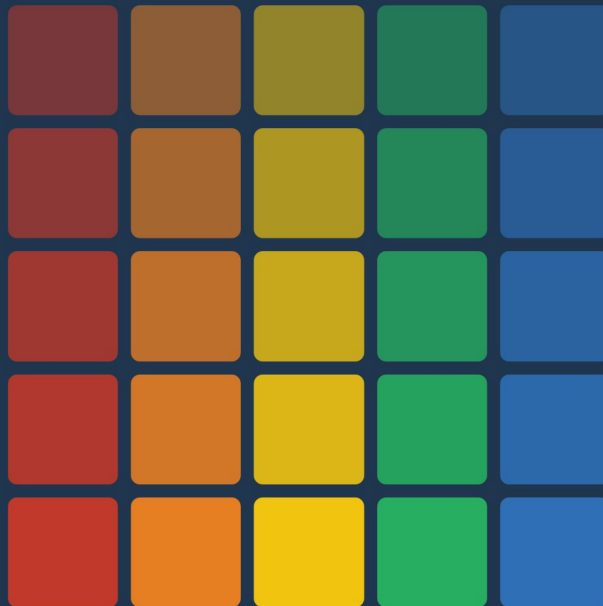


THE WRITING ACADEMY®, LLC

THE WRITING MATRIX

*Discovering a Student's Cognitive Address
through RPLDs*

(Range Performance Level Descriptors)



Foundational Emergent Visible Independent Reflective

Using Answer Choices to Guide Instruction

RANDI WHITNEY

THE WRITING MATRIX:

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The Writing Matrix:

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INSTRUCTIONAL LANGUAGE

Foundational, Emergent, Visible, Independent, and Reflective are the instructional level names used in this book. They describe demonstrated thinking on a particular task. They are not labels for students.

The student examples in this book are fictional or composite examples created for professional learning.

A NOTE TO THE TEACHER

You do not have to change everything you teach. The Writing Matrix helps you see more clearly what students understand, where their thinking stops, and what small instructional move can help them advance.

Teachers already collect a great deal of evidence. Students answer questions, discuss texts, write short responses, compose essays, revise drafts, and complete assessments. Yet the next instructional decision is not always obvious. A score may show that a student struggled, but it may not show whether the student needed stronger recall, better evidence, deeper reasoning, clearer relationships, more developed writing, or focused conventions instruction.

This book offers a practical way to look again at the work students are already doing. The four dimensions - TAUGHT, TAP, THINK, and TOGGLE - identify the kind of comprehension or writing work being asked. The five levels - Foundational, Emergent, Visible, Independent, and Reflective - describe how fully, precisely, and independently the student demonstrates it.

Together, those two coordinates create a Cognitive Address. The address is temporary. It belongs to the demonstrated thinking, not to the child. The purpose is not to create another label. The purpose is to know what to teach next.

Throughout the book, the moving analogy remains intentionally simple. Find the current Cognitive Address. Name the Next Address. Decide what the student needs to pack up. Teach the move. Check for growth. The Keys to Keep at the end of each chapter highlight the reminders worth carrying into instruction.

Begin small. Use one task, one dimension, and one group. When the process helps you make a clearer decision, add another piece. The matrix should lighten the work of interpretation, not add unnecessary weight to a teacher's day.

RANDI WHITNEY

THE FIVE-MINUTE OVERVIEW

The Writing Matrix can be understood through five decisions. You can begin using the process before reading the complete book.

Decision	Teacher question	Action
1. Find the Address	What kind of thinking did the task require, and what did the student demonstrate?	Name the dimension and current level.
2. Name the Next Address	What is the smallest observable step that comes next?	Choose one level to the right.
3. Pack Up	What knowledge, strategy, language, writing behavior, or convention is missing?	Name one precise instructional need.
4. Teach the Move	How will I model, guide, and then remove support?	Connect reading and writing practice around the same thinking.
5. Check for Growth	Can the student use the new thinking accurately, consistently, independently, and in a fresh task?	Update the address and choose the next move.

Foundational (Beginning)	Emergent (Developing)	Visible (Engaging)	Independent (Independent)	Reflective (High Independent)
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ONE SENTENCE SUMMARY

The matrix helps teachers identify where a student's thinking is now and teach the smallest useful move toward deeper, more independent reading and writing.

When analyzing writing, use three separate lenses: cognition, composition, and conventions. A student may demonstrate deep reasoning while still needing help organizing or editing the response. Another may produce polished sentences that remain literal. Separating the lenses produces a more accurate next lesson.

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QUICK ROUTES

Need the whole system quickly? Read Chapters 2, 5, 8, and 9.
Need written-response support? Read Chapters 7, 12, and 13.
Need a lesson tomorrow? Begin with Tools 2, 3, 5, and 6.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Read It Once, Then Use It as a Reference

The first four chapters explain the matrix. Chapters 5-7 show how to analyze questions, answer choices, and writing. Chapters 8-10 turn the analysis into instruction and grouping. Chapters 11-14 apply the matrix to reading, written responses, complete writing instruction, intervention, access, and enrichment. Chapter 15 follows Emsy and Merrick through the complete process.

Use the Shortest Route That Answers Your Question

Teacher need	Go to
I need to understand the whole matrix.	Chapters 2-4 and Tool 1.
I need to identify a student's current level.	Chapters 5-7 and Tool 4.
I know the address but do not know what to teach.	Chapters 8-9 and Tool 3.
I need to form a group and plan a lesson.	Chapter 10 and Tool 6.
I need reading questions or written prompts.	Chapters 11-12 and Tool 2.
I need writing-process, composition, conventions, or text-based response support.	Chapter 13 and Tools 7-8.
I need intervention, accessibility, language support, or enrichment.	Chapter 14.
I need student or family communication tools.	Tool 9.

A PRACTICAL PROMISE

Use only the parts that make the next instructional decision clearer. The matrix should serve the teacher; the teacher should not serve the matrix.

BEFORE YOU BEGIN: FIVE RULES

1. The address belongs to the demonstrated thinking, not to the child.
2. A student can have a different address in TAUGHT, TAP, THINK, and TOGGLE.
3. One answer is a clue; a pattern of evidence supports placement.
4. In writing, examine cognition, composition, and conventions separately.
5. Teach one level to the right and check the move with a fresh task.

The Fixed Color Order

Foundational (Beginning)	Emergent (Developing)	Visible (Engaging)	Independent (Independent)	Reflective (High Independent)
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Foundational is red, Emergent is orange, Visible is yellow, Independent is green, and Reflective is blue. Use pastel versions of these colors so the page remains readable and professional. When related level names appear in local materials, preserve the same developmental order.

What the Book Does Not Ask You to Do

- Do not assign one permanent color to a student.
- Do not rewrite every assessment before beginning.
- Do not create twenty groups at the same time.
- Do not lower the cognitive demand simply because a student needs language or access support.
- Do not correct every writing issue in one conference.

KEYS TO KEEP

- Begin with one task and one next move.
- Record only the evidence that changes instruction.
- Use reading to reveal understanding and writing to make the reasoning visible.

A Score Is Not Enough

A percentage tells us how a student performed. It rarely tells us why the student responded as they did or what the teacher should teach next. This chapter introduces the shift from counting errors to locating thinking.

- Distinguish performance data from instructional information.
- See how the same score can hide different reading and writing needs.
- Use a five-step routine to turn student work into a next instructional move.

The most useful question after an assessment is not only, 'How many were correct?' It is, 'Where did the student's thinking stop?'

The Problem With a Single Number

Teachers often receive a score, a performance category, or a list of missed items. Those results are useful, but they are incomplete. A score can tell us that a student had difficulty. It cannot, by itself, tell us whether the difficulty came from recalling what was taught, selecting evidence, explaining an inference, understanding a relationship, organizing a response, or editing the final writing.

Consider Emsy and Merrick. Both earn 60 percent on the same assessment. Emsy selects answers that are reasonable but only partly supported by the text. Merrick repeatedly selects choices that repeat exact words from the passage, even when the question asks for an inference. Their scores are identical. Their next lessons should not be.

Same Score, Different Instructional Need

Student	What the response reveals	Most useful next instruction
Emsy	Understands the general idea but selects evidence that is broad or incomplete.	Compare related evidence with precise evidence and justify which detail proves the answer.
Merrick	Relies on literal wording when the task requires meaning that is implied.	Combine two clues and explain what they suggest beyond what is directly stated.

Reading In and Writing Out

The same concern appears in writing. Two constructed responses may receive the same holistic score even though the writers need very different support. One response may contain thoughtful reasoning but little textual evidence. Another may include several quotations but never explain why they matter. A third may communicate a strong idea through sentences that still need editing. A single score can hide all three patterns.

The Writing Matrix treats reading and writing as connected evidence. Reading questions show what a student recognizes, selects, infers, or relates. Written responses show whether the student can make that understanding visible by stating an idea, choosing support, explaining the reasoning, organizing relationships, revising the message, and editing the final product.

A USEFUL DISTINCTION

A reading answer shows the decision the student made.

A written response shows the decision, the supporting evidence, the reasoning, and the way the student organized and communicated the idea.

Both can reveal a Cognitive Address, but writing provides a wider view of the student's thinking process.

The Five-Step Teacher Routine

1. Find the current Cognitive Address. Identify the dimension and level the student consistently demonstrates.
2. Name the Next Address. Choose the smallest observable level of thinking that comes next.
3. Decide what the student needs to pack up. Name the knowledge, strategy, language, or writing behavior needed for the move.
4. Teach the move. Model the difference, guide practice, and gradually remove support.
5. Check for growth. Ask the student to demonstrate the new thinking independently with a fresh question, prompt, or text.

This routine is intentionally short. It does not require a new label for every student or a separate curriculum for every group. It gives teachers a clearer way to use the questions, prompts, assessments, discussions, and writing samples that are already part of instruction.

What a Cognitive Address Is - and Is Not

A Cognitive Address is a temporary description of demonstrated thinking within a particular dimension and skill. It is not a judgment of intelligence, effort, potential, or worth. A student can have different addresses in different dimensions. The address can also change as the text, prompt, support, and independence change.

- Say, 'The student is currently demonstrating Emergent THINK on this task.'
- Do not say, 'The student is an Emergent thinker.'
- Record what the student can already do before naming what is missing.
- Use the address to select instruction, not to create a permanent group.

What This Looks Like Tomorrow

After a short reading task, a teacher notices that several students chose evidence related to the topic but not evidence that directly proved their answers. Instead of reteaching the entire passage, the teacher plans a ten-minute comparison lesson. Students rank three details from weakest to strongest, explain why the strongest detail fits the exact question, and then apply the same thinking in a two-sentence written response. The lesson is small because the diagnosis is precise.

That is the promise of the matrix: not more testing, more paperwork, or more labels, but a better instructional decision after the evidence is collected.

KEYS TO KEEP

- A score reports performance; a Cognitive Address points toward instruction.
- Students with the same score may need different next lessons.
- Reading answers and written responses should be examined for the thinking they reveal.
- Always describe the demonstrated behavior, not the child.
- Find the Address, name the Next Address, pack what is needed, teach the move, and check for growth.

The Matrix at a Glance

The Writing Matrix combines four dimensions of comprehension with five levels of cognition. The result is a twenty-cell map that helps teachers describe current thinking and select the next move in both reading and writing.

- Understand how the four dimensions and five levels intersect.
- Read a Cognitive Address as a dimension-level coordinate.
- Avoid averaging a student's different strengths into one color or label.

The Two Parts of Every Cognitive Address

Every Cognitive Address has two parts. The first part names the type of thinking. The second part names the level of independence, precision, and depth demonstrated within that thinking.

ADDRESS FORMAT

DIMENSION + LEVEL. Examples: TAP-Visible, THINK-Emergent, TOGGLE-Independent.

The Four Dimensions

Dimension	Central question	In a written response
TAUGHT	What do I know, recall, understand, or apply?	Uses taught content, vocabulary, genre knowledge, craft, structure, or strategy.
TAP	What evidence supports the answer or idea?	Selects, includes, integrates, and evaluates details, examples, facts, quotations, or source information.
THINK	What can I infer, explain, or understand about why?	Develops reasoning, elaboration, interpretation, reflection, or significance.
TOGGLE	How are two or more things related?	Explains and organizes relationships among ideas, evidence, events, paragraphs, texts, or claims.

The Five Levels

Foundational (Beginning)	Emergent (Developing)	Visible (Engaging)	Independent (Independent)	Reflective (High Independent)
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Level	Plain-language description	The next move
Foundational	I recognize, locate, or notice it with strong support.	Identify or recall it more deliberately.
Emergent	I am beginning the thinking, but it is partial or inconsistent.	Make the understanding visible and complete.
Visible	I can show and explain the thinking, often with some support.	Initiate and complete it independently.
Independent	I can select and carry out the thinking on my own.	Evaluate, adapt, connect, and extend it.
Reflective	I can evaluate, synthesize, transfer, and create.	Deepen the work in increasingly novel contexts.

The Twenty-Cell Matrix

The Writing Matrix: Quick View

Dimension	Foundational	Emergent	Visible	Independent	Reflective
TAUGHT	Recognize	Recall	Explain	Apply	Connect and extend
TAP	Locate	Identify	Select	Support precisely	Evaluate and synthesize
THINK	Notice	Infer	Explain why	Reason independently	Interpret and evaluate
TOGGLE	Notice a connection	Name a relationship	Explain the relationship	Analyze the relationship	Synthesize and create

How the Same Dimension Changes Across Levels

A TAP task is not automatically low-level or high-level. At Foundational, TAP may ask a student to locate an obvious detail. At Visible, TAP asks the student to select relevant evidence and explain what it supports. At Reflective, TAP asks the student to synthesize several pieces of evidence, evaluate their strength, and identify what information is still missing.

The same is true in writing. A Foundational TAP response may copy a sentence from the text. An Independent TAP response selects and integrates precise evidence. A Reflective TAP response weighs sources, combines evidence, and explains the limitations of the available support.

Do Not Average Away the Profile

A student may be Independent in TAUGHT, Visible in TAP, Emergent in THINK, and Foundational in TOGGLE. Averaging those four addresses into one overall level removes the very information the teacher needs. Preserve the pattern. The profile shows which strengths can support instruction and which dimension may be creating the roadblock.

EXAMPLE PROFILE

TAUGHT-Independent: applies what has been taught without prompting.

TAP-Visible: selects relevant evidence but not always the strongest evidence.

THINK-Emergent: makes a plausible inference but does not fully explain why.

TOGGLE-Foundational: notices a connection but cannot yet name or explain the relationship.

Cognitive Demand Is Not the Same as Writing Length

A one-sentence response can require Reflective thinking. A five-paragraph response can remain at Foundational if it only repeats information. When teachers analyze written work, they should name both the cognitive demand and the production demand. The prompt may require a short constructed response, an extended constructed response, or a full composition. The length changes the amount of writing; it does not automatically determine the depth of thinking.

KEYS TO KEEP

- Every address combines one dimension with one cognitive level.
- The four dimensions describe the kind of thinking; the five levels describe how far the thinking goes.
- The color belongs to the demonstrated thinking, not to the student.
- Preserve the four-part profile rather than producing one average color.
- Response length and cognitive depth must be considered separately.

The Five Levels of Thinking

Teachers need a quick, reliable way to distinguish the five levels without learning five separate systems. This chapter explains the levels in one continuous progression and shows how each appears in reading and writing.

- Recognize the observable behavior at each level.
- Separate supported success from independent performance.
- Use the color progression consistently from red through blue.

One Progression, Many Skills

The five levels are not tied to one grade, one genre, or one question type. They describe how a student approaches a particular cognitive demand. The same student may demonstrate different levels on different skills, and a student may move between levels as support is added or removed.

Foundational (Beginning)	Emergent (Developing)	Visible (Engaging)	Independent (Independent)	Reflective (High Independent)
------------------------------------	---------------------------------	------------------------------	-------------------------------------	---

Foundational: Recognize, Locate, or Notice

Foundational thinking begins with access. The student may recognize a taught concept when it is shown, locate an obvious sentence, restate literal information, or notice that two things connect. Strong support, repeated wording, answer choices, or a model may still be necessary.

In writing, the student may copy an obvious detail, restate the prompt, label a concept, or produce one sentence after seeing an example. The work is not empty. It shows the entry point for instruction.

MOVE TOWARD EMERGENT

Ask the student to identify or recall the information deliberately rather than only recognizing it when it appears.

Emergent: Begin, Identify, or Partly Connect

Emergent thinking contains the beginning of the intended process. The student may recall a concept with a prompt, choose evidence related to the topic, make a plausible inference, or name a relationship. The response is often reasonable but broad, incomplete, or inconsistent.

In writing, the student may state an answer but provide weak support, include evidence without explaining it, or begin an organized response that is not yet developed. The teacher's task is to identify what is already present and teach the missing connection.

MOVE TOWARD VISIBLE

Help the student make the thinking complete and observable through explanation, relevant evidence, and clear relationship language.

Visible: Show and Explain

At Visible, the student's understanding can be seen, heard, or read. The student explains a taught concept, selects relevant evidence, supports an inference, or explains a relationship. However, the success may still depend on a familiar format, a graphic organizer, a sentence frame, partner talk, or teacher prompting.

In writing, the response usually has a recognizable answer, evidence, explanation, and basic organization. The next goal is not simply a longer response. It is greater control with less support.

MOVE TOWARD INDEPENDENT

Gradually remove prompts and require the student to select the strategy, evidence, and organization without being told what to use.

Independent: Initiate, Select, and Carry Out

Independent thinking includes initiation. The student knows how to begin, selects an appropriate strategy or evidence, carries out the reasoning, and can explain the decision. Independence does not mean speed, silence, perfection, or never asking a question. It means the student owns the important cognitive choices.

In writing, the student can interpret the prompt, develop a controlling idea, select and integrate evidence, explain the reasoning, organize the response, revise for meaning, and use an editing routine with limited teacher direction.

MOVE TOWARD REFLECTIVE

Ask the student to evaluate alternatives, transfer the learning, revise decisions deliberately, and explain why one approach is stronger than another.

Reflective: Evaluate, Synthesize, Transfer, and Create

Reflective students examine the quality of their own thinking. They compare interpretations, weigh evidence, identify limitations, transfer a concept to a new context, or create a new application. Reflective work is not simply more work. It requires more meaningful intellectual territory.

In writing, the student may address nuance, compare sources, acknowledge a counterargument, adapt the structure for an audience, revise for a deliberate effect, or explain the significance of an idea beyond the immediate text.

CONTINUE BEYOND REFLECTIVE

Increase novelty, complexity, ambiguity, independence, and transfer. Reflective is a depth of work, not a finish line.

A Quick Comparison

Level	Reading evidence	Writing evidence	Teacher focus
Foundational	Recognizes or locates the obvious.	Copies, labels, or restates.	Build access and deliberate identification.
Emergent	Begins the thinking but is broad or incomplete.	States an idea with partial support or development.	Complete the missing connection.
Visible	Explains the thinking with some support.	Shows answer, evidence, reasoning, and basic organization.	Fade scaffolds and increase precision.
Independent	Chooses and performs the process alone.	Plans, develops, revises, and edits with ownership.	Promote evaluation and transfer.
Reflective	Evaluates, synthesizes, and extends.	Creates insight and makes deliberate craft decisions.	Increase novelty and significance.

A Note About Support

Support changes what we can claim about independence. A correct answer reached after several leading questions may show that the student can perform the thinking with support, but it does not yet establish Independent performance. Record both the level of cognition and the amount of support required. Then remove one support at a time.

Language supports, accessibility tools, oral rehearsal, and assistive technology do not automatically lower the cognitive level. The important question is whether the support improves access or completes the thinking for the student. A support that allows a student to express an independently developed idea preserves cognition. A prompt that supplies the idea does not.

KEYS TO KEEP

- Foundational is an entry point, not a failure label.
- Emergent responses contain part of the next level and should be analyzed for what is already present.
- Visible understanding is not always Independent understanding.
- Independence includes initiating and selecting the process, not merely finishing it.
- Reflective work increases evaluation, synthesis, transfer, and creation rather than quantity alone.

The Four Dimensions in Question and Prompt Form

The four dimensions work in two forms. In reading, they become questions that reveal comprehension. In writing, they become prompts that require students to communicate and develop that comprehension.

- Distinguish TAUGHT, TAP, THINK, and TOGGLE.
- Convert a reading question into a clear written-response prompt.
- Identify the primary and supporting dimensions in a complex task.

The Same Thinking, Two Ways to See It

A question asks the student to choose, state, or explain an answer. A writing prompt asks the student to construct and develop that answer. The underlying dimension can remain the same. The difference is that writing requires the student to make more of the thinking visible.

The Four Dimensions in Reading and Writing

Dimension	Question form	Written-response prompt form
TAUGHT	What have you learned about how roots help a plant?	Explain how roots help a plant, using what you have learned about plant structures.
TAP	Which detail best supports the idea that roots protect the plant during dry weather?	Explain which details best support the idea that roots protect the plant during dry weather.
THINK	Why can deep roots help a plant survive?	Explain why deep roots can help a plant survive. Support your explanation with evidence.
TOGGLE	How is root depth related to the amount of water a plant can reach?	Analyze the relationship between root depth and the amount of water a plant can reach.

TAUGHT: Use What Has Been Learned

TAUGHT focuses on knowledge, vocabulary, concepts, genre expectations, strategies, and craft that have been explicitly introduced. At lower levels, students recognize or recall. At higher levels, they apply, connect, and transfer what was taught.

- Question: Which text structure was used in paragraph 3?
- Prompt: Describe the text structure used in paragraph 3 and explain how you recognized it.
- Composition prompt: Apply what you have learned about strong conclusions to revise the final paragraph.

TAP: Select and Use Evidence

TAP focuses on the quality of support. Evidence may include a fact, example, quotation, paraphrase, action, dialogue, sensory detail, research note, or source. Students progress from locating something in the text to deciding what evidence is relevant, precise, strong, and sufficient.

- Question: Which detail best supports the reader's conclusion?
- Prompt: Explain which detail best supports the conclusion and why it is stronger than the other available details.
- Composition prompt: Develop an informational paragraph that uses accurate facts and examples to support the main idea.

THINK: Develop Meaning and Reasoning

THINK asks students to move beyond the literal. It includes inference, motivation, interpretation, explanation, elaboration, reasoning, reflection, and significance. In writing, THINK is often the place where a response either becomes meaningful or remains a summary.

- Question: Why does the narrator hesitate before speaking?
- Prompt: Explain why the narrator hesitates before speaking. Use evidence from the passage to support your reasoning.
- Composition prompt: Develop an argument explaining why the proposed change would benefit the community.

TOGGLE: Explain Relationships

TOGGLE focuses on what happens between ideas. Students may compare, trace cause and effect, analyze sequence, connect a claim to evidence, explain how setting shapes a character, or show how paragraphs build a conclusion. In writing, TOGGLE also supports organization and cohesion because writers must make relationships visible to the reader.

- Question: How does the setting influence the character's decision?
- Prompt: Analyze the relationship between the setting and the character's decision.
- Composition prompt: Compare the two solutions and explain how each would affect the community differently.

When a Prompt Uses More Than One Dimension

Complex tasks often require several dimensions. The teacher should identify the primary dimension - the thinking the prompt is mainly designed to reveal - and the supporting dimensions that make success possible.

EXAMPLE PROMPT

Analyze how the two authors develop different views of the same event. Use evidence from both texts to support your response.

Role	Dimension	Why it is present
Primary	TOGGLE	The student must analyze a relationship between two authors' views.
Supporting	TAP	The student must select evidence from both texts.
Supporting	THINK	The student must explain what the evidence reveals about each view.
Supporting	TAUGHT	The student applies taught knowledge about viewpoint and text development.

Writing Prompts Should Be Directions

A reading question may begin with who, what, when, where, why, or how. A written-response prompt should clearly direct the student to produce writing. Strong prompts commonly begin with verbs such as Explain, Describe, Analyze, Compare, Evaluate, Develop, Justify, or Synthesize. The verb should match the intended cognitive demand rather than merely make the prompt sound difficult.

PROMPT-WRITING CHECK

- Does the opening verb clearly tell students what to produce?
- Can students identify the main idea they must address?
- Is evidence required when the task is text-based?
- Does the prompt reveal one primary dimension even if other dimensions support it?
- Is the expected response length stated or otherwise clear?

KEYS TO KEEP

- Every dimension can appear as a reading question or a written-response prompt.
- TAUGHT uses learning, TAP uses evidence, THINK develops meaning, and TOGGLE explains relationships.
- Complex prompts may include all four dimensions, but one should remain primary.
- Written prompts should begin with a clear direction such as Explain, Describe, Analyze, or Evaluate.
- Writing makes more of the student's thinking visible than an answer choice alone.

Find the Cognitive Address

A Cognitive Address should be based on a pattern of evidence, not one answer. This chapter gives teachers a short process for determining the current dimension and level in reading and writing.

- Use the task, the response, and confirming evidence together.
- Record transitional performance without forcing a false level.
- Distinguish cognition from language, composition, and conventions.

Begin With the Task

Before analyzing the student's response, identify what the task actually required. Name the primary dimension, the target cognitive level, the response format, and the amount of support provided. A student cannot be placed accurately if the demand of the task is unclear.

