

## Our Three-Strategy School Year

### *An adventure in learning*

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**Investing the necessary time to make examples relevant for students is a worthwhile and meaningful activity.**

The 1996-1997 school year will forever be etched in my memory as "Our Three-Strategy School Year."

It began in the summer of 1996 when Jim Knight, research associate at the Center for Research on Learning, approached me about working with his three oldest sons on a regular basis to learn a series of learning strategies. Jim proposed that we begin the school year by learning the *Assignment Completion Strategy* and then move on to the *Sentence Writing* and *Paragraph Writing Strategies*. After discussing schedules and logistics, we decided I would meet with Geoffrey (grade 10), Cameron (grade 9), and David (grade 7) three times a week after school for an hour and a half. Although we were flexible on how we used our time together, the typical routine was to spend the first 10 minutes reviewing Quality Quest Planners, the next 45-50 minutes learning specific strategies, and the last 30 minutes completing homework assignments. Some days, we focused only on homework, especially if there were pressing exams or papers due or if I thought I needed clarification or suggestions on how to teach a specific portion of one of the strategies. I am very pleased to report that **all** of us, Geoff, Cam, Dave, and Gwen, mastered three learning strategies in one school year and learned many important lessons along the way. The culmination of this successful venture was a presentation

at the 1997 National SIM Trainers' Conference where the four of us shared what we had learned as well as what we liked and didn't like about each strategy. Preparing for and presenting at this conference was a wonderful experience for all of us. As I watched the boys take ownership for what they had learned and take pride in preparing their presentation, I realized they were forever changed by this experience. I can also attest to the fact that the "Knight Boys" were requested to make appearances at future SIM conferences! In the sections below, we summarize our important learnings using the same format used for the conference presentation. Specifically, for each of the three strategies we learned, I will provide teaching and training tips, and David, Geoffrey, and Cameron will tell you what we liked and didn't like about the *Assignment Completion*, *Sentence Writing*, and *Paragraph Writing Strategies*.

### **The Assignment Completion Strategy Teaching/Training Suggestions**

We were able to learn the *Assignment Completion Strategy* in approximately one month's time. Each of the boys reacted a bit differently to using the Quality Quest Planner, with Dave, the seventh-grader, using it most consistently and without prompting. Although Dave is conscientious by

nature, the four of us concluded that there is great benefit in learning this system early in one's school career. Dave was very open to learning this organizational system because he realized that the transition from elementary to junior high school meant greater responsibility. He took pride in recording, completing, and numbering his assignments and came to rely on the planner as an important organizational tool.

Because organization was an important issue for all three of the boys, I looked for every opportunity to reinforce this skill. One activity that worked well was to assign the boys organizational tasks throughout the Advanced Practice Stage of this strategy. In this stage, I would give the boys an assignment (just as a teacher would) and they would be responsible for recording the assignment in their planners, completing the task independently, and turning in their products on the requested due date. Below are two of the assignments the boys completed while mastering the Advanced Practice Stage of this strategy.

#### **Assignment G4** (the "G" was for Gwen)

Organize your current folders and books by doing the following:

1. Labeling each folder with the appropriate course name.
2. Filing all papers in the appropriate folder. (One suggestion would be to have class handouts on one side of the folder and assignments on the other side of the folder).
3. Showing me the system you have developed and describing how it works.

#### **Assignment G5**

1. Find (look around the house if necessary) these items, which are often necessary for completing homework assignments, and place them in the top drawer of the kitchen table. Each person

is responsible for finding the following items:

**Cam:** pens, pencils, rulers, calculators

**Geoff:** crayons, colored pencils, markers

**Dave:** glue, scissors, tape

2. If you are unable to find any

## **What We Liked and Didn't Like about the Assignment Completion Strategy**

### **What we liked: David Knight**

- The covers on the second edition of the Quality Quest Planner were laminated and more substantial than the covers on the first edition.
- Dave liked the organization of the planners, which have spaces to list assignments and weekly planning sheets "so you can plan what you're going to do and when you're going to do it." The planner also includes monthly planning sheets for students to write down when all of their assignments are due.
- Most planners Dave had used in the past required students to write the full name of the assignment. In the Quality Quest Planner, assignments are referred to by number, so it doesn't take as long to complete daily, weekly, or monthly planning sheets.
- The planner includes space for the telephone numbers of other members of class. "So if you ever forget an assignment, heaven forbid, you can call up and ask them."
- The black-and-white cover design of the planner attracted a lot of attention. "My friends were always sneaking around in my books, and I figured it was because of the attractive cover."

