting material that has errors is to have someone else read through it first. Many employees don’t take the time to ask a co-worker to proof their work, or they are just too embarrassed to ask.

Employers cite the following as some of the most common mistakes they find in their employees’ writing.⁶

Type of Error	Incorrect Usage	Correct Usage
Misuse of apostrophe	Its for it is Employees’ for one employee	It’s Employee’s
Split Infinitives	To graciously decline	To decline graciously
Use of contractions in formal writing	Can’t	Cannot
Misuse of commas	Maxwell Baker goalie for the winning team accepted the trophy. Please bring chart paper pencils and a highlighter to the meeting.	Maxwell Baker, goalie for the winning team, accepted the trophy. Please bring chart paper, pencils, and highlighters to the meeting.
Incomplete sentences	Because of the lack of new jobs in the area.	He accepted the transfer because of the lack of new jobs in the area.
Ending a sentence with a preposition	Where is my folder at?	Where is my folder?
Lack of subject and verb agreement	Everybody know Mrs. Jones is getting a promotion. The box of markers are on the top shelf.	Everybody knows Mrs. Jones is getting a promotion. The box of markers is on the top shelf.
Pronoun and antecedent agreement	If a person wishes to succeed in business, you have to know the rules of the game.	If a person wishes to succeed in business, he or she has to know the rules of the game.

Interestingly, the majority of these issues are addressed on the GED Language Arts, Writing Test, Part I.

To assist students in identifying grammatical and punctuation errors, provide them with examples of real-life errors in writing. Have students make corrections to the authentic materials and discuss why the corrections were needed.

To facilitate improvement in the area of grammar, students should also critique their own writing and that of their peers. Pair students and have them proof each other’s work. Over time, students will reduce the number of errors in part because of the spirit of competition that

⁶ White, Claire E. *Effective writing for the workplace*. Writers Write: The Internet Writing Journal. (August 1997). <http://www.writerswrite.com/journal/cew1.htm>.

develops between them and their respective team mates. In addition, they will become more comfortable with sharing their writing with others and hopefully will be more likely to ask a co-worker to proof their writing in the workplace.

Watch Your Words

There are many word pairs that students commonly confuse and ultimately misuse. Teachers need to work with students and help them distinguish word pairs and learn how to access reference materials when they just can't remember which word to use and when to use it. The following is a brief list of some of the most commonly misused word pairs.

- Here/hear
- Bare/bear
- Accept/except
- Affect/effect
- Allude/elude
- Passed/past
- Principal/principle
- Who's/whose
- Board/bored
- Brake/break
- Conscious/conscience
- Lay/lie
- Lose/loose
- Elicit/illicit

For a more comprehensive list of commonly misused word pairs or homonyms, Wikipedia's List of Frequently Misused English Words can be accessed at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_frequently_misused_English_words. This site includes the words and standard and non-standard (incorrect) examples of their use.

In addition to commonly misused word pairs, students also use words that aren't really words. The following words are often heard in conversation, but are not accepted words. Most dictionaries will state that these words are nonstandard. The following are some of the most frequently used nonstandard words.

- Allright and alright instead of all right
- Irregardless instead of regardless
- Enthused instead of enthusiastic
- Theirselves instead of themselves
- Anyways, somewheres, nowheres (none of these words should be plural)

Last, but not least in the “watch your words” section, is the use of slang. Slang is not acceptable for workplace communication. Students need to understand the difference between jargon and slang.

Jargon is the specialized or technical language of a trade, profession, or similar group. It is a unique language that belongs exclusively to a specific group or profession. Engineers, lawyers, educators, doctors, and tax analysts use jargon to exchange complex information. Jargon is often unintelligible to those outside of the specific group.

According to Merriam-Webster, slang is defined as language peculiar to a particular group. It is an informal nonstandard vocabulary composed of coinages, arbitrarily changed words, and extravagant, forced, or facetious figures of speech. Slang is best left for after work hours and the weekends.

Be Gender Neutral

In the past, traditional rules favored the use of the word “he” when referring to a person’s actions. It did not matter whether the person was male or female. Today, the rules have changed. In the workplace, supervisors or co-workers may take offense at the use of gender-specific words when referring to both males and females.

Students need to learn how to write in a gender-neutral manner. The easiest is to eliminate the pronoun whenever possible. Gender-neutral writing uses language that does not stereotype either gender nor appear to be referring to only one gender when that is not the writer’s intention.

The goal of workplace writing is to communicate information to a specific audience in a form in which the audience can understand it and can use it. According to Jean Hollis Weber, a technical editing consultant focusing on science, engineering, and technology, gender-specific writing can interfere with communication especially if it insults the audience (or a portion of the audience) or is awkward (such as repeatedly using “he/she” or “he or she”).⁷

Gender specific:

Everyone should bring his copy of the marketing report to the meeting.

Everyone should bring her copy of the marketing report to the meeting.

Gender neutral:

Everyone should bring a copy of the marketing report to the meeting.

Jean Hollis Weber recommends that writers develop more effective, gender-neutral verbal and written communications such as the following:

Bypass the problem of gender whenever possible. Use one of the following when writing out procedures or providing instructions:

- Imperative mood (Example: Do not use the copier for personal use.)
- Second person (Example: You must not use the copier for personal use.)
- First person plural (Example: To set a good example, we must avoid using the copier for our personal use.)

⁷ Weber, Jean Hollis, *Gender-neutral technical writing*. TECHWR-1. <http://www.techwr-1.com/techwhirl/magazine/writing/genderneutral.html>

Use plural nouns and plural pronouns. Avoid problems with using singular nouns and pronouns by using plural ones, such as:

- **Gender Specific** (Example: To access the account, the owner must login with his name and password.)
- **Gender Neutral** (Example: To access the account, login with your name and password.)
- **Gender Neutral Plural Noun and Pronoun** (Example: To log in, owners must login with their names and passwords.)

Avoid pronouns completely when possible.

- Repeat the noun (sometimes this also makes your meaning clearer):
 - Gender Specific** (Example: Procedure manuals are designed for the reader. You write these manuals for him, not for you.)
 - Gender Neutral** (Example: Procedure manuals are designed for the reader. You write these manuals for the reader, not for you.)
- Use "a" or "the" instead of him or her, such as:
 - Gender Specific** (Example: The writer should understand his reader well.)
 - Gender Neutral** (Example: The writer should understand the reader well.)

Rewrite the sentence or passage. In some cases, the only thing a writer can do is revise the sentence, such as the following.

- **Gender Specific** (Example: Each account owner has his own login name and password.)
- **Gender Neutral** (Example: Each account owner has a personal login name and password.)⁸

Watch Your Style

Every workplace has its own sense of style. The workplace style may be relaxed or rigid, fun-loving or serious, or somewhere in between. Workplaces typically draw their style from that of the people who are in charge. Likewise, each workplace has its own style of communicating. It is important that adults who are employed or are seeking employment learn how to write using the style that is most appreciated and used at that particular workplace.

While law firms still communicate in a very formal style, high-tech companies may have a more relaxed method for communicating within the workplace and to their customers. However, most workplaces frown on communication that looks like an Instant Message between friends. Students should understand that emoticons and Internet shorthand are not examples of effective communication in the workplace.

Empire State College in Saratoga Springs, New York has an excellent writing website. Have students check out the following sites:

⁸ *Gender-neutral technical writing.* <http://www.techwrl.com/techwhirl/magazine/writing/genderneutral.html>.

- Personality Choices in Business Writing
http://www.esc.edu/esconline/across_esc/WritingResources.nsf/frames/Personality+Choices+in+Business+Writing?OpenDocument
- Style Seminar
http://www.esc.edu/ESConline/Across_ESC/WritersComplex.nsf/wholeshortlinks2/Style+Seminar+Menu.

Each of these sites provides examples of different styles of writing that may help students better understand how their choice of words and the way in which they write can influence others.

Strategies for Incorporating Writing in the Workplace into the GED Curriculum

Adults in the workforce face a variety of writing tasks. They may be asked to write a brief summary of an event that occurred during the course of their day, respond in writing to a customer's complaint, or compose an email to a co-worker regarding an upcoming meeting. However, if the only thing students do in class is select the correct multiple-choice response to a question, then they have no experience in transferring their knowledge to real-world applications.

What needs to be taught in GED writing classes if students are to become more effective writers at home, in school, and in the workplace? Instruction should help students:

- Use Edited American English (EAE), including the mechanics and usage of grammar
- Improve their spelling skills
- Identify the audience and purpose for their writing
- Select and use words appropriately and concisely
- Choose the type of communication that is going to be the best way of effectively communicating their messages
- Practice these skills on a daily basis

Strategy – Use Authentic Tasks (AT) in writing

Authentic tasks are activities or assignments that have real-world applications. These tasks look like something that would be carried out at home or in the workplace, and they require students to use and apply a variety of skills. Authentic tasks fill a genuine need for students and lead to a tangible end product.⁹ They enable students to demonstrate their proficiency at applying the concepts and skills they have learned in real-world situations.

A task is considered authentic when:

- students are asked to construct their own responses rather than to select from ones presented; and
- the task replicates challenges faced in the real world.¹⁰

⁹ Authentic Tasks. North Central Regional Education Laboratory
<http://www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/issues/students/atrisk/at4lk3.htm>

¹⁰ Mueller, Jonathan. *Authentic task: Authentic assessment toolbox*.
<http://jonathan.mueller.faculty.noctrl.edu/toolbox/tasks.htm>

Teachers should ask the following questions before setting up an authentic task (Mueller).