Task Analysis Before Placement

Question to ask	Example
What dimension is primary?	THINK: the student must infer why the character changes a decision.
What level is targeted?	Independent: the student must select evidence and explain the reasoning without prompts.
What response format is required?	A short constructed response.
What support was available?	The passage and a general editing checklist; no sentence frame.

Then Study the Response

Ask what the student actually demonstrated. Look first for the highest level that appears consistently, not the hardest item the student happened to answer correctly. In writing, identify the cognitive behavior before scoring organization or conventions. A response can contain strong thinking even when spelling or punctuation is still developing.

- What did the student understand accurately?
- What evidence did the student select or ignore?
- Where did the reasoning stop?
- What relationship did the student name, explain, or analyze?
- How much teacher support was required?
- Can the student repeat the behavior with a new text or prompt?

Use Three Sources of Evidence

Whenever practical, confirm an address with at least three meaningful demonstrations. The evidence can come from one brief assessment sequence rather than three separate tests.

1. Performance on a question or prompt. Did the student meet the intended demand?
2. The response pattern. What does the selected answer, written explanation, revision, or error reveal?
3. A confirming explanation or transfer task. Can the student explain the thinking or use it again in a fresh context?

PLACEMENT LANGUAGE

Tentative Address: one meaningful indicator.

Probable Address: two aligned indicators.

Confirmed Instructional Address: a stable pattern across three or more opportunities.

Record Students Who Are Between Levels

Students often live between addresses while a skill is developing. A student may show Visible THINK during a discussion and Emergent THINK in independent writing. Another may select strong evidence in a familiar passage but choose broad evidence in a new subject area. Record the transition instead of forcing a false precision.

TRANSITION NOTATION

THINK: Emergent to Visible. The student makes a reasonable inference and can connect it to evidence with a prompt, but does not yet do so consistently in independent writing.

Separate Mode From Cognition

A student may think more deeply than the written product initially shows. Oral rehearsal, speech-to-text, a bilingual glossary, an adapted writing tool, or a visual organizer may reveal reasoning that handwriting or language production has concealed. Record the cognitive evidence and the mode of demonstration. Then teach the writing skills that will help the student communicate the thinking more independently.

A More Accurate Student Profile

Area	What the teacher records
Cognitive Address	THINK-Independent orally; THINK-Visible in independent writing.
Composition	Controlling idea is clear; elaboration is brief and paragraph structure is uneven.
Conventions	Sentence boundaries and capitalization need explicit practice.
Access	Oral rehearsal and a planning frame improve expression without supplying the idea.

Do Not Diagnose From a Misaligned Task

If the passage depends on unfamiliar background knowledge, the directions are unclear, or the vocabulary was never taught or supported, the result may not represent cognition accurately. Before assigning an address, ask whether the student had reasonable access to the text and task. The matrix should clarify instruction, not convert an access barrier into a permanent judgment.

KEYS TO KEEP

- Identify the task's dimension, level, response format, and supports before interpreting the response.
- Use a pattern of evidence rather than one item.
- Record transitional performance when the skill is emerging but not stable.
- Separate the Cognitive Address from composition, conventions, language, and access needs.
- Choose the address that best guides the next lesson, not the label that sounds most precise.

Learn From the Answer Choices

Selected-response items can provide more than a right-or-wrong score when the answer choices represent meaningful reasoning patterns. This chapter shows how to use distractors as clues while avoiding overinterpretation.

- Recognize common thinking patterns inside incorrect answer choices.
- Design answer choices that are plausible and instructionally useful.
- Confirm a suspected address before changing instruction.

Wrong answers are not all equally wrong. Each may reveal a different stopping point in the student's thinking.

The Correct Answer Measures Success; the Distractors May Explain the Miss

A traditional item report tells the teacher which students selected the correct answer. A diagnostic item goes one step further. Each distractor is written around a believable misconception, partial understanding, or incomplete reasoning path. When a pattern repeats, the choices can help the teacher decide what to ask next and what to teach.

A distractor does not prove a student's level. A student may misread, guess, rush, misunderstand one word, or lose attention. Treat the selected choice as a clue. Confirm the clue through another item, a brief explanation, or a written response.

Four Common Distractor Patterns

Pattern	What it may reveal	Useful follow-up
Literal restatement	The student notices words in the passage but does not move to the implied meaning.	What do these details suggest beyond what the author states directly?
Related but weak evidence	The student understands the topic but not the exact proof needed.	How does this detail answer the precise question?
Reasonable but unsupported inference	The student can infer but does not anchor the idea in the text.	Which clue caused you to think that?
Relationship named but not analyzed	The student sees the connection but cannot explain its effect or significance.	What changes because this relationship exists?

An Annotated THINK Item

READING QUESTION

Why does the narrator most likely return to the community garden at the end of the passage?

Choice	Answer	Possible reasoning pattern
A	The narrator returns because the passage says the garden is still open.	Relies on a literal fact that does not explain the decision.
B	The narrator returns because gardening is enjoyable.	Offers a plausible general idea, but the text does not make it the strongest explanation.
C	The narrator returns because the garden reminds the narrator of a promise to help the neighborhood.	Connects a relevant clue to an implied motivation.
D	The narrator returns because the weather becomes cooler.	Notifies a nearby detail but confuses sequence with cause.

If a student repeatedly selects choices like A, the next lesson may focus on moving beyond literal repetition. If a student repeatedly selects choices like B, the next lesson may focus on testing a reasonable idea against the available evidence. If a student selects D, the roadblock may be relationship analysis rather than inference alone.

Use Answer Choices to Lead Into Writing

A selected response can be followed by a short written prompt that confirms the reasoning. For the item above, ask: Explain why the narrator returns to the community garden. Use one detail from the passage to support your response. The student's writing reveals whether the choice was based on evidence, guessing, or a partially formed idea.

ONE QUESTION, TWO FORMS OF EVIDENCE

The selected answer shows which conclusion the student chose.

The written response shows whether the student can select evidence and explain the connection.

The two results together produce a more reliable Cognitive Address.

How to Write Useful Distractors

1. Begin with the intended reasoning, not with random wrong answers.
2. List the actual misunderstandings students commonly show in discussion or writing.
3. Write each distractor so that it is believable to a student who holds that misunderstanding.
4. Keep vocabulary and sentence length comparable so the correct answer is not obvious because of style.
5. Avoid tricks. The goal is to reveal thinking, not to surprise students.
6. Plan a brief follow-up question that can confirm what the selected choice may mean.

Do Not Force One Choice for Every Level

A four-choice item cannot always represent all five cognitive levels, and it should not try to do so artificially. Some questions may have two distractors at a similar level that reflect different misconceptions. Other items may target only the distinction between literal and inferential reasoning. Use the matrix to make choices purposeful, not formulaic.

From Item Pattern to Next Lesson

Repeated response pattern	Likely next instructional move
Chooses words that match the passage	Compare a literal detail with the meaning the details imply.
Chooses evidence on the topic but not the proof	Sort details as merely related, relevant, and strongest.
Chooses a plausible inference with no support	Require one clue and a sentence explaining how it led to the inference.
Confuses before-and-after with cause-and-effect	Trace what actually caused the change and test whether the second event would occur without the first.
Selects the strongest answer but cannot explain why	Move from answer selection to a brief written justification.

KEYS TO KEEP

- Treat a distractor as a clue, not a diagnosis.
- Build wrong answers around real misconceptions and incomplete reasoning patterns.
- Follow selected responses with a brief explanation or written response when the placement matters.
- Do not force every answer choice to represent a different color.
- Use patterns across items to decide the next lesson.

Read a Written Response Through Three Lenses

A written response should not be reduced to one overall impression. Teachers can make better decisions by examining the cognition, the composition, and the conventions separately before combining the results.

- Identify the student's Cognitive Address within the response.
- Separate organization and craft from the quality of the thinking.
- Teach conventions without allowing errors to erase strong reasoning.

Why One Writing Score Is Often Not Enough

Writing asks students to manage several demands at once. They must understand the prompt, develop an idea, select evidence, explain reasoning, organize the response, choose words, construct sentences, revise, and edit. A single score may summarize the finished product, but it rarely tells the teacher which part of the process needs the next lesson.

The three-lens approach keeps the analysis clear. First examine the thinking. Then examine how the response is built. Finally examine the conventions that help the reader understand it.

The Three Lenses

Lens	Central question	What to notice
Cognition	What does the student understand and how deeply is it developed?	TAUGHT, TAP, THINK, TOGGLE, evidence, reasoning, relationships, significance.
Composition	How effectively is the response built for its purpose and audience?	Controlling idea, structure, development, cohesion, craft, word choice, paragraphing.
Conventions	How accurately and clearly is the response edited?	Sentence boundaries, syntax, grammar, spelling, capitalization, punctuation.

Lens One: Cognition

Read once for meaning before marking errors. Identify the response's primary dimension and the highest level the student demonstrates consistently. Ask whether the student answers the prompt, uses evidence, explains why the evidence matters, and makes relationships clear.

- TAUGHT: Does the student apply the relevant content, genre knowledge, or strategy?
- TAP: Is the evidence present, relevant, precise, and sufficient?
- THINK: Does the student move beyond summary into reasoning or interpretation?
- TOGGLE: Are relationships explained and used to organize the response?

Lens Two: Composition

Next, examine how the response is built. A student may have a strong idea that is difficult to follow because the paragraph order is unclear. Another may organize well but repeat the same shallow point. Composition includes the controlling idea, structure, development, cohesion, craft, word choice, and attention to audience and purpose.

In a short constructed response, composition may be visible in only a few sentences: a direct answer, evidence, explanation, and a clear relationship. In an extended response, the teacher can also examine paragraph development, transitions, introduction, conclusion, and the intentional use of structure.

Lens Three: Conventions

Finally, examine the conventions that allow the reader to understand the message. The teacher may identify patterns in sentence construction, grammar, spelling, capitalization, or punctuation. These patterns deserve explicit instruction and practice both in isolation and inside authentic writing.

Conventions matter, but they should not erase clear cognitive evidence. A student who develops a strong interpretation with imperfect punctuation may demonstrate advanced THINK cognition while still needing a focused editing lesson. Likewise, a polished response with correct spelling may remain Foundational if it only repeats the passage.

Two Responses That Need Different Lessons

PROMPT

Explain why the speaker changes a decision after hearing the community members. Use evidence from the passage to support your response.

Response	Three-lens reading	Next lesson
Emsy: The speaker changes the decision because the stories show that the plan would leave some families without transportation. The sentence boundaries are uneven, but the evidence and reasoning are clear.	Cognition: THINK-Independent. Composition: clear but compact. Conventions: sentence boundaries need support.	Teach sentence boundaries in isolation, then ask Emsy to edit the authentic response without reducing the reasoning demand.
Merrick: The speaker listened to the community. The community told stories. The speaker changed the decision. The writing is correctly punctuated but mostly retells events.	Cognition: THINK-Foundational to Emergent. Composition: orderly but underdeveloped. Conventions: generally controlled.	Teach the evidence-to-reasoning bridge: what did the stories reveal, and why did that information change the decision?

Revision and Editing Are Different Moves

Revision improves meaning. A revision lesson may strengthen the answer, replace weak evidence, add reasoning, reorganize relationships, or choose more purposeful language. Editing improves correctness and clarity at the sentence and word level. Students need both, but they should not be taught as if they are the same action.

Revision questions	Editing questions
Does the response answer the exact prompt?	Are sentence boundaries clear?
Is the evidence strong and sufficient?	Do subjects and verbs agree?
Does the reasoning explain why the evidence matters?	Are spelling patterns applied correctly?
Are relationships and paragraph order clear?	Are capitalization and punctuation correct?
Does the conclusion add significance rather than repeat?	Does each sentence communicate the intended meaning?

A Practical Marking Routine

1. Read the entire response once without marking.

2. Underline the central answer or controlling idea.
3. Bracket the evidence and label its strength.
4. Circle the reasoning that explains why the evidence matters.
5. Draw a simple connection between ideas that TOGGLE together.
6. Name one composition strength and one revision priority.
7. Identify one conventions pattern for explicit practice rather than correcting every error at once.

KEYS TO KEEP

- Read for meaning before correcting mechanics.
- Score cognition, composition, and conventions as related but separate sources of information.
- Strong conventions do not prove deep thinking, and weak conventions do not erase it.
- Revision strengthens meaning; editing strengthens correctness and clarity.
- Choose one precise next lesson instead of marking every possible weakness.

The Twenty Cognitive Addresses

The twenty cells of the matrix are the practical center of the system. Each address describes what the student is doing, what comes next, and how the teacher can connect reading questions to written-response prompts.

- Use a concise description for every address.
- Select a teacher prompt and next move without searching through a long chapter.
- Connect the same cognitive target across reading and writing.

How to Use This Chapter

Find the dimension that matches the task. Move across the five levels until the description most closely matches the student's consistent performance. Read the Next Address column and choose one teacher prompt or instructional move. The complete printable version appears again in The Teacher's Moving Kit.

TAUGHT Addresses

Level	Student is doing	Next move and teacher language	Reading question / writing prompt
Foundational	Recognizes familiar information when it is shown or repeated.	Move to recall. Ask: What do you remember learning about this?	Question: Which word names the taught structure? Prompt: Describe what you remember about the structure.
Emergent	Recalls a fact, term, or process with some prompting.	Move to explanation. Ask: How would you explain this in your own words?	Question: What does the term mean? Prompt: Explain the term in your own words and give an example.
Visible	Explains taught information but applies it inconsistently.	Move to independent application. Ask: Which learning applies here, and how will you use it?	Question: Which taught strategy helps with this passage? Prompt: Apply the strategy to explain the passage.
Independent	Selects and applies taught learning without a prompt.	Move to transfer. Ask: Where else could this learning be useful?	Question: How does prior learning deepen this idea? Prompt: Analyze how the prior concept changes your understanding.
Reflective	Connects, evaluates, adapts, and extends prior learning.	Deepen through synthesis. Ask: What new understanding can you create by combining these ideas?	Question: Which earlier concept best reframes this issue? Prompt: Synthesize the concepts to develop a new conclusion.

TAP Addresses

Level	Student is doing	Next move and teacher language	Reading question / writing prompt
Foundational	Locates an obvious stated detail, often through matching words.	Move to relevance. Ask: Does this detail answer the exact question?	Question: Which sentence states the location? Prompt: Describe the location using one detail from the text.
Emergent	Selects evidence related to the topic but not always to the claim.	Move to relevant evidence. Ask: Which detail most directly supports your answer?	Question: Which detail supports the idea? Prompt: Explain which detail directly supports the idea.
Visible	Selects relevant evidence and identifies what it supports.	Move to precision. Ask: Is there a stronger detail that proves the idea more clearly?	Question: Which evidence is strongest? Prompt: Justify which evidence is strongest and why.
Independent	Selects and integrates strong, precise evidence independently.	Move to evaluation. Ask: Which pieces work together, and are they sufficient?	Question: Which two details create the strongest support? Prompt: Integrate two details and explain how they work together.
Reflective	Synthesizes, weighs, and critiques evidence across details or sources.	Deepen through limits and missing evidence. Ask: What evidence would strengthen or change the conclusion?	Question: What evidence is missing? Prompt: Evaluate the evidence and propose what additional support is needed.

THINK Addresses

Level	Student is doing	Next move and teacher language	Reading question / writing prompt
Foundational	Restates literal information or recognizes an obvious implied idea.	Move to a simple inference. Ask: What do these clues make you think?	Question: What do the details suggest? Prompt: Explain what the details suggest even though it is not stated directly.
Emergent	Makes a plausible inference but relies on one clue or personal opinion.	Move to text-based support. Ask: What in the text caused you to think that?	Question: What can be inferred? Prompt: Explain the inference and support it with a relevant clue.
Visible	Gives an inference and evidence, but the explanation is brief or incomplete.	Move to full reasoning. Ask: How does that evidence lead to your conclusion?	Question: Why does the evidence support the inference? Prompt: Explain the complete evidence-to-reasoning connection.
Independent	Develops and supports a logical inference without prompting.	Move to alternatives. Ask: What other interpretation is possible, and which is stronger?	Question: Which interpretation is best supported? Prompt: Compare two interpretations and defend the stronger one.
Reflective	Evaluates nuance, ambiguity, author choices, and significance.	Deepen through transfer. Ask: Why might the author leave this unstated, and how does that choice affect meaning?	Question: How does the unstated idea shape the reader? Prompt: Evaluate the author's choice and explain its significance.

TOGGLE Addresses

Level	Student is doing	Next move and teacher language	Reading question / writing prompt
Foundational	Notifies that two ideas, events, or elements connect.	Move to naming the relationship. Ask: What kind of connection is this?	Question: Which two events are connected? Prompt: Describe the connection between the two events.
Emergent	Names a relationship but does not fully explain how it works.	Move to explanation. Ask: What does one have to do with the other?	Question: What relationship exists? Prompt: Explain how the two ideas are related.
Visible	Explains the relationship using basic relational language.	Move to analysis. Ask: What changes because this relationship exists?	Question: How does one event affect the other? Prompt: Analyze how the first event influences the second.
Independent	Analyzes interactions, patterns, contrasts, causes, and effects.	Move to significance. Ask: What larger meaning or pattern does this relationship reveal?	Question: Why is the relationship important? Prompt: Analyze the relationship and explain its significance.
Reflective	Synthesizes complex relationships and transfers the pattern to a new context.	Deepen through creation. Ask: How could this pattern explain or predict something new?	Question: Where else might this pattern apply? Prompt: Synthesize the relationships to develop a new prediction or insight.

When More Than One Address Appears

A response may demonstrate several dimensions at different levels. Record the primary address first, then note the supporting addresses that affect success. For example, a student may be THINK-Independent but TAP-Visible. The inference is strong, but the chosen evidence is not yet the most precise. The next lesson should target evidence selection without reteaching the entire inference process.

KEYS TO KEEP

- Use the twenty addresses as a quick instructional reference, not a permanent placement chart.
- Identify what the student is already doing before naming the next move.
- The reading question and writing prompt should target the same thinking in different response forms.
- A response may show different levels across dimensions; preserve that pattern.
- Reflective students still need new contexts, deeper evaluation, and purposeful creation.

Teach One Level to the Right

The most manageable instructional move is usually the next observable level, not a leap from the beginning of the progression to the end. This chapter turns that principle into a repeatable reading-and-writing lesson routine.

- Name a next move that is small enough to teach and measure.
- Model the difference between the current and next-level response.
- Fade support until the student owns the new thinking.

Do not ask a student to move across the entire matrix in one lesson. Teach the next reachable level and verify the move.

Why Small Cognitive Moves Work

Broad goals such as 'improve comprehension' or 'write a stronger response' are difficult to teach and difficult to measure. A next-level goal is specific: select evidence that directly supports the answer; explain how the evidence leads to the inference; analyze how one idea affects another; apply the taught structure independently.

The student can see the difference, the teacher can model the missing step, and both can recognize when the behavior becomes independent.

The Four Moves

From	To	Instructional emphasis
Foundational	Emergent	Move from recognition or noticing to deliberate recall, identification, or naming.
Emergent	Visible	Complete the partial thinking through relevant evidence, explanation, or relationship language.
Visible	Independent	Fade prompts and require the student to initiate, select, and carry out the process.
Independent	Reflective	Evaluate, synthesize, adapt, transfer, critique, or create.

The Seven-Step Moving Lesson

1. Name what the student can already do. Begin from strength, not deficiency.
2. State the Next Address in student-friendly language.
3. Compare two responses so the difference between the levels is visible.
4. Model the missing cognitive step while thinking aloud.
5. Guide the student through one or two examples.
6. Remove one support and ask the student to try independently.
7. Collect a brief new response to check whether the move is beginning to hold.

Example: THINK-Emergent to THINK-Visible

CURRENT BEHAVIOR

The student makes a reasonable inference but does not consistently connect it to a specific clue.

NEXT ADDRESS

The student states the inference and identifies relevant evidence that supports it.

The teacher places two short responses side by side. One states only the inference. The other states the same inference and points to the detail that made the inference reasonable. The teacher models: 'I cannot stop at what I think. I must show what in the text caused me to think it.' Students then match three inferences to supporting clues and write one complete response.

TEACHER LANGUAGE

Your inference makes sense. Now show the reader the clue that led you there. What in the text caused you to think that?

Example: TAP-Visible to TAP-Independent

The student can select relevant evidence when the teacher asks which detail works, but does not independently compare the available evidence. The lesson should not reteach how to find evidence. It should teach how to rank evidence for precision and strength.

1. Present three relevant details.
2. Model why one is broad, one is useful, and one is the strongest proof.
3. Ask students to rank a new set and justify the ranking.
4. Provide a fresh prompt and require independent evidence selection in writing.

Teach Reading and Writing Together

A reading question can introduce the cognitive move, but writing helps stabilize it. After students select the strongest evidence, ask them to write one sentence explaining why it is strongest. After students identify a relationship, ask them to write how one element affects the other. The written step makes the reasoning visible and gives the teacher another piece of evidence.

Fade the Scaffold, Not the Thinking

Scaffolds should help students access and rehearse the target. They should not remain in place so long that the student never has to initiate the process. A practical fading sequence is: teacher model, shared response, sentence frame, cue card, independent response, transfer response.

Support	What the teacher watches for	When to reduce it
Think-aloud	Can the student identify the step the teacher modeled?	When the student can explain the process back.
Sentence frame	Can the student complete the reasoning rather than copy words?	When the frame begins to restrict or replace independent language.
Graphic organizer	Can the student use the categories to plan?	When the student can plan the same relationships on a blank page.
Partner rehearsal	Can the student state the idea clearly before writing?	When the student can rehearse internally and write without relying on a partner.

Check the Move With Fresh Evidence

The practice item used during modeling is not enough to confirm a new address. Give the student a new question, prompt, or passage with reduced support. Look for accuracy, consistency, independence, and transfer. A move may be beginning before it is fully secure. Record growth honestly and continue practice as needed.

KEYS TO KEEP

- Write the goal as one observable move, not a broad wish.
- Compare current-level and next-level responses so students can see the difference.
- Use reading to introduce the thinking and writing to make it visible.
- Fade supports deliberately while preserving the cognitive demand.
- Confirm the move with a fresh task, not only the example used during teaching.

Group by What Students Need Next

Flexible groups become more useful when they are formed around a shared next instructional need rather than a broad score or permanent ability label.

- Form groups using the current address, roadblock, and destination.
- Choose whole-group, small-group, or individual instruction intentionally.
- Move students as soon as new evidence changes the need.

A Group Is a Temporary Instructional Decision

Students should not be grouped because they are 'red students,' 'low readers,' or 'weak writers.' They should be grouped because they currently need the same next lesson. A group might need to move from related evidence to relevant evidence, from inference to evidence-supported inference, or from a named relationship to an analyzed relationship.

The group should dissolve when the shared need changes. Some students will move quickly. Others will need another example, a different support, or more time. Flexible grouping works only when movement is expected.

The Three Pieces of a Useful Group

Planning element	Teacher decision
Current Address	What can these students already do consistently?
Roadblock	What specific missing step prevents the next level?
Next Address	What observable behavior will the lesson teach?

Group Names Should Describe the Goal

Avoid	Use instead
The Red Group	Selecting Relevant Evidence
Low Readers	Moving From Literal Clues to Inference
Weak Writers	Explaining Why Evidence Matters
The Advanced Group	Evaluating Competing Interpretations

Choose the Right Instructional Structure

Not every need requires a small group. Use the class map to decide whether the next move belongs in whole-group instruction, a targeted group, or an individual conference.

Structure	Use it when	Example
Whole group	Most students need the same concept or model.	Model the difference between summary and explanation before all students write.
Small group	A cluster of students shares one precise roadblock.	Teach five students to rank related evidence from broad to strongest.
Individual	The need is unique, sensitive, or tied to one student's process.	Conference with a student whose oral reasoning is stronger than the written expression.
Mixed group	Peer explanation will help and the task has roles at several levels.	Students compare two interpretations and defend evidence in a structured discussion.

A Twenty-Minute Group Routine

Time	Teacher and student action
2 minutes	Name the strength, current address, and Next Address.
4 minutes	Compare a current-level response with a next-level response.
5 minutes	Model the missing step and complete one example together.
5 minutes	Students practice with decreasing support and explain their choices.
4 minutes	Students complete a brief independent reading or writing check.

Group Reading and Writing Around the Same Move

A group working on TAP-Visible to TAP-Independent might first rank evidence for a reading question, then use the strongest detail in a written response. A group working on TOGGLE-Emergent to TOGGLE-Visible might identify cause and effect in a passage, then write two sentences explaining how the cause produced the effect. One cognitive target can support both comprehension and composition.

Monitor Without Creating More Paperwork Than Instruction

Use a simple group record. Note the date, current address, next move, task used, amount of support, and result. A check mark alone is not enough; record a short behavior statement such as 'selected strongest evidence independently in two new passages' or 'explained the relationship with a sentence frame but not yet without it.'

MOVEMENT RULE

Change the group when the evidence changes. Do not keep a student in a group because of an earlier score once the original need is no longer present.

Protect Student Dignity

Do not post names under colors or announce levels publicly. Students can know their personal goal without being compared to classmates. The teacher may display the progression and celebrate many kinds of growth, but individual Cognitive Addresses should remain part of private instructional records and conferences.

KEYS TO KEEP

- Group by the next skill students need, not by an overall score.
- Use goal-based group names rather than colors or ability labels.
- Choose whole group, small group, individual, or mixed grouping based on the evidence.
- Connect reading and writing practice around the same cognitive move.
- Change groups as soon as the shared need changes.

