

# Introduction

As mandated state assessments place more and more pressure on teachers and students alike, it's no longer enough to merely teach our students the elements of good writing. Students must perform on mandated state assessments. Because of this, in many classrooms, writing instruction has evolved into a series of test-driven writing responses scored with rubrics. But even with all the preparation and practice, some students still fall below the assessment benchmark. The irony is that some of these students are our very best writers. Why is this happening?

Children usually do best at what they enjoy doing most. It should come as no surprise that many students enjoy gym and art classes the most. When asked, our students said they enjoyed gym because they got to move around, they could make noise, and they could be on teams. They liked art because it was colorful, there was more than one right answer, and the teacher was like a

coach giving directions and letting the kids do the rest on their own.

We have over fifty years of combined teaching experience, and we can honestly say that writing and test prep have never been favorites of our students or our peers. At best, they rank down there with word problems and rained-out recess. Unfortunately, many students not only dislike writing, they're actually intimidated by it. For them, state mandated writing assessments inspire fear, stress, even panic.

For many teachers and students, pressure to perform has turned a stimulating and often enjoyable learning process into one filled with anxiety. The role of the teacher often resembles more of a drill sergeant than a coach. Fewer students view writing as a means of communication or a vehicle for creative expression. For many, writing is simply a section on the dreaded test and leaves them wondering, "When will I ever use this?"

## The Birth of a New Genre of Writing

Beginning in third grade and continuing through grade eleven, most students will spend a minimum of forty-five days in high-stakes assessment settings. The writing requirements and prompt responses on assessments have become so specific that this form of writing has evolved into its very own genre. Like all genres of writing, assessment writing requires a specific ensemble of skills and strategies in order to communicate to a specific audience for a specific reason. Your students must know that the writing process they demonstrate on assessments is no different from the writing process they

use both inside and outside the classroom.

Good writing is, quite simply, good writing.

But assessment writing is unique. What sets it apart is that the audience is made up of evaluators rather than just readers. This situation may be compared to a movie being viewed by a general audience one night, and then viewed by an audience of movie critics the next. Both sets of viewers will find things they like and dislike about the movie. The critics' opinions, however, will have a direct impact on the public relations and financial success of the movie.

Evaluators are looking for particular things. They want to see the demonstration of specific skills. Students writing for assessments must demonstrate those skills in order to obtain points. The more skills they demonstrate, the more points they accrue, and the higher their final score will be.

Yet writing—and writing instruction—is so much more than test prep! Writing provides a way for people to connect, and to feel connected, to themselves and to others. Writing is a powerful way of making oneself

heard. It's a way for children to let others know who they are. Most students, if not all students, will need to write throughout their entire lives for both personal and professional reasons.

Writing is far more important than prompts and response sheets. We as educators must never forget that. Yes, we must prepare our students for the test. But we must also prepare them for their writing lives. With *See It, Be It, Write It*, you can do both.

## Why Do Enactments?

This book explains the prompt enactment process, a strategy for teaching writing that consists of two basic parts:

1. Students enact a prompt. Physically acting out a prompt helps writers think more critically about it and compare their own experiences to it. They begin to think about the prompt in specific and personal ways. Later in the year, and well before the assessment, students learn to do this step in their heads.
2. With the aid of a Standing Ovation Checklist, students write a response to the prompt. The checklists in this book help them remember to include various writing techniques that are part of state assessment scoring rubrics and are elements of good writing in general. With practice, students internalize the writing techniques so they no longer need to refer to a hard copy.

Why do enactments? The prompt enactment process improves writing skills and performance on writing assessments. As we have seen from this new genre of writing, these are not necessarily identical, but they are of course both important. The prompt enactment process:

### Helps students engage with writing

**assignments** so they can write creatively, thoughtfully, and personally. Enactments bring writing prompts to life for students and connect the prompts to their background experiences, which helps them write responses with more detail—and more motivation and purpose.

### Takes the mystery out of testing for kids.

The Standing Ovation Checklists are directly aligned with state and national standards, including the Common Core Standards and state assessment scoring rubrics, yet they are presented in a user-friendly format. The checklists are very specific, taking the guesswork out of writing and scoring. Whether students are writing for a high-stakes assessment or a regular school assignment—even in curricular areas other than language arts—the checklists help them demonstrate all the writing techniques they have mastered. As the process becomes habit, your students will internalize the checklists. This is important during standardized testing situations when posters, rubrics, and visual aids may not be visible to the students.

**Is easy to differentiate.** Most classrooms contain students from a wide range of backgrounds and ability levels. It's the

teacher's responsibility to reach all students where they *are*, and not where we think they should be. Since the prompt enactment process encourages students to make personal connections to writing prompts, it takes advantage of students' strengths and supports their weaknesses. And every part of the prompt enactment process can be differentiated readily, from enacting, to analyzing, to writing, to editing. This is covered in detail in Chapter 5: Differentiating the Enactment Process.

**Is aligned with state standards** and can be tailored to your state's assessment test. As you can see on the tables on pages 7–9, the prompt enactment process is aligned to state standards for language arts and national performing arts standards for states that have them. The Standing Ovation Checklists included in this book are aligned with

scoring rubrics used on real state assessment tests. This book has in-depth chapters on all the types of writing prompts that appear on state assessments, so you can easily focus on material your students need to know.

**Supports social-emotional health.** As your young writers take center stage to enact prompts, they learn to understand their own feelings as well as the feelings of others. Their self-esteem grows as they express themselves, improve their skills, and receive a sincere and appreciative round of applause after each enactment.

**Is fun.** Kids doing prompt enactments are actively learning. They move around, they laugh, they share ideas. They might even act silly. Active learning not only is a great way to retain information, it is more fun than passive learning!

## About This Book

*See It, Be It, Write It* is divided into four sections.

**Part 1: Using Performing Arts to Improve Writing Skills and Test Scores.** This part summarizes the prompt enactment process and explains how to use it throughout your year. We recommend you read all of the chapters in Part 1 to gain a strong sense of how to use the process.

**Part 2: Extending and Optimizing the Process.** This part guides you in differentiating the process so you can engage all your learners; offers plenty of easy ways to take enactments further if you so desire (with sets, scriptwriting, costumes, and more); and describes the social-emotional learning (SEL) benefits of enactments (including specific SEL-based activities). Reading Part 2 will help you get the most out of the prompt enactment process.

### Part 3: The Types of Writing Prompts.

Each chapter in this part explains in detail one of the types of writing prompts found on state assessments: picture, speculative, persuasive, poetry, and quote or adage prompts. The chapters show you precisely how to do the prompt enactment process with each type of writing prompt, providing examples and plenty of tips for directing a smooth performance. Each chapter in Part 3 also contains a prompt-specific version of the Standing Ovation Checklist. We recommend you read the chapter or chapters that correspond with the prompt types your students will find on their assessment.

**Part 4: Ready-to-Use Prompts.** This part provides—you guessed it—ready-to-use writing prompts. You'll find five prompts for each of the five types, complete with discussion questions and suggestions for enacting.

You'll also find five themed assignments that contain one writing prompt for each of the different prompt types based on the same subject matter, as well as suggestions for extending and differentiating the theme. These prompts are complete and ready to be printed out and put into use right away. (We also encourage you—or your students—to design your own prompts.)

Throughout this book you will find “Director’s Notes,” which are asides to you, the director of the big prompt-enacting and writing show in your classroom. Director’s Notes provide additional important information about the topic at hand.

Also included with this book is a CD-ROM, on which you’ll find all seventy-six

of the reproducible handouts in the book (plus twenty more reproducible student prompts not in the book). All the forms are in PDF format. Many of these, including forms for planning and organizing your year, are customizable with fields you can fill in on screen. Having electronic copies of the various versions of the Standing Ovation Checklist can be quite handy when you need to print out copies for every student in your class.

The best thing about *See It, Be It, Write It* is that you won’t need to reinvent the wheel. This process helps kids, whatever their writing ability or confidence level, to take ownership of their writing—whether they are writing for class, for a state assessment, or for themselves.

# 1 Chapter 1

## Standards, Assessments, and Getting to Know Your Students

Through the prompt enactment process, you and your students will take a journey of writing instruction that will help them become stronger, more competent writers—in your classroom and beyond. Early in the school year, your journey begins with the creation of a lively, collaborative learning atmosphere. You and your students will work together enacting and discussing prompts, writing responses, and revising. As the year goes on, the fun, collaborative spirit continues even as students take on more of the work themselves. By the end of the year, as the testing date approaches, students will need to do the enactment process all on their own—and not only on their own, but inside their heads!

### The Enactment Process and State Standards

In addition to helping your students improve as writers and preparing them for your state assessment, it's also important to note that the enactment process itself satisfies curriculum standards for writing, speaking and listening, and theater. The enactment process is not something extra to do—it is a new way to teach what you're already doing. The process directly involves the teacher and the student in speaking, listening, writing, and reading in ways that promote a student's ability to communicate successfully.

The tables on pages 7–9 shows exactly how the enactment process addresses typical language arts curriculum standards. The standards provided include standards for two representative states, California and Texas. Your own state's standards are likely very similar.

#### Director's Note

Forty-eight states have agreed to participate in the establishment of Common Core Standards, the goal of which is to establish more uniform expectations for the nation's students. Based on drafts made available in 2009 and the current process to establish these standards, we are confident the enactment process will align with the Common Core Standards. 🎭

The prompt enactment process also satisfies state and national standards for arts education. The following national standards were developed by the Consortium of National Arts Education Associations.

## Aligning the Enactment Process with State Language Arts Standards

Addressed during the Enactment Process	California	Texas
Students focus on the beginning, then on the middle, and finally on the end of their enactments and their written stories; students and teachers talk through what could have happened before and after the moment they enact; when speaking and scribing, teachers and students use transition words to discuss chronology.	Listening and Speaking Strategies, 1.5 and 1.6 (Organization and Delivery): Organize ideas chronologically or around major points of information. Provide a beginning, a middle, and an end, including concrete details that develop a central idea.	Beginning in 4th grade, students are expected to develop drafts by choosing an appropriate organizational strategy (e.g., sequence of events, cause effect, compare contrast) and building on ideas to create a focused, organized, and coherent piece of writing.
Conventions of written English are discussed and practiced during discussions about enactments, teacher scribing, student writing, and especially when using the Standing Ovation Checklist to compose and edit.	Written and Oral English Language Conventions, 1.0: Students write and speak with a command of standard English conventions appropriate to this grade level.	Beginning in 4th grade, students are expected to edit drafts for grammar, mechanics, and spelling using a teacher developed rubric.
Writers are taught various strategies to engage readers, including using hooks and drafting sentences that use question marks and exclamation points.	Written and Oral English Language Conventions, 1.1 (Sentence Structure): Understand and be able to use complete and correct declarative, interrogative, imperative, and exclamatory sentences in writing and speaking.	Beginning in 5th grade, students are expected to use a variety of sentence structures and transitions to link paragraphs.
Students practice using precise vocabulary through exercises like "Put <i>said</i> to bed" and the 5 synonym switch.	Writing Strategies, 1.5 (Research and Technology): Use a thesaurus to identify alternative word choices and meanings.	
Students learn to recognize the writing task by analyzing writing prompts and practice writing appropriate responses, keeping the audience in mind; students practice using precise vocabulary; students are encouraged to write "fan mail" to other students as well as write and send persuasive letters.	Writing Strategies, 1.0: Students write clear, coherent, and focused essays. The writing exhibits the students' awareness of the audience and purpose. Essays contain formal introductions, supporting evidence, and conclusions.	Beginning in 4th grade, students are expected to write letters whose language is tailored to the audience and purpose (e.g., a thank-you note to a friend) and that use appropriate conventions (e.g., date, salutation, closing).

Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills for English Electives © 2009 by the Texas Education Agency. Reprinted with permission.

English-Language Arts Content Standards for California Public Schools: Kindergarten Through Grade Twelve © 1997 by the California State Board of Education. Reprinted with permission.

## Aligning the Enactment Process with State Language Arts Standards (continued)

Addressed during the Enactment Process	California	Texas
Students learn to write in various genres and to stay on topic by participating in scribing sessions, and later they practice it in their own writing and edit it using a Standing Ovation Checklist. Clear focus and strong supporting details are stressed at every stage of the process.	Writing Applications, 2.0: Students write narrative, expository, persuasive, and descriptive texts of at least 500 to 700 words in each genre. Student writing demonstrates a command of standard American English and the research, organizational, and drafting strategies.	Students write expository and procedural or work-related texts to communicate ideas and information to specific audiences for specific purposes. Beginning in 3rd grade, students are expected to write brief compositions that contain a clear focus, organization, and sufficient supporting details.
Students may work on poetry prompts when appropriate; the enactment process is also appropriate for cross-curricular writing, and specific instruction for doing so is included in this book.	Literary Response and Analysis, 3.0: Students read and respond to historically or culturally significant works of literature that reflect and enhance their studies of history and social science. They clarify the ideas and connect them to other literary works.	
The audience discusses the enactment with the actors; students discuss the enactment and the writing with the teacher during scribing sessions; students have many opportunities to work in groups on enacting, writing, and editing.	Listening and Speaking 1.0, Comprehension: Ask questions that seek information not already discussed.	Students work productively with others in teams. Beginning in 3rd grade, students are expected to participate in teacher- and student-led small-group discussions by posing and answering questions with appropriate detail and providing suggestions that build upon the ideas of others.
Students may practice standard English as well as the expression of ideas and feelings when doing enactments, during discussions, during scribing sessions, when writing responses, and when editing, particularly when editing with the Standing Ovation Checklists.	Written and Oral English Language Conventions, 1.0: Students write and speak with a command of standard English conventions appropriate to this grade level.	Beginning in 3rd grade, students are expected to write imaginative stories that build the plot to a climax and contain details about the characters and setting. Students write literary texts to express their ideas and feelings about real or imagined people, events, and ideas.
Students brainstorm for essays during enactments, visualization, and discussions; they draft essays and revise them using the Standing Ovation Checklist.	Writing Strategies, 1.4 (Evaluation and Revision): Students revise drafts to improve the coherence and logical progression of ideas by using an established rubric.	Students use elements of the writing process (planning, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing) to compose text. Beginning in 2nd grade, students are expected to edit drafts for grammar, punctuation, and spelling using a teacher developed rubric.

## National Standards for Arts Education

Theatre, Content Standard 2, Achievement Standard: Students imagine and clearly describe characters, their relationships, and their environments

Theatre, Content Standard 1, Achievement Standard: Students improvise dialogue to tell stories, and formalize improvisations by writing or recording the dialogue

Theatre, Content Standard 1, Achievement Standard: Students refine and record dialogue and action

Theatre, Content Standard 2, Achievement Standard: Students in an ensemble, create and sustain characters that communicate with audiences

Theatre, Content Standard 1, Achievement Standard: Script writing by the creation of improvisations and scripted scenes based on personal experience and heritage, imagination, literature, and history

Theatre, Content Standard 7, Achievement Standard: Students analyze classroom dramatizations and, using appropriate terminology, constructively suggest alternative ideas for dramatizing roles, arranging environments, and developing situations along with means of improving the collaborative processes of planning, playing, responding, and evaluating

Theatre, Content Standard 6, Achievement Standard: Students express and compare personal reactions to several art forms

Visual Arts, Content Standard 5: Reflecting upon and assessing the characteristics and merits of their work and the work of others

National Standards for Theatre Education © 2001 by the American Alliance for Theatre & Education. Reprinted with permission.

## Getting to Know Your State Assessment

Early in the year, your students don't need to worry about the assessment they'll take at the end of the year, but you do. Though good writing skills are appropriate for any writing occasion, you don't want your students to be surprised by what they find on the test. Therefore, you'll use the contents of your state's assessment test to help determine the structure of your yearlong writing program.

The contents of your state's assessment test are based on your state's writing standards, which you can access at the department of education (DOE) Web site for your state. (You can also find links to each state's standards at [www.educationworld.com](http://www.educationworld.com).) Although many states are involved in the process of establishing Common Core Standards, individual states will maintain control over their assessments

and the terminology used to identify and describe different purposes for writing. Even if your state adopts the Common Core Standards, the best place to learn about your state assessment test is from your state DOE.

To find the information on your state's DOE Web site, look for a tab or button labeled "Assessment." After finding the assessment section, locate the particular grade and name of your state's test. You may find a section labeled "Test Item Specifications" or something similar, and that is where you will be able to read about the types of questions, the quantity of questions, and the length of time students have to respond to the assessment tasks. You will not be able to preview specific prompts for the current year, of course, however you may find prompts from previous years, which can



be very valuable (see pages 43–45). You will also be able to find information about the types of writing prompts by regularly checking the DOE Web site for postings related to the high stakes assessment; look for presentations, multimedia slides, and official notifications.

## A brief description of prompt types

Keep in mind that like the standards themselves, the terminology used to describe types of writing, the names of assessment prompts, and their targeted grade levels will vary from state to state. Use the chart on this page to help match up your states terminology with that used in this book.

### Picture prompt

The picture prompt requires students to look at an illustration or photo, make keen

observations, and incorporate their observations and thoughts into a creatively written story. The students must demonstrate their ability to apply creative writing skills while crafting their story.

### Speculative prompt

The speculative prompt requires students to read a brief scenario, make a personal connection to the scenario, and craft a story that includes a resolution to the scenario. Speculative prompts sometimes include social-emotional skill-building strategies and moral dilemmas. Similar to the picture prompt, this task allows the students to demonstrate their ability to write creatively.

### Persuasive prompt

The persuasive prompt requires students to take a stance on a given topic or situation. Their task is to include details from their experiences, or information they have learned during class lessons or from other sources, in order to persuade the reader to agree with their position. Persuasive prompts often require students to respond in the form of a friendly letter.

### Poetry prompt

The poetry prompt requires students to respond to a poem. A teacher reads the poem aloud, and students read it silently. The students do not write a poem. Their assignment is to make a connection to the main idea of the poem and include that connection in their written response. They must be sure to respond to questions related to the main idea and theme of the poem. Evaluators are looking for a text-to-text, text-to-self, or text-to-world connection.

### Quote or adage prompt

The quote or adage prompt requires students to respond to a quote. A teacher reads the quote aloud, and the students read it silently. The students must grasp the main idea or message of the quote and connect that message to a personal experience. Students must

## Terms Commonly Used on State Assessments (Jargon Conversion Table)

If it says	This book says
Visual stimulus or visual narrative prompt	Picture prompt
Personal narrative or writing to convey experience, real or imagined	Story (in response to a picture prompt or speculative prompt)
Argument, argumentative writing, or convincing writing	Persuasive writing (or persuasive prompt)
Narrative in response to a variety of stimulus materials, explanatory writing, expository writing	Written response (to a poetry prompt or quote or adage prompt)
Benchmarks	Mastery level
Proficiency levels: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Basic</li> <li>• Proficient</li> <li>• Advanced</li> </ul>	Proficiency levels: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Partially Proficient</li> <li>• Proficient</li> <li>• Advanced Proficient</li> </ul>
Composition or essay	Written response
Narrative writing	Story

respond to questions following the quote and demonstrate their ability to make connections and to write about a lesson they have learned or might learn from such an experience. As with the poetry prompt, evaluators are looking for a text-to-text, text-to-self, or text-to-world connection.

You can collect everything you need to know about your state’s test on a copy of the “Writing Assessment Information Fact Sheet,” on page 12. You will also want to check into your state’s DOE Web site regularly for updates on test dates, sample prompts, and important test information.

## Getting to Know Your Students

Once you’ve gathered the information you need about your standards and your assessment, you’ll want to find out what kind of writers you have in your classroom. If an assessment was given last year, find out what each student scored on it. You may locate the results in the students’ cumulative folder or in an online database; many states have tracking systems that give educators access to the records of students who have transferred within districts, between districts, and from state to state or province to province.

Whenever possible, visit the resident sage, last year’s teacher, to gain further insight into your students’ strengths and weaknesses. Working together will save valuable time and give you a deeper understanding of each student’s individual needs. By itself, a test score does not represent a student. It is never enough!

Collect the prior test scores and any other information you can gather from the previous teachers for each student in your class on the “Previous Writing Test Data Collection Sheet” (page 13). You will be able to sort students by score and also categorize them by mastery levels.

Once you have collected data for all your students, use the “Assessment Writing Clusters” chart (page 14) to group your students for appropriate instruction. This is one method of addressing specific needs of groups of students and using test data to make instructional decisions. Don’t consider these groups set in stone for the entire school year. Please note that due to each

state’s control over word choices, the terminology may be different in your state than the terminology used in this chart. In New Jersey, we use the terms *advanced proficient*, *proficient*, and *partial proficient* to indicate levels of mastery. Please adapt the categories in this chart to reflect the names of the levels of mastery in your state.

### Director’s Note

**A customizable version of each of these charts is included on the CD-ROM, so you can fill in your state’s specific terminology.** 🐾

In some school districts, teachers collect and maintain samples of their students’ writings at different intervals during the school year. These documents are placed in a writing folder that is passed along to the next year’s teacher. Teachers may use these samples as a preview of their students’ abilities and prior mastery to prepare for future remedial and/or instructional lessons. Prompt responses are ideal writing samples to be placed in students’ writing folders.

The “Student Progressive Writing Chart” on page 15 may be used as a cover page for each student’s writing folder. It shows what writing prompts each student has been exposed to. You may mark an X in the appropriate square when the student is exposed to the given prompt, or, to be more specific, you may include a date when that lesson began. For your convenience, you may collect your entire class’s information on the “Class Progressive Writing Chart” on page 16.

# Writing Assessment Information Fact Sheet

Name of state assessment: \_\_\_\_\_

State Department of Education Web site: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of the District Testing Coordinator: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of School-based Testing Coordinator: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Dates and times assessment will be given:

Day of Week	Date	Time

Types of Writing Prompts included on assessment:

Name of Writing Prompt	Description of Prompt	Date of Instruction

Names of students needing special accommodations during assessment:

Name of Student	Accommodation(s) Needed

Prior to the assessment, have you:

- Checked your state's Department of Education Web site for assessment information and updates?
- Taken down/covered all educational aides from walls, etc?
- Reviewed IEPs/classified student educational plans?
- Made arrangements for testing accommodations?
- Rearranged classroom furniture as per testing protocols?
- Obtained two #2 pencils for each student?
- Obtained a functioning clock/timer?

# Previous Writing Test Data Collection Sheet

Student's Name	Name of Test	Date of Test	Type of Prompt	Score on Writing Section	Mastery Level
1.					
2.					
3.					
4.					
5.					
6.					
7.					
8.					
9.					
10.					
11.					
12.					
13.					
14.					
15.					
16.					
17.					
18.					
19.					
20.					
21.					
22.					
23.					
24.					
25.					
26.					
27.					
28.					
29.					
30.					

# Assessment Writing Clusters

## Cluster 1: Students with Advanced Proficient Writing Scores


## Cluster 2: Students with Proficient Writing Scores


## Cluster 3: Students with Partial Proficient Writing Scores


# Student Progressive Writing Chart

Student's name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date and grade student began in the school system: \_\_\_\_\_

	Picture Prompt	Speculative Prompt	Persuasive Prompt	Poetry Prompt	Quote/Adage Prompt
1st-grade teacher:					
2nd-grade teacher:					
3rd-grade teacher:					
4th-grade teacher:					
5th-grade teacher:					
6th-grade teacher:					
7th-grade teacher:					
8th-grade teacher:					
9th-grade teacher:					
10th-grade teacher:					
11th-grade teacher:					
12th-grade teacher:					

Comments:

---



---



---



---

# Class Progressive Writing Chart

Information from each individual Student Progressive Writing Chart may be applied to the chart below to aid in your yearlong planning for writing instruction.

Student's Name	Picture Prompt	Speculative Prompt	Persuasive Prompt	Poetry Prompt	Quote/ Adage Prompt

From *See It, Be It, Write It: Using Performing Arts to Improve Writing Skills and Test Scores* by Hope Sara Blecher-Sass, Ed.D., & Maryellen Moffitt, copyright © 2010. Used with permission from Free Spirit Publishing Inc., Minneapolis, MN; 800-735-7323; www.freespirit.com. All rights reserved.