- What should students know and be able to do?
- What indicates students have met these standards?
- What does good performance on this task look like?
- How well did the students perform the task?

Example:

What should students know and be able to do?

- Write a letter of complaint to a company

What indicates students have met the standards for letter writing?

- Uses an appropriate format including opening, closing, and subject line
- Uses correct grammar and spelling
- Organizes document and provides possible solution to the problem

What does good performance look like?

- The format is appropriate for the purpose.
- There few, if any, grammatical or spelling errors.
- The paragraphs are constructed appropriately with a main idea, details, and concluding sentences. Transitions are used within and between paragraphs. Words are used appropriately.
- The writer has clearly outlined the problem and offered solutions that are acceptable.
- The writer has included contact information so that the company can respond via email, regular mail, or by phone.

How well did the students perform the task?

- Effective – met all criteria
- Adequate – met most of the criteria
- Inadequate – failed to meet the majority of the criteria

Strategy – Use Authentic Materials

Whether or not teachers choose to incorporate AT in the classroom, they should provide students with access to authentic materials. While it may be easier to pull an existing workbook from the shelf, the use of authentic materials will produce richer and deeper learning experiences for students. The following are just a few examples of authentic materials that teachers may wish to begin gathering for classroom use.

- Visual materials – photographs, graphs, tables, charts, and maps
- Visual/auditory materials – news clips, comedy shows, short stories on tape, radio advertisements, documentaries, and television commercials
- Print materials – newspaper articles, book/movie reviews, letters to the editor and editorials, advice columns, informational brochures, print advertisements, leases, employment applications, employee manuals, memos, and letters

Research has shown that the use of authentic materials can increase the motivation to learn, as well as renew students' interest in the content area in which they are working. Students who are motivated to learn tend to remain in programs longer and thus have greater levels of achievement.

Authentic materials should be used to teach the basics of Edited American English (EAE). These types of materials allow students to build grammatical skills in a real-life context, rather than one in which skills are taught in isolation. Employee materials, newspaper articles, brochures, and advertisements are excellent sources of the good, bad, and ugly when it comes to grammar usage and mechanics.

Strategy – Teach Students to Write to a Specific Audience and from a Different Perspective

Writing in the workplace is always done for a specific audience. Unlike creative writing where the audience is more general in nature, workplace writing is designed to communicate to a specific person or group of people. A job applicant writes a resume for the person who will be doing the hiring. A receptionist writes a phone message for the person who will be receiving that message. A lawyer writes a brief for the judge who is reviewing a case. A police officer writes a crime report for the prosecutor. Likewise, when students write an essay on the GED Language Arts, Writing Test, they are writing for the readers of those essays, not for their friends or neighbors.

In order to be effective writers, students must learn to consider their audience so that their writing will meet the audience's needs and expectations. An effective writer who knows his/her audience will not give a full-page narrative to a person who likes reports in bulleted format. Likewise an effective writer will not use technical jargon when conveying information to someone who does not have that same technical background. An understanding of the audience tells the writer:

- How much information to convey
- What kinds and levels of details should be included
- What concepts should be emphasized
- How much time should be spent on research
- What writing pattern should be used
- How should the information be organized
- What words, tone, and style will work best¹¹

Effective writers also need to be able to write from a variety of perspectives. Writing from a different perspective enables the writer to take on a different role, much like an actor does in preparing for a new film or play. Writing from a different perspective requires that the writer view the subject matter differently.

The Northern Nevada Writing Project¹² has developed an excellent strategy for assisting students in writing for a specific audience and from a different perspective. RAFTS writing assignments have students complete the following steps:

¹¹ The Writing Process. *Online guide to writing and research*. University of Maryland University College. http://www.umuc.edu/prog/ugp/eqp_writingcenter/writinggde.

- Role – take on a different role as the writer
- Audience – write for a specific audience
- Format – use a format that is assigned to them
- Topic – write about any subject
- Strong verb –use a strong verb (that is assigned) to give the writing a more clearly defined purpose.

The following is an example of a RAFTS writing prompt from the Northern Nevada Writing Project at: <http://writingfix.com>.

Role: a historian

Audience: a senate committee

Format: a three-minute speech

Topic: a current war

Strong verb: inspire

Before beginning, students need to write the prompt in paragraph form.

You are a historian with strong opinions about how the current war is similar to a past war. Because of your expertise, you have been asked to answer questions in front of a Senate hearing committee that will determine governmental funding to support the current war. Before answering any questions, you have been asked to read a three-minute statement that introduces your passion for this topic. Write your three-minute statement so that it inspires the committee to reconsider how the funding will be apportioned.

Teachers can generate new writing prompts in social studies, science, and mathematics by accessing the RAFTS site at:

http://writingfix.com/WAC/Writing_Across_Curriculum_RAFTS_Soc_Studies.htm.

Strategy – Teach Patterns of Writing

Adults in the workforce may be asked to perform a wide variety of writing tasks. Each of these tasks may be different. However, there are patterns in the way information is presented. Students need to recognize the type of pattern they should use when writing and the characteristics that accompany that pattern.

Patterns of Writing

- Specific to general – Starts with the details and leads the reader to the overall picture or conclusion. The conclusion then becomes the main idea or thesis sentence of the report or document. This type of communication is often used to persuade the audience by first laying out the facts.
- General to specific – Starts with the big picture and then fills in all the details. The report or document starts with the main idea and fills in the details before drawing to

¹² Northern Nevada Writing Project. National Writing Project at: <http://www.unr.edu/educ/nnwp/>.

a conclusion. This type of communication is often used to help the audience understand what it will take to accomplish a specific goal.

- Problem-cause-solution or problem-process-solution – Starts with a description of the problem and then proceeds through an analysis that leads to the method for solving the problem. The writer either identifies what lead to the problem or identifies procedures for solving the problem. This type of communication could be used when writing a product review, a report, or even a proposal for responding to customer complaints.
- Interpreting data – Starts with the big picture or what claim the data supports. The general information is followed by the specific details found within the data and whether or not the data actually supports the claims that have been made. This process is often found within companies that conduct customer surveys and need to make decisions based on what the data tells them.
- Summary – Starts with an overview of the material that has been reviewed. It is important that the writer stays neutral when writing a review and avoids inserting his/her personal opinion or bias. Summaries provide an opportunity for the writer to clearly convey his/her understanding of the information. This type of writing is an excellent way for an employee to clearly demonstrate an understanding of what the company is all about or what the company is doing.
- Critique – Starts with reading someone else’s writing, such as a book, a poem, or a report. After reading, the writer must determine what criteria will be used to evaluate the material. The writer should make a list of the criteria to maintain consistency throughout the critique. Employees are often called upon to critique procedures used to complete a specific task or to look at a new product and see if it meets the employer’s needs.

Strategy – Sample Lesson: Writing in the Workplace

Have students brainstorm different types of writing they may have to use in the workplace. Discuss what makes each kind of writing different, including the audience, purpose, tone, and style.

Review with students the patterns of writing that are commonly used in school and the workplace. If possible, provide them with samples of each type of writing. These samples can be obtained from the newspaper, employee guides, and other sources.

Select one of the following scenarios for the lesson. Distribute a copy of the scenario to all of the students. Allow students to make their own selections about the type of written response they will give to each scenario.

Have students develop their responses using one of the patterns of writing that was reviewed earlier. When students have finished writing their responses, have them exchange with a peer and discuss their responses. Have students make recommendations to each other on how they could improve their responses. Have students take their responses home and make edits and share them with the class during the next class period.

Scenario 1

There has been a problem with vandalism in the parking lot where you work. To date, no one in the office has tried to address the problem. Yesterday, your friend's car was vandalized and will cost her more than \$1,000 to fix. You are afraid that your car will be next.

Select one of the following and prepare a written response.

- Persuade your boss that action must be taken to stop the vandalism.
- Write a letter to the editor of the newspaper.
- Write a script to use when talking with the police.

Scenario 2

As part of your job, you are responsible for maintaining the supplies for the office. There are 36 staff members in the office and they use a lot of supplies. Each week, you do a quick inventory to see what needs to be ordered from the office supply store. Over the past few weeks, you have noticed that you have had to order more and more supplies of notepads, pens, and pencils. In fact, it seems that those supplies are just flying out the door. The average cost of weekly orders has increased by over 25%. You are not sure what is happening, but your manager has asked to meet with you regarding the problem.

Select one of the following and prepare a written response.

- Provide a data analysis to the manager regarding the increase in supply costs.
- Write a summary of the problem and possible causes.
- Write a summary of the problem and possible solutions.

Scenario 3

In order to save money, you have started riding your bicycle to work every day. Your job is only about three miles from your home, so the ride isn't bad. The exercise is good for you, and by the end of the year you will have saved enough money to purchase a new entertainment system. The village council where you live is considering adopting a new rule that will require all residents (children and adults) to wear a helmet when riding a bicycle on public property.

Select one of the following and prepare a written response.

- Write a letter to your local council member urging passage of the new rule.
- Write a letter to your local newspaper opposing passage of the new rule.