Use the Matrix in Reading

The matrix becomes practical when teachers use one strong text to ask purposeful questions across all four dimensions and several cognitive levels. This chapter models that process with literary and informational text.

- Build a sequence of TAUGHT, TAP, THINK, and TOGGLE questions from one text.
- Increase cognitive demand without making directions unnecessarily difficult.
- Use oral and written follow-ups to make comprehension visible.

Begin With a Worthy Text

A useful matrix lesson begins with a text that gives students something meaningful to notice, question, infer, and connect. The passage should be appropriate for the grade, rich enough to support more than recall, and short enough that the teacher can revisit it closely. Literary and informational texts invite different kinds of evidence, but both can support all four dimensions.

The teacher should read the text first, identify the most important understanding, and then build questions backward from that understanding. The goal is not to write one question for every cell during every lesson. The goal is to choose a sequence that reveals what students know and moves their thinking forward.

Literary Text: The Folded Note

PASSAGE

The school garden had one rule posted on the gate: take only what you need and leave something for the next person. For weeks, the narrator followed the rule without thinking much about it. Then a storm flattened the tomato plants and scattered the labels from every row. The next morning, the narrator found an older neighbor tying the broken stems to wooden stakes. No one had asked the neighbor to come. The narrator wanted to hurry inside before the first bell, but a folded note caught on the gate. It read, 'A garden survives because someone stays.' The narrator looked at the clock, placed the backpack beneath the bench, and reached for a roll of twine. By the time the bell rang, several other students had stopped to help. The garden still looked damaged, but the rows no longer looked abandoned.

A Four-Dimension Question Sequence

Dimension	Question	Likely evidence of understanding
TAUGHT	What taught idea about theme or lesson helps you understand the note on the gate?	The student recalls that a theme is a message developed through events and choices, not merely a topic.
TAP	Which detail most strongly supports the idea that the narrator accepts responsibility?	The student selects the decision to put down the backpack and reach for twine, rather than a detail that is merely about the garden.
THINK	Why does the narrator decide to help even though the first bell is near?	The student infers that the note and the neighbor's actions change how the narrator understands responsibility.
TOGGLE	How does the older neighbor's action influence the narrator and then the other students?	The student traces a chain of influence rather than listing three separate actions.

Move One Question Through the Five Levels

The THINK question can be adjusted without changing the passage. Notice that the progression changes the reasoning demand, not merely the number of words in the question.

Level	THINK question
Foundational	What does the narrator do after reading the note?
Emergent	What can the reader infer about the narrator after the note is read?
Visible	Why does the note influence the narrator? Use one clue from the passage.
Independent	How do the note and the neighbor's actions work together to change the narrator's decision?
Reflective	Why might the author leave the writer of the note unidentified, and how does that choice strengthen the passage's message?

Model the Reasoning, Then Release It

For students moving from Emergent to Visible THINK, the teacher might say: 'I know the narrator decides to help, but the question asks why. I will combine two clues. The neighbor is already repairing the plants even though no one asked. The note says a garden survives because someone stays. Together, those clues show the narrator beginning to see that responsibility belongs to whoever notices the need.'

Students can then practice with a second inference, first orally and then in a two- or three-sentence response. The oral rehearsal supports access; the written response shows whether the reasoning can be communicated.

Informational Text: Why Shade Changes a Street

PASSAGE

On a sunny day, pavement absorbs energy and releases heat back into the air. Streets with little shade can become much warmer than nearby areas covered by grass or trees. A mature tree interrupts this process in two ways. Its leaves block part of the sunlight before it reaches the ground. The tree also releases water vapor through tiny openings in its leaves, which can cool the surrounding air. The effect is not limited to comfort. Cooler sidewalks may make walking safer during hot weather, and shaded buildings may require less energy for air conditioning. However, planting one tree does not instantly change a street. Young trees need water, healthy soil, room for roots, and years of growth. Communities that plan for shade must therefore consider both the immediate work of caring for young trees and the long-term benefits of a mature canopy.

Questions Across the Four Dimensions

Dimension	Question	Cognitive focus
TAUGHT	Which taught idea about cause and effect helps explain why shaded pavement is cooler?	Apply a learned structure or concept.
TAP	Which two details best support the idea that trees cool an area in more than one way?	Select and combine precise evidence.
THINK	Why must a community think beyond the day a tree is planted?	Infer the importance of long-term care and delayed benefits.
TOGGLE	How are the needs of young trees related to the benefits of mature trees?	Analyze a relationship across time.

Use a Short Written Follow-Up

After discussion, ask students to write: Analyze the relationship between caring for young trees and receiving the benefits of mature trees. Use evidence from the passage. This prompt turns the TOGGLE question into a written response and reveals whether students can select evidence, explain the relationship, and organize the answer coherently.

Plan Questions Backward From the Understanding

1. Name the most important understanding the text can support.
2. Choose the primary dimension that best reveals that understanding.
3. Write one accessible question that allows all students to enter the discussion.
4. Write one question that requires evidence, reasoning, or relationship analysis.
5. Add a brief written prompt that makes the thinking visible.
6. Plan one next-level prompt for students who are ready to extend the work.

Avoid Four Common Reading Mistakes

- Do not confuse long wording with high cognitive demand.
- Do not ask students to infer before ensuring that essential vocabulary and text access are in place.
- Do not accept a quotation as proof unless the student can explain how it answers the question.
- Do not stop after students answer orally; use a brief written follow-up when you need evidence of independent thinking.

KEYS TO KEEP

- Choose a text rich enough to support recall, evidence, inference, and relationships.
- Build questions backward from the understanding that matters most.
- Increase cognitive demand by changing the mental action, not by making directions harder to read.
- Use oral reasoning to support access and writing to make comprehension visible.
- One strong text can support several addresses without requiring a different passage for every group.

Use the Matrix in Written Responses

Written-response prompts make comprehension visible. This chapter shows how to convert each dimension into a clear direction, plan short and extended responses, and recognize what different levels look like in student writing.

- Write prompts that begin with a clear instructional verb.
- Separate cognitive demand from response length.
- Model answer, evidence, reasoning, and relationships in short and extended writing.

A Prompt Is a Direction, Not a Question With a Blank Line

A strong written-response prompt tells students what to produce. It begins with a clear verb and identifies the central content, relationship, or reasoning. When the task is text-based, it also tells students to use evidence. The response length may be stated directly or established by the lesson and rubric.

From Question to Prompt

Dimension	Question form	Prompt form
TAUGHT	What did you learn about how the author builds suspense?	Describe how the author builds suspense, using the craft ideas taught in this unit.
TAP	Which details best support the conclusion?	Explain which details best support the conclusion and why they are the strongest evidence.
THINK	Why does the speaker change the decision?	Explain why the speaker changes the decision. Support your reasoning with evidence from the text.
TOGGLE	How are the two solutions related?	Analyze the relationship between the two solutions and explain how their effects differ.

Use Verbs That Match the Intended Thinking

Verb	What it asks the writer to do	Common dimension
Describe	Provide accurate features, details, or a clear account.	TAUGHT or Foundational TOGGLE
Explain	Make meaning or reasoning clear.	THINK, TAP, or TOGGLE
Analyze	Examine parts, interactions, effects, or patterns.	TOGGLE or higher-level THINK
Compare	Show meaningful similarities and differences.	TOGGLE
Justify	Defend a decision with evidence and reasoning.	TAP and THINK
Evaluate	Judge strength, quality, significance, or sufficiency.	Reflective TAP, THINK, or TOGGLE
Develop	Build an idea, claim, explanation, or narrative with support.	All dimensions in composition
Synthesize	Combine ideas or sources to create a larger understanding.	Reflective TAP or TOGGLE

Short Constructed Responses

A short constructed response can reveal substantial thinking in a small space. The response should be long enough to answer the prompt and show the intended dimension, but it should not be padded with sentences that do not add meaning.

A COMPACT RESPONSE STRUCTURE

Answer: State the direct response or controlling idea.

Evidence: Select a relevant and precise detail.

Reasoning: Explain how the evidence supports the answer.

Relationship: Make the important connection explicit when the prompt requires TOGGLE thinking.

Five Levels of One THINK Response

PROMPT

Explain why the narrator chooses to help repair the garden. Use evidence from the passage to support your response.

Level	What the response may look like
Foundational	The narrator helps repair the garden. The response restates the action but does not explain why.
Emergent	The narrator helps because the garden is damaged. The reason is plausible but remains broad and mostly literal.
Visible	The narrator helps because the note says the garden survives when someone stays. The response provides relevant evidence but explains the connection only briefly.
Independent	The narrator realizes that responsibility belongs to the people who notice a need. The neighbor's quiet work and the note's message lead the narrator to set down the backpack and help. The evidence and reasoning are connected independently.
Reflective	The unidentified note turns one person's action into a shared responsibility. Because anyone could have written it, the narrator cannot treat helping as someone else's job. The response interprets an author choice and explains its larger significance.

Extended Constructed Responses

An extended response increases production demand. Students must sustain a controlling idea, organize paragraphs, integrate evidence, develop reasoning, and revise for cohesion. The cognitive demand may remain the same as a short response, but the writer must carry it across a longer structure.

A Practical Extended-Response Plan

Section	Purpose	Questions for the writer
Opening	Establish the answer, interpretation, or claim.	What is my clearest response to the prompt? What should the reader understand from the beginning?
Development 1	Present strong evidence and reasoning.	Which detail is strongest? What does it prove? Why does it matter?
Development 2	Add another idea, source, relationship, or example.	How does this evidence extend, contrast with, or deepen the first point?
Conclusion	Bring the reasoning together and add significance.	What larger understanding follows from the evidence?

Plan the Dimensions Before Drafting

Before students write, ask them to mark the prompt for the primary and supporting dimensions. A TOGGLE prompt may require TAP evidence and THINK reasoning. A TAUGHT prompt may require the student to apply a structure and then use TOGGLE to organize it. Planning the dimensions helps students understand that a strong response is more than a collection of quotations.

EXAMPLE PROMPT CODE

Prompt: Analyze how the two texts develop different views of community responsibility. Use evidence from both texts.

Primary dimension: TOGGLE-Independent.

Supporting dimensions: TAP-Independent and THINK-Independent.

Production demand: extended constructed response.

Model, Practice, and Transfer

1. Model how to decode the prompt and identify the primary dimension.
2. Think aloud while selecting evidence and rejecting weaker choices.
3. Write one part of the response in front of students and explain the decisions.
4. Invite students to complete a second part with guidance.
5. Ask students to draft independently from a similar prompt.
6. Revise for the target cognition before editing conventions.
7. Transfer the same thinking to a new text, genre, or response length.

Do Not Let a Formula Replace Thinking

Structures, acronyms, and sentence frames can help students begin, but they should not become a ceiling. A response that mechanically fills spaces may contain every required part and still lack reasoning. Use structure to support the student until the student can make purposeful decisions. Then fade it.

KEYS TO KEEP

- Written prompts should begin with a clear direction such as Explain, Describe, Analyze, Compare, Justify, or Evaluate.
- A short response can require deep thinking; a long response can remain shallow.
- Plan the primary and supporting dimensions before drafting.
- Teach answer, evidence, reasoning, and relationships as connected decisions rather than a mechanical formula.
- Revise the meaning before editing the mechanics.

Teach Writing From Start to Finish

The matrix strengthens writing only when it lives inside complete writing instruction. Students need direct teaching, modeling, guided and independent practice, feedback, and repeated opportunities to compose, revise, edit, and share across purposes, genres, and response lengths.

- Teach every step of the writing process explicitly and provide time to practice it.
- Develop craft and composition in literary, informational, argumentative, short, and extended writing.
- Teach conventions both in focused lessons and inside authentic student writing.

The Matrix Is a Thinking Tool, Not a Replacement for Writing Instruction

TAUGHT, TAP, THINK, and TOGGLE help teachers see the cognitive work inside writing. They do not replace instruction in planning, drafting, revising, editing, sharing, craft, genre, sentence construction, spelling, grammar, capitalization, or punctuation. A complete writing program makes all of those elements visible and teachable.

The most effective sequence is explicit enough that students can see the decisions an experienced writer makes and flexible enough that students eventually make those decisions independently.

The Five Steps of the Writing Process

Step	Teacher explicitly models	Students practice
Planning	Interpret the prompt, choose a purpose and audience, develop a controlling idea, gather evidence or details, and organize relationships.	Talk, sketch, list, sort, map, or outline before drafting.
Drafting	Turn the plan into connected sentences and paragraphs while keeping the purpose visible.	Compose short and extended drafts in literary, informational, argumentative, and text-based forms.
Revising	Rethink ideas, evidence, reasoning, structure, cohesion, craft, and word choice.	Add, remove, rearrange, combine, and replace language to improve meaning.
Editing	Check syntax, grammar, spelling, capitalization, punctuation, and sentence clarity.	Practice a focused convention in isolation, then apply it to authentic writing.
Sharing	Prepare writing for a reader and explain choices made during the process.	Publish, present, discuss, display, exchange feedback, or reflect on growth.

A Direct-Instruction Cycle for Writing

1. Name the skill and explain why writers use it.
2. Show the skill in a strong mentor example.
3. Model the decision through a think-aloud or live writing demonstration.
4. Compare an effective and less effective example.
5. Practice together with immediate feedback.
6. Provide independent practice in a new sentence, paragraph, or composition.
7. Return to authentic writing and require students to apply the skill during revision or editing.

This cycle can be used for a sentence boundary, a strong thesis, a narrative detail, a transition, evidence integration, paragraph development, or a complete extended response. The amount of time changes; the instructional clarity does not.

Teach Conventions in Isolation and in Authentic Writing

Students need focused practice when they are learning a spelling pattern, sentence structure, grammar rule, capitalization use, or punctuation mark. They also need to apply that learning inside real writing. Isolated practice builds accuracy. Authentic application builds transfer.

From Focused Practice to Transfer

Convention	Focused lesson	Authentic application
Sentence boundaries	Sort complete sentences, fragments, and run-ons; revise examples aloud.	Edit a paragraph from the student's draft and explain each boundary decision.
Verb tense	Identify the time of actions and revise inconsistent verbs in short examples.	Check tense consistency in a narrative or informational explanation.
Spelling	Study a taught pattern, morpheme, or word family in words and sentences.	Locate and correct applications of the pattern in the student's own draft.
Capitalization	Practice names, titles, beginnings, and grade-appropriate uses in isolation.	Complete a capitalization pass on an authentic response.
Punctuation	Model how punctuation marks relationships and sentence meaning.	Revise punctuation to improve clarity, rhythm, quotation, or sentence structure in the draft.

Teach Composition Across Three Major Purposes

Writing type	Core work	Matrix connections
Literary	Develop characters, setting, events, conflict, dialogue, imagery, reflection, and an intentional effect.	TAUGHT craft; TAP concrete details; THINK motivation and meaning; TOGGLE event, character, and setting relationships.
Informational	Establish a clear topic or thesis, organize accurate ideas, use facts and examples, explain concepts, and conclude with significance.	TAUGHT content and structure; TAP facts; THINK explanation; TOGGLE text structure and idea relationships.
Argumentative	State a defensible claim, develop reasons, use evidence, explain reasoning, address another view, and conclude purposefully.	TAUGHT genre expectations; TAP evidence; THINK reasoning; TOGGLE claim-evidence and counterargument-rebuttal relationships.

Teach Craft Deliberately

Craft should not be left to chance or taught only as a list of terms. Students need to see how writers use text structure, word choice, figurative language, dialogue, pacing, sentence length, repetition, imagery, transitions, and literary devices to create an effect. A mentor text helps students study the choice in context before trying it in their own writing.

A SIMPLE MENTOR-TEXT ROUTINE

Notice: What did the writer do?

Name: What is the craft move called, and what effect does it create?

Try: Imitate the move in one sentence or short passage.

Apply: Use the move purposefully in an original draft.

Reflect: Explain whether the choice improved the intended effect.

Use High-Quality Mentor Texts With a Clear Purpose

A mentor text is not simply a passage students read before writing. The teacher selects it because it demonstrates a specific decision students are ready to study. A literary mentor might show how a writer reveals character through action. An informational mentor might show how examples clarify a complex idea. An argumentative mentor might show how evidence and reasoning work together.

- Choose texts appropriate for the students' grade and the skill being modeled.
- Use complete texts when students need to study overall structure and shorter excerpts when the focus is one craft move.
- Return to the same mentor text for different purposes rather than rushing through many disconnected examples.
- Make the transfer explicit: 'Now we will use this writer's decision in our own work.'

Teach a Variety of Response Lengths

Students need practice composing at several lengths. Sentence-level writing develops precision. Short constructed responses require a direct answer, evidence, and reasoning. Extended constructed responses require sustained development and organization. Full compositions allow students to make broader decisions about genre, audience, craft, and structure.

Length	Primary instructional value	Possible practice
Sentence or pair of sentences	Precision, syntax, evidence integration, and a single reasoning connection.	Write one evidence sentence and one explanation sentence.
Short constructed response	Concise answer, evidence, reasoning, and relationship clarity.	Respond to one text-dependent prompt in a focused paragraph.
Extended constructed response	Sustained controlling idea, multiple pieces of evidence, paragraph development, cohesion, and conclusion.	Analyze two texts or develop an argument across several paragraphs.
Full composition	Complete writing process, genre craft, audience, purpose, revision, editing, and sharing.	Compose a literary, informational, or argumentative piece from planning through publication.

Teach Text-Based Responses Explicitly

Students should not be expected to learn text-based writing simply because they are assigned a prompt. Model how to read the prompt, return to the text, select evidence, integrate or paraphrase it accurately, explain its meaning, connect it to the answer or claim, and revise the response for clarity. Repeat the process with literary and informational texts and with prompts requiring explanation, analysis, comparison, and evaluation.

TEXT-BASED RESPONSE ROUTINE

- Read and mark the direction in the prompt.
- State the answer, interpretation, or claim in your own words.
- Select evidence that directly supports that idea.
- Integrate the evidence so it fits the sentence and remains accurate.
- Explain how the evidence supports the idea.
- Connect the reasoning to the larger relationship or significance.
- Revise for meaning and edit for conventions.

A Balanced Week of Writing Instruction

Day	Direct instruction and modeling	Student practice
Monday	Study a mentor text and model the target craft or composition skill.	Try the move in a sentence or short passage.
Tuesday	Model planning and drafting for a literary, informational, argumentative, or text-based task.	Plan and begin a draft.
Wednesday	Model revision for evidence, reasoning, organization, or craft.	Revise the authentic draft with focused feedback.
Thursday	Teach one convention in isolation and model how to apply it in context.	Practice the convention, then edit the draft.
Friday	Model sharing, reflection, and goal setting.	Share, publish, reflect, and identify the next Cognitive Address.

Keep Instruction and Practice Paired

Every skill students are expected to demonstrate should first be made visible through explanation and modeling, and every modeled skill should be followed by meaningful practice. A teacher guide becomes useful when it does more than describe quality; it shows the teacher how to teach it and gives students an opportunity to perform it.

KEYS TO KEEP

- The matrix supports complete writing instruction; it does not replace it.
- Explicitly teach and practice planning, drafting, revising, editing, and sharing.
- Teach conventions in focused lessons and require students to transfer them into authentic writing.
- Model literary, informational, argumentative, short, extended, and text-based writing with purposeful mentor texts.
- Pair every important teacher model with guided and independent student practice.

Intervention, Access, and Enrichment

The same Cognitive Address can require different instructional routes. This chapter helps teachers identify the actual roadblock, preserve the intended thinking, intensify instruction when a move is difficult, and extend learning when students are ready for more.

- Distinguish a cognitive need from a language, access, or transcription barrier.
- Intensify instruction without simply repeating the same assignment.
- Provide meaningful Reflective extensions rather than additional quantity.

Start by Finding the Actual Roadblock

A student may miss a THINK question because the inference is difficult. The student may also miss it because an essential word is unfamiliar, the sentence structure is hard to process, the evidence was not located, or the response format conceals what the student understands. Intervention begins with a better diagnosis, not a stronger label.

Possible Roadblocks and Better First Moves

Observed difficulty	Possible roadblock	First move to test
Student cannot explain an inference in writing.	Reasoning is weak, or writing production hides the reasoning.	Ask for an oral explanation, then compare it with the written response.
Student selects weak evidence.	The student confuses related information with proof.	Sort evidence as present, related, relevant, and strongest.
Student writes very little.	The student may lack ideas, language, stamina, planning, or transcription fluency.	Use brief oral rehearsal and a visual plan, then observe what changes.
Student's paragraph is difficult to follow.	The relationship among ideas may be unclear, or sentence boundaries may interfere.	Separate TOGGLE organization from conventions and teach the first broken step.
Student succeeds only with a frame.	The frame may support language, or it may be completing the reasoning.	Remove one part of the frame and note which thinking remains independent.

Preserve the Destination While Improving Access

A support should help the student reach the intended thinking. It should not automatically replace the task with easier cognition. A student can analyze a relationship while listening to a text, using enlarged print, dictating a response, consulting a bilingual glossary, or organizing ideas visually. The mode may change while the cognitive destination remains the same.

ACCESS TEST

- Does the support remove an unnecessary barrier?
- Does the student still make the important cognitive decision?
- Can the teacher tell which part of the response belongs to the student?
- Is there a plan to increase independence when the support is temporary?

Language Support Without Lowering the Thinking

Students developing academic English may understand more than they can yet express in the expected form. Build language around the same dimension and level. Preteach essential words, provide visuals, rehearse orally, allow structured partner talk, clarify the meaning of the prompt, and offer sentence support that preserves the student's responsibility for the idea.

Support	How it preserves cognition	Example
Essential vocabulary	Gives access to the concept without supplying the answer.	Teach influence, evidence, contrast, and consequence before a TOGGLE task.
Oral rehearsal	Allows the student to organize an independently developed idea before writing.	Explain the inference to a partner, then write it.
Sentence support	Provides academic syntax while leaving the evidence and reasoning decisions to the student.	The evidence shows ____; this matters because ____.
Visual organization	Makes relationships visible without deciding what the relationships are.	Use a cause-and-effect map that students complete from the text.
Bilingual resources	Allows access to meaning and precise vocabulary.	Use a glossary or first-language discussion before an English response.

Specially Designed Instruction

Students receiving special education supports may need explicit changes in the way a skill is taught, practiced, or demonstrated. The teacher should connect the instructional design to the student's documented needs while preserving the learning goal whenever possible.

- Break a multi-step response into smaller visible decisions.
- Reduce the amount of text processed at one time while keeping the same reasoning demand.
- Use concrete examples and nonexamples before moving to abstract text.
- Provide repeated modeling with consistent language, then fade one cue at a time.
- Allow speech-to-text, keyboarding, adapted paper, or oral response when transcription is not the skill being measured.
- Teach self-monitoring routines that the student can use independently.

When the Move Is Not Happening

Repeating the same worksheet more slowly is not necessarily intervention. If the student is not moving, revisit the roadblock and change the instruction. Intensification may involve greater clarity, smaller steps, more frequent practice, immediate feedback, stronger examples, or additional opportunities to transfer the skill.

Ways to Intensify a Lesson

Change	What it looks like
Increase explicitness	Model each reasoning decision aloud and label the step students are expected to imitate.
Reduce competing demands	Use a shorter passage or fewer evidence choices while keeping the same target level.
Increase response frequency	Use several brief practice opportunities rather than one long task.
Tighten feedback	Respond immediately to the specific move rather than commenting generally at the end.
Vary the representation	Move among oral explanation, sorting, annotation, visual mapping, sentence work, and paragraph writing.
Fade more deliberately	Remove one support at a time and document what the student can still do.

Enrichment Means More Depth, Not More Pages

Students who demonstrate Independent or Reflective thinking need opportunities to evaluate, synthesize, transfer, critique, and create. Additional questions of the same type may increase workload without increasing cognition.

Dimension	Reflective reading extension	Reflective writing extension
TAUGHT	Connect the concept to another discipline or identify its limits.	Adapt the taught craft or structure for a different audience or purpose.
TAP	Evaluate conflicting evidence or identify what evidence is missing.	Synthesize sources and explain why some evidence deserves greater weight.
THINK	Compare several defensible interpretations and analyze ambiguity.	Develop and defend a nuanced interpretation, including its limitations.
TOGGLE	Identify a larger pattern across texts or predict what happens when one element changes.	Create a response organized around a new relationship or transfer the pattern to a new context.

Check the Support, Not Just the Product

A polished product created through heavy teacher direction does not establish independence. Record which supports were used and whether they provided access, language, organization, or actual reasoning. Then plan the next opportunity with one less support. Growth becomes visible when the student can carry more of the process.

KEYS TO KEEP

- Intervention begins by identifying the actual roadblock.
- Change the route when necessary, but preserve the intended cognitive destination whenever possible.
- Language and accessibility supports can reveal cognition rather than reduce it.
- Intensify instruction through clarity, frequency, feedback, and smaller steps - not repetition alone.
- Enrichment should increase evaluation, synthesis, transfer, and creation rather than quantity.

Put It All Together: Emsy and Merrick

Two complete case studies show how the matrix moves from assessment to instruction. The chapter ends with a manageable thirty-day plan for introducing the process without changing everything at once.