### **What we didn't like: Cameron Knight**

- The schools the brothers attended provided planners for students that indicated important dates, such as school holidays, customized for each school.
- Some teachers required students to use the school planners and wouldn't honor the Quality Quest Planners. Some teachers took points off for use of the Quality Quest Planner.
- Some pages in the planner were lost when they tore loose from the coil binding.
- Some of the steps to planning assignments were not appropriate for regular daily assignments.
- The plastic tabs that indicate the monthly, weekly, and daily planning sheet sections of the planner wore out and fell off. Cam suggested providing dividers to slip into the planner to mark these sections.

## What We Liked and Didn't Like about the Sentence Writing Strategy

### What we liked: Geoffrey Knight

- The abbreviations made it easy to remember the sentence formulas.
- “The workbook exercises really helped us work with sentence formulas.”
- Geoff noticed improvements in his writing from the specifics of punctuation to the overall quality of the completed product. “My teachers noticed that I could use semicolons correctly, whereas my classmates would use them but not very correctly.”
- The brothers liked the PENS steps.

Apparently, there was nothing about the *Sentence Writing Strategy* that the brothers did not like.

of these items, make a list of what needs to be purchased. Also, add to this list any items that were not listed above but that you think you may need for homework assignments.

Another activity I used while teaching this strategy was to play “Jeopardy” during the Verbal Rehearsal Stage. We played “Jeopardy” using a simple board I had constructed using tagboard and colored construction paper for pockets. Jeopardy questions were written on the back of 3-by-5-inch notecards and inserted into the construction paper pockets. The front of the notecard contained the point value of the question (100, 200, etc.). I have found this simple board to be an invaluable teaching tool and have adapted it throughout the years for various activities (vocabulary review, spelling bees, review before exams, to name a few). The boys loved this activity and it was a great tool for practicing the strategy mnemonic as well

as checking comprehension. One additional tip regarding the Jeopardy board is to include a category titled “Potpourri” where fun facts and questions related to student interests can be incorporated. I included hockey

facts and other interesting trivia in this column, and it served as a wonderful way to get to know each other better.

A third teaching suggestion regarding this strategy (and any strategy!) is to invest the necessary time to make the examples relevant for the students. All of the strategy manuals recommend this, and I can attest to the fact that the time invested in finding appropriate examples is a worthwhile and meaningful activity. For example, during the Describe Stage of this strategy, it is recommended that a discussion take place regarding “quality goals” using pictures that represent different levels of quality (for example, cars, trucks, or mountain bikes). Since Cam is extremely interested in computers, I used pictures of computers, which made the discussion especially lively and relevant.

A final training tip regarding this strategy is to construct a

## Verbal Rehearsal Jeopardy

### Materials needed:

- tagboard
- construction paper
- 3x5 notecards

### Procedure:

1. Use the construction paper to prepare pockets to hold the question and answer cards.
2. Attach the pockets to the tagboard.
3. Write the answers on the back of each notecard.
4. Write the point value of each question on the front of the notecards.
5. Distribute the cards evenly in the construction paper pockets.

**Tips:** Include a “Potpourri” category for fun facts and questions related to student interest. Also, rather than allowing one student or team to dominate, rotate around the room, giving each student or team an opportunity to answer a question.

three-ring binder system before beginning to teach the strategy and to use this binder throughout training to collect examples.

## **The Sentence Writing Strategy Teaching/Training Suggestions**

The most important teaching tip I could offer regarding this strategy is to consider co-teaching it or to regularly consult someone who has taught the strategy before. Even though I had heard many testimonials as to the power of this strategy, the size of the manual always intimidated me. Jim Knight encouraged me to “jump in” and offered support as I taught it for the first time (meeting at a local bagel shop helped, too). Especially helpful to me were Jim’s scoring suggestions and analogies. Thanks to this support, we were able to master simple, compound, complex, and compound-complex sentences by early December.

A second teaching tip I can recommend is to encourage students to incorporate graphics when constructing cue cards. Initially, I copied the cue cards from the back of the appendices and did not require the boys to make their own cue cards since I thought it would save time. This was a mistake. When the boys were responsible for designing their own cue cards, they were much more invested in the process of learning. I was very impressed with their examples and graphics, which served to aid the memory process.

A third and final training tip is to consider making a “Sentence Writing Packet” that contains the most frequently

## **What We Liked and Didn’t Like about the Paragraph Writing Strategy**

### **What we liked: Cameron Knight**

- Cam described his success in writing a persuasive essay for class. The essay had to be at least five paragraphs long and could be on any topic of his choice. Cam chose to persuade the reader “Why hockey is the greatest sport.” “I worked in the *Paragraph Writing Strategy*. I used all five paragraphs as if they were just one big paragraph—a topic paragraph, details, clincher.” When the teacher handed essays back to the class, she noted the overall poor quality of most of the essays. “But when she handed mine back, she said, ‘Cameron, yours is great.’”
- “Another thing that really helped in writing essays was the Transition Chart” included in the strategy, which provides a list of transitions for students to use.
- The brothers again enjoyed the student workbooks. “We would always compete” for the best score.
- The brothers liked using the Progress Chart to graph their improvements.
- Cam summed up the *Paragraph Writing* experience: “It’s fun to write now. Before, I was a terrible writer, all simple sentences. Now, I write complex-compound sentences and string them all together into paragraphs and essays.”

### **What we didn’t like: David Knight**

- The analogies designed to help students understand topic, detail, and clincher sentences were “kind of pointless” and the brothers saw the stick figures as outdated or babyish. “I didn’t understand the analogy, and I don’t think anyone else did either.”
- The graphics are “pretty poor.”
- The strategy needs to provide a smoother transition to writing essays.

used information. I designed packets for each of the boys and included the following information: Helping Verbs (Cue Card #5), Coordinating Conjunctions (Cue Card #9), Subordinating Conjunctions (Cue Card #12), and Sentence Formulas (page 173). We referred to these packets often.

## **The Paragraph Writing Strategy Teaching/Training Suggestions**

We did not begin learning the *Paragraph Writing Strategy* until mid-February, and we completed Lessons 1 through 4 (Topic, Detail, Clincher Sentences, and Whole

Paragraphs) by mid-April. The one area that I felt needed strengthening after teaching this strategy was how to prepare the boys for the transition to theme and essay writing. For example, it was clear to me that they had mastered writing complete paragraphs; however, they still struggled with how to link a series of paragraphs together when writing a book report, essay, or short paper, and they needed access to this information immediately.

Rather than using the Jeopardy game for the Verbal Rehearsal Stage of this strategy, I constructed notecards with questions on the front and answers on the back. During Verbal Rehearsal, we divided the notecards into three piles and the boys took turns self-quizzing as well as quizzing in pairs. The notecards were easy to construct and could be used again in future Verbal Rehearsal practice sessions. Another interesting variation of this activity I plan to use next time I teach the Verbal Rehearsal Stage of a strategy is to see what questions students will generate themselves as they create these study cards.

A second worthwhile activity I asked the boys to engage in was to draw an organizer that graphically depicted how topic, detail, and clincher sentences were related to one another as well as the specific details that make each type of sentence unique. We did this activity after completing the Describe Stage of clincher sentences.

A third teaching tip is to construct a laminated notecard that includes the Transition Chart (Cue Card #30). This chart could then be inserted into a school notebook for quick and easy use. This chart

was extremely helpful for the boys, and they referred to it frequently.

### Summary

In preparation for this article, I was asked to reflect on why I undertook this project. Although there were multiple reasons for saying “yes,” some reasons were more important than others. For example, one of the reasons I agreed to this task was the opportunity to earn some extra money—an

important consideration for any graduate student. A second reason I agreed to this task was the opportunity to learn three very important strategies—an important consideration for any SIM Trainer. The third reason I agreed to a three-strategy school year was the opportunity to work with students—an important consideration for any teacher. I am proud to call myself all of these things, a KU-CRL graduate student, a SIM Trainer, and, most importantly, a teacher. It was truly a successful “Three-Strategy School Year.”

### Gwen’s teaching tips

- Encourage students to design their own cue cards and to incorporate graphics when constructing them.
- For each student, make a Sentence Writing Packet containing the most frequently used information.
- Co-teach or regularly consult an expert.
- Ask students to draw an organizer graphically depicting relationships among topic, detail, and clincher sentences as well as details that make each type of sentence unique.
- Laminate a notecard containing the Transition Chart for easy and frequent reference.

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# Scoring ideas for Error Monitoring

Mary Frances Luysterburg, a SIM Trainer from Tampa, Florida, shared these revised scoring instructions for the controlled practice lessons of the *Error Monitoring Strategy*. This method of scoring uses two colors to mark different kinds of errors.

Using the answer key that corresponds to the lesson (pages 130-153 in the *Error Monitoring Strategy* manual), follow these steps:

1. With color No. 1, circle (directly on the student's lesson) each error the student failed to detect. Tally and put the total (for each category) in area No. 1 on the score sheet and also in the area marked 2 and 3. (In other words, if they didn't find it, they couldn't have fixed it.)
2. With color No. 1, draw a line through each error that has not been corrected. Tally and put the totals in area No. 2.
3. With color No. 1, make an X on each correction that is incorrect. Tally Xs and put the totals in area No. 3.
4. With color No. 2, circle each nonerror detected by the student. Tally and put the totals for each category in the area marked No. 4.
5. With color No. 2, make an X on each correction for a nonerror. Tally Xs and put the total in area No. 5.

Student's Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Lesson No.: \_\_\_\_\_

## CONTROLLED PRACTICE SCORE SHEET

### Finding Mistakes:

	<b>C</b>	<b>O</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>S</b>	
<p>④ These were correct, but you circled them</p>					Mastery=No more than 1 nonerror in each category
<p>① Mistakes not found</p>					
<p><b>Total Errors</b></p>					
<p>Percentage of Mistakes found = <math>\frac{20 - \boxed{\phantom{00}}}{20} = \frac{\boxed{\phantom{00}}}{20} \times 100 = \boxed{\phantom{00}}\%</math> ●</p>					Mastery=90% or above

### Fixing Mistakes:

	<b>C</b>	<b>O</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>S</b>	
<p>⑤ It was correct, but you tried to fix it</p>					Mastery=No more than 1 nonerror in each category
<p>② Mistakes not found</p>					
<p>③</p>					
<p><b>Total Errors</b></p>					
<p>Percentage of Mistakes Corrected = <math>\frac{20 - \boxed{\phantom{00}}}{20} = \frac{\boxed{\phantom{00}}}{20} \times 100 = \boxed{\phantom{00}}\%</math> □</p>					Mastery=90% or above

## Strategy instruction grading procedure

Responding to questions regarding how to assign grades during strategy instruction, **Linda Estes** and **Alberta Roth**, SIM Trainers in the Klein, Texas, Independent School District developed a grading procedure for teachers to follow.

Grades *are assigned* based on the student's learning responsibilities. Grades *are not based* on percentages achieved on each assignment during specific strategy instruction. The following outlines a student's learning responsibility for each stage of strategy instruction.

### Stage 1: Pre-Test

- Participate in the pre-testing process
- Generate a learning commitment
- Participate in feedback session

### Stage 2: Describe

- Maintain student strategy folder
- Participate in class discussion
- Take required class notes
- Maintain class notes in student strategy folder
- Record information on designated charts

### Stage 3: Model

- Maintain student strategy folder
- Participate in class discussion
- Take required class notes
- Maintain class notes in student strategy folder
- Complete assigned strategy worksheets
- Finish assignments

- Record information on designated charts

### Stage 4: Verbal Practice

- Maintain student strategy folder
- Participate in class discussion
- Recall the mnemonic device(s)
- Explain the mnemonic device(s)
- Participate in verbal practice activities (individual review, peer practice, group practice)
- Arrange for and partake in oral quizzes
- Record information on designated charts

### Stage 5: Controlled Practice & Feedback

- Maintain student strategy folder
- Participate in class discussion
- Use the mnemonic device(s) on assigned lesson material
- Work on controlled practice assignments
- Comply during practice sessions (guided, cooperative, independent)
- Complete designated worksheets
- Take comprehension tests
- Participate in feedback sessions
- Record information on designated charts

### Stage 6: Advanced Practice & Feedback

- Maintain student strategy folder
- Participate in class discussion
- Use the mnemonic device(s) on assigned lesson material
- Work on advanced practice assignments
- Complete designated worksheets
- Take comprehension tests

- Participate in feedback sessions
- Record information on designated charts

### Stage 7: Post-Test & Commitment

- Maintain student strategy folder
- Take the strategy post-test
- Use the mnemonic device(s) on post-test
- Participate in feedback session
- Commit to generalization
- Write a new commitment
- Record information on designated charts

### Stage 8: Generalization

- Maintain student strategy folder
- Review mnemonic device(s)
- Use the mnemonic device(s) in varied settings
- Participate in classroom discussions
- Make cue cards for all classes (tape on the inside cover of textbooks)
- Write affirmations for generalization of strategy
- Report use of strategy
- Complete class assignments
- Record information on designated charts

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