Strategy – Use Graphic Organizers



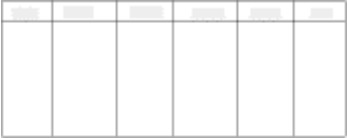


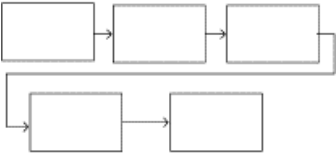
A graphic organizer is a communication tool that uses visual symbols to express ideas and concepts in order to convey meaning. A graphic organizer often depicts the relationships between facts, terms, and ideas within a specific task. Most graphic organizers form a powerful visual picture of information and allow the mind “to see” undiscovered patterns and relationships.


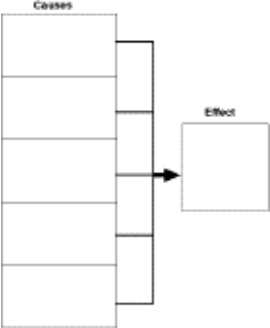
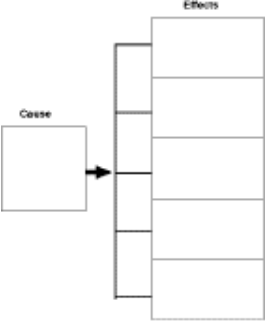
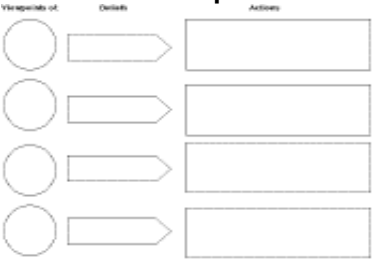
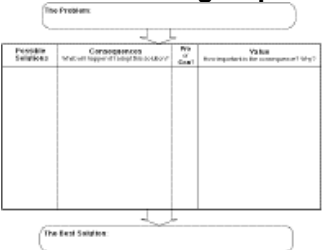
Graphic organizers are a helpful way to organize information as students prepare to write. Graphic organizers:

- Help students understand how things go together
- Help students remember information better so they remember to include specific details in their writing
- Make it easier to write the final draft of a project, report, or specific task
- Provide an organizational structure for any type of writing

The following are examples of a wide range of graphic organizers that students can use to assist them in writing at home, school, or in the workplace. They were retrieved from the World Wide Web at: <http://www.somers.k12.ny.us/intranet/skills/thinkmaps.html>.

Types of Graphic Organizers

Thinking Skills	Questions	Graphic Organizers/ Thinking Maps
Describing Qualities	What are you describing? What are its qualities?	Bubble Map 
Classifying/ Categorizing	What sort of thing is this? What are the sub-categories? What other things can go into these sub-categories?	Tree Map  Chart 
Compare and Contrast	What are the similar and different qualities of these things? What qualities of each thing correspond to one another? In what way?	Modified Venn 
Sequencing	What happened? What is the sequence of events? What are the substages?	Timeline  Flow Chart 

<p>Part to Whole</p>	<p>What is the whole object or concept? What are the major parts of it? What are the subparts of each major part (if any)?</p>	<p>Bracket Map</p> 
<p>Cause and Effect</p>	<p>What are the causes and effects of this event? What might happen next?</p>	<p>Multiple Causes Map</p>  <p>Multiple Effects Map</p> 
<p>Point of View</p>	<p>What are the various perspectives? How do they impact behavior? What contributed to their development?</p>	<p>Point of View Map</p> 
<p>Problem Solving</p>	<p>What is the problem? What are the possible solutions? Which solution is best? How will you implement this solution?</p>	<p>Problem-Solving Map</p> 

When introducing a new graphic organizer, it is important to describe the purpose of the organizer, model its use, and provide students with opportunities for guided practice. Once students become comfortable with using the organizer, more independent applications are appropriate.

Strategy – Writing Instructions

Writing instructions should be one of the most basic and easy to perform writing tasks that students encounter. However, it is much more difficult than most people imagine. When giving instructions regarding a well-known task, it is easy to leave out steps in the process. The person who is giving the instructions “knows” how to perform the task and often leaves out essential information. Unfortunately, the reader, the person who needs the instructions, is often left holding the bag because the instructions are incomplete. Because so many jobs require that employees write instructions to co-workers, clients, or customers, this is one skill that students need to master.

Have students brainstorm a list of things that require giving directions to someone. The list may include things at work or home. Select one of the items and have students work in teams to develop a set of instructions for accomplishing that particular task or activity. Have teams compare their lists and discuss the following questions.

- Were the same steps or directions listed on each team’s list? How were they different?
- What steps or directions could have been eliminated?
- What steps or directions should have been added?

Review with students the importance of the following items when writing instructions or directions for someone else.

- Write in a clear and concise manner.
- Understand the activity or task.
- Put yourself in the place of the reader (the one who has to use your instructions).
- Visualize the steps in great detail and transferring those details to paper.
- Test the instructions to make sure they really work.

Being able to write instructions, in addition to being able to give them orally, can make a difference in the workplace. This skill can easily transfer to the writing process used on the GED essay. Although some prompts are expository in nature, some of the essay prompts focus on ‘how-to’ do something. Students should be taught how to transfer the techniques for writing instructions to the development of a “how-to” essay.

Strategy – Writing Practice

To become better writers, students need practice. They need to practice every day and preferably in every content area. Writing is an essential skill, but it is not one that comes easily to most students. Start each class session with a writing prompt. Provide the students with a set period of time to write, such as 5 minutes. Have students respond to the prompt in their writing logs or journals. Do not assess this writing for grammatical errors, but rather read for the content that is included. The goal is to get students to be more comfortable with the writing process.

The following are a few examples of the hundreds of prompts available at Freeology.Com. More writing prompts are available on the website at: <http://freeology.com/journal/index.php>.

Quotes The quotes require that students write about what they think the quote or idea means and how the idea applies to their lives.

1. "The best way to predict the future is to invent it." - **Alan Kay**
2. "We act as though comfort and luxury were the chief requirements of life, when all that we need to make us happy is something to be enthusiastic about." - **Einstein**
3. "It takes no more time to see the good side of life than it takes to see the bad." - **Jimmy Buffet**
4. "Dance as if no one is watching. Sing as if no one is listening. Love as if you have never been hurt." - **Unknown**
5. "Maturity is the ability to do a job whether or not you are supervised, to carry money without spending it, and to bear an injustice without wanting to get even." - **Ann Landers**
6. "A pessimist sees the difficulty in every opportunity; an optimist sees the opportunity in every difficulty." - **Winston Churchill**

Values These prompts are aimed at helping students to identify what is valuable to them, to prioritize values, and to see things from someone else's perspective.

1. Describe a person you admire.
2. Describe how you would feel if you were your teacher. If you were in charge, what would you do differently?
3. Imagine you are stranded on a tropical island with your classmates. You have no supervision, no rules, no leader, no McDonald's etc... How would you choose a leader? What jobs would you need? What rules would you have? What if someone broke the rules?
4. If your house caught fire, what would you take with you? Put these in order of priority: your pet, your \$100 savings, photo album, necklace from grandma, favorite piece of clothing.
5. What does courage mean to you? Describe an instance when you, or someone you have heard about, was courageous.
6. Life stinks; life is good; life is what you make it. Which one of these best describes your philosophy on life?

Creative Responses These topics encourage students to finish the story, think creatively, and have fun!

1. You hear a knock on the door. You answer. No one is there, but on the ground you see three items: a paper bag with something in it, a key, and a phone number written on the back of a business card. Who left them and why?
2. While visiting your grandparents' farm, you discover an underground shelter in the field. Dusting away the dirt and insects, you find the handle and begin to lift the heavy iron door . . .
3. If I were invisible, I would . . .
4. What would you do with a million dollars? List five things you would buy.
5. Explain what you think life would be like without: plumbing, electricity, cars, windows, air conditioning. On a daily basis, what things would you do differently?

Personal Response These topics require students to put their personal experiences into words. While there is less creativity, students are turning mental images and feelings into words.

1. Think of a teacher, relative, or adult that you respect and want to impress. What is it about that person that makes you want to do well for them?
2. Describe a time that your hard work was beneficial.
3. Describe a place of which you are or were afraid.
4. Have you ever felt lost? Literally or figuratively? Explain.
5. Picture the meal at a special occasion in your life. Now focus on *one* of your five senses: see, smell, hear, taste, and touch. Describe what that sense experiences throughout the meal.

The Importance of Writing in the Going Beyond the Basics Classroom

“At a deeply practical level, writing sustains American life and popular culture in many ways that are clear and in some that are rarely noticed....Although only a few hundred thousand adults earn their living as full-time writers, many working American would not be able to hold their positions if they were not excellent writers....Writing today is not a frill for the few, but an essential skill for the many.”¹³

The Neglected “R” The Need for a Writing Revolution

If students are to become more effective and proficient writers, they need time to develop their skills. They also need the opportunity to write for a variety of audiences and purposes. The purpose of this portion of the **Going Beyond the Basics** project is to take the first steps toward instituting programs, instructional strategies, and authentic materials that will enable students to understand “why” writing is important and “how” to become better writers both personally and as employees.

¹³ College Board. *The neglected “r”, the need for a writing revolution*. (April 2003). The National Commission on Writing in America’s Schools and Colleges.

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Chapter 4: Reading in the Workplace

“Literacy in today’s workplace, as well as in postsecondary classrooms, requires that students read and interpret a wide range of reference materials: periodicals, memoranda and other documents that may contain technical information, including intricate charts and graphs. College students and employees need to know how to find, comprehend, interpret and judge the quality of information and evidence presented in such texts. They also need to be able to report their own evaluations, interpretations, and judgments in ways that will either advance scholarship in an area of postsecondary study or contribute to workplace productivity.”

*Ready or Not: The American Diploma Project*¹⁴

An Introduction to Reading in the Workplace

Reading is a basic skill that everyone begins learning at an early age. However, there is not a magic point in time where one stops learning to read, but rather one’s reading skills continue to evolve and grow with time and experience. Reading is an essential skill. It enables people to learn new information, solve problems, be entertained, search the past, and dream of the future. Adults use their reading skills every day. They read a note from their child’s teacher, check the newspaper for the latest sports scores, follow directions to cook new recipes, and read material in the workplace.

Many students think that when they get their high school diploma, they will never have to read again. As noted in an early research study in 1989, today’s employee often spends more time reading than does the average high school student. The material may be different, but the necessity for reading is still there. Almost half of North Carolina employers who were surveyed in that study indicated that they believe current high school graduates have inadequate reading skills.¹⁵ This continues to be true in today’s workplace.

According to a report issued by ACT, Inc. (2006), the reading skills that students need for college are the same skills they need for the workplace. ACT, Inc. analyzed data from almost 500,000 high school juniors in Illinois who took the ACT and the WorkKeys Reading for Information Test between 2001 and 2004. Based on the analysis, ACT, Inc. discovered that “whether planning to enter college or workforce training programs after graduation, high school students need to be educated to a comparable level of reading.”

¹⁴ The American Diploma Project. *Ready or not: Creating a high school diploma that counts.* (2004). Washington, DC: Achieve, Inc. <http://www.achieve.org/node/552>.

¹⁵ Vasu, M.L., and Frazier, A. *Workforce preparedness for economic development: Report of the 1989 North Carolina business and industry survey.* (1989). North Carolina Department of Economic and Community Development. Raleigh: NC.

Reading Skills Required for College and Workforce Training Readiness¹⁶

Skill Group	ACT – College Readiness Standards	WorkKeys – Reading for Information
Main Ideas and Supporting Details	<p>Infer the main idea or purpose of straightforward paragraphs</p> <p>Understand the overall approach taken in a passage (e.g., point of view, kinds of evidence used)</p> <p>Locate important details</p> <p>Make simple inferences about how details</p>	<p>Understand main ideas, topic sentences, and the relationships among sentences in a paragraph</p> <p>Correctly use technical terms when describing the main idea and supporting details in a passage</p> <p>Recognize organizational structures of passages to identify pertinent details and recognize appropriate applications</p> <p>Select important details to clarify meaning</p>
Sequential, Comparative, and Cause-Effect Relationships	<p>Order simple sequences of events</p> <p>Identify clear relationships between people, ideas, and events</p> <p>Identify clear cause-effect relationships</p>	<p>Apply straightforward instructions to new situations</p> <p>Apply complex instructions that include conditionals to situations described in a passage</p>
Meaning of Words	<p>Use context to determine the appropriate meaning of some figurative and nonfigurative words, phrases, and statements</p>	<p>Figure out the correct meaning of a word based on how the word is used</p> <p>Understand the definitions of acronyms defined in a passage</p> <p>Identify the appropriate definition of words with multiple meanings based on context</p>
Generalizations and Conclusions	<p>Draw generalizations and conclusions about people, ideas, and events</p> <p>Draw simple generalizations and conclusions using details that support the main point of a passage</p>	<p>Apply technical terms to stated situations</p> <p>Apply given information to new situations</p>

¹⁶ ACT. *Ready for college and ready for work: Same or different?* (2006). <http://www.act.org/path/policy/pdf/ReadinessBrief.pdf>.

To adequately prepare students for the GED Tests and for life and work beyond the GED, programs must incorporate more high-level academic instruction. This is essential in the area of reading where many students in adult education programs lack a sufficient level of fluency and comprehension. GED programs must move students beyond the basics into more complex reading that will enable them to both read text and also respond and use that text to solve problems and address issues at home and in the workplace.

In 2004, Achieve, Inc. issued a report entitled *Ready or Not* that outlines specific skills and concepts students should master before they graduate from high school. The English benchmarks are organized into eight strands:

- Language
- Communication
- Writing (Section 3 of the guide)
- Research
- Logic
- Informational Text
- Media
- Literature

The following are selected English benchmarks that should be included in any GED program that assists students in preparing for college and the workforce.

Language

- Use roots, affixes, and cognates to determine the meaning of unfamiliar words.
- Use context to determine the meaning of unfamiliar words.
- Recognize nuances in the meanings of words; choose words precisely to enhance communication.
- Comprehend and communicate quantitative, technical, and mathematical information.

Communication

- Give and follow spoken instructions to perform specific tasks, to answer questions, or to solve problems.
- Summarize information presented orally by others.
- Paraphrase information presented orally by others.
- Identify the thesis of a speech and determine the essential elements that elaborate it.
- Analyze the ways in which the style and structure of a speech support or confound its' meaning or purpose.
- Make oral presentations that: exhibit a logical structure appropriate to the audience, context, and purpose; group related ideas and maintain a consistent focus; include smooth transitions in order to:
 - support judgments with sound evidence and well-chosen details;
 - make skillful use of rhetorical devices;

- provide a coherent conclusion; and
- employ proper eye contact, speaking rate, volume, enunciation, inflection and gestures to communicate ideas effectively.
- Participate productively in self-directed work teams for a particular purpose (for example, to interpret literature, write or critique a proposal, solve a problem, make a decision), including:
 - posing relevant questions;
 - listening attentively to the ideas of others;
 - extracting essential information from others' input;
 - building on the ideas of others and contributing relevant information or ideas in group discussions;
 - consulting texts as a source of ideas;
 - gaining the floor in respectful ways;
 - defining individuals' roles and responsibilities and setting clear goals;
 - acknowledging the ideas and contributions of individuals in the group;
 - understanding the purpose of the team project and the ground rules for decision-making;
 - maintaining objectivity, offering dissent courteously, ensuring a hearing for the range of positions on an issue, and avoiding premature consensus;
 - tolerating ambiguity and a lack of consensus; and
 - selecting a leader/spokesperson when necessary;
 - creating predictable structures through the use of headings, white space, and graphics; and
 - adopting a customary format, including proper salutation, closing, and signature.

Research

- Define and narrow a problem or research topic.
- Gather relevant information from a variety of print and electronic sources, as well as from direct observation, interviews, and surveys.
- Make distinctions about the credibility, reliability, consistency, strengths, and limitations of resources, including information gathered from websites.
- Report findings within prescribed time and/or length requirements.

Logic

- Distinguish among facts and opinions, evidence, and inferences.
- Identify false premises in an argument.
- Describe the structure of a given argument; identify its claims and evidence; and evaluate connections among evidence, inferences, and claims.

- Evaluate the range and quality of evidence used to support or oppose an argument.
- Recognize common logical fallacies and understand why these fallacies do not prove the point being argued.
- Analyze written or oral communications for false assumptions, errors, loaded terms, caricature, sarcasm, leading questions, and faulty reasoning.
- Understand the distinction between deductive and inductive reasoning.
- Analyze two or more texts addressing the same topic to determine how authors reach similar or different conclusions. Construct arguments (both orally and in writing) that:
 - develop a thesis that demonstrates clear and knowledgeable judgment;
 - structure ideas in a sustained and logical fashion;
 - use a range of strategies to elaborate and persuade, such as descriptions, anecdotes, case studies, analogies, and illustrations;
 - clarify and defend positions with precise and relevant evidence, including facts, expert opinions, quotations, and/or expressions of commonly accepted beliefs and logical reasoning;
 - anticipate and address the reader's concerns and counterclaims; and
 - provide clear and effective conclusions.

Informational Text

- Follow instructions in informational or technical texts to perform specific tasks, answer questions, or solve problems.
- Identify the main ideas of informational text and determine the essential elements that elaborate them.
- Summarize informational and technical texts and explain the visual components that support them.
- Distinguish between a summary and a critique.
- Interpret and use information in maps, charts, graphs, time lines, tables, and diagrams.
- Identify interrelationships between and among ideas and concepts within a text, such as cause-and-effect relationships.
- Synthesize information from multiple informational and technical sources.
- Draw conclusions based on evidence from informational and technical texts.
- Analyze the ways in which a text's organizational structure supports or confounds its meaning or purpose.
- Recognize the use or abuse of ambiguity, contradiction, paradox, irony, incongruities, exaggerations, and understatement in text and explain their effect on the reader.
- Evaluate informational and technical texts for their clarity, simplicity, and coherence and for the appropriateness of their graphics and visual appeal.

Media

- Evaluate the aural, visual, and written images and other special effects used in television, radio, film, and the Internet for their ability to inform, persuade, and entertain (for example, anecdote, expert witness, vivid detail, tearful testimony, and humor).
- Examine the intersections and conflicts between the visual (such as media images, painting, film, and graphic arts) and the verbal.
- Recognize how visual and sound techniques or design (such as special effects, camera angles, and music) carry or influence messages in various media.

Literature

- Demonstrate knowledge of 18th and 19th century foundational works of American literature.
- Analyze foundational U.S. documents for their historical and literary significance (for example, The Declaration of Independence, the Preamble to the U.S. Constitution, Abraham Lincoln’s “Gettysburg Address”, Martin Luther King’s “Letter from Birmingham Jail”).
- Interpret significant works from various forms of literature: poetry, novel, biography, short story, essay, and dramatic literature; use understanding of genre characteristics to make deeper and subtler interpretations of the text.
- Analyze the setting, plot, theme, characterization, and narration of classic and contemporary short stories and novels.
- Demonstrate knowledge of meter, rhyme scheme, rhythm, alliteration, and other conventions of verse in poetry.
- Identify how elements of dramatic literature (for example, dramatic irony, soliloquy, stage direction, and dialogue) articulate a playwright’s vision.
- Analyze works of literature for what they suggest about the historical periods in which they were written.
- Analyze the moral dilemmas in works of literature, as revealed by characters’ motivations and behaviors.
- Identify and explain the themes found in a single literary work; analyze the ways in which similar themes and ideas are developed in more than one literary work.¹⁷

Each of these benchmarks helps students build skills they need for the workplace and for success on the GED Tests. If students are to master these reading skills, then teachers must be able to include more authentic reading materials and more opportunities for reading practice. These benchmarks go beyond what is included on the printed page and into the broader range of comprehending material from a variety of media, an essential skill in today’s high-tech world.

¹⁷ The American Diploma Project. *Ready or not: Creating a high school diploma that counts*. (2004). Washington, DC: Achieve, Inc. <http://www.achieve.org/node/552>.

Workplace Reading

“Surviving and thriving as a professional today demands two new approaches to the written word. First, it requires a new approach to orchestrating information by skillfully choosing what to read and what to ignore. Second, it requires a new approach to integrating information, by reading faster and with great comprehension.”

Jim Calano, Real Life 101

O*NET, the Occupational Information Network, is a national database that includes jobs and worker attributes developed for the U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration (DOLETA). O*NET identifies worker attributes and assigns them zones. Each zone indicates the types of skills and educational background necessary for specific professions.¹⁸ The zones move from 1-5 with 1 having the lowest skill requirements and 5 having the highest educational requirements. All zones require reading skills; however some require more advanced skills. Zone 3 jobs are those where the occupations are most likely to provide a living wage, i.e., a wage sufficient to support a small family.

Workplace reading varies depending on a person’s job. Lawyers, doctors, and engineers, which are considered Zone 5 occupations, require very advanced reading skills and the ability to comprehend text that would be considered complex. Zone 1, which includes occupations such as taxi drivers, receptionists, and retail sales clerks, requires less advanced reading skills. However, it is important to remember that virtually all occupations require some level of reading skill.

Workplace reading material generally communicates specific information. It may be provided in a wide variety of formats: directions, memos, reports, letters, proposal, prescriptions, charts, graphs, spreadsheets, and tables. While the formats may vary, the skills themselves remain constant.

When reading in the workplace, there is typically some action that is required. The outcome for reading a(n):

- Report may require an employee to determine the best course of action for implementing a new process.
- Procedural manual may require that the employee change something or it may confirm that the employee has been doing something correctly.
- Organizational charts help the employee better understand the structure of the workplace and who is responsible for certain tasks.
- Graph related to company performance may mean that the employee needs to develop some recommendations to improve that performance.

All of these tasks require that the employee have strong reading skills with an ability to comprehend, apply, analyze, synthesize, and evaluate the text.

¹⁸ O*NET. U. S. Department of Labor Employment and Training Administration.
<http://www.onetcenter.org/>.

The Connection between Workplace Reading and the GED

Workplace or technical readings and the GED Tests are similar in nature. Both convey information about specific topics. In the case of the GED Tests, students have to read a wide range of texts, from workplace and community documents in Language Arts, Reading to real-life applications of scientific theories to word problems in mathematics. Each requires the student to understand what has been read and answer questions that may require the student to apply, analyze, synthesize, or evaluate information.

Workplace or technical readings convey information designed for a specific purpose. Workplace reading is found in a variety of formats, including:

- Directions
- Memos or letters
- Proposals
- Graphic information such as charts, tables, graphs, and spreadsheets
- Presentation materials
- Newsletters
- Meeting minutes
- Reports
- Surveys
- Procedural manuals or guides and policies
- Press releases
- Contracts, proposal, and grants

Reading is required in all five areas of the GED Tests. From letters that need corrections or revisions in the Language Arts, Writing Test or word problems that must be solved in the GED Mathematics Test, students must be effective and efficient readers.

To demonstrate the importance of being able to comprehend text in the workplace, the GED Testing Service (GEDTS) requires that the item writers use the following types of real-life text when constructing the tests:

- Workplace and community documents, which are part of the real world environment
- “How to” texts, which are documents that provide instructions or directions
- Informational texts, which are documents that provide information about a particular topic

Students who take the GED Tests are assessed on their knowledge of concepts as well as their ability to use knowledge, information, and skills to solve problems. The GED Tests include questions that assess candidates’ abilities to apply, analyze, synthesize, and evaluate information in both narrative and graphic formats. Graphic literacy is an important aspect of the GED Tests.

The following is a brief description of each cognitive level found on the GED Tests and the corresponding skills that are assessed. Although the cognitive skill requirements vary among content areas, GED students are expected to answer questions that measure their skills in:

Comprehension

- Understand and restate information
- Summarize ideas
- Translate knowledge into new contexts
- Make inferences
- Draw conclusions

Application

- Use information in a new context
- Solve problems that require skills or knowledge

Analysis

- Identify patterns
- Distinguish fact from opinion
- Recognize hidden or unstated meaning
- Identify cause and effect relationships
- Make a series of related inferences

Synthesis

- Use old ideas to create new ones
- Make generalizations based on given facts
- Relate knowledge from a variety of areas
- Make predictions based on available information

Evaluation

- Make judgments about the validity and reliability of information based on criteria provided or assumed
- Compare and discriminate among ideas
- Assess the value of theories, evidence, and presentations
- Make choices based on reasoned argument
- Recognize the role that values play in beliefs and decision making
- Indicate logical fallacies in arguments

While approximately 75% of the GED Language Arts, Reading Test is comprised of literary text, the remaining 25% consists of nonfiction prose which students may encounter in real-life situations, at home, in the community, or in the workplace. These texts include:

- critical reviews of visual and performing arts; and
- workplace and community documents, such as mission and goal statements, rules for employee behavior, legal documents, communications, such as letters, excerpts from manuals, etc.

The GED Social Studies Test includes historical documents, but it also includes practical documents that adults use in their roles as citizens, consumers, and members of the workforce. These texts may include:

- Consumer information
- Voters' guides
- Atlases
- Tax forms
- Budget graphs
- Political speeches
- Almanacs
- Statistical abstracts

If GED preparation programs are to more adequately prepare their students for postsecondary education and the workplace, they must incorporate more opportunities for students to hone their reading skills through the use of texts that have a more practical application than those currently found in the workbooks and textbooks of the traditional GED program.

Technical Reading and the Workplace

While many students may be familiar with some of the techniques required for reading a newspaper article, short story, or novel, they may not recognize that these are the same skills needed for reading technical or workplace materials. If students have the basics, they can more easily learn the skills that are unique to technical or workplace reading materials.

Technical Reading Skills

To be effective technical or workplace readers, students must be able to:

- Follow step-by-step directions
- Comprehend multiple step directions
- Recognize the more technical vocabulary or jargon used within their own fields
- Read concise writing which may be written in short phrases, bullets, or incomplete sentences
- Recognize and use reading as a tool for completing a specific task
- Read critically and use logic and reasoning skills
- Solve problems that require reading numbers, symbols, or graphics (charts, tables, graphs)
- Use their own personal experiences or knowledge relative to the content being read
- Read text from in a variety of formats, such as:
 - Step-by-step instructions
 - Question and answer (FAQs)

- Graphic displays that are meant to clarify or reinforce directions
- Interpret abbreviations or acronyms unique to their workplace
- Change reading rate based on the type of text being read¹⁹

Strategies for Incorporating Reading in the Workplace into the GED Curriculum

Adults in the workforce encounter a variety of reading tasks. They may be required to read the results of a survey and provide a summary for members of their work team. They may be asked to review company policies and procedures as part of their orientation to a new job. They may be asked to review a customer complaint and develop a process for solving that customer's problem. However, if students only read short excerpts from GED preparation materials and select the correct multiple-choice response to a question, they may leave the GED program with a high school diploma, but have no experience in transferring their knowledge to the real-world of work.

What needs to be taught in GED classes if students are to become more effective readers at home, in school, or in the workplace? Instruction must help students:

- Use workplace text in order to practice and improve their reading skills
- Expand their vocabulary and learn how to continue adding to that vocabulary on their own through the use of context clues
- Learn how to summarize material so they can synthesize information and break it down to its most essential elements – the gist of the information
- Recognize their purpose in reading and thus their approach to specific types of text
- Acquire graphic literacy skills so they are comfortable with interpreting charts, graphs, tables, and spreadsheets.
- Determine who is important and should be the major focus of their attention when reading specific types of text
- Recognize the structure of different types of workplace text and use graphic organizers to aid in understanding
- Draw inferences from text using a think-aloud strategy and word clues
- Make connections between what they are reading and their personal knowledge and experience, other text they have read, and how the world works

Strategy – Use Authentic Tasks (AT) in Reading

Authentic tasks are important in every academic area. An authentic task replicates challenges faced in the real-world, as well as leading to a tangible end product.²⁰ They enable students to demonstrate their proficiency in applying the concepts and skills they have learned in real-world situations.

¹⁹ Comprehending Different Texts. Wisconsin Literacy Education and Reading Network Source (WILEARNS). Retrieved from the World Wide Web on 11/29/06 at: <http://wilearns.state.wi.us/apps/Print.asp?ap=&cid=73>.

²⁰ Authentic Tasks. North Central Regional Education Laboratory. <http://www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/issues/students/atrisk/at4lk3.htm>.

When setting up an authentic task, the teacher should use the following questions designed by Jonathan Mueller as a guideline.²¹

What should students know and be able to accomplish?

- Read directions and complete a specific task

What indicates students have met the standards for reading directions?

- Is able to summarize steps in the directions
- Asks questions for further understanding
- Uses references to identify meaning of words that may be unfamiliar

What does good performance look like?

- The task is completed using the steps outlined
- The task is completed in a timely manner

How well did the students perform the task?

- Effective – met all criteria
- Adequate – met most of the criteria
- Inadequate – failed to meet the majority of the criteria

Teachers should also provide students with access to authentic materials in the reading classroom. Research has indicated that the use of authentic materials increases the learners' motivation level.

The following are some examples of authentic materials for classroom use:

- Graphic-based materials – photographs, graphs, tables, charts, and maps
- Print materials – newspaper articles, book/movie reviews, letters to the editor and editorials, advice columns, informational brochures, print advertisements, leases, employment applications, employee manuals, memos, and letters

Strategy – Teach Students How to Expand Their Vocabulary Through the Use of Context Clues

Workplace text is often filled with words that may be unfamiliar to students. While it is important that students have an understanding of how to use reference materials, such as a dictionary, thesaurus, and glossary, one of the most valuable tools is the use of context clues. Context clues help students to discover the meaning of unfamiliar or difficult words.

Context clues are generally broken into four categories.

- Synonym – a word with the same meaning is used in the particular sentence or paragraph.

²¹ Mueller, Jonathan. Authentic Task. Authentic Assessment Toolbox.
<http://jonathan.mueller.faculty.noctrl.edu/toolbox/tasks.htm>.

- *My challenger’s argument is fallacious, misleading – plain wrong.* In this sentence the word “fallacious” is defined by the use of the following words in the sentence – *misleading, plain wrong.*
- Antonym – a word or group of words that has the opposite meaning reveals the meaning of an unknown term.
 - *Although some men are loquacious, others hardly talk at all.* In this sentence, the word “loquacious” is the opposite of the following words in the sentence – *others hardly talk at all.*
- Explanation – the challenging word is explained within the sentence or in a sentence that comes immediately before it.
 - *The patient is so somnolent that she requires medication to help her stay awake for more than a short time.* In this sentence, the definition is provided at the end of the sentence by the words: “*She requires medication to help her stay awake . . .*”.
- Example – specific examples are provided to define the challenging word or term.
 - *Celestial bodies, such as the sun, moon, and stars are governed by predictable laws.* In this sentence, the term is defined by using the examples that are provided, *sun, moon, and stars*, so the reader knows that the writer is referring to planets, stars, etc.²²

Provide sentences from workplace or technical text that includes challenging vocabulary. Have students identify the category and what they think the difficult or unfamiliar word or term means based on the context clues provided within the sentence or surrounding sentences.

Strategy – Summarizing Text

The ability to summarize text is essential when reading in the workplace. Technical or workplace text may require an employee to understand all of the fine points and details, but most of the time it is the bottom line that really matters – the gist of the text. While we often think of summarization as a relatively simple skill, it is not. Summarization requires that students synthesize material into a few words or sentences. To build summarization skills, students must practice. The following is one technique that can be used to assist students in improving their summarization skills.

- Provide students with a one-page workplace document and a graphic organizer, such as the Main Idea Graphic Organizer included in **Section 6** of this guide.
- Have students read the document and complete the graphic organizer. When they have finished, have the students write three or four sentences or a short paragraph that summarizes what they have read.
- Students should read through their summaries and circle key words or ideas.
- List the key words on the board or overhead.
- Have students work in groups and combine the related ideas.

²² Techniques for Skillful Reading – Context Clues. College Reading Skills Program. California State Polytechnic University. Pomona: California.
http://www.csupomona.edu/~lrc/crsp/handouts/context_clues.html.

- Have students select the four or five most important words or phrases. Students may disagree over this selection. Provide them with ample time to come to consensus on their top selections.
- Model how to combine the words or phrases into a one-sentence summary. Discuss with students whether or not the one sentence summary gets at the “gist” of the text.²³

It is important that students have ample opportunity to practice using this strategy within small or large groups before moving to more independent work. It is highly recommended that the teacher model this strategy at least three or four times before asking students to work independently in pairs or groups. Ample time should be set aside for debriefing.

Strategy – Understanding Purpose for Reading and Determining what is Important

Effective readers are efficient readers. They know their purpose for reading and use a variety of techniques that enable them to read in the most efficient manner possible. They know how deeply they should read specific text because they have already determined what is important and what is not.

Effective readers recognize that when they need only minimal information, they can usually skim the text – looking at headings, subheadings, introductions, and summaries. If they need more information than skimming will provide, they will scan the text for key words or concepts and read the information in the surrounding sentences. A reader who scans text for information, often relies more heavily on graphics, such as pictures, graphs, tables, or diagrams, and reads the captions that accompany the graphics.

If more detailed information is needed, effective readers take a more active approach to reading. They may take notes in the margins of the text or highlight or underline text.

Effective readers understand the different types of material they have to read. They recognize the text format and use that to help them read more efficiently. In the workplace or at home, students often read text from magazines or newspaper. They should know that:

- News articles include the most important information first. As the reader moves through the article, the details may increase but their significance lessens.
- Opinion articles include the most important information in the introduction and the summary, with the supporting arguments/details included in the middle.
- Feature articles provide more background information on a subject. The most important information is usually included in the body of the text.

Informational text, such as procedural manuals, letters, memos, advertisements, leases, and proposals often pose greater problems for students because the text structure is different than that with which they usually encounter in short stories and novels.

There are four patterns of text structure with which students should be familiar. Understanding these patterns will help them find the information they are seeking in a more effective and efficient manner.

²³ Adapted from Comprehending Different Texts – Summarization. Wisconsin Literacy Education and Reading Network Source (WILEARNS). <http://wilearns.state.wi.us/apps/Print.asp?ap=&cid=806>.

- Enumeration/Description – text in which the major idea is supported by a list of details or examples. This may be found in a policy manual where the policy is provided and then a list of examples describing how the policy is implemented.
 - Signal Words and Phrases – for instance, for example, such as, to illustrate, most important, in addition, another, furthermore, first, second, etc.
- Chronological/Sequential Order – text in which a main idea is supported by details that must occur in a particular sequence or order. Directions for assembling a product or for carrying out a specific task may be provided within this type of structure so that the reader knows what has to be done and the sequence in which the steps should occur.
 - Signal Words and Phrases – first, next, then, initially, before, after, when, finally, preceding, following, meanwhile, previously, ultimately, shortly, eventually, initially, ever since, not long after, etc.
- Comparison/Contract – text in which the supporting details of two or more main ideas indicate how those ideas are similar or different. Readers encounter this type of text structure when they read an advertisement that compares two products or services.
 - Signal Words and Phrases – different from, same as, similar to, as opposed to, instead of, although, however, compared with, as well as, either...or, on the other hand, unless, even if, on the contrary, likewise, regardless, etc.
- Cause/Effect – text in which the supporting details give causes of a main idea or supporting details are the results produced by the main idea. This type of text structure may be found when reading about a problem that must be solved or what caused the problem.
 - Signal Words and Phrases – because of, as a result of, in order to, may be due to, effects of, therefore, consequently, for this reason, if...then, thus, it follows that, hence, etc.²⁴

To help students recognize text structure, teach them to watch for signal words found within the text. These signal words will enable them to identify the type of text structure and better understand the relationship among main ideas and their respective supporting details.

Finally, when dealing with more involved informational text, such as books and manuals, students should look to textual clues that may help them identify items of importance. These clues include: heading, subheadings, bold or italic print, summaries, pull-out quotes, and notes in the margin. If students take advantage of these features, they will be able to better determine what is most important to read and the best of use of their time rather than reading aimlessly through a massive amount of information that has little or no value to them.

Strategy – Graphic Literacy

Some information can best be displayed using visuals or graphics. In the workplace, students often encounter graphics such as: graphs, tables, charts, diagrams, photographs, and maps.

²⁴ Reading Instructional Handbook. Pennsylvania Department of Education. (1998). <http://www.smasd.org/pssa/html/Reading/rihand12.htm>.

However, many students in GED programs underestimate the value of graphics and may skip over them and just read the text. Students should learn to use graphics as a means for determining what is important in text, as well as for obtaining more in-depth understanding of the text itself.

Increase awareness of visual information:

- Take students on a visual tour when reading new information. Have them locate the graphics before reading the text and write what they learned from the graphic. After they read the text, have them determine how significant the graphic was to the overall understanding of the material.
- Provide students with questions about text that can only be found within the captions of the graphics. This will help reinforce the importance of reading captions.

Create graphics:

- Have students illustrate the most important points found within a text.
- Have students develop their own charts, graphs, and tables to display information in a more understandable manner

Practice interpreting graphics:

- Provide students with line, bar, and circle graphs from the newspaper, a magazine, or an annual report from a business. Have them write a paragraph that explains what the graph depicts.
- Conduct surveys within the classroom or school. Have students develop graphs that display the information. Have them ask someone else to read and interpret the graph to see if the information is easily understood.

Strategy – Use Graphic Organizers

Graphic organizers help students construct meaning from text. The following chart provides a description of some of the types of graphic organizers that may be useful to students.

The list was adapted from: Tools for Reading, Writing, and Thinking, Greece Central School District. Teachers may access the site and download copies of each of these and more graphic organizers at: <http://www.greece.k12.ny.us/instruction/ela/6-12/Tools/Index.htm>.

Graphic organizer templates have been included in **Section 6** of this guide.

Overview of Graphic Organizers

Type	Description
Academic Notes	A note-taking page with helpful reminders in the margin that helps students define, summarize, serialize, classify, compare, and analyze ideas and concepts
Cause and Effect	A series of graphic organizers that use different formats for tracing causes and effects

Conflict Dissection	A four-column graphic organizer for identifying "someone...wanted...but...so" in order to dissect conflicts that are presented in text
Decision Making	Two graphic organizers that help students work through a decision-making process
Discussion Notes	A graphic organizer that helps students prepare for a discussion about a text, with prompting questions in the margin that help to guide their thinking
Event Mapping	A web for charting the who, what, where, when, why and how of a particular event
Fact vs. Opinion	A graphic organizer for identifying facts and opinions in text, including space for students to explain how they know the details from the text are facts or opinions
Four Square Perspective	A graphic organizer that helps students examine a topic or issue from four different points of view, with space to synthesize conclusions, connections, and questions
Inference Notes	A circular graphic organizer for organizing literal information in the inside wedges of the circle and inferences in the outer wedges of the circle
Key Concept Synthesis	A graphic organizer for identifying the five most important concepts from a reading, with space for students to put the concept into their own words, to explain why the concept is important, and to make connections to other important concepts in the reading
KWL (revised)	A four-column chart that helps students identify what they already know for sure about a topic, what they think they know about the topic but are unsure, what they would like to learn about the topic, and the connections they can make between the topic and other things they already know
PreReading Notes	A note taking page with questions in the margin that help students to survey the text, activate prior knowledge, and decide their purpose for reading
Text Connections	A graphic organizer that helps students make text-to-self, text-to-world, and world-to-self connections to think deeply about an essential question (includes a direction page)
Text Response Journal Entries	Two journal entry pages that prompt students to make connections between specific textual references and their own ideas/experience

Strategy – Think-Alouds and Making Inferences

Most GED students are very adept at answering literal questions. However, if they have to make inferences, they fumble and become easily frustrated. “Reading between the lines” or inferring is an essential skill for the workplace. Workplace text is often more about reading between the lines or understanding “how” something has been written, rather than more literal interpretations.

Inferences provide readers with a greater understanding of text. To make inferences, students need to gather clues from the text and combine these clues with their own background knowledge and experience. This enables them to draw conclusions about what the writer really intended to say in the text.

Think-aloud is a strategy in which the teacher models the comprehension process. The teacher verbalizes personal thoughts while reading a passage to the class. As the teacher reads, he/she asks questions to probe the text. The following are some examples of how think-alouds work in the classroom:

- Make predictions
 - Based on the introduction, I think this article is about . . .
 - The title makes me think of . . .
- Describe visual images
 - I can see the assembly line with each worker putting together the car. Each worker is focused on an individual task.
 - Can't you just see everyone gathered around the copier trying to figure out how to make it work?
- Share an analogy or make a link with prior knowledge
 - It seems to me that you have to have the patience of a saint to work in that position.
 - I remember when I started my first job and thought I would never remember all the rules of the job.
- Identify a confusing point
 - I am not sure what they mean by . . .
 - I don't understand where they are headed with this, but maybe if I continue to read, I will understand it better.
- Use fix-up strategies
 - I didn't understand that last part; I guess I need to reread it.²⁵

A second strategy that students can use is to look for text clues or “invisible messages” within text. Invisible messages provide information that is not explicitly stated. Johnson and Johnson (1986) identified ten different types of inferences. They include:

- Location – Where did the action occur?

²⁵ Campbell, P. (2003). *Teaching reading to adults: a balanced approach*. University of Alberta: Canada.

- Time – When did it occur?
- Action – What did the character do? What is required?
- Instrument – What tool or device was used?
- Object – What were the objects involved?
- Category – Does this fit into a specific category or type?
- Occupation or pastime – To what occupation or pastime is this referring?
- Cause-effect – What caused the situation or what was the effect of the situation?
- Problem-solution – What is the problem? What could be done about it?
- Feeling-attitude – What emotions are involved?²⁶

Provide students with text and have them search for the invisible messages. Have the students share their results with the rest of the class. Discuss any differences among the invisible messages found.

Strategy – Connecting to Text

Effective readers draw heavily on their own background knowledge and experience. They make connections with text in order to gain better understanding of what they read. The research has identified three basic types of connections that effective readers make as they read. These connections include:

- Text to self – the easiest connection where the reader connects to personal experiences. For example: *This is the same process I had to use to enter my sales reports at the furniture store.*
- Text to text – this connection occurs when the reader is reminded of something previously read. For example: *Based on this report, the department is facing problems similar to those encountered by the XYZ corporation. I read an article about the restructuring of that department and the difference it made in productivity.*
- Text to world – this connection goes beyond personal experiences to an understanding of personal ideas about how the world works. Much of this knowledge comes from television, movies, newspapers, magazines, or from other people. For example: *I saw a program on television that talked about age discrimination in the workplace. This memo from the supervisor addresses some of the same issues.*

Students need to be aware the three types of connections. Teachers need to provide students with a variety of material and have them identify which type of connection they can make with each text. However, it is not sufficient for students to merely state that they have made a text to text connection but rather explain how that connection helps them understand the passage.

²⁶ Johnson, D.D. & Johnson, B. (1986). Highlighting vocabulary in inferential vocabulary instruction. *Journal of Reading*, 29(7), 622-625.

Strategy – Sample Lesson: Summarizing Workplace Documents

The following document is familiar to many GED instructors. It is an example of the type of workplace and community document that appears on the GED Language Arts, Reading Test. The document is a composite of several different workplace documents and does not reflect the policy of one particular company.

Distribute a copy of the document and a copy of the Main Idea Graphic Organizer from **Section 6** of this guide to each student.

- Have students read the document and complete the graphic organizer. When they have finished, have the students write three or four sentences or a short paragraph that summarizes what they have read.
- Have students read through their summaries and circle key words or ideas.
- Have students share their key words with the rest of the class. List all of the identified key words on the board or overhead.
- Have students work in groups and combine the related ideas found in the key words and then write a one-sentence summary of the article.
- Compare the sentences from each group. Discuss the differences and why they think there were differences among each group, such as background knowledge, and personal experiences.
- Have students select the sentence that best summarizes the document.

How Shall Employees Conduct Themselves?

Guidelines For Conducting Business With Those Outside Our Company

Our employees are the most effective advertisement of our values, beliefs, and abilities. Always keep in mind that when you are acting in your capacity as our employee, you are contributing materially to the public image and the ultimate success of this company.

Gifts for Influence

No payment or gift of money, goods, or services should be given or received to influence government or business decisions. Accurate and complete records for all accounts will be strictly monitored for everyone's protection. If it becomes apparent to you in the course of the performance of your business responsibilities that a payment of some kind is expected by your business associate, please contact your division president.

Conflict of Interest

A conflict of interest can be described as a situation where a person has a vested interest in two areas of the business world that may give the person an unfair advantage in business dealings. Our employees should be sensitive to any relationship that creates such a relationship—or even creates the appearance of such a relationship.

Keep these rules in mind:

- Throughout your employment period, be vigilant about potential conflicts of interest between this company's interests and your personal or immediate family's interests.
- Don't use your position with this company to obtain a personal benefit of any kind.
- Avoid any action or relationship that creates, or even creates the appearance of, a conflict of interest. For example, having an interest in a non-public company that competes or does business with our company or any of its affiliates might create the appearance of a conflict of interest and might prompt accusations and/or an investigation.

Disclosure

This company respects your privacy, as well as your right to conduct your personal affairs without interference; however, you must make prompt, complete, and continuing disclosure of all facts relating to any factual or potential conflict of interest.

Investigations

Inquiries or investigations may be undertaken at this company's direction by its attorneys, investigators, internal auditors, or independent public accountants. Employees should regard this vigilance as the company's commitment not only to fair competition but also to the protection of its employees. Your cooperation is needed for your protection as well as that of this company, and it is a condition of your employment.

GED Testing Service Sample Composite Workplace Document

The Importance of Reading in the Going Beyond the Basics Classroom

In 1987, B. June Schmidt conducted a study to determine the reading level of office documents. The purpose of the study was to develop materials that would help students enhance their technical reading skills. One hundred and twenty-one documents were

collected from ten businesses and analyzed for reading level using the FORCAST formula.²⁷ The FORCAST formula uses the percentage of one-syllable words as the basis for determining reading level. It eliminates recurring technical terms, which can artificially increase the reading level of technical materials.

The study found that the average reading grade level for the documents ranged from 11.3 for those collected from a bank to 13.4 for those collected from a university continuing education center office. Other businesses that provided documents and their average reading grade levels included are:

- space industry manufacturer - 11.4
- town administration office - 11.8
- hospital - 12.0
- insurance company - 12.0
- chemical industry manufacturer - 12.1
- railroad - 12.8
- country administration office - 13.1
- and a school division office - 13.1

The reading grade level of typical office documents is considerably higher than general interest reading materials. Furthermore, most reading done by adults is technical, job-related reading and not the type of reading emphasized in schools.²⁸

Reading in the workplace has not changed greatly since Schmidt's study in 1987. The delivery method may rely more heavily on technology than print, but the basic skills needed remain the same. There is still a need for higher-level reading skills in the workplace. Today, more and more students not only are employed, but also enter postsecondary education and training where higher-level reading skills are essential for success.

²⁷ Caylor, J. S., Sticht, T. G., Fox, L. C., and Ford, J. P. (1975). "Readability of job materials." In Sticht, T. G. ed. *Reading for Working: A Functional Literacy Anthology*. Alexandria, VA: Human Resources Organization.

²⁸ Schmidt, B. J. (1987). "Preparing Business Students to Read Office Documents." *The Delta Pi Epsilon Journal*, (29) 4, 111-124.

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Chapter 5: Resources and Websites

Language Arts, Writing Websites

ABC's of the Writing Process

This site shows the five basic steps in the writing process: prewriting, writing, revising, editing and publishing. <http://www.angelfire.com/wi/writingprocess>

Authentic Assessment Toolbox

Extensive site developed by Jonathan Mueller that provides materials on how to use authentic tasks and/or assessments in the classroom.

<http://jonathan.mueller.faculty.noctrl.edu/toolbook/howdoyoudoit.htm>

Brief Guide to Business Writing.

Online text developed by the University of Iowa that provides easy to read and understand information on commonly used and accepted guidelines for business writing.

<http://www.biz.uiowa.edu/faculty/kbrown/writing.html>

Common Errors in English

This site provides information on hundreds of common errors found in writing focusing on the misuse of words. www.wsu.edu/~brians/errors/index.html

EdHelper.Com.

Downloadable graphic organizers.

http://www.edhelper.com/teachers/graphic_organizers.htm?

Freeology.Com.

The Teacher's Freebie Directory Free downloadable graphic organizers and hundreds of writing prompts. <http://www.freeology.com/graphicorgs/>

GED Testing Service

Examples of questions on the language arts, writing portion of the GED plus information on the GED Tests. <http://www.gedtest.org>

Grammar Slammer

This website acts as a resource guide for all things related to grammar and includes rules and examples for all areas. <http://englishplus.com/grammar/gsdeluxe.htm>

Guide to Grammar and Writing

Professor Charles Darling at Capital Community College has created this incredible resource on grammar and writing. The site provides information at the word and sentence, paragraph, or essay level. <http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/>

The Guide to Grammar and Writing also features online quizzes and an assortment of downloadable PowerPoint presentations on various grammatical issues.

<http://webster.commnet.edu/grammar/index.htm>

Hacker Handbook

This interactive resource includes a series of quizzes to test student's knowledge in all areas of

grammar. These exercises were developed by Dianne Hackett at Prince George's Community College in Maryland. Note: Shockwave is required to complete the exercises.

<http://www.bedfordstmartins.com/hacker/exercises/>

Hard Spell

This interactive spelling game includes hundreds of words and never uses the same list twice. It is challenging but excellent for helping students with more difficult words. In Game 1 you must find the word that is spelled correctly. In Game 2, you find the incorrectly spelled word and correct it. http://www.bbc.co.uk/hardspell/hardspell_game.shtml

High School Ace

A list of different language arts websites, including commonly confused words, grammar and vocabulary lessons, and poetry. <http://highschoolace.com/ace/ace.cfm>

Purdue University's OWL

One of the most extensive collections of advice about writing found on the web. About half of the more than 75 handouts address punctuation and grammatical issues and include exercises for the user. Others focus on style, reference formats, and give advice about the writing process itself. <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/>

RAFTS Northern Nevada Writing Project The project includes print materials that may be purchased as well as access to RAFTS prompts that can be generated electronically. <http://www.unr.edu/educ/nnwp/index.html>

Spell Check at Funbrain

This site provides two levels of difficulty. Excellent resource for students who have problems with spelling. <http://www.funbrain.com/spell/index.html>

The Elements of Style

An

easy-to-understand guide to correct grammar. This online version contains the complete original text. It is filled with tips on how to write clearly and correctly and how to avoid the most common grammatical errors. <http://www.bartleby.com/141/index.html>

The Internet Grammar Guide

An

online course in English grammar written primarily for university undergraduates. However, useful to anyone who is interested in the English language. <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/internet-grammar/>

The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE)

A wealth of information on the writing process, NCTE has developed national standards for assessment and evaluation in the area of English. One of the 29 standards for assessment and evaluation in the NCTE report states that "control of the conventions of edited American English...spelling, handwriting, punctuation and grammatical usage should be developed primarily during the writing process. <http://www.ncte.org/>

The WAC Clearinghouse

This site publishes journals, books, and other resources for teachers who use writing in their courses. <http://wac.colostate.edu/index.cfm>

The Writing Site

This site is maintained by the Corporation for Educational Technology and the Indiana Department of Education. The site includes extensive writing resources for the classroom teacher. <http://www.thewritingsite.org>

Wacky Web

Choose from over a dozen different story titles, then fill in the blanks for different parts of speech. After you've identified all the words, click and a nonsensical story will be made with them. <http://www.eduplace.com/tales/>

WebGrammar

This site includes general to specific grammar tips as well as a Writing Section with style guides and other resources. <http://www.webgrammar.com/>

Word Games

site includes eight word games that students can play alone or as a group. <http://www.eastoftheweb.com/games/index.html>

This

Writing Skills Necessary for Employment

on business and the need for writing within the workplace National Commission on Writing, College Board. http://www.writingcommission.org/pr.writing_for_employ.html

A report

Language Arts, Reading Websites

Augusta Technical College

Reading strategies for students.

<http://www.augusta.tec.ga.us/CounselingCenter/AcademicCounseling/readingStrategies.shtml>

Authentic Assessment Toolbox

Extensive site developed by Jonathan Mueller that provide materials on how to use authentic tasks and/or assessments in the classroom.

<http://jonathan.mueller.faculty.noctrl.edu/toolbook/howdoyoudoit.htm>

Cerritos College Skills Tutorials

in the area of reading.

<http://www.cerritos.edu/reading/tutorials.htm> Practice

Detroit Newspapers in Education (NIE Online)

Sponsored by The Detroit News, NIE Online provides links to daily lesson plans for use in teaching current events. The site also includes an index of weekly plans.

<http://nieonline.com/detroit/index.cfm>

EdHelper.Com

Downloadable graphic organizers.

http://www.edhelper.com/teachers/graphic_organizers.htm?

Education with Student News from CNN

This site provides teachers with instructional materials for integrating current events across the curriculum. A student section keeps students in grades 6-12 aware of the latest news of interest to them. Lesson plans, background material, profiles, links to useful Internet sites, and forums for interaction with other teachers are also included.

<http://www.cnn.com/EDUCATION/>.

Heteronym Home Page

Find out everything you wanted to know about heteronyms.

<http://www-personal.umich.edu/~cellis/heteronym.html>

Interactive Word Games

to strengthen vocabulary skills.

<http://www.wordplays.com/p/index>

Games

Reading Skills in Business: Information from Answers.com

Strategies for assisting students in building the skills they need to be successful readers in the workplace.

business

<http://www.answers.com/topic/reading-skills-in-business>

RHL School

downloadable reading comprehension worksheets.

<http://www.rhlschool.com> Free

Smithsonian Online

All types of reading resources from the Smithsonian Museum.

<http://www.si.edu/>

The English Zone

Printable worksheets for reading comprehension and vocabulary.

<http://www.english-zone.com/>

The Internet Public Library

References, books, and exhibits.

<http://www.ipl.org/>

The Wacky World of Words

Use different games and activities from this site for vocabulary enrichment.

<http://www.gecdsb.on.ca/d&g/jan00/web4.htm>

Using Newspapers in the Classroom

This website includes a list of activities across a variety of content areas that can be completed in the classroom by using newspapers. <http://www.teachersdesk.org/news.html>

Vocabulary University

Lots of fun activities and interactive games that assist students in learning such vocabulary fundamentals as root words.

<http://www.vocabulary.com/>

Wisconsin Literacy Education and Reading Network Source

An excellent resource for teachers to add strategies and techniques to the adult education program.

<http://wilearns.state.wi.us/apps/default.asp>

Word Games

site includes eight word games that students can play alone or as a group.

<http://www.eastoftheweb.com/games/index.html>

This

Word Play

Extensive site that lists links to sites for acronyms, homonyms, language translation, mnemonics, American slang, anagrams, American Sign Language, lyric meanings, Shakespearean insults, Mad Libs, Klingon language, limericks, oxymorons, palindromes, puns, rhyming dictionary, rap dictionary, idioms, and so much more.

<http://www.wolinskyweb.net/word.htm>