- Trace two different student profiles from evidence to next instruction.
- See how reading, writing, composition, and conventions interact.
- Begin using the matrix through a small, sustainable implementation plan.

Case Study One: Emsy

Emsy participates thoughtfully in discussion and often offers an interpretation that other students have not considered. On selected-response items, Emsy usually identifies the central idea and makes sound inferences. In written responses, however, the evidence is often broad and the explanation is compressed into one sentence. Sentence boundaries also become inconsistent when the response grows longer.

Emsy's Initial Profile

Area	Evidence	Instructional interpretation
TAUGHT	Applies taught concepts about theme and text structure without prompting.	Independent.
TAP	Chooses evidence related to the idea but not always the strongest or most precise detail.	Visible.
THINK	Develops a strong inference orally and explains it clearly when asked.	Independent orally; Visible in independent writing.
TOGGLE	Explains relationships during discussion but does not always organize them clearly across a paragraph.	Visible to Independent.
Composition	Controlling idea is strong; elaboration and paragraph development are brief.	Needs sustained development.
Conventions	Run-ons appear when several ideas are combined.	Needs sentence-boundary instruction and application.

Emsy's Next Address and Pack-Up Plan

PRIMARY NEXT MOVE

TAP-Visible to TAP-Independent in written responses: select and integrate the strongest evidence without teacher prompting.

Emsy does not need a general inference lesson. The reasoning is already strong. The immediate plan should help Emsy compare evidence, select the most precise support, and develop the evidence-to-reasoning connection across complete sentences.

- Pack up: evidence ranking, precise quotation or paraphrase, one sentence explaining what the evidence proves, and a sentence-boundary check.
- Teach: compare three related details and justify which one most directly supports the interpretation.
- Practice: write a short response using the strongest detail, then revise one sentence for clearer development.
- Conventions transfer: complete a focused sentence-boundary lesson and edit the authentic response.
- Growth check: use a new passage and require independent evidence selection and explanation.

Emsy's Evidence of Movement

After several brief lessons, Emsy selects one precise detail rather than copying a long section. The written response explains what the detail reveals and why it supports the interpretation. The next assessment shows the same behavior in an unfamiliar informational passage. Emsy's TAP address can now be recorded as Independent for this type of task. Sentence boundaries still require monitoring, but they no longer obscure the cognitive growth.

Case Study Two: Merrick

Merrick's writing is neat, complete, and generally correct. The response usually follows the expected structure, and editing is careful. Yet Merrick often retells the text rather than explaining what it means. On inference questions, choices that repeat exact wording from the passage are especially attractive.

Merrick's Initial Profile

Area	Evidence	Instructional interpretation
TAUGHT	Recalls vocabulary and genre expectations and applies familiar response structure.	Visible to Independent.
TAP	Finds obvious details but does not consistently decide which evidence is relevant to the inference.	Emergent.
THINK	Restates events and literal facts; inference appears only after strong prompts.	Foundational to Emergent.
TOGGLE	Lists events in order but may treat sequence as explanation.	Emergent.
Composition	Response is orderly and complete but underdeveloped.	Structure is stronger than reasoning.
Conventions	Sentence construction, capitalization, punctuation, and spelling are generally controlled.	Relative strength.

Merrick's Next Address and Pack-Up Plan

PRIMARY NEXT MOVE

THINK-Foundational to THINK-Emergent: move from literal restatement to a reasonable inference built from two clues.

Merrick does not need another lesson on paragraph format or punctuation. Those strengths can support the new goal, but they should not distract the teacher from the actual roadblock. Merrick needs repeated practice distinguishing what the text states from what the clues suggest.

- Pack up: literal-versus-implied language, two-clue combination, and the prompt 'This makes me think...'
- Teach: sort statements as directly stated or inferred, then connect two details to one conclusion.
- Practice: explain an inference orally before writing it in one or two sentences.
- Bridge to TAP: identify the clue that makes the inference reasonable.
- Growth check: use a new passage without the stated-versus-inferred labels.

Merrick's Evidence of Movement

Merrick begins to say, 'The text does not state this, but these two details make it reasonable.' In a new response, Merrick explains that the narrator feels responsible because the narrator stops watching and begins helping after reading the note. The inference is still direct, but it moves beyond retelling and is connected to a clue. Merrick is now demonstrating Emergent THINK and is ready to work toward Visible evidence-supported explanation.

What the Two Cases Teach Us

Emsy	Merrick
Deep reasoning can be hidden by brief development or conventions errors.	Strong conventions and organization can hide shallow reasoning.
The next lesson focused on stronger evidence and written development.	The next lesson focused on moving beyond literal restatement.
Writing support helped communicate existing cognition.	Cognitive instruction helped deepen otherwise polished writing.
The teacher did not reteach what Emsy already owned.	The teacher did not mistake correctness of form for depth of thought.

A Thirty-Day Start-Up Plan

Week	Teacher focus	What to implement
Week 1	Learn the matrix and use common language.	Introduce the four dimensions and five levels. Analyze a few existing questions and prompts. Do not change every assessment.
Week 2	Collect and interpret a small amount of evidence.	Choose one reading task and one written response. Record the dimension, level, and one possible roadblock.
Week 3	Teach one level to the right.	Form one temporary group around a shared next move. Use a ten- or twenty-minute lesson and a brief growth check.
Week 4	Refine and expand.	Update addresses, move students as needed, add one conventions or writing-process lesson, and choose the next dimension to study.

The Complete Teacher Routine

1. Identify the dimension and cognitive demand of the question or prompt.
2. Study the answer or written response for what the student already demonstrates.
3. Confirm the pattern with another response, explanation, or transfer task.
4. Name the current Cognitive Address and the Next Address.
5. Identify the roadblock and decide what the student needs to pack up.
6. Teach one level to the right through modeling, guided practice, writing, and feedback.
7. Separate cognition, composition, and conventions when examining writing.
8. Check for accuracy, consistency, independence, and transfer.
9. Update the address and select the next move.

The purpose of the matrix is not to create another label. It is to make the next instructional decision clearer.

KEYS TO KEEP

- Two students with the same score may need entirely different instruction.
- Use strengths in one area to support growth in another.
- Teach the first real roadblock rather than the most visible surface error.
- Begin with one task, one group, and one next move; the system does not need to be implemented all at once.
- The best evidence of success is a student who can explain what changed in the thinking and demonstrate it independently.

The Teacher's Moving Kit

These tools are designed to help teachers move students from one demonstrated level of thinking to the next without turning the process into additional paperwork.

Use only the tools that answer the instructional question in front of you. A teacher may begin with the Quick-Reference Matrix, a Response Analysis page, and one Pack-Up Plan. The remaining tools can be added as the system becomes familiar.

What Each Tool Helps You Do

Tool	Purpose
1. Quick-Reference Matrix	See the four dimensions, five levels, and twenty addresses at a glance.
2. Question and Prompt Stem Bank	Write reading questions and written-response prompts at several levels.
3. Address-to-Next-Move Guide	Match the current behavior to the next instructional step.
4. Response Analysis Tools	Examine selected answers and written responses through clear evidence lenses.
5. Pack-Up Plan	Name the roadblock, skill to teach, practice, support, and growth evidence.
6. Grouping and Lesson Planner	Form temporary groups and plan focused ten-, twenty-, or thirty-minute lessons.
7. Writing Process and Conventions Tools	Teach, practice, revise, edit, and transfer writing skills.
8. Composition and Text-Based Response Tools	Plan literary, informational, argumentative, short, extended, and source-based writing.
9. Student and Family Tools	Share strengths, goals, next moves, and home conversation prompts without labels.
10. Keys to Keep	Use one page to remember the complete system.

USE THE LIGHTEST TOOL THAT WORKS

The matrix should reduce uncertainty, not create a second job. Record only the evidence that changes instruction.

Quick-Reference Matrix

PURPOSE

Use this tool when you need to identify a Cognitive Address or explain the system to a colleague, student, or family member.

Foundational (Beginning)	Emergent (Developing)	Visible (Engaging)	Independent (Independent)	Reflective (High Independent)
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Five Levels of Cognition

Level	Student-friendly meaning	Instructional direction
Foundational	I recognize, locate, or notice it with support.	Move toward deliberate recall, identification, or naming.
Emergent	I am beginning the thinking, but it is partial or inconsistent.	Complete the thinking with relevant evidence, explanation, or relationship language.
Visible	I can show and explain the thinking, often with some support.	Fade prompts and require independent selection and execution.
Independent	I can initiate and complete the thinking on my own.	Evaluate, adapt, connect, and transfer.
Reflective	I can evaluate, synthesize, transfer, and create.	Deepen the work in increasingly novel contexts.

Four Dimensions

Dimension	Reading question	Written-response work
TAUGHT	What do I know, recall, understand, or apply?	Use taught content, vocabulary, craft, genre, structure, or strategy.
TAP	What evidence supports the answer or idea?	Select, integrate, and evaluate facts, details, quotations, examples, or sources.
THINK	What can I infer, explain, or understand about why?	Develop reasoning, interpretation, elaboration, reflection, or significance.
TOGGLE	How are two or more things related?	Explain and organize relationships among ideas, evidence, events, texts, or claims.

Twenty-Cell Quick View

Dimension	Foundational	Emergent	Visible	Independent	Reflective
TAUGHT	Recognize	Recall	Explain	Apply	Connect and extend
TAP	Locate	Identify	Select	Support precisely	Evaluate and synthesize
THINK	Notice	Infer	Explain why	Reason independently	Interpret and evaluate
TOGGLE	Notice a connection	Name a relationship	Explain the relationship	Analyze the relationship	Synthesize and create

ADDRESS NOTATION

Short address: THINK-Visible.

More precise address: THINK-Visible for explaining character motivation in a short constructed response.

Next Address: THINK-Independent for independently explaining how evidence supports the inference.

Question and Prompt Stem Bank

PURPOSE

Use these stems as starting points. Replace the blanks with grade-appropriate content and revise the wording so the mental action matches the intended level.

TAUGHT Stems

Level	Reading question stem	Written-response prompt stem
Foundational	Which taught word, fact, or feature is shown in ____?	Describe the taught word, fact, or feature shown in ____.
Emergent	What do you remember about ____?	Explain what you remember about ____ in your own words.
Visible	How does the taught idea help explain ____?	Explain how the taught idea helps you understand ____.
Independent	Which taught strategy or concept should be applied to ____?	Apply the taught strategy or concept to analyze ____.
Reflective	How does prior learning change or deepen your understanding of ____?	Synthesize what you learned before with the new information to develop a deeper conclusion about ____.

TAP Stems

Level	Reading question stem	Written-response prompt stem
Foundational	Which sentence states ____?	Describe ____ using one stated detail from the text.
Emergent	Which detail is related to the idea that ____?	Explain which detail is related to the idea that ____.
Visible	Which detail directly supports ____?	Explain how one relevant detail supports ____.
Independent	Which evidence most strongly supports ____?	Justify which evidence most strongly supports ____ and integrate it into your response.
Reflective	Is the evidence sufficient to support ____? What is missing?	Evaluate the strength and sufficiency of the evidence for ____ and identify what additional support is needed.

THINK Stems

Level	Reading question stem	Written-response prompt stem
Foundational	What do the details suggest about ____?	Describe what the details suggest about ____.
Emergent	What can the reader infer about ____?	Explain what can be inferred about ____ and identify one supporting clue.
Visible	Why does the evidence support the inference that ____?	Explain why the evidence supports the inference that ____.
Independent	Which interpretation of ____ is best supported, and why?	Develop an interpretation of ____ and explain the complete evidence-to-reasoning connection.
Reflective	How does the author's unstated meaning or choice shape ____?	Evaluate how the author's choice shapes meaning, consider another interpretation, and explain the significance.

TOGGLE Stems

Level	Reading question stem	Written-response prompt stem
Foundational	Which two ideas, events, or elements are connected?	Describe the connection between ____ and ____.
Emergent	What type of relationship exists between ____ and ____?	Explain how ____ and ____ are related.
Visible	How does ____ affect, contrast with, or contribute to ____?	Explain how ____ affects, contrasts with, or contributes to ____.
Independent	How does the relationship between ____ and ____ develop the larger idea?	Analyze the relationship between ____ and ____ and explain its effect on the larger idea.
Reflective	What larger pattern does the relationship reveal, and where else could it apply?	Synthesize the relationships to develop a new insight, prediction, or application.

PROMPT CHECK

A written prompt should begin with a direction such as Explain, Describe, Analyze, Compare, Justify, Evaluate, Develop, or Synthesize. State the evidence expectation and response length when students need that information.

Address-to-Next-Move Guide

PURPOSE

Use this guide after identifying a current level. Choose the smallest next move and one brief teacher prompt.

TAUGHT

Current level	Student currently	Next move	Teacher prompt
Foundational	Recognizes familiar information.	Recall without seeing the answer.	What do you remember learning about this?
Emergent	Recalls with prompting.	Explain in own words.	How would you explain this to someone else?
Visible	Explains but applies inconsistently.	Apply independently.	Which learning belongs here, and how will you use it?
Independent	Applies independently.	Connect and transfer.	Where else could this learning help you?
Reflective	Connects and adapts learning.	Synthesize or create a new application.	What new understanding can you build from these ideas?

TAP

Current level	Student currently	Next move	Teacher prompt
Foundational	Locates an obvious detail.	Identify relevant evidence.	Does this detail answer the exact question?
Emergent	Finds related evidence.	Select directly relevant evidence.	Which detail most directly supports the answer?
Visible	Selects relevant evidence.	Choose strongest and most precise evidence independently.	Which detail proves the idea most clearly?
Independent	Integrates strong evidence.	Evaluate and combine evidence.	Which pieces work together, and are they sufficient?
Reflective	Synthesizes and critiques evidence.	Identify limits or missing support.	What evidence could change or strengthen the conclusion?

THINK

Current level	Student currently	Next move	Teacher prompt
Foundational	Restates or notices an obvious implication.	Make a basic inference.	What do these clues make you think?
Emergent	Makes a plausible inference.	Connect it to relevant evidence.	What in the text caused you to think that?
Visible	Gives inference and evidence.	Explain the full reasoning connection.	How does that evidence lead to the conclusion?
Independent	Reasons independently.	Evaluate another interpretation.	What else could be inferred, and which idea is stronger?
Reflective	Evaluates nuance and significance.	Transfer or analyze an author choice.	Why might the author leave this unstated, and what effect does that create?

TOGGLE

Current level	Student currently	Next move	Teacher prompt
Foundational	Notices a connection.	Name the relationship.	What kind of connection is this?
Emergent	Names the relationship.	Explain how it works.	What does one have to do with the other?
Visible	Explains the relationship.	Analyze its influence or effect.	What changes because this relationship exists?
Independent	Analyzes interaction and pattern.	Explain larger significance.	What larger meaning does the relationship reveal?
Reflective	Synthesizes complex relationships.	Transfer or create a new application.	How could this pattern explain or predict something new?

Response Analysis Tools

PURPOSE

Use these pages to analyze selected answers and written responses before deciding what to teach next.

Selected-Response Analysis

Record	Teacher notes
Question or item	
Primary dimension	TAUGHT / TAP / THINK / TOGGLE
Target level	Foundational / Emergent / Visible / Independent / Reflective
Student selection	
What the choice shows the student noticed	
What the choice shows the student may have overlooked	
Possible reasoning pattern	
Follow-up question to confirm	
Current address and confidence	Tentative / Probable / Confirmed
Next move	

Written-Response Analysis Through Three Lenses

Lens	Evidence to record	Instructional decision
Cognition	Primary dimension; address; quality of evidence, reasoning, and relationships.	What thinking should move next?
Composition	Controlling idea, development, structure, cohesion, craft, word choice, audience, purpose.	What revision will most improve meaning?
Conventions	Syntax, grammar, sentence boundaries, spelling, capitalization, punctuation.	What one pattern needs focused instruction and authentic application?
Support used	Oral rehearsal, frame, organizer, assistive technology, conference prompt, partner support.	What can be faded, and what remains necessary for access?

Written Response Notes

Prompt and student response	Teacher analysis
Prompt:	Primary dimension and target level:
Student response or excerpt:	Current Cognitive Address:
	Composition strength:
	Revision priority:
	Conventions pattern:
	Next Address:
	Evidence needed to confirm movement:

MARKING ORDER

Read once for meaning. Identify cognition. Examine composition. Identify one conventions pattern. Choose one next lesson. Avoid correcting everything at once.

Pack-Up Plan

PURPOSE

Use one plan for one precise move. The best plan is not the longest plan; it is the plan that identifies the actual roadblock and the smallest useful next step.

Blank Pack-Up Plan

Planning question	Teacher notes
Current Cognitive Address	
What the student can already do	
Roadblock	
Next Address	
What the student needs to pack up	Knowledge / strategy / evidence habit / reasoning / relationship language / writing process / convention
Teacher model	
Guided practice	
Support and fading plan	
Independent growth check	
Evidence of accuracy, consistency, independence, and transfer	

Completed Example: Emsy

Planning question	Completed plan
Current Address	TAP-Visible in independent writing.
Strength	Develops a strong interpretation and selects evidence related to it.
Roadblock	Does not consistently compare available details for precision and strength.
Next Address	TAP-Independent.
Pack up	Evidence ranking, precise paraphrase, integration, and one complete reasoning sentence.
Teach	Compare three related details and model why one is the strongest proof.
Practice	Rank a new evidence set, justify the ranking, and write a short response.
Support to fade	Evidence ranking guide.
Growth check	Select and integrate the strongest evidence in a new passage without the guide.

Completed Example: Merrick

Planning question	Completed plan
Current Address	THINK-Foundational to Emergent.
Strength	Recalls details, organizes responses, and edits carefully.
Roadblock	Relies on literal restatement when the text requires an inference.
Next Address	THINK-Emergent.
Pack up	Directly stated versus inferred, two-clue combination, and a basic inference statement.
Teach	Sort statements and model how two details create a conclusion not stated directly.
Practice	Explain an inference orally, identify the clue, and write one or two sentences.
Support to fade	The prompt 'This makes me think...'
Growth check	Form a reasonable inference from a new passage without the sorting labels.

Grouping and Lesson Planner

PURPOSE

Use these pages to form temporary groups around a shared next need and deliver a focused lesson with a brief independent check.

Class Snapshot

Student	Current address	Roadblock	Next address	Possible group

Temporary Group Plan

Planning field	Notes
Goal-based group name	
Students	
Shared current address	
Shared roadblock	
Next Address	
Reading task	
Writing task	
Support to use	
Support to fade	
Independent check and date	

Ten-Minute Moving Lesson

Minutes	Action
1	Name the current strength and Next Address.
2	Compare a current-level and next-level response.
3	Model the missing step.
2	Students practice with one prompt.
2	Students complete a brief independent check.

Twenty-Minute Moving Lesson

Minutes	Action
2	Name the goal and connect it to prior success.
4	Model the missing cognitive move.
5	Complete a reading example together.
5	Students apply the same move in writing.
4	Collect an independent response and record the support used.

Thirty-Minute Moving Lesson

Minutes	Action
3	State the current address, roadblock, and destination.
6	Study a mentor example and compare response levels.
6	Teacher models and students explain the decision steps.
7	Guided reading-to-writing practice with immediate feedback.
5	Independent transfer task.
3	Student reflection and next evidence date.

Writing Process and Conventions Tools

PURPOSE

Use these tools to make each writing-process step explicit and to connect focused conventions instruction with authentic student writing.

Writing Process Teaching and Practice Tracker

Step	Teacher model completed	Guided practice completed	Independent practice completed	Evidence / date
Planning	☐	☐	☐	
Drafting	☐	☐	☐	
Revising	☐	☐	☐	
Editing	☐	☐	☐	
Sharing	☐	☐	☐	

Revision Check: Improve Meaning

- ☐ The response answers the exact prompt and has a clear controlling idea.
- ☐ The evidence is relevant, precise, and sufficient for the response length.
- ☐ The reasoning explains how and why the evidence supports the idea.
- ☐ Relationships among ideas and paragraphs are clear.
- ☐ The organization fits the purpose, audience, genre, and length.
- ☐ Word choice and craft create the intended effect.
- ☐ The conclusion adds significance rather than simply repeating.

Editing Check: Improve Correctness and Clarity

- ☐ Every sentence is complete and sentence boundaries are clear.
- ☐ Subjects, verbs, pronouns, and verb tense are used accurately.
- ☐ Taught spelling patterns, morphemes, and high-utility words are checked.
- ☐ Capitalization follows grade-appropriate expectations.
- ☐ Punctuation supports meaning and sentence structure.
- ☐ The final response is readable and communicates the intended meaning.

Conventions Mini-Lesson Planner

Planning field	Teacher notes
Convention skill	
Why writers need it	
Clear rule or pattern	
Teacher model	
Examples and nonexamples	
Focused isolated practice	
Application in authentic writing	
Feedback and correction routine	
Independent transfer check	

Mentor-Text Study

Step	Teacher and student action
Notice	Identify the writer's craft, structure, evidence, reasoning, or convention.
Name	State what the move is called and why the writer may have used it.
Study	Examine how the move affects meaning, clarity, organization, or the reader.
Try	Imitate the move in one sentence or short passage.
Apply	Use the move purposefully in an original draft.
Reflect	Explain whether the choice created the intended effect.

Composition and Text-Based Response Tools

PURPOSE

Use these pages to ensure students receive explicit models and repeated practice across literary, informational, argumentative, short, extended, and text-based writing.

Composition Coverage Map

Writing type	Teacher model	Guided practice	Independent practice	Mentor text	Date / evidence
Literary composition	[]	[]	[]	[]	
Informational composition	[]	[]	[]	[]	
Argumentative composition	[]	[]	[]	[]	
Short constructed response	[]	[]	[]	[]	
Extended constructed response	[]	[]	[]	[]	
Text-based response	[]	[]	[]	[]	

Prompt Decoder

Prompt feature	Student notes
Direction verb	Explain / Describe / Analyze / Compare / Justify / Evaluate / Develop / Synthesize
Primary dimension	TAUGHT / TAP / THINK / TOGGLE
Topic, text, or issue	
Evidence requirement	
Response type	Literary / Informational / Argumentative / Text-based
Response length	Sentence / Short constructed response / Extended constructed response / Full composition
Audience and purpose	
My controlling idea	

Evidence-to-Reasoning Organizer

My answer, interpretation, or claim	Strong evidence	What the evidence shows	Why it supports my idea

Short Constructed Response Planner

Part	My plan
Direct answer	
Relevant and precise evidence	
Reasoning: how and why the evidence supports the answer	
Relationship or significance, when required	
Revision priority	
Editing priority	

Extended Constructed Response Planner

Section	Idea and evidence	Reasoning and relationship
Opening / controlling idea		
Development paragraph 1		
Development paragraph 2		
Additional paragraph or counterargument		
Conclusion / significance		

REQUIRED TEACHING SEQUENCE

Do not assign the planner without instruction. Model how to complete it, practice together, require independent use, and then fade the form when the student can make the decisions without it.

Student and Family Tools

PURPOSE

Use strengths-based language to help students and families understand the current skill, the next goal, and the evidence that will show growth.

My Cognitive Address

Reflection	Student response
The task I am working on	
The dimension	TAUGHT / TAP / THINK / TOGGLE
What I can already do	
My current Cognitive Address	
My Next Address	
What I need to pack up	
What support helps without doing the thinking for me	
How I will show that I can do it independently	

Student Keys to Keep

- [] I can explain what the question or prompt asks me to do.
- [] I can name the evidence, reasoning, or relationship I need.
- [] I can use the strategy with less support than before.
- [] I revise the meaning before I edit the mechanics.
- [] I can explain what changed in my thinking.
- [] I know what I am learning next.

Family Conference Planner

Conference step	Teacher notes
Begin with a specific strength	
Describe the current Cognitive Address in plain language	
Show one reading answer or written response	
Explain the Next Address	
Describe what the student is learning to pack up	
Explain how progress will be checked	
Offer one simple home conversation prompt	
Invite family observations and questions	

Home Conversation Prompts

- What do you already know that helps you understand this?
- Which detail gives you the strongest proof?
- What in the text made you think that?
- How are those two ideas connected?
- What do you want your reader to understand?
- What would you revise first, and why?
- Which convention are you checking in this draft?

FAMILY LANGUAGE

Avoid saying that a child is a color or fixed level. Say what the student currently demonstrates, what comes next, and how the new skill will be taught and checked.

Keys to Keep: One-Page Implementation Guide

PURPOSE

Keep this page nearby as a reminder of the full process.

Step	Teacher action	Key question
1. Identify	Name the task's primary dimension and target level.	What thinking did the question or prompt require?
2. Observe	Study the answer or written response for what the student already does.	What is present, and where does the thinking stop?
3. Confirm	Use another response, explanation, or transfer task.	Does the pattern repeat?
4. Address	Record the current Cognitive Address without labeling the child.	Which dimension-level description best fits?
5. Diagnose	Identify the first actual roadblock.	Is the need cognitive, compositional, conventional, linguistic, or access-related?
6. Plan	Name the Next Address and what the student needs to pack up.	What is the smallest observable next move?
7. Teach	Model, guide, and connect reading to writing.	How will I make the missing step visible?
8. Fade	Remove one support at a time while preserving access.	What can the student now do without me?
9. Check	Collect fresh evidence of accuracy, consistency, independence, and transfer.	Can the student use the thinking in a new task?
10. Move	Update the address, change the group, and select the next goal.	What comes next?

KEYS TO KEEP

- A score is a starting point; the response explains the instructional need.
- The four dimensions are TAUGHT, TAP, THINK, and TOGGLE.
- The levels move from Foundational to Emergent to Visible to Independent to Reflective.
- Teach one level to the right and verify the move with fresh evidence.
- In writing, examine cognition, composition, and conventions separately.
- Explicitly model and practice the complete writing process, craft, composition, conventions, and text-based responses.
- Group by the next skill students need and change groups when the evidence changes.
- Support access without completing the thinking for the student.
- Use the lightest tool that changes instruction.
- The purpose of the matrix is clarity: know where the student is, what comes next, and what to teach tomorrow.

The following section contains a NARRATIVE diagnostic assessment tool.

Narrative Writing

Purpose and Rationale: This diagnostic reveals where each student is currently thinking as a narrative writer - from establishing a topic and relationships, to shaping actions, thoughts, and dialogue, to landing an important moment and a lasting lesson. Rather than assigning a single score, it locates the student's cognitive address across the narrative dimensions so instruction can target the very next move. Use the answer choices and the student's own writing together to name what the writer already controls and what to teach next.

TRAILS™ Narrative Writing Diagnostic Assessment

Range Performance Level Descriptor (RPLD) Integrated Edition

The Writing Academy®, LLC

Purpose

A low-stakes narrative readiness assessment that identifies not only what students can produce, but the level of thinking they currently demonstrate within each TRAILS™ component. Results are used to adjust instruction, scaffolds, feedback, and opportunities for independence—not to generate a traditional grade.

● Foundational	■ Emergent	▼ Visible	▲ Independent	◆ Reflective
(Beginning)	(Developing)	(Engaging)	(Independent)	(Highly Independent)

TRAILS™ Framework

- T — Topic: establish and maintain a clear narrative topic, situation, or experience.
- R — Relationships: develop relationships among characters and show how those relationships influence the story.
- A — Actions, Thoughts, and Dialogue: use meaningful actions, thoughts, and dialogue to develop characters and move events forward.
- I — Important Moment: slow down and fully develop the most important moment.
- L — Lesson or Lasting Effect: communicate what was learned, realized, changed, or remembered.
- S — Setting: use place, time, atmosphere, and sensory detail intentionally.

Core RPLD Principle

A student should not be assigned one thinking level for all of narrative writing. Score each TRAILS™ strand independently. A student can be Independent in Topic and Setting while remaining Visible in Important Moment and Emergent in Lesson or Lasting Effect.

Teacher Administration Guide

What to say, what to provide, and what not to coach

Materials to Prepare

- One student diagnostic packet per student.
- The short anchor passage, “The Extra Chair,” included in this packet.
- Pencil or approved writing tool; lined paper if additional writing space is needed.
- Teacher RPLD scoring profile and answer key.
- Any routinely provided documented accommodations. Accommodations should provide access without supplying narrative ideas, wording, or structure.

Suggested Administration Sequence

Phase	Suggested time	Purpose
1. Opening	2–3 min	Explain that this is not a grade and that students should show what they can do now.
2. Anchor Passage + Recognition	15–20 min	Read/follow the short passage, then complete recognition items.
3. Guided Narrative Build	15–20 min	Students make their thinking visible through TRAILS™ planning prompts.
4. Independent Narrative	30–40 min	Students plan and write independently. This section carries the strongest evidence for Independent/Reflective levels.
5. Broad Writing Check	5–8 min	Brief revising/editing information only; do not let it drive the narrative RPLD profile.

Opening Script

Teacher says: “Today you are going to show me how you think as a narrative writer. This is not a grade and I do not expect everyone to do the same things yet. Some parts may feel easy and some may feel challenging. That is useful information for me because it tells me what I should teach you next. Do your best work and show me what you already know about telling and developing a story.”

What the Teacher May and May Not Do

MAY DO

- Read directions and the anchor passage aloud if that is part of normal classroom access or an approved accommodation.
- Clarify procedural directions such as where to write or which part to complete next.
- Encourage effort with neutral language such as “Show me what you know.”
- Provide extra paper or time when appropriate.

DO NOT DO DURING THE DIAGNOSTIC

- Do not suggest a plot, important moment, lesson, setting detail, dialogue line, or character relationship.
- Do not tell students that a response is “right,” “strong,” or “needs more detail.”
- Do not remind individual students of a TRAILS™ element they forgot during the independent composition.
- Do not correct spelling, punctuation, or grammar while the student is composing.

Anchor Passage for Part 1

The Extra Chair

Teacher says before reading: *“First, we will read a short story. Follow along as I read it aloud. Afterward, you will read it quietly and answer questions about the choices the writer made. I will not explain the answers while you are working.”*

Rain tapped against the classroom windows while Ms. Alvarez pushed the desks into a circle. It was the first Monday after winter break, and everyone seemed to be talking at once. Everyone except Eli. He sat beside the coat hooks, turning a pencil between his fingers and staring at the empty desk next to him.

That desk belonged to Jonah, Eli's best friend. Jonah had moved away over the break. For three years, the boys had worked together on science projects, traded parts of their lunches, and argued about which superhero was the strongest. Eli had known Jonah was leaving, but the empty chair made it feel real.

Ms. Alvarez clapped twice. “We have a new student joining us today,” she announced. A boy with wet hair stepped into the room and gripped the straps of his backpack. “Class, this is Mateo.”

Eli looked down. Not that chair, he thought. Please don't put him in Jonah's chair.

“Mateo, you can sit right here,” Ms. Alvarez said, pointing to the empty desk.

Mateo walked over slowly. “Is this seat taken?” he whispered.

Eli almost said yes. The word sat behind his teeth. Then he noticed Mateo's hands shaking as he tried to unzip his backpack. Eli remembered his own first day at the school, when Jonah had moved his lunch tray and said, ‘Sit here. You don't have to know anybody yet.’

Eli slid Jonah's old chair back with his foot. “No,” he said. Then he added, “You can sit here. I can show you where everything is.”

Mateo's shoulders relaxed. “Thanks.”

At lunch, Eli carried his tray toward the table where he and Jonah used to sit. For a second, he almost chose another table. Instead, he pulled out the chair beside him. Mateo sat down, and Eli began explaining why the cafeteria pizza looked better than it tasted. Mateo laughed.

The chair was still Jonah's chair in Eli's memory. But by the end of the day, Eli understood that keeping a friendship did not mean keeping an empty seat. Sometimes remembering one person could help you make room for another.

Teacher says after reading: *“Now read the passage quietly one more time. Then answer the passage questions on your own. You may look back at the story as often as you need.”*

Part 1A: Reading the Writer’s Narrative Choices

Use “The Extra Chair”

P1. T — Topic

Which statement BEST describes the central narrative situation?

- A. A class prepares for lunch.
- B. Eli struggles with a change after his friend moves and must decide how to respond to a new student.
- C. Jonah moves to another school.
- D. Students return from winter break.

P2. R — Relationships

Which detail BEST shows how Eli’s past relationship with Jonah affects his choice with Mateo?

- A. The rain taps on the windows.
- B. Jonah and Eli argued about superheroes.
- C. Eli remembers Jonah making room for him on his first day, so he chooses to make room for Mateo.
- D. Mateo’s hair is wet.

P3. A — Actions, Thoughts, and Dialogue

Which line BEST reveals Eli’s internal conflict?

- A. “Class, this is Mateo.”
- B. Eli looked down.
- C. Not that chair, he thought. Please don’t put him in Jonah’s chair.
- D. Mateo’s shoulders relaxed.

P4. I — Important Moment

Which moment changes the direction of the story most?

- A.** Ms. Alvarez moves the desks.
- B.** Eli sees Jonah's empty chair.
- C.** Eli remembers what Jonah did for him and invites Mateo to sit beside him.
- D.** The class talks after winter break.

P5. L — Lesson or Lasting Effect

What lasting idea does Eli begin to understand?

- A.** Pizza can be disappointing.
- B.** New students should always sit in empty chairs.
- C.** Remembering an old friendship can help a person choose kindness in a new relationship.
- D.** Moving is always difficult.

P6. S — Setting

Which setting detail most helps create the mood at the beginning?

- A.** The classroom has desks.
- B.** Rain taps the windows while the room is noisy, but Eli sits quietly by the coat hooks.
- C.** Lunch takes place in a cafeteria.
- D.** The class has winter break.

Part 1B: Recognizing Strong Narrative Writing

Choose the response that would create the strongest narrative writing.

1. T — Topic

Which opening most clearly establishes a narrative topic or situation?

- A. School is something people attend almost every day.
- B. I like many different things about school and my friends.
- C. The moment I saw my science project lying in pieces on the hallway floor, I knew this would not be an ordinary morning.
- D. Science projects can be made from many different materials.

2. T — Staying Focused

A student is writing about the day she became separated from her family at a crowded festival. Which detail BEST belongs in the narrative?

- A. Festivals have been celebrated for hundreds of years.
- B. I squeezed between two groups of people, searching for my mother's red jacket.
- C. My favorite food at festivals is usually funnel cake.
- D. The festival took place in a city with many stores.

3. R — Relationships

A student is writing about two sisters who must work together to find their lost dog. Which sentence BEST develops the relationship between the sisters?

- A. My sister and I are related because we have the same parents.
- B. "You check the park, and I'll search behind the houses," Maya said, squeezing my hand before we separated.
- C. Dogs are sometimes difficult to find when they run away.
- D. My sister wore blue shoes that afternoon.

4. R — Behavior

Which detail BEST shows that a grandfather and grandson have a close relationship?

- A. Grandpa was seventy years old.
- B. Grandpa lived several miles from our house.
- C. Before every baseball game, Grandpa tapped my glove twice and whispered, "Play brave."
- D. Grandpa had watched baseball for many years.

5. A — Actions

Which sentence BEST uses action to help the reader experience the story?

- A. I was very nervous.
- B. Nervousness is a feeling people sometimes experience.
- C. My fingers tightened around the microphone as I stepped toward the front of the stage.
- D. The stage was in the school cafeteria.

6. A — Thoughts

Which sentence BEST reveals the narrator's thoughts?

- A. The race was beginning soon.
- B. I stared at the finish line and wondered whether all those early morning practices had been enough.
- C. There were eight runners in the race.
- D. Everyone stood near the starting line.

7. A — Dialogue

Which use of dialogue contributes MOST to the narrative?

- A. "Hi," I said.
- B. "Okay," she answered.
- C. "Don't open that door yet," Marcus whispered. "I heard something moving on the other side."
- D. "Yes," I replied.

8. A — Combining Craft

Which passage BEST combines action, thought, and dialogue?

- A. I was scared when I walked into the room.
- B. I walked inside. My teacher was there. She spoke to me.
- C. I pushed open the classroom door and stopped. Every chair faced the front. Did I come on the wrong day? I wondered. "Surprise!" my classmates shouted as they jumped from behind their desks.
- D. The classroom had twenty desks and several posters.

9. I — Important Moment

A student is writing about learning to ride a bicycle. Which moment should receive the MOST development?

- A. Choosing what shirt to wear that morning.
- B. Eating breakfast before going outside.
- C. The moment the student realizes no one is holding the bicycle and is riding independently.
- D. Putting the bicycle back in the garage afterward.

10. I — Slowing Down

Which passage BEST develops an important moment instead of rushing through it?

- A. I went onstage, performed, and then it was over.
- B. I sang my song. Everyone clapped. Then I went home.
- C. The first note came out softer than I intended. I glanced at my teacher, who gave me a small nod. I took another breath and tried again. This time, my voice filled the room.
- D. The performance happened on Thursday night.

11. I — Meaningful Details

Which detail would BEST help develop the moment when a student discovers that a missing pet has returned home?

- A. The house had four windows.
- B. I heard the familiar scratch against the back door and froze before racing across the kitchen.
- C. Pets need food and water every day.
- D. My backpack was lying beside the table.

12. L — Lesson

Which ending BEST communicates a lesson learned from getting lost during a hiking trip?

- A. Then we drove home.
- B. It was an interesting day in the forest.
- C. From that day forward, I understood why Dad always stopped to study the trail map before we started walking.
- D. Hiking trails can be long.

13. L — Lasting Effect

Which ending BEST shows that the events of the story had a lasting effect on the narrator?

- A. The next day was Monday.
- B. I still keep Grandma's handwritten recipe beside my bed, not because I need it to cook, but because her words remind me of the afternoon she taught me much more than how to bake bread.
- C. Grandma liked cooking.
- D. We cleaned the kitchen afterward.

14. S — Setting

Which description BEST establishes a setting that contributes to the narrative?

- A. We were outside.
- B. It was nighttime.
- C. Wind pushed against the cabin windows while rain hammered the metal roof, making it almost impossible to hear anything beyond the room.
- D. Cabins are usually made from wood.

15. S — Mood

A student is writing a suspenseful story. Which setting detail BEST supports the mood?

- A. The hallway had a floor and walls.
- B. The lights flickered as I walked down the empty hallway, and somewhere behind me a door slowly creaked open.
- C. The hallway was inside the school.
- D. Students walk through hallways during the day.

Part 2: Build the Narrative

This section makes student thinking visible through guided construction.

Teacher says: “Now the answer will not be in a list. I want to see how you build the parts of a narrative when I give you a place to think about each one. Use your own ideas. I can explain where to write, but I will not give you story ideas or tell you what to add.”

Narrative Situation

Student Prompt

Imagine that you are expecting an ordinary day when something unexpected happens that changes your relationship with another person. The other person may be a friend, family member, classmate, teacher, teammate, neighbor, or another person you know. The narrative may be real or fictional.

16. T — Topic

In one or two sentences, explain what will happen in your story.

My story will be about:

17. R — Relationships

Who are the two most important people in your story? Describe how their relationship is different at the beginning and the end.

Character 1: _____ Character 2: _____

18. A — Actions, Thoughts, and Dialogue

Write one example of an action, one thought, and one line of dialogue that could appear in your narrative.

Action: _____

Thought: _____

Dialogue: “ _____ ”

19. I — Important Moment

What will be the single most important moment in your story? Why is this moment important?

20. L — Lesson or Lasting Effect

What will the narrator learn, realize, understand, or remember because of this experience?

21. S — Setting

Where and when does the story take place? List two specific setting details that could help create the mood or influence what happens.

Part 3: Independent Narrative Writing

The strongest evidence for Independent and Reflective thinking

Teacher says: “This is the part where I want to see what you can do as a writer on your own. You may use the planning space, but you do not have to follow a formula. Make choices that help the reader understand and experience your story. I will not remind you which TRAILS parts to add while you are writing. When you think you are finished, reread your story and make any changes you believe will make it stronger.”

Narrative Writing Prompt

Writing Task

Think about a time when an unexpected event changed the way you thought about another person or changed your relationship with that person. Write a narrative about this experience. Your narrative may be based on a real experience or may be fictional.

Remember TRAILS™

- T — Topic: establish a clear situation and maintain focus on the central experience.
- R — Relationships: develop the relationships among the important characters.
- A — Actions, Thoughts, and Dialogue: show what characters do, think, feel, and say.
- I — Important Moment: slow down and fully develop the most important moment.
- L — Lesson or Lasting Effect: show how the experience affected the narrator, another character, or their relationship.
- S — Setting: create a deliberate setting that helps the reader understand, experience, or feel the story.

Optional Planning Space

Beginning — What is happening before the important moment?

Important Moment — What happens that changes something?

Ending — What is different afterward?

Write Your Narrative

Part 4: Broad Writing Check

Secondary information only

The primary purpose of this diagnostic is narrative development. Revising and editing results may help teachers plan support, but they should not determine the student's primary TRAILS™ thinking profile.

22. Revising Check

Read the sentence: "I walked into the gym and saw everyone looking at me." Which revision would BEST make this important moment more vivid?

- A. I walked into the gym.
- B. Everyone was there.
- C. The gym was a place where people played sports.
- D. I stepped through the gym doors and stopped. Hundreds of faces turned toward me at once, and my stomach seemed to drop to the floor.

23. Editing Check

Which sentence is written correctly?

- A. "Come back!" shouted Mia as she ran toward the gate.
- B. "Come back"! shouted Mia as she ran toward the gate.
- C. "come back!" shouted Mia as she ran toward the gate.
- D. Come back! "shouted Mia as she ran toward the gate."

Teacher says when students finish: *"Thank you. I am going to use this writing to decide what to teach you next and which parts you are ready to do with more independence. This is information for growth, not a grade."*

Teacher Scoring & RPLD Interpretation Guide

Score the thinking, not just the number correct

● Foundational	■ Emergent	▼ Visible	▲ Independent	◆ Reflective
(Beginning)	(Developing)	(Engaging)	(Independent)	(Highly Independent)

Three Sources of Evidence

Assessment evidence	What it measures best	Highest level it can support by itself	Teacher interpretation
Part 1	Recognition and discrimination among narrative choices	■ Emergent (Developing)	Correct answers show that the student can recognize effective narrative craft. Recognition alone is not evidence that the student can produce the craft independently.
Part 2	Guided construction of individual TRAILS™ elements	▼ Visible (Engaging)	The student's thinking becomes visible because the student must generate the element, but the prompt still tells the student exactly what to create.
Part 3	Independent integration and transfer	◆ Reflective (Highly Independent)	Independent writing is required to justify ▲ Independent or ◆ Reflective. Reflective additionally requires strategic, intentional craft and evidence of evaluation/revision/transfer.
Part 4	Broad revising/editing awareness	Supplemental only	Use to plan conventions support; do not lower a narrative thinking level solely because conventions are weak.

How to Assign a Level to Each TRAILS™ Strand

- Do not average the six TRAILS™ strands into one thinking level. Record each strand separately.
- Use the highest level that is supported by consistent evidence, not by a single lucky response.
- If Part 1 is strong but Part 2/3 are weak, the student likely recognizes the skill but cannot yet construct it independently.
- If Part 2 is strong but Part 3 is weak, the student's thinking is Visible: the skill appears when the task names and structures it, but does not transfer consistently into independent writing.
- If Part 3 shows the skill without prompting, Independent is appropriate. Reflective requires strategic choice, depth, control, and/or revision that improves the reader's experience.

A useful teacher question

Instead of asking “How many points did the student earn?” ask “What is the highest level of thinking this student can demonstrate consistently in this TRAILS™ strand, and what support would allow the next level to appear?”

TRAILS™ RPLD Student Thinking Profile

One student can—and often will—have six different levels

TRAILS™ strand	Current RPLD level	Evidence from this diagnostic	Next instructional target
T — Topic			
R — Relationships			
A — Actions, Thoughts, and Dialogue			
I — Important Moment			
L — Lesson or Lasting Effect			
S — Setting			

Teacher Growth Conversation Template

Teacher says: “I noticed that your _____ is currently at the _____ level because I saw you _____. That means you already know how to _____. Your next step is to _____. I am going to give you just enough support to practice that next step, and then I will watch for you to do it on your own.”

Example

“Your Setting is Independent because you used the storm and the dark hallway to affect the mood and what your character did. Your Important Moment is Visible because you identified the right moment in planning, but in the story you moved through it in only two sentences. We are going to keep your setting work independent and target only the important moment by stretching those few seconds into several meaningful details.”

Worked Example: Turn the Profile into an Instructional Plan

Sample student profile:
T ▲ Independent | R ▼ Visible | A ▼ Visible | I ■ Emergent | L ■ Emergent | S ▲ Independent

Instructional decision	What the teacher does	What the teacher avoids
Preserve strengths	Let Topic and Setting remain independent during new writing. Praise the specific evidence of control, then move on.	Do not assign basic topic-identification or setting-senses worksheets just because the student is weaker elsewhere.
Target first	Teach Important Moment with a camera-zoom rehearsal, then connect the expanded moment to a meaningful Lesson/Lasting Effect.	Do not reteach all six TRAILS™ components at once.
Fade support	After guided practice, give a fresh short narrative task without an Important Moment box and look for transfer.	Do not keep the student on the same organizer after the target appears independently.
Teacher can say: “You already know how to keep your story focused and make the setting work for you. I am not going to make you start over on those skills. We are going to work on slowing down the moment where everything changes and then showing why that moment mattered. When you can do that without my organizer, we will move the support again.”		

T — Topic

Does the student establish a clear narrative situation and sustain focus on the central experience?

Thinking level	What the student answer/work shows	Teacher move to grow thinking	Evidence that the student is ready to move up
• Foundational (Beginning)	The response is off-topic, extremely broad, or a list of events with no clear central experience. The student may be able to point to a narrative topic when choices are provided but cannot yet establish one in writing.	Use oral rehearsal and a one-sentence story frame: “This is a story about the time when ____ changed because ____.” Sort focused vs. unfocused openings. Ask the student to name the one event the story is really about.	The student can select and state a clear story focus with teacher support and can identify details that belong or do not belong.
■ Emergent (Developing)	The student states a recognizable situation but focus drifts, begins too broadly, or includes unrelated events. Recognition is stronger than production.	Have the student underline the “story promise” in the opening and cross-check each planned event: “Does this help tell that story?” Provide two possible openings and discuss which is more focused.	The student independently writes a focused topic/situation during guided planning and keeps most planned events connected to it.
▼ Visible (Engaging)	The student can create a focused topic when the organizer explicitly asks for it. The idea is clear in planning, but the final narrative may wander or start too far before the important event.	Fade the organizer. Ask for a one-sentence story promise before drafting, then have the student reread after drafting and mark any sentence that does not serve that promise.	The independent narrative establishes the situation efficiently and remains focused without teacher reminders.
▲ Independent (Independent)	The student independently establishes a clear situation and sustains focus across the narrative. Details generally serve the central experience.	Move from focus to intentional framing. Ask: “What should the reader understand or feel from the very first lines?” Compare two possible openings and revise for purpose.	The student deliberately frames the topic, controls what is included/excluded, and can explain why the chosen opening best prepares the reader.
◆ Reflective (Highly Independent)	The student strategically frames the central experience, selects only purposeful details, and may use an opening/ending relationship, motif, or intentional structure to deepen meaning.	Extend rather than remediate. Invite experimentation with alternate openings, time shifts, or framing devices. Ask the student to justify how structure changes the reader’s understanding.	Sustain strategic control in unfamiliar narrative prompts and transfer the same focus decisions to a different genre or audience.

R — Relationships

Does the student show how characters are connected and how events influence that relationship?

Thinking level	What the student answer/work shows	Teacher move to grow thinking	Evidence that the student is ready to move up
● Foundational (Beginning)	Characters may be named, but the relationship is absent, confusing, or stated only as a label such as “my friend.”	Use a two-character relationship map: “At the beginning they ____; after the event they ____.” Rehearse one interaction orally before writing.	The student can identify who matters and describe a simple beginning relationship with support.
■ Emergent (Developing)	The relationship is recognizable but mostly told rather than demonstrated. Interactions may not affect the story.	Ask “What would this person do or say that only makes sense because of this relationship?” Model replacing labels with a small interaction, gesture, memory, or line of dialogue.	The student creates one relevant interaction that reveals the relationship rather than merely naming it.
▼ Visible (Engaging)	The student can describe the relationship and a change in planning, and includes some interaction in the draft, but development may be uneven.	Remove the relationship map and ask the student to show beginning vs. ending through two moments in the story. Conference with: “Where can the reader see the relationship change?”	The independent story includes interactions before/after the important moment that make the relationship understandable without explanation from the teacher.
▲ Independent (Independent)	Relationships are developed through purposeful interaction, and the narrative shows how the event changes, tests, strengthens, or reveals the relationship.	Push toward subtlety and complexity: conflicting feelings, misunderstandings, gestures, or dialogue with subtext. Ask the student to cut any sentence that simply labels the relationship if the story already shows it.	The student deliberately chooses interactions that reveal change and can explain how those choices shape the reader’s view of the characters.
◆ Reflective (Highly Independent)	Relationship development is layered and intentional; changes may be implied through recurring actions, dialogue, contrast, or reflection rather than directly stated.	Invite multiple points of view or scenes where the same interaction means different things to different characters.	The student transfers nuanced relationship craft to new narrative contexts and can analyze how small choices alter character dynamics.

A — Actions, Thoughts, and Dialogue

Does the student use character behavior, internal thinking, and speech to develop character and move events forward?

Thinking level	What the student answer/work shows	Teacher move to grow thinking	Evidence that the student is ready to move up
● Foundational (Beginning)	The writing mainly reports events: “I was scared. We went inside.” Actions, thoughts, and dialogue are missing or unrelated.	Use “Show it three ways”: What did the body do? What did the character think? What could the character say? Orally generate one of each before writing.	The student can recognize and generate a relevant action, thought, or dialogue line with support.
■ Emergent (Developing)	The student uses one craft type, often repeatedly, but may add dialogue or actions that do not change character understanding or events.	Have the student label A/T/D in a short excerpt and ask, “What job does this sentence do?” Keep only lines that reveal character or move the story.	The student can choose among action, thought, and dialogue based on what the moment needs.
▼ Visible (Engaging)	The student can generate all three in the guided section and uses some in the story, but integration may feel inserted or formulaic.	Fade sentence stems. During revision, circle one important paragraph and ask the student to add the one A/T/D move that best deepens it—not all three automatically.	The independent narrative integrates purposeful action, thought, and/or dialogue naturally where they are needed.
▲ Independent (Independent)	The student independently uses A/T/D to reveal character, create tension, and advance events. Choices are generally purposeful rather than decorative.	Teach economy and subtext. Ask whether the dialogue sounds like something the character would truly say and whether internal thoughts add information the reader could not already see.	The student selects craft strategically and can explain why a thought, action, or line of dialogue is more effective than another option.
◆ Reflective (Highly Independent)	A/T/D work together with precision. Dialogue may reveal more than it says directly; actions and thoughts may contrast; craft choices shape pacing and character complexity.	Invite revision for voice, subtext, and contrast between internal and external behavior.	The student transfers strategic character craft across narrators, points of view, and unfamiliar prompts.

I — Important Moment

Can the student identify the moment of greatest change and slow it down using meaningful detail and controlled pacing?

Thinking level	What the student answer/work shows	Teacher move to grow thinking	Evidence that the student is ready to move up
• Foundational (Beginning)	The story may have events, but there is no clear turning point, or the most important moment is skipped or summarized in a single vague sentence.	Use a timeline and place a star on the one moment where something changes. Orally “freeze” the moment and ask: What did you see? hear? do? think? say?	The student can identify the important moment and add at least two relevant details with strong guidance.
■ Emergent (Developing)	The important moment is present but rushed. The student may spend more time on setup than on the event that actually matters.	Use a pacing ratio: quickly summarize what leads up to the moment, then stretch 5–10 seconds into several sentences. Model “camera zoom.”	The student can expand the important moment in guided writing so it receives more development than routine events.
▼ Visible (Engaging)	The student can name the important moment and explain why it matters in planning, but the independent draft may only partially slow it down.	Remove the “why is it important?” prompt and instead have the student highlight the moment in the draft. Ask: “Where does time slow down? If I blink, will I miss the change?”	The independent narrative clearly slows at the turning point and uses meaningful sensory/action/thought detail.
▲ Independent (Independent)	The student controls pacing independently, developing the important moment with enough detail for the reader to experience the change.	Teach intentional pacing choices: sentence length, paragraph breaks, silence, repeated action, or delayed information. Ask what pacing effect the student wants.	The student can revise pacing strategically and explain how a pacing choice changes tension, emotion, or emphasis.
◆ Reflective (Highly Independent)	The important moment is crafted deliberately. The writer manipulates time and detail for emotional or thematic effect and may use contrast, pause, or reflection with control.	Extend through experimentation with compressed vs. expanded versions of the same scene or nonlinear structure.	The student transfers pacing control to unfamiliar stories and chooses the degree of expansion based on purpose rather than a formula.

L — Lesson or Lasting Effect

Does the narrative reveal how the experience matters—what changed, was learned, was realized, or continues to affect the narrator or relationship?

Thinking level	What the student answer/work shows	Teacher move to grow thinking	Evidence that the student is ready to move up
• Foundational (Beginning)	The story simply stops, ends with “then I went home,” or gives no evidence that the event mattered.	Ask orally: “What was different after this happened?” Offer concrete choices: thinking, feeling, behavior, relationship, or future action.	The student can state one clear change or realization when directly prompted.
■ Emergent (Developing)	The student states a lesson in a generic way (“I learned to never give up”) that may not be well connected to the events.	Trace the lesson back to a specific story moment: “What happened that taught that?” Replace generic morals with a sentence that could only belong to this story.	The student writes a lesson or effect that is clearly tied to the event, with some support.
▼ Visible (Engaging)	The guided plan contains a relevant realization or lasting effect, but the final ending may summarize or state it abruptly.	Have the student reread the ending and ask: “Can the reader see the change, not just be told the lesson?” Add a final action, thought, image, or relationship shift that shows the effect.	The independent narrative ends in a way that clearly reveals change and connects naturally to the events.
▲ Independent (Independent)	The student independently communicates a meaningful change or realization connected to the narrative and avoids a generic moral.	Push toward resonance rather than explanation. Ask whether one image, action, or reflection could imply the lesson more powerfully than stating it directly.	The student intentionally chooses between direct reflection and implied meaning and can explain the effect on the reader.
◆ Reflective (Highly Independent)	The lasting effect is woven through the narrative and may be implied, echoed through an image or relationship, or revealed through subtle reflection. The ending deepens the story rather than merely closing it.	Invite thematic connections, motif, circular endings, or understated reflection.	The student creates resonant endings in new contexts and can revise endings for different audiences or purposes.

S — Setting

Does the student use where/when/atmosphere as an active part of the narrative rather than merely naming a place?

Thinking level	What the student answer/work shows	Teacher move to grow thinking	Evidence that the student is ready to move up
● Foundational (Beginning)	Setting is absent or only named: “We were at school.” It does not help the reader imagine or understand the event.	Use a setting senses chart: What could the character see, hear, feel, smell, or notice? Choose only details relevant to the story.	The student can add one or two concrete setting details when prompted.
■ Emergent (Developing)	The student includes descriptive details, but they may be random, list-like, or disconnected from mood/events.	Ask: “Why does the reader need this detail?” Sort details into useful vs. decorative. Model how weather, space, noise, or objects can affect what happens.	The student selects setting details that support the mood or action, not just describe the place.
▼ Visible (Engaging)	The student can plan two purposeful details and uses some in the narrative, but setting may disappear after the beginning.	Fade the senses organizer. Ask the student to revisit setting at the important moment: “What changes in the surroundings—or what does the character notice now?”	The independent narrative uses setting more than once and connects it to mood, action, or character experience.
▲ Independent (Independent)	The student independently selects setting details that shape mood, actions, pacing, or meaning. The setting feels integrated rather than added on.	Push toward atmosphere and symbolism. Ask whether a repeated place/object/weather detail could deepen meaning without overdescribing.	The student can revise setting choices for a specific emotional effect and explain how the details influence the reader.
◆ Reflective (Highly Independent)	Setting operates as part of the craft: atmosphere, contrast, recurring imagery, or symbolic details contribute to theme, character, or structural unity.	Invite the student to rewrite the same event in a different setting and analyze how the story’s meaning or mood changes.	The student transfers intentional setting craft across prompts and manipulates environment for narrative effect.

How Teachers Move Students from One Thinking Level to the Next

The scaffold should change as the thinking changes

● Foundational → ■ Emergent

Goal: move from not yet demonstrating the skill to recognizing and attempting it.

Teacher move: Teacher provides explicit model, oral rehearsal, choices, sorting, sentence starters, and one small target at a time.

Teacher language: ““Watch how I make this choice. Now tell me which example works better and why. Next, you try one with me.””

■ Emergent → ▼ Visible

Goal: move from recognition/partial attempts to generating the skill when the task names it.

Teacher move: Teacher removes answer choices, gives a targeted organizer, uses guided questions, then asks the student to generate the element.

Teacher language: ““You already recognize what this looks like. Now I want you to build one. I’ll give you the question, but the idea must come from you.””

▼ Visible → ▲ Independent

Goal: move from successful guided construction to transfer inside a complete narrative without reminders.

Teacher move: Teacher fades organizers and prompts, asks students to apply the skill in authentic writing, then checks whether it appears spontaneously.

Teacher language: ““You can do this when I point to it. Now I’m going to stop naming it for you. Show me where you decide it belongs in your own story.””

▲ Independent → ◆ Reflective

Goal: move from competent independent use to strategic, intentional craft and self-evaluation.

Teacher move: Teacher offers choices, asks for justification, invites revision for effect, and increases complexity rather than adding more of the same work.

Teacher language: ““You can already do this on your own. Now decide which version creates the effect you want, revise intentionally, and tell me why your choice is stronger.””

Do Not Over-Scaffold Strong Strands

Important

If a student is ▲ Independent or ♦ Reflective in a strand, do not require the student to keep completing Foundational or Emergent practice for that same strand simply because another strand is weaker. Preserve independence where it already exists and target the strand that needs growth.

Embedded Progress-Monitoring Tools

A second full diagnostic is not required

Strand	2–5 minute embedded check	What counts as growth
T — Topic	Give two unrelated narrative ideas. Ask the student to choose one and write a focused two-sentence opening that makes the central experience clear.	Student demonstrates the next-level behavior with less prompting and in a new example.
R — Relationships	Provide two characters and one event. Ask the student to write a short interaction that shows their relationship before or after the event without labeling it.	Student demonstrates the next-level behavior with less prompting and in a new example.
A — Actions, Thoughts, Dialogue	Give a plain sentence such as “Mia was worried.” Ask the student to develop the moment using the one craft move that would best reveal the worry.	Student demonstrates the next-level behavior with less prompting and in a new example.
I — Important Moment	Give a three-sentence rushed event. Ask the student to expand only the turning point into 5–7 sentences while leaving routine events compressed.	Student demonstrates the next-level behavior with less prompting and in a new example.
L — Lesson/Lasting Effect	Give a narrative ending that only says “Then I went home.” Ask the student to revise it so the reader understands what changed or why the experience mattered.	Student demonstrates the next-level behavior with less prompting and in a new example.
S — Setting	Give a neutral location and a target mood. Ask the student to add two details that create that mood and affect the character’s experience.	Student demonstrates the next-level behavior with less prompting and in a new example.

Progress-Monitoring Cycle

Instructional Cycle

Narrative Diagnostic → TRAILS™ RPLD Profile → Target One or Two Strands → Provide Level-Matched Support → Short Embedded Writing Check → Reduce or Adjust Support → Look for Independent Transfer → Extend Craft

Quick Teacher Conference Record

Use this record for a brief strand-specific conference. The goal is to document one observable strength and one next thinking move - not to rescore the entire narrative.

Student / Date	Student: _____ Date: _____
Priority Strand / Current Level	Strand: T R A I L S Level: ● Foundational ■ Emergent ▼ Visible ▲ Independent ◆ Reflective
Evidence I Saw	In the student work, I noticed: _____ _____ _____
Next Move / Recheck	Next thinking target: _____ Support I will provide: _____ I will recheck this skill on/through: _____
Conference Language “I can see that you can already _____. Your next thinking move is to _____. I am going to give you _____ support while you practice it. Then I will look for you to do it with less help in a new piece of writing.”	

Teacher Answer Key & Evidence Map

Recognition items support—but do not replace—writing evidence

Item	Answer	Primary evidence
P1	B	T
P2	C	R
P3	C	A
P4	C	I
P5	C	L
P6	B	S
1	C	T
2	B	T
3	B	R
4	C	R
5	C	A
6	B	A
7	C	A
8	C	A
9	C	I
10	C	I
11	B	I
12	C	L
13	B	L
14	C	S
15	B	S
22	D	Revising
23	A	Editing

Scoring Reminder

Do not convert the recognition-item total into the student's RPLD level. A student can answer every recognition item correctly and still be Visible rather than Independent if those same narrative decisions do not appear in the student's own writing.

Flexible Grouping by Strand

Group for the skill, not for a global “ability” label. A student may need one group for Important Moment and a different level of support for Setting.

- Foundational groups: explicit modeling + oral rehearsal + concrete choices.
- Emergent groups: remove choices; use guided generation and comparison.
- Visible groups: fade the organizer; require transfer into a short authentic narrative.
- Independent groups: preserve autonomy; use conferences and strategic revision rather than repetitive worksheets.
- Reflective groups: increase complexity, audience, point of view, structure, subtlety, and self-evaluation.

The following section contains an INFORMATIVE diagnostic assessment tool.

Informative Writing

Purpose and Rationale: This diagnostic reveals where each student is currently thinking as an informative writer - from establishing a central idea, to selecting relevant evidence, to explaining that evidence and organizing a clear structure. Rather than assigning a single score, it locates the student's cognitive address across the informative dimensions so instruction can target the very next move. Use the answer choices and the student's own writing together to name what the writer already controls and what to teach next.

TREES™ Informative Writing Diagnostic Assessment

Range Performance Level Descriptor (RPLD) Integrated Edition

The Writing Academy®, LLC

Purpose

A low-stakes informative-writing readiness assessment that identifies not only what students can recognize and produce, but the level of thinking they currently demonstrate within each TREES™ component. Results are used to adjust instruction, scaffolds, feedback, and opportunities for independence—not to generate a traditional grade.

● Foundational	■ Emergent	▼ Visible	▲ Independent	◆ Reflective
(Beginning)	(Developing)	(Engaging)	(Independent)	(Highly Independent)

TREES™ Framework

- T — Thesis (Central Idea): establish a focused response containing the topic, the thinking verb, and the answer to the prompt.
- R — Reasons: develop clear, distinct reasons that explain why the thesis (central idea) is true.
- E1 — Evidence: select accurate, relevant text evidence that directly supports each reason.
- E2 — Explanation: explain how and why the evidence proves the reason and supports the thesis (central idea).
- S — Significance: extend the learning beyond the immediate text to a larger lesson, implication, principle, or audience.

Core RPLD Principle

A student should not be assigned one thinking level for all informative writing. Determine a separate level for T, R, E1, E2, and S. A student may be Independent in Thesis and Evidence while remaining Visible in Explanation and Emergent in Significance.

Teacher Administration Guide

What to say, what to provide, and what not to coach

Materials to Prepare

- One student diagnostic packet per student.
- The short anchor passage, “The Power of a School Garden,” included in this packet.
- Pencil or approved writing tool; lined paper if additional writing space is needed.
- Teacher RPLD scoring profile and answer key.
- Any routinely provided documented accommodations. Accommodations should provide access without supplying the thesis, reasons, evidence, explanation, significance, or wording.

Suggested Administration Sequence

Phase	Suggested time	Purpose
1. Opening	2–3 min	Explain that this is not a grade and that students should show what they can do now.
2. Anchor Passage + Recognition	15–20 min	Read/follow the short passage, then complete passage-based and general recognition items.
3. Guided Informative Build	15–20 min	Students make their thinking visible through TREES™ planning prompts.
4. Independent Informative Response	30–40 min	Students plan and write independently. This section carries the strongest evidence for Independent and Reflective levels.
5. Broad Writing Check	5–8 min	Brief revising/editing information only; do not let it drive the primary TREES™ profile.

Opening Script

Teacher says: “Today you are going to show me how you think as an informative writer. This is not a grade, and I do not expect everyone to do the same things yet. Some parts may feel easy and some may feel challenging. That is useful information for me because it tells me what I should teach you next. Do your best work and show me what you already know about building an informative response with TREES™.”

What the Teacher May and May Not Do

MAY DO

- Read directions and the anchor passage aloud if that is part of normal classroom access or an approved accommodation.
- Clarify procedural directions such as where to write or which section to complete next.
- Pronounce a word from the directions or passage without explaining which answer it supports.
- Encourage effort with neutral language such as “Show me what you know.”
- Provide extra paper, approved assistive technology, or routine access accommodations.

DO NOT DO DURING THE DIAGNOSTIC

- Do not identify the topic, thinking verb, answer to the prompt, thesis, reasons, evidence, explanation, or significance for the student.
- Do not tell students which details from the passage to use or whether a chosen detail is strong enough.
- Do not ask leading questions that supply the missing reasoning, such as “Doesn’t this prove responsibility?”
- Do not add sentence frames beyond the ones already printed in the guided section.
- Do not correct spelling, punctuation, grammar, wording, or organization while the student is composing.
- Do not remind individual students of a TREES™ component they omitted during Part 3.

Anchor Passage for Part 1

The Power of a School Garden

Teacher says before reading: “First, we will read a short informational passage. Follow along as I read it aloud. Afterward, you will read it quietly and answer questions about the choices an informative writer would make. I will not explain the answers while you are working.”

When students at Oak Ridge Elementary noticed that an unused area behind their school was filled with weeds, they began imagining something different. With the help of their teachers and several community volunteers, they transformed the empty space into a school garden.

At first, the students thought the garden would simply be a place to grow vegetables. Soon, however, they discovered that the garden provided many different learning opportunities. During science lessons, students observed insects, studied plant life cycles, and recorded how quickly different plants grew. Mathematics classes used the garden to measure plant height, calculate the distance between rows, and compare the amount of produce harvested each week.

The garden also helped students develop responsibility. Each class was assigned specific jobs such as watering plants, pulling weeds, checking the soil, or recording observations. Students quickly learned that when someone forgot a responsibility, the plants were affected. Working together became important because the success of the garden depended on everyone completing a job.

The benefits eventually extended beyond the school. When the garden produced more vegetables than the students could use, the classes donated some of the food to a local community center. Students who had originally planted seeds for a classroom project began to understand that their work could also help other people.

By the end of the year, the once-empty patch of land had become much more than a garden. It had become a place where students learned academic skills, practiced responsibility, worked together, and contributed to their community.

Teacher says after reading: “Now read the passage quietly one more time. Then answer the passage questions on your own. You may look back at the passage as often as you need.”

Part 1A: Reading the Writer’s Informative Choices

Use “The Power of a School Garden”

P1. T — Thesis (Central Idea)

Which statement BEST expresses the central idea the informative writer should establish?

- A. The garden was located behind Oak Ridge Elementary.
- B. The school garden became important because it helped students apply academic skills, develop responsibility, work together, and contribute to their community.
- C. Students grew vegetables in rows.
- D. Community volunteers visited the school.

P2. R — Reasons

Which TWO ideas would provide the strongest reasons for explaining why the garden became an important learning experience?

- A. The garden replaced an area that had weeds.
- B. Students used science and mathematics in real situations.
- C. Students developed responsibility and learned that their work could help others.
- D. The garden was located outside the school building.

P3. E1 — Evidence

Which detail BEST supports the reason that the garden made academic learning more meaningful?

- A. Teachers and volunteers helped create the garden.
- B. Students observed insects, studied plant life cycles, measured plant height, and calculated distances between rows.
- C. The empty area had once contained weeds.
- D. The garden grew vegetables.

P4. E2 — Explanation

Which explanation BEST shows why the assigned garden jobs helped students learn responsibility?

- A. The students had several different jobs.
- B. Gardens need water and healthy soil.
- C. The students learned that their choices affected the plants and the success of the entire group, so completing each job consistently mattered.
- D. Pulling weeds can take a long time.

P5. S — Significance

Which statement BEST carries the learning beyond this one school garden?

- A. Every school should grow the same vegetables.
- B. The students finished their project by the end of the year.
- C. Real-world projects can help students use academic knowledge, accept responsibility, and understand that their work can improve a community.
- D. School gardens are usually built outside.

P6. TREES™ Reasoning Chain

Which sequence BEST shows how the ideas in a strong informative response should work together?

- A. Evidence → title → opinion → ending
- B. Topic → unrelated details → summary
- C. Reason → copied sentence → new topic
- D. Thesis (central idea) → reasons → evidence → explanation → significance

Part 1B: Recognizing Strong Informative Writing

Choose the response that would create the strongest informative writing.

1. T — Identifying the Topic

What is the main topic students must write about?

- A. Vegetables
- B. Oak Ridge Elementary
- C. Why the school garden became an important part of students' learning
- D. How to build a garden

2. T — Identifying the Verb

In the prompt, what is the main thinking verb telling the writer what to do?

- A. Explain
- B. Garden
- C. Students
- D. Important

3. T — Answering the Prompt

Which statement BEST answers why the school garden became an important part of the students' learning experience?

- A. The garden was located behind the school.
- B. The school garden became important because it allowed students to learn academic skills, develop responsibility, and contribute to their community.
- C. Students planted vegetables in rows.
- D. Many schools have gardens.

4. T — Complete Thesis

Which thesis (central idea) BEST includes the topic, thinking verb, and answer to the prompt?

- A. The school garden was behind Oak Ridge Elementary.
- B. Students learned about gardens.
- C. The passage explains that the school garden became an important learning experience because it helped students develop academic skills, responsibility, teamwork, and an understanding of how their work could help others.
- D. Gardens are helpful.

5. R — Strong Reason

Which is the BEST reason supporting the thesis (central idea)?

- A. The garden contained vegetables.
- B. The garden helped students apply academic skills in real situations.
- C. The school building had an unused area.
- D. Volunteers came to the school.

6. R — Reason or Detail

Which statement is a reason rather than simply a detail?

- A. Students measured plant height.
- B. Students watered the plants.
- C. The garden taught students responsibility because the plants depended on students completing their assigned jobs.
- D. The garden was located behind the school.

7. R — Multiple Reasons

Which TWO reasons would provide the strongest organization for the response?

- A. The garden was green.
- B. The garden helped students apply academic learning.
- C. The garden helped students develop responsibility and teamwork.
- D. The garden was behind the school.

8. E1 — Relevant Evidence

A writer's reason is that the garden helped students use academic skills in meaningful ways. Which evidence BEST supports that reason?

- A. "The unused area behind their school was filled with weeds."
- B. Students "observed insects, studied plant life cycles, and recorded how quickly different plants grew."
- C. Volunteers helped create the garden.
- D. The garden contained vegetables.

9. E1 — Matching Evidence

A writer's reason is that the garden helped students become more responsible. Which evidence BEST supports that reason?

- A. Each class was assigned jobs such as watering plants, pulling weeds, and checking the soil.
- B. The garden was located outside.
- C. Students studied plant life cycles.
- D. The classes donated vegetables.

10. E1 — Relevance

A writer wants to prove that the garden helped students understand how their actions could affect other people. Which evidence should the writer use?

- A. The area had originally been filled with weeds.
- B. Students measured plant height.
- C. Students donated extra vegetables to a local community center.
- D. Teachers helped students create the garden.

11. E2 — Evidence Is Not Enough

A response gives a reason and then states that each class had jobs such as watering plants and pulling weeds. What is still missing?

- A. A topic
- B. A reason
- C. An explanation of how the evidence proves the reason
- D. A title

12. E2 — Strong Explanation

Which sentence BEST explains why the assigned jobs support the idea that students learned responsibility?

- A. Gardens have many jobs.
- B. This shows responsibility because students learned that the plants depended on them completing their assigned tasks consistently.
- C. Students had to water plants.
- D. The students went to school every day.

13. E2 — Connecting Evidence

Students used mathematics to measure plant height and calculate the distance between rows. Which explanation BEST connects this evidence to academic learning?

- A. Mathematics includes numbers.
- B. Plants can be measured.
- C. This shows that students applied mathematics skills to a real task instead of practicing the skills only on paper.
- D. Schools teach mathematics.

14. S — Recognizing Significance

Which conclusion BEST moves beyond simply repeating what happened in the passage?

- A. The students had a garden.
- B. In conclusion, they learned science, math, and responsibility.
- C. The experience shows that learning can become especially powerful when students use what they know to solve problems, work with others, and make a difference in their community.
- D. The garden grew vegetables behind the school.

15. S — Bigger Idea

Which statement BEST communicates the significance of the students' experience?

- A. Vegetables can grow in gardens.
- B. Students went outside during school.
- C. The garden demonstrates that even a small school project can teach students that their knowledge and actions can have an impact beyond the classroom.
- D. Students should always plant vegetables.

Part 2: Build the Informative Response

This section makes student thinking visible through guided construction.

Teacher says: “Now the answer will not be in a list. I want to see how you build the parts of an informative response when I give you a place to think about each one. Use your own ideas from the passage. I can clarify where to write, but I will not give you the thesis, reasons, evidence, explanation, or significance.”

Student Prompt

Explain why the school garden became an important part of the students’ learning experience. Use information from “The Power of a School Garden” to support your response.

16. T — Thesis (Central Idea)

Build a complete thesis containing the topic, the thinking verb, and the answer to the prompt. Topic: _____

Verb: _____ Answer: _____

17. R — Reasons

Write two distinct reasons explaining why the garden was important. Optional third reason may be added if it strengthens the response.

18. E1 — Evidence

Choose specific evidence from the passage for each reason. Make sure each piece of evidence directly matches the reason it is meant to support.

19. E2 — Explanation

Explain how each piece of evidence proves its reason. Use your own words. You may begin with “This evidence shows...” or “This matters because...,” but your reasoning must go beyond repeating the evidence.

20. S — Significance

Think beyond the students in this passage. What larger idea could another student, teacher, school, family, or community learn from this experience? Why does that idea matter beyond one school garden?

Part 3: Independent Informative Writing

The strongest evidence for Independent and Reflective thinking

Teacher says: “This is the part where I want to see what you can do as an informative writer on your own. You may use the passage and the optional planning space, but you do not have to follow a formula. Make choices that help your reader understand why the garden was important. I will not remind you which TREES™ parts to add while you are writing. When you think you are finished, reread your response and make any changes you believe will make it stronger.”

Writing Task

Explain why the school garden became an important part of the students’ learning experience. Use evidence from “The Power of a School Garden” to support your response.

Remember TREES™

- T — Thesis (Central Idea): establish a focused answer containing the topic, thinking verb, and answer to the prompt.
- R — Reasons: develop clear reasons explaining why the thesis is true.
- E1 — Evidence: use relevant, specific information from the passage.
- E2 — Explanation: explain how and why the evidence proves each reason and supports the thesis.
- S — Significance: extend the learning to a larger lesson, implication, principle, or audience.

Optional Planning Space

Thesis (Central Idea)

Reason 1 → Evidence → Explanation

Reason 2 → Evidence → Explanation

Significance — Why does this matter beyond the passage?

Write Your Informative Response

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Part 4: Broad Writing Check

Secondary information only

The primary purpose of this diagnostic is informative-response development. Revising and editing results may help teachers plan support, but they should not determine the student's primary TREES™ thinking profile.

21. Revising Check

Read the paragraph: "The garden helped students learn responsibility. Each class had jobs. Students had to water plants and pull weeds. This shows that the garden was important." Which revision would MOST strengthen the explanation?

- A. The garden had vegetables in it.
- B. This responsibility mattered because students learned that their choices affected whether the plants remained healthy and whether the group succeeded.
- C. Some students like vegetables.
- D. Gardens need water.

22. Editing Check

Which sentence is written correctly?

- A. The students learned science math and responsibility.
- B. The students learned science, math, and responsibility.
- C. the students learned science, math, and responsibility.
- D. The students learned, science math and responsibility.

Teacher says when students finish: "Thank you. I am going to use this work to decide what to teach you next and which parts you are ready to do with more independence. This information is for growth, not a grade."

Teacher Scoring & RPLD Interpretation Guide

Score the thinking, not just the number correct

● Foundational (Beginning)	■ Emergent (Developing)	▼ Visible (Engaging)	▲ Independent (Independent)	◆ Reflective (Highly Independent)
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Three Sources of Evidence

Assessment evidence	What it measures best	Highest level it can support by itself	Teacher interpretation
Part 1	Recognition and discrimination among informative-writing choices	■ Emergent (Developing)	Correct answers show that the student can recognize effective TREES™ choices. Recognition alone is not evidence that the student can produce the craft independently.
Part 2	Guided construction of individual TREES™ elements	▼ Visible (Engaging)	The student's thinking becomes visible because the task names each component. Strong performance here does not automatically prove transfer into a complete response.
Part 3	Independent integration and transfer	◆ Reflective (Highly Independent)	Independent writing is required to justify Independent or Reflective. Reflective additionally requires strategic choice, self-evaluation, revision, or transfer.
Part 4	Broad revising/editing awareness	Supplemental only	Use to plan conventions support; do not lower a TREES™ thinking level solely because conventions are weak.

How to Assign a Level to Each TREES™ Strand

- Do not average the five TREES™ strands into one thinking level. Record each strand separately.
- Use the highest level supported by consistent evidence, not by one lucky selected response.
- If Part 1 is strong but Parts 2 and 3 are weak, the student likely recognizes the skill but cannot yet construct it independently.
- If Part 2 is strong but Part 3 is weak, the skill is Visible: it appears when the task names and structures it, but transfer is not yet dependable.
- If Part 3 shows the skill without prompting, Independent is appropriate. Reflective requires intentional choices, evaluation, revision, audience awareness, synthesis, or transfer.

A useful teacher question

Instead of asking “How many points did the student earn?” ask “What is the highest level of thinking this student can demonstrate consistently in this TREES™ strand, and what is the least support needed to help the next level appear?”

TREES™ RPLD Student Thinking Profile

One student can—and often will—have five different levels

TREES™ strand	Current RPLD level	Evidence from this diagnostic	Next instructional target
T — Thesis (Central Idea)	_____		
R — Reasons	_____		
E1 — Evidence	_____		
E2 — Explanation	_____		
S — Significance	_____		

Teacher Growth Conversation Template

Teacher says: “I noticed that your _____ is currently at the _____ level because I saw you _____. That means you already know how to _____. Your next step is to _____. I am going to give you just enough support to practice that next step, and then I will watch for you to do it on your own.”

Example
“Your Evidence is Independent because you selected specific proof that matched both reasons without help. Your Explanation is Visible because the organizer helped you show how the evidence proves the reason, but that reasoning did not appear consistently in the independent response. We will preserve your independent evidence work and focus our next instruction on explaining the connection without a frame.”

Worked Example: Turn the Profile into an Instructional Plan

Sample student profile: T ▲ Independent | R ▲ Independent | E1 ▲ Independent | E2 ▼ Visible | S ■ Emergent

Instructional decision	What the teacher does	What the teacher avoids
Preserve strengths	Let Thesis, Reasons, and Evidence remain independent during new writing. Praise the specific evidence-to-reason matches the student already controls.	Do not assign basic prompt-analysis, reason-identification, or evidence-matching worksheets just because Explanation or Significance is weaker.
Target first	Teach E2 with a reason → evidence → “how this proves it” oral rehearsal. Then have the student add one independent explanation sentence to an authentic body paragraph.	Do not reteach all five TREES™ components at once. Do not confuse copied evidence with explanation.
Build next	Use a significance ladder: passage event → larger lesson → who else could use the lesson → why it matters. Begin orally, then write one sentence.	Do not accept a repeated thesis or generic moral as evidence of significance.
Fade support	After guided practice, give a fresh short passage and one reason/evidence pair. Remove the explanation frame first, then remove the significance prompts.	Do not keep the student on the same organizer after the target skill appears independently.

Teacher can say: “You already know how to build a clear thesis, choose reasons, and find strong evidence. I am not going to make you start over on those skills. We are going to work on the part that will make your evidence do more work for the reader—explaining how it proves your reason. Then we will practice carrying the learning beyond the passage in your significance statement. When you can do those two things without my frame, I will remove the support again.”

T — Thesis (Central Idea)

Does the student establish a complete, focused response to the prompt and use it to control the informative composition?

Thinking level	What the student answer/work shows	Teacher move to grow thinking	Evidence that the student is ready to move up
● Foundational (Beginning)	The thesis is missing, off-topic, copied from the passage, or extremely broad. The student may not yet identify the topic, thinking verb, and answer even when choices are provided.	Use oral prompt analysis and a one-sentence frame. Mark the topic, verb, and answer in three separate steps. Compare complete and incomplete theses and jointly build one response.	The student can select the topic, identify the thinking verb, orally answer the prompt, and attempt a thesis with teacher support.
■ Emergent (Developing)	The student recognizes a strong thesis but produces an incomplete, overly general, or frame-dependent thesis. One of the three required parts may be weak or implied.	Use a partial frame rather than a complete model. Ask “What is missing?” Have the student revise one weak thesis and explain how each part responds to the prompt.	The student independently builds a complete topic + verb + answer thesis in the structured Part 2 task.
▼ Visible (Engaging)	The student constructs a complete thesis when the task names the three parts. In the independent response, the thesis may be formulaic, broad, or inconsistently sustained.	Fade the organizer. Compare acceptable and precise theses. Ask what reasons the thesis requires and revise the wording so it controls the whole response.	The student transfers a focused thesis into the independent composition and sustains that focus throughout the response.
▲ Independent (Independent)	The student independently writes a complete, focused thesis and uses it to establish direction for the response.	Increase precision and flexibility. Use more complex why/how prompts and ask the student to refine wording for purpose, audience, and the organization that follows.	The student makes deliberate thesis choices, self-revises for precision, and can explain why one version controls the response more effectively.
◆ Reflective (Highly Independent)	The student crafts a nuanced thesis, anticipates organization, revises the controlling idea as thinking develops, and adapts it to purpose and audience.	Use unfamiliar content, paired texts, and prompts with multiple defensible approaches. Ask the student to justify the selected thesis and evaluate alternatives.	The student transfers thesis control across texts, genres, audiences, and complex purposes while explaining the effect of wording and structure.

R — Reasons

Does the student generate clear, distinct reasons that explain why the thesis (central idea) is true and organize the response?

Thinking level	What the student answer/work shows	Teacher move to grow thinking	Evidence that the student is ready to move up
● Foundational (Beginning)	The student gives facts, events, or details instead of reasons, or cannot distinguish a reason from a detail even when choices are supplied.	Use reason/not-a-reason sorts. Ask “Why is the thesis true?” orally. Turn one detail into a reason by naming what the detail proves.	The student can recognize a reason and generate one relevant reason with oral or written support.
■ Emergent (Developing)	The student recognizes strong reasons but generates only one general reason, overlapping reasons, or reasons that depend on teacher prompting.	Generate several possibilities together, then rank them. Use “Does this answer why?” checks and separate broad reasons from supporting details.	The student generates at least two relevant, distinct reasons in the structured Part 2 task.
▼ Visible (Engaging)	The student develops relevant reasons in the organizer, but one may remain broad, overlap another, or lose focus in the full response.	Fade the organizer and require independent reason selection. Ask the student to name the job of each paragraph and test whether the reasons overlap.	The student independently uses distinct reasons to organize and sustain the complete response.
▲ Independent (Independent)	The student independently develops clear, distinct reasons that directly support the thesis and organize the composition.	Increase decision-making: prioritize reasons, select the strongest sequence, combine related ideas, and remove a weaker reason when it does not add value.	The student becomes strategic about which reasons matter most, why they matter, and how their order affects clarity.
◆ Reflective (Highly Independent)	The student selects, prioritizes, sequences, and refines reasons intentionally as evidence develops, recognizing relationships among ideas.	Use prompts with competing possible reasons. Ask for justification of order, importance, grouping, and relationships among reasons.	The student transfers strategic reasoning to complex, unfamiliar, and multi-source informative tasks.

E1 — Evidence

Does the student select and integrate accurate, specific evidence that directly supports each reason?

Thinking level	What the student answer/work shows	Teacher move to grow thinking	Evidence that the student is ready to move up
● Foundational (Beginning)	Evidence is absent, copied without purpose, inaccurate, or unrelated to the reason. The student may struggle to identify relevant proof even when choices are supplied.	State the reason first, then hunt for proof. Use evidence/not-evidence sorts and reason-to-evidence matching cards. Model why one detail supports the reason and another does not.	The student recognizes relevant evidence and can match one specific piece of proof to a reason with support.
■ Emergent (Developing)	The student often recognizes relevant evidence but selects vague, incomplete, first-found, or weakly matched proof without prompting.	Offer two or three candidate details and ask the student to defend the strongest. Gradually remove highlighting and require the reason to be stated before evidence is selected.	The student selects specific, relevant evidence for each reason in the structured Part 2 organizer.
▼ Visible (Engaging)	The student selects appropriate evidence when reasons and evidence boxes are provided, but may default to the first relevant detail or integrate evidence weakly in the full response.	Ask “Is it relevant, or is it the strongest available?” Fade evidence boxes and require the student to locate, record, and integrate proof independently.	The student independently selects and integrates strong, specific evidence in Part 3.
▲ Independent (Independent)	The student independently selects accurate, specific evidence that clearly supports each reason and integrates it into the response.	Increase complexity through evidence from different parts of a text, multiple pieces of evidence, paired sources, or evidence that requires inference.	The student makes strategic evidence choices, combines proof without redundancy, and explains why the selected evidence is sufficient.
◆ Reflective (Highly Independent)	The student evaluates evidence quality, sufficiency, source relationships, relevance, and redundancy; synthesizes multiple details; and can justify selections.	Provide competing evidence sets, paired texts, and source-quality decisions. Ask the student to defend evidence choices and revise when stronger proof becomes available.	The student transfers evidence evaluation and synthesis across texts, disciplines, audiences, and purposes.

E2 — Explanation

Does the student explain how and why the evidence proves the reason and supports the thesis (central idea)?

Thinking level	What the student answer/work shows	Teacher move to grow thinking	Evidence that the student is ready to move up
• Foundational (Beginning)	Explanation is absent or simply repeats the evidence. The student does not yet distinguish “what the text says” from “how or why that proves the reason.”	Explicitly contrast E1 and E2. Use oral “This shows... because...” practice and ask one causal question at a time: “So what?” “Why does that matter?”	The student can recognize a real explanation and attempt one sentence that goes beyond repetition.
■ Emergent (Developing)	The student recognizes a strong explanation and may use a frame, but the written reasoning remains brief, formulaic, general, or partly repetitive.	Keep the frame but require original wording. Ask “How does this prove your reason?” and “What did the evidence cause, show, allow, or reveal?”	The student produces a clear explanation with support in Part 2.
▼ Visible (Engaging)	The student explains evidence in the organizer and makes reasoning visible, but the explanation may be one-layered or inconsistent during independent writing.	Fade the sentence frame. Require a second layer of reasoning. Have the student underline E1 and circle E2 to verify that both jobs are present.	The student independently links evidence → reason → thesis throughout Part 3 without restating the text.
▲ Independent (Independent)	The student clearly explains how the evidence proves the reason and supports the thesis without merely repeating the passage.	Push analytical depth through cause/effect, relationships, implications, or why the evidence is especially convincing. Use evidence that requires inference.	The student becomes strategic and layered in explanation and can revise a surface explanation into a deeper one.
◆ Reflective (Highly Independent)	The student builds layered analytical explanation, connects evidence to multiple ideas, evaluates why evidence matters, and revises reasoning to improve clarity and depth.	Use paired evidence, synthesis questions, counterexamples, and metacognitive reflection. Ask the student to compare explanations and justify which one changes understanding most.	The student transfers analytical explanation to complex texts, multiple sources, and unfamiliar tasks.

S — Significance

Does the student communicate why the information matters beyond the immediate passage and to people beyond the writer?

Thinking level	What the student answer/work shows	Teacher move to grow thinking	Evidence that the student is ready to move up
● Foundational (Beginning)	The response ends abruptly, repeats the thesis, or summarizes the passage without showing why the learning matters beyond the immediate text.	Teach the difference between summary and significance. Ask orally: “Who else could learn from this?” “Where else could this idea matter?” Use concrete audiences such as school, family, or community.	The student recognizes a significance statement and attempts a broader connection with support.
■ Emergent (Developing)	The student recognizes strong significance and attempts a larger idea, but the statement may be generic, moral-like, inspirational, or still tied closely to the passage.	Use a temporary significance stem, then require the specific larger principle. Compare “repeat the passage” endings with “carry the idea beyond the passage” endings.	The student produces a meaningful broader connection with support in Part 2.
▼ Visible (Engaging)	The student extends beyond the passage in the structured task, but the independent conclusion may be general or only loosely connected to the response’s reasoning.	Fade stems. Require two moves: “beyond this text” and “why it matters.” Connect significance directly to the thesis, reasons, and evidence already developed.	The student independently creates a relevant, defensible significance statement in Part 3.
▲ Independent (Independent)	The student ends the independent response with a relevant larger lesson, implication, principle, or real-world connection that grows from the response.	Increase sophistication through audience, theme, real-world systems, and transfer. Ask for the most defensible larger idea, not merely any larger idea.	The student becomes nuanced and intentional in extending significance and can explain why the conclusion is warranted by the evidence.
◆ Reflective (Highly Independent)	The student develops nuanced, transferable significance that synthesizes the response and connects the learning to broader principles, disciplines, audiences, or contexts.	Invite cross-text, cross-disciplinary, and real-world connections. Require the student to justify the significance, revise it for audience, and avoid unsupported inspiration.	The student transfers significance and synthesis to increasingly complex informative writing and unfamiliar contexts.

Special Focus: E1 and E2 Are Different Thinking Jobs

Finding proof is not the same as explaining proof

The distinction teachers must protect

E1 answers: “What information from the text supports the reason?” E2 answers: “How and why does that information prove the reason and support the thesis?” A student may be Independent in E1 and still be Foundational, Emergent, or Visible in E2.

Worked Example

Reason: The garden helped students learn responsibility.

E1 — Evidence: Each class had jobs such as watering, pulling weeds, and checking the soil.

E2 — Explanation: Because the plants and the group depended on each student completing a job, students learned that their choices had real consequences.

Diagnostic pattern	What the pattern means	Teacher decision
No relevant evidence; no explanation	E1 is Foundational. E2 may be absent because there is nothing relevant to explain.	Target E1 first: state the reason, locate one matching detail, and explain why it is relevant.
Relevant evidence is copied; explanation repeats it	E1 may be Emergent, Visible, or Independent. E2 remains Foundational/Emergent.	Preserve the evidence skill. Ask “So what?” and “How does this prove the reason?” Do not reteach evidence selection unnecessarily.
Evidence and explanation appear with a frame	The reasoning is Visible when the task names the two jobs.	Fade the E2 frame while keeping the same reason/evidence pair. Recheck in one independent paragraph.
Evidence is strategically selected and explanation is layered	E1 and E2 may be Independent or Reflective depending on transfer, evaluation, and revision.	Increase text complexity, require synthesis, and ask the student to compare the strength of evidence and explanations.

Instructional warning

Do not lower a strong E1 level because E2 is weak, and do not award a strong E2 level merely because a student copied accurate evidence. Score the two jobs separately, preserve the stronger one, and target the weaker one.

How Teachers Move Students from One Thinking Level to the Next

The scaffold should change as the thinking changes

● Foundational → ■ Emergent

Goal: move from not yet demonstrating the skill to recognizing and attempting it.

Teacher move: provide an explicit model, oral rehearsal, choices, sorting, highlighting, sentence starters, and one small target at a time.

Teacher language: “Watch how I make this choice. Now tell me which example works better and why. Next, you try one with me.”

■ Emergent → ▼ Visible

Goal: move from recognition or partial attempts to generating the skill when the task names it.

Teacher move: remove answer choices, provide a targeted organizer, use guided questions, and ask the student to build the component independently inside the scaffold.

Teacher language: “You already recognize what this looks like. Now I want you to build one. I’ll give you the question, but the idea must come from you.”

▼ Visible → ▲ Independent

Goal: move from successful guided construction to transfer inside a complete informative response without reminders.

Teacher move: fade organizers and prompts, require authentic writing, and check whether the component appears spontaneously and consistently.

Teacher language: “You can do this when I point to it. Now I’m going to stop naming it for you. Show me where you decide it belongs in your response.”

▲ Independent → ◆ Reflective

Goal: move from competent independent use to strategic, intentional decision-making, self-evaluation, and transfer.

Teacher move: offer defensible choices, ask for justification, invite revision for precision and effect, and increase text, audience, and task complexity.

Teacher language: “You can already do this on your own. Now decide which version creates the clearest and strongest meaning, revise intentionally, and tell me why your choice is stronger.”

Do Not Over-Scaffold Strong Strands

Important

If a student is ▲ Independent or ♦ Reflective in a strand, do not require the student to keep completing Foundational or Emergent practice for that strand simply because another strand is weaker. Preserve independence where it already exists and target the strand that needs growth.

Embedded Progress-Monitoring Tools

A second full diagnostic is not required

Strand	2–5 minute embedded check	What counts as growth
T — Thesis	Give a new short why prompt. Ask the student to identify topic/verb/answer, then write one thesis with the smallest support needed.	The student demonstrates the next-level thesis behavior with less prompting and in a new context.
R — Reasons	Give one thesis and ask for two distinct reasons. Then ask the student to rank them and explain why they do not overlap.	The student generates, separates, and prioritizes reasons with less support.
E1 — Evidence	Provide a short paragraph and one reason. Ask the student to select the strongest evidence and defend the choice.	The student locates and justifies stronger, more relevant evidence with less prompting.
E2 — Explanation	Provide one reason/evidence pair. Ask the student to write how and why the evidence proves the reason without a frame.	The student produces a non-repetitive explanation independently in a new example.
S — Significance	Give a summary ending and ask the student to transform it into a larger lesson, implication, or principle for another audience.	The student extends the idea beyond the text with a defensible connection and less prompting.

Progress-Monitoring Cycle

Instructional Cycle

Informative Diagnostic → TREES™ RPLD Profile → Target One or Two Strands → Provide Level-Matched Support → Short Embedded Writing Check → Reduce or Adjust Support → Look for Independent Transfer → Extend Depth and Synthesis

Quick Teacher Conference Record

Use this record for a brief strand-specific conference. Document one observable strength, one current level, one next thinking move, and the support that will be removed when growth appears.

Student		Date	
Priority TREES™ strand		Current RPLD level	
Evidence observed		Next-level target	
Temporary scaffold		Recheck date/task	

Conference Language

“I can see that you can already _____. Your next thinking move is to _____
_____. I will give you _____ for now. When you can show the next-
level behavior with less help, we will remove that support.”

Teacher Answer Key & Evidence Map

Recognition items support—but do not replace—writing evidence

Item	Answer	Primary evidence
P1	B	T
P2	B and C	R
P3	B	E1
P4	C	E2
P5	C	S
P6	D	TREES™ chain
1	C	T
2	A	T
3	B	T
4	C	T
5	B	R
6	C	R
7	B and C	R
8	B	E1
9	A	E1

Item	Answer	Primary evidence
10	C	E1
11	C	E2
12	B	E2
13	C	E2
14	C	S
15	C	S
21	B	Revising
22	B	Editing

Scoring Reminder

Do not convert the recognition-item total into the student's RPLD level. A student can answer every recognition item correctly and still be Visible rather than Independent if the same informative-writing decisions do not appear in the student's own composition.

Flexible Grouping by Strand

Group for the skill, not for a global “ability” label. A student may need one group for Explanation and a different level of support for Thesis or Evidence.

- Foundational groups: explicit modeling + oral rehearsal + concrete choices.
- Emergent groups: remove some choices; use guided generation, sorting, and comparison.
- Visible groups: fade the organizer; require transfer into one authentic paragraph or complete response.
- Independent groups: preserve autonomy; use conferences, stronger texts, and strategic revision instead of repetitive worksheets.
- Reflective groups: increase complexity, audience, synthesis, source relationships, metacognition, and self-evaluation.

The following section contains an ARGUMENTATIVE diagnostic assessment tool.

Argumentative Writing

Purpose and Rationale: This diagnostic reveals where each student is currently thinking as an argumentative writer - from making a precise claim and giving reasons, to using and explaining evidence, to addressing counterarguments and establishing significance. Rather than assigning a single score, it locates the student's cognitive address across the argumentative dimensions so instruction can target the very next move. Use the answer choices and the student's own writing together to name what the writer already controls and what to teach next.

CREATURES™ Argumentative Writing Diagnostic Assessment

Range Performance Level Descriptor (RPLD) Integrated Edition

The Writing Academy®, LLC

Purpose

A low-stakes argumentative-writing readiness assessment that identifies not only what students can produce, but the level of thinking they currently demonstrate within each CREATURES™ component. Results are used to select the next instructional move—not to assign a permanent label or traditional grade.

● Foundational	■ Emergent	▼ Visible	▲ Independent	◆ Reflective
(Beginning)	(Developing)	(Engaging)	(Independent)	(Highly Independent)

CREATURES™ Framework — Consider both sides and defend a claim.

- C — Claim: state a clear, defensible position on the issue.
- R — Reasons: explain why the claim should be accepted.
- E — Evidence: use accurate, relevant information from the source text.
- A — Argument: organize claim, reasons, evidence, and responses into a logical case.
- T — Thinking: explain how the evidence supports the reasons and claim.
- U — Understanding Others (Counterargument): represent an opposing viewpoint fairly.
- R — Rebuttal: answer the counterargument with reasoning and evidence.
- E — Ending: bring the argument to a clear, purposeful close.
- S — Significance: explain why the issue or decision matters beyond personal preference.

Core RPLD Principle

A student should not be assigned one thinking level for all of argumentative writing. Determine the highest supported level separately for Claim, Reasons, Evidence, Argument, Thinking, Understanding Others, Rebuttal, Ending, and Significance. Preserve the components the student already controls and target only the thinking that needs to grow.

Teacher Administration Guide

What to say, what to provide, and what not to coach

Materials to Prepare

- One student diagnostic packet per student.
- The short anchor passage, “The Recess Decision,” included in this packet.
- Pencil or approved writing tool; lined paper if additional writing space is needed.
- Teacher RPLD scoring profile and answer key.
- Any routinely provided documented accommodations. Accommodations should provide access without supplying a claim, reasons, evidence choices, counterargument, rebuttal, wording, or organization.

Suggested Administration Sequence

Phase	Suggested time	Purpose
1. Opening	2–3 min	Explain that this is not a grade and that students should show what they can do now.
2. Anchor Passage + Recognition	20–25 min	Read/follow the balanced passage, then complete passage-based and general recognition items.
3. Build the Argument	20–25 min	Construct each CREATURES™ component with visible scaffolds.
4. Independent Writing	35–45 min	Plan and write a complete argument without step-by-step coaching.
5. Broad Check + Close	5–7 min	Collect supplemental revising/editing evidence and close the assessment.

Opening Script

Teacher says:

“Today you are going to show me how you think as an argumentative writer. This is not a grade, and I do not expect everyone to do the same things yet. Some parts may feel easier than others. That is useful information because it helps me know what to teach next. You will read about a school decision, consider both sides, and defend the position you believe is strongest. Use your own thinking, and do your best without asking me which side or answer to choose.”

What the Teacher May and May Not Do

MAY DO

- Read directions and the anchor passage aloud if that is part of normal classroom access or an approved accommodation.
- Clarify procedural directions such as where to write, whether students may reread, or how much time remains.
- Provide documented accessibility supports that do not supply argumentative content or decisions.
- Repeat the prompt exactly as written and encourage students to use the passage and show their best independent thinking.
- Provide additional lined paper without adding prompts, frames, or labels.

DO NOT DO DURING THE DIAGNOSTIC

- Do not suggest which side the student should take or help the student write the claim.
- Do not supply a reason, evidence quotation, explanation, counterargument, rebuttal, ending, or significance statement.
- Do not tell the student that one paragraph, sentence, or answer is “better” while the assessment is underway.
- Do not point to the exact sentence in the passage that should be used as evidence.
- Do not require students to use a teacher-created formula beyond the supports already printed in Part 2.
- Do not edit or revise the student’s independent composition during administration.

Anchor Passage for Part 1

The Recess Decision

Teacher says before reading:

“First, we will read a short passage about a decision a school must make. Follow along as I read it aloud. The passage presents information from more than one point of view. Afterward, you will read it quietly and answer questions about the choices an argumentative writer could make. Listen for the decision, the evidence on both sides, and the concerns that would need to be answered.”

At Cedar Grove Elementary, students receive twenty minutes of recess each day. The student council has asked the principal to extend recess to thirty minutes. The school day cannot be made longer, so the extra ten minutes would have to come from the morning skill lab, a time when students read, practice mathematics, or meet with a teacher in a small group.

Before making a decision, Principal Ortiz arranged a two-week trial for students in grades three through five. During the trial, teachers recorded how quickly students settled into afternoon lessons, how the longer recess affected skill-lab instruction, and what happened on the playground.

Supporters of the change noticed several benefits. With ten more minutes, students had time to organize games instead of spending most of recess choosing teams. They also had more time to solve small disagreements before the bell rang. Eighteen of the twenty-four teachers reported that their classes began afternoon work within three minutes after the longer recess. Before the trial, only eleven teachers reported that result. Several students said the additional movement helped them feel calmer and more prepared to concentrate.

Other teachers raised concerns. Ten fewer minutes of skill lab each day meant one hundred fewer minutes of targeted practice during the two-week trial. Six teachers said they were unable to finish planned reading or mathematics conferences with every student. Playground supervisors also recorded five arguments during the final ten minutes of the longer recess, compared with two arguments during the first twenty minutes. These teachers worried that adding time could create more conflicts while reducing support for students who need extra instruction.

Some families suggested a compromise. The school could extend recess to twenty-five minutes, or it could provide a thirty-minute recess only three days each week. Student council members replied that a consistent daily schedule would be easier for students and teachers to remember. They also argued that students might learn more efficiently after enough time to move and reset.

Principal Ortiz has not made a decision. She has asked students, teachers, and families to study the trial results, consider both sides, and defend the plan they believe would best support learning at Cedar Grove Elementary.

Teacher says after reading:

“Now read the passage quietly one more time. Then answer the passage questions on your own. You may look back at the text as often as you need. Remember that understanding both sides does not mean you must agree with both sides.”

Part 1A: Reading the Writer’s Argumentative Choices

Use “The Recess Decision”

P1. C — Claim

Which claim responds most directly and defensibly to the issue?

- A. Recess is a part of the school day.
- B. Cedar Grove should extend daily recess to thirty minutes because the trial showed that many students returned ready to learn and had more time to manage play problems.
- C. Skill lab includes reading and mathematics.
- D. Some students like longer recess.

P2. R — Reasons

A writer claims that Cedar Grove should extend recess. Which is the strongest reason supporting that claim?

- A. Thirty is a larger number than twenty.
- B. Students enjoy making school decisions.
- C. The longer recess may help students return to class calmer and begin work more efficiently.
- D. The school has playground supervisors.

P3. E — Evidence

Which detail from the passage BEST supports the reason that longer recess may help students begin class more efficiently?

- A. The student council asked for a change.
- B. Eighteen of twenty-four teachers reported that classes began afternoon work within three minutes after longer recess, compared with eleven teachers before the trial.
- C. Six teachers could not finish every skill-lab conference.
- D. Some families suggested a compromise.

P4. A — Argument

Which plan would create the most logical argument?

- A. Begin with an ending, add an unrelated fact, and state a claim last.
- B. Describe only the opposing side and never state a position.
- C. List every detail from the passage without explaining how the details connect.
- D. State a claim; develop reasons with evidence and thinking; represent the other side; rebut the concern; and close with significance.

P5. T — Thinking

Which sentence BEST explains how the class-start evidence supports longer recess?

- A. Eighteen is greater than eleven.
- B. Recess lasted thirty minutes during the trial.
- C. Because more classes began work quickly after longer recess, the extra movement may have helped students return prepared, which supports the claim that the time can improve learning conditions.
- D. Teachers recorded information during the trial.

P6. U — Understanding Others (Counterargument)

Which sentence most accurately represents a concern from the opposing side?

- A. Opponents do not want students to have fun.
- B. Some teachers worry that extra recess would reduce targeted skill-lab time and could increase playground conflicts.
- C. Opponents believe recess should be removed completely.
- D. Teachers dislike the student council.

P7. R — Rebuttal

Which response BEST answers the opposing concern while remaining fair?

- A. Anyone who opposes longer recess is wrong.
- B. Skill lab does not matter.
- C. The conflicts should be ignored because recess is fun.
- D. Although lost skill-lab time is a real concern, the school could protect required small-group sessions and examine whether faster afternoon starts recover some learning time before rejecting the longer-recess plan.

P8. E — Ending

Which ending most effectively brings an argument for longer recess to a close?

- A. That is all I have to say.
- B. The school has many teachers.
- C. Cedar Grove should choose the plan that best balances focused learning with students' need to move, and the trial results support giving students a longer daily recess.
- D. Recess takes place outside.

P9. S — Significance

Which statement BEST explains why the decision matters beyond whether students simply prefer more play time?

- A. Students may have time to play kickball.
- B. The decision matters because schools must balance instructional minutes with the conditions that help students focus, cooperate, and learn.
- C. Thirty minutes is ten minutes more than twenty.
- D. Families have opinions about school.

Part 1B: Recognizing Strong Argumentative Writing

Choose the response that would create the strongest argumentative writing.

1. C — Claim

Which sentence is a defensible claim?

- A. School libraries contain books.
- B. I like music and reading.
- C. Our school should allow students to choose one library book for independent reading each week because choice can increase interest and reading stamina.
- D. Books are found in many places.

2. C — Making a Claim Precise

Which revision makes the claim “Homework is bad” more precise and defensible?

- A. Homework is very bad for everyone.
- B. Elementary students should receive short, purposeful homework rather than long nightly assignments because practice should reinforce learning without replacing needed rest.
- C. Homework exists in many schools.
- D. I do not like homework.

3. R — Reasons

A student claims that the school should create recycling stations. Which is the strongest reason?

- A. Recycling bins are often blue.
- B. Stations can make it easier to sort materials and reduce the amount of school waste.
- C. The cafeteria is a large room.
- D. Students carry backpacks.

4. R — Distinct Reasons

Which pair provides two distinct reasons for allowing classroom plants?

- A. Plants are green, and some plants are tall.
- B. Plants need water, and plants need soil.
- C. Students can name plants, and students can draw plants.
- D. Plants can support science observation, and caring for them can build responsibility.

5. E — Relevant Evidence

A writer argues that a later start could help students arrive ready to learn. Which evidence BEST supports the reason that attendance may improve?

- A. School buses are yellow.
- B. Some students say they enjoy sleeping.
- C. After a one-week trial, the number of tardy students dropped from eighteen to nine.
- D. School begins on Monday.

6. E — Strongest Evidence

Which evidence is strongest for the claim that a school walking club can increase participation?

- A. Membership rose from twelve students in September to thirty-seven in November after the club added beginner groups.
- B. The club uses orange cones.
- C. Students wear shoes while walking.
- D. The teacher enjoys walking.

7. A — Argument

Which organization creates the clearest argumentative structure?

- A. Evidence, unrelated story, claim, new topic.
- B. Conclusion, counterargument, title, claim.
- C. Two different claims with no reasons.
- D. Claim; reason/evidence/thinking; second reason/evidence/thinking; counterargument; rebuttal; ending and significance.

8. A — Connecting Ideas

Which transition most effectively connects a second reason to an argument about a safer arrival plan?

- A. Also.
- B. Beyond improving safety, the plan could also help students arrive on time.
- C. I have another reason now.
- D. This is my next paragraph.

9. T — Explaining Evidence

Evidence: “During the pilot, cafeteria waste fell by twenty-two percent.” Which sentence BEST explains the evidence?

- A. The cafeteria has trash containers.
- B. Twenty-two is a number.
- C. This decrease shows that sorting stations changed how students disposed of materials, supporting the claim that the stations can reduce waste.
- D. Students ate lunch during the pilot.

10. T — Deepening the Thinking

Which sentence adds the strongest reasoning after evidence that more students returned library books on time when reminders were sent?

- A. Timely returns matter because other students can then access the books they need, so reminders help the whole reading community rather than only one borrower.
- B. Reminders are messages.
- C. The books were returned.
- D. Libraries have shelves.

11. U — Understanding Others

Which sentence fairly states a counterargument to keeping a class pet?

- A. People who oppose class pets hate animals.
- B. Some families and staff may worry that allergies, cleaning needs, and weekend care would create responsibilities the class cannot manage.
- C. Nobody has a good reason to disagree.
- D. Class pets are cute.

12. U — Showing Both Sides

Which sentence shows understanding of both viewpoints without giving up the writer's claim?

- A. The other side is ridiculous.
- B. Some people disagree with me.
- C. Everyone knows my side is right.
- D. Supporters of a no-homework night value family time, while opponents worry students may lose needed practice.

13. R — Rebuttal

Counterargument: "A school garden costs too much." Which rebuttal BEST responds to that concern?

- A. Gardens are great.
- B. That concern is silly.
- C. Although start-up costs matter, the school can begin with donated containers and a small pilot, then expand only if the benefits justify the cost.
- D. People should donate things.

14. R — Answering the Concern

Which response addresses the counterargument instead of merely repeating the claim?

- A. Although longer lunch lines may delay students, assigning two serving stations could reduce the delay while preserving the new menu choices.
- B. The new menu is best because it is best.
- C. People who disagree are wrong.
- D. Lunch is served at noon.

15. E — Ending

Which ending closes an argument effectively?

- A. That is my essay.
- B. For these reasons, the school should adopt the walking-bus plan and review its results after one month to make sure it improves both safety and attendance.
- C. I also like bicycles.
- D. There are many sidewalks.

16. E — Ending Without a New Topic

Which ending avoids introducing an unrelated new argument?

- A. In conclusion, our school needs a reading-buddy program. We should also buy new playground equipment.
- B. Reading is good.
- C. The program has buddies.
- D. By pairing older and younger readers, the school can strengthen reading confidence while building a more connected student community.

17. S — Significance

Which statement moves beyond personal preference?

- A. I want the plan to happen.
- B. The new schedule is my favorite.
- C. This decision matters because the way a school uses time communicates what it believes students need in order to learn well.
- D. Schedules have clocks.

18. S — A Warranted Larger Idea

Which statement communicates a defensible significance for student service projects?

- A. Every student who completes a project will become a hero.
- B. When students use academic skills to solve real community needs, schoolwork can become a way to practice responsibility and citizenship.
- C. Service projects fix every community problem.
- D. Communities are large places.

Part 2: Build the Argument

This section makes student thinking visible through guided construction.

Teacher says:

“Now the answer will not be in a list. I want to see how you build each part of an argument. You may use the passage, and you may choose either side of the recess decision. The labels and questions will help organize the task, but the ideas and wording must come from you.”

Student Prompt

Using information from “The Recess Decision,” build an argument about whether Cedar Grove Elementary should add ten minutes to daily recess. Consider both sides and defend the claim you believe is strongest.

19. C — Claim

State a clear, defensible position that directly answers the school’s decision.

My claim is that Cedar Grove Elementary should / should not _____

20. R — Reasons

Give two distinct reasons that explain why your claim should be accepted.

Reason 1

Reason 2

21. E — Evidence

Choose specific information from the passage that supports each reason.

Evidence for Reason 1

Evidence for Reason 2

22. A — Argument

Plan a logical order for the whole argument. Write the job of each section or the idea you will place there.

1. Claim / position:

2. Strongest reason + evidence:

3. Second reason + evidence:

4. Opposing concern:

5. Rebuttal:

6. Ending / significance:

23. T — Thinking

Explain how each piece of evidence supports its reason and strengthens the claim.

Evidence 1 matters because _____

Evidence 2 matters because _____

24. U — Understanding Others (Counterargument)

State the strongest reasonable concern someone on the other side might have. Represent that concern fairly.

Some people may believe _____
because _____

25. R — Rebuttal

Respond directly to the counterargument. A strong rebuttal may acknowledge a valid concern, then answer it with evidence, reasoning, a condition, or a practical solution.

Although _____

however, _____

26. E — Ending

Write an ending that reinforces the claim, brings the reasoning together, and does not introduce an unrelated new topic.

27. S — Significance

Why does this decision matter beyond whether individual students simply want more or less recess?

Part 3: Independent Argumentative Writing

The strongest evidence for Independent and Reflective thinking

Teacher says:

“This is the part where I want to see what you can do as an argumentative writer on your own. You may plan before you write, and you may look back at the passage. Choose the position you believe you can defend most strongly. I cannot help you choose a side, select evidence, or decide what to say. Use the writing tools you already know, and make your reasoning clear to a reader who may not agree with you.”

Writing Task

Using information from “The Recess Decision,” write an argumentative response in which you make and defend a claim about whether Cedar Grove Elementary should add ten minutes to daily recess. Consider both sides, use relevant evidence, explain your thinking, respond to an opposing concern, and end by showing why the decision matters.

Remember CREATURES

- C — Claim: answer the decision with a clear position.
- R — Reasons: explain why the claim should be accepted.
- E — Evidence: use relevant information from the passage.
- A — Argument: organize ideas into a logical, connected case.
- T — Thinking: explain how the evidence proves the reasons and claim.
- U — Understanding Others: represent a reasonable opposing concern fairly.
- R — Rebuttal: answer that concern with reasoning and evidence.
- E — Ending: close the argument purposefully.
- S — Significance: explain why the issue matters beyond personal preference.

Optional Planning Space

Claim

Reason 1 / Evidence / Thinking

Reason 2 / Evidence / Thinking

Counterargument / Rebuttal

Ending / Significance

[illegible]

Part 4: Broad Writing Check

Secondary information only

This portion is intentionally brief. The primary purpose of the diagnostic is to assess argumentative development through CREATURES™, not isolated editing or revising skills. Use these items as supplemental evidence only.

28. Broad Revising Check

Read the paragraph:

The school should extend recess because students began class faster during the trial. Some teachers are concerned about losing skill-lab time. Longer recess is still the better plan.

Which revision would MOST strengthen the rebuttal?

- A. Recess takes place outside on the playground.
- B. The student council asked the principal for a change.
- C. Although skill-lab time is important, the school can protect required small-group sessions and compare whether faster afternoon starts make up part of the lost time.
- D. Many students enjoy recess.

29. Broad Editing Check

Which sentence is written correctly?

- A. Although skill lab is important students also need time to move cooperate and return ready to learn.
- B. Although skill lab is important, students also need time to move, cooperate, and return ready to learn.
- C. although skill lab is important, students also need time to move cooperate, and return ready to learn.
- D. Although skill lab is important students, also need time to move, cooperate and return ready to learn.

Teacher says when students finish:

“Thank you. I am going to use this work to notice the parts of argumentative writing you can already manage and the one or two thinking moves that will help you grow next. You will not be placed into one permanent level, and you will not need to repeat skills you already control.”

Teacher Scoring & RPLD Interpretation Guide

Score the thinking, not just the number correct

● Foundational (Beginning)	■ Emergent (Developing)	▼ Visible (Engaging)	▲ Independent (Independent)	◆ Reflective (Highly Independent)
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Three Sources of Evidence

Assessment evidence	What it measures best	Highest level it can support by itself	Teacher interpretation
Part 1	Recognition and discrimination among argumentative choices	■ Emergent (Developing)	Correct answers show that the student can recognize effective argumentative thinking. Recognition alone does not prove independent production.
Part 2	Guided construction of individual CREATURES™ components	▼ Visible (Engaging)	The student's thinking becomes observable because the student must generate the component, but the structure and labels are supplied.
Part 3	Independent transfer into a complete argument	▲ Independent or ◆ Reflective	Use this writing as the primary evidence for sustained independence, strategic decision-making, audience awareness, and transfer.
Part 4	Broad revising and editing evidence	Supplemental only	Use as supporting evidence. Do not let conventions override the primary argumentative-writing profile.

A useful teacher question

Instead of asking “How many points did the student earn?” ask “What is the highest level of thinking this student can demonstrate consistently in this CREATURES™ strand, and what is the smallest scaffold that will make the next level attainable?”

How to Assign a Level to Each Strand

- Use the highest level supported by the student's actual work across recognition, guided construction, and independent writing.
- When evidence fluctuates between two adjacent levels, begin instruction at the lower level while continuing to invite evidence of the higher level.
- Independent and Reflective levels require student-generated writing. Selected-response success cannot establish either level by itself.
- Do not average the nine strand levels into one label. Record the profile and use it to form temporary, skill-specific groups.

CREATURES™ RPLD Student Thinking Profile

One student can—and often will—have nine different levels

CREATURES™ strand	Current RPLD level	Evidence from this diagnostic	Next instructional target
C — Claim	_____		
R — Reasons	_____		
E — Evidence	_____		
A — Argument	_____		
T — Thinking	_____		
U — Understanding Others	_____		
R — Rebuttal	_____		
E — Ending	_____		
S — Significance	_____		

Teacher Growth Conversation Template

Teacher says:

“I noticed that your _____ is currently at the _____ level because I saw you _____. That means you already know how to _____. Your next target is to _____. I will give you _____ support while you practice, and then I will remove that support so you can show the skill independently.”

Example

“Your Claim is Independent because you stated a clear position and kept it consistent across the whole response. Your Thinking is Visible because you explained the evidence when the organizer named the job, but some evidence was left unexplained in the independent essay. We will keep your claim independent and target one evidence-to-thinking connection at a time.”

Worked Example: Turn the Profile into an Instructional Plan

Sample student profile: C ▲ Independent | R ▲ Independent | E ▼ Visible | A ▲ Independent | T ■ Emergent | U ▼ Visible | R (Rebuttal) ■ Emergent | E (Ending) ▲ Independent | S ▼ Visible

Instructional decision	What the teacher does	What the teacher avoids
Preserve strengths	Allow Claim, Reasons, Argument, and Ending to remain independent during new writing. Name the evidence of control and keep the student writing authentic responses.	Do not assign basic claim-identification, paragraph-order, or conclusion worksheets for strands already demonstrated independently.
Target first	Teach Thinking and Rebuttal together: explain one evidence detail, state the opposing concern fairly, and answer the exact concern.	Do not reteach all nine CREATURES™ components at once.
Use the least scaffold	Provide one evidence → “This matters because...” frame and one “Although... however...” rebuttal frame. Remove each frame after success.	Do not keep full sentence frames after the student can generate the connection independently.

Teacher can say:

“You already know how to make a clear claim, organize reasons, and close the argument. I am not going to make you start over on those skills. Our next work is to explain why each piece of evidence matters and to answer the strongest concern from the other side. First I will give you a frame; then you will do the same thinking without it.”

What Progress Should Look Like

- The student moves from naming evidence to explaining how it changes the reader’s understanding of the reason.
- The student moves from “Some people disagree” to a fair, specific counterargument.
- The student moves from repeating the claim after “however” to directly answering the concern with reasoning or evidence.
- Stronger components remain available for independent use while the targeted components receive temporary support.

C — Claim

Does the student state a clear, defensible position that directly answers the issue and can be supported with reasons and evidence?

Thinking level	What the student answer/work shows	Teacher move to grow thinking	Evidence that the student is ready to move up
• Foundational (Beginning)	No defensible position is stated. The response may copy the topic, list both sides without choosing, or give a preference such as “I like recess” without answering the decision.	Use issue/position sorts. Ask the student to choose yes/no/which plan orally, then complete “The school should ____ because ____.” Compare a topic, a preference, and a defensible claim.	The student can choose a side and state a relevant claim with one supporting idea.
■ Emergent (Developing)	The student often recognizes a strong claim in Part 1 and can state a position with a full frame, but the claim may be broad, absolute, or dependent on teacher wording.	Move to a partial frame. Ask, “What exact decision are you answering?” and “Could the passage support this?” Revise always/never language and connect the claim to a reason.	The student independently writes a complete, supportable claim in Part 2.
▼ Visible (Engaging)	The student constructs a complete claim in the guided task, but the wording may be formulaic, drift in the full essay, or fail to match every reason.	Fade the claim frame. Conduct a claim–reason audit: underline key words in the claim and check whether each reason proves that exact position.	The student transfers a focused claim into the independent composition and sustains it.
▲ Independent (Independent)	The student independently states and maintains a focused, defensible claim that controls the response and is supported by the selected reasons and evidence.	Increase precision and complexity. Use issues with more than two possible plans, ask the student to qualify the claim, and consider audience or conditions.	The student begins to make deliberate claim choices and revise wording for precision.
◆ Reflective (Highly Independent)	The student crafts a nuanced or qualified claim, revises it as evidence and counterarguments develop, and can justify why the chosen wording is stronger than alternatives.	Use unfamiliar issues, paired sources, and multiple defensible positions. Ask the student to compare possible claims and explain the tradeoffs each claim creates.	Transfer strategic claim control across issues, audiences, sources, and purposes.

R — Reasons

Does the student develop distinct, logical reasons that explain why the claim should be accepted?

Thinking level	What the student answer/work shows	Teacher move to grow thinking	Evidence that the student is ready to move up
● Foundational (Beginning)	The student provides facts, examples, or preferences instead of reasons, or cannot yet answer “Why should the reader accept this claim?” even when choices are provided.	Use reason/not-a-reason sorts. Ask “Why?” orally and turn one detail into a broad reason by naming what the detail proves.	The student can recognize a reason and generate one relevant reason with support.
■ Emergent (Developing)	The student recognizes strong reasons but generates only one general reason, overlapping reasons, or reasons that require teacher prompting.	Generate several possibilities together, then rank them. Use “Does this answer why?” and “Is this different from Reason 1?” checks.	The student generates at least two relevant, distinct reasons in Part 2.
▼ Visible (Engaging)	The student produces relevant reasons in the organizer, but one may be broad, uneven, repetitive, or lose focus in the independent response.	Fade the organizer and require independent reason selection. Ask the student to name the job of each paragraph and test whether two reasons could be combined.	The student independently uses distinct reasons to organize the full response.
▲ Independent (Independent)	The student independently develops clear, distinct reasons that directly support the claim and guide the organization of the argument.	Raise the decision-making demand: prioritize reasons, choose the strongest sequence, and connect related reasons rather than merely listing them.	The student becomes strategic about which reasons matter most and why.
◆ Reflective (Highly Independent)	The student selects, prioritizes, and sequences reasons intentionally, recognizes relationships and tradeoffs among them, and may refine reasons as evidence develops.	Use issues with competing valid reasons. Ask for justification of order, relative importance, and the relationship between reasons.	Transfer strategic reasoning to complex, unfamiliar, and multi-source arguments.

E — Evidence

Does the student select and integrate accurate, relevant evidence that supports the reasons, claim, and rebuttal?

Thinking level	What the student answer/work shows	Teacher move to grow thinking	Evidence that the student is ready to move up
• Foundational (Beginning)	Evidence is absent, unrelated, copied without purpose, or based only on personal opinion. The student may struggle to identify strong source evidence even when choices are provided.	State the reason first, then hunt for proof. Use evidence/not-evidence sorts and matching cards. Model why one detail supports the reason and another does not.	The student recognizes relevant evidence and can match one source detail to a reason.
■ Emergent (Developing)	The student often recognizes evidence in Part 1, but student-selected evidence is vague, incomplete, weakly matched, or dependent on highlighting and choices.	Offer two or three candidate details and ask the student to defend the strongest. Gradually remove highlighting and require the reason before the evidence choice.	The student independently selects specific, relevant evidence in the Part 2 organizer.
▼ Visible (Engaging)	The student selects appropriate evidence when reasons and evidence spaces are provided, but may choose the first relevant detail, copy too much, or integrate evidence weakly in the essay.	Ask, “Is this merely relevant, or is it the strongest available?” Fade evidence boxes and require locating, paraphrasing, and placing evidence independently.	The student independently selects and integrates strong evidence in Part 3.
▲ Independent (Independent)	The student independently selects accurate, specific evidence that supports each reason and uses evidence when responding to the opposing concern.	Increase complexity by requiring evidence from different parts of a source, multiple pieces, or paired texts. Ask the student to check sufficiency, not just presence.	The student makes strategic evidence choices and begins to synthesize proof.
◆ Reflective (Highly Independent)	The student evaluates evidence for strength, sufficiency, relevance, source relationship, and limitations; synthesizes details; and can explain why one piece is more useful than another.	Use competing or partially conflicting evidence sets. Ask the student to weigh counterevidence, identify missing information, and justify which evidence should carry the most weight.	Transfer evidence evaluation and synthesis across sources, issues, and audiences.

A — Argument

Does the student organize all CREATURES™ components into one coherent, logical case rather than a list of disconnected parts?

Thinking level	What the student answer/work shows	Teacher move to grow thinking	Evidence that the student is ready to move up
• Foundational (Beginning)	The response is a list of opinions or facts. A claim may be absent, and ideas do not form a logical line from position to support to response.	Use color-coded sentence strips for claim, reason, evidence, thinking, other side, rebuttal, and ending. Build one short argument together and name the job of each move.	The student can arrange a simple claim–reason–evidence sequence with support.
■ Emergent (Developing)	The student attempts an argument with a claim and at least one reason, but important links are missing, repeated, or out of order. Counterargument and rebuttal may be absent.	Use a partially completed map. Ask “What must the reader understand next?” and connect each section with a transition that names the relationship.	The student constructs a complete, logical sequence in the Part 2 organizer.
▼ Visible (Engaging)	The student builds the full structure when the organizer names every part, but the independent response may become formulaic, choppy, or lose one component.	Fade section labels while preserving a short planning list. Require the student to choose the order of reasons and explain why the counterargument belongs where it does.	The student transfers a coherent argument structure into the complete independent response.
▲ Independent (Independent)	The student independently coordinates claim, reasons, evidence, thinking, counterargument, rebuttal, ending, and significance into a coherent whole.	Increase flexibility. