

RESEARCH AND STANDARDS

In recent years, more emphasis has been placed on proficiency testing for students in public schools. Testing has extended from subjects such as reading and math to other subjects, including writing. One effect of this emphasis on testing has been a renewed interest in teaching writing, especially instruction based on the state and national standards that have been developed over the past three decades (Strickland et al. 2001). The focus on testing can be seen in both general and special education classes around the nation. The most frequently required types of writing measured on standardized tests are personal narrative, letter, persuasive or opinion essay, and imaginative narrative (Isaacson 2004). The national assessments consistently show that the persuasive essay proves to be more of a challenge than other genres for students (De La Paz 2001). This binder contains activities and prompts that develop students' skills in that type of writing: persuasive or opinion essay. The activities not only prepare students for success on standardized tests, but also for the life skill that adults need of writing effectively.

For students to become good writers, they must be given frequent opportunities to write. Students, especially those with learning problems, must receive instruction that is explicit. This means step-by-step strategies should be provided in clear, simple language (Isaacson 2004). Students must understand the goals of their writing, and they must also receive frequent feedback. The forty prompts included in this binder allow students many opportunities to write for meaningful purposes. The rubrics detail the goals and allow the teacher to provide feedback.

Writing is a difficult task even for the most proficient students. However, for those with learning problems it is even more challenging. Teachers must have high expectations, though, that every student will learn to write and write well. To achieve this goal, instruction must be tailored to fit the needs of the students (Graham and Harris 1994). Each prompt in this binder has three levels for teachers to choose from to give their students the appropriate level of support. This ensures every student has a chance to succeed.

De La Paz, Susan. 2001. Stop and dare: A persuasive writing strategy. *Intervention in School and Clinic* 36.4: 234–244.

Graham, Steve, and Karen R. Harris. 1994. Implications of constructivism for teaching writing to students with special needs. *Journal of Special Education* 28: 275–89.

Isaacson, Stephen. 2004. Instruction that helps students meet state standards in writing. *Exceptionality* 12: 39–54.

Strickland, Dorothy, Angela Bodino, Kathy Buchan, Karen Jones, Audrey Nelson, and Michelle Rosen. 2001. Teaching writing in a time of reform. *The Elementary School Journal* 101: 385–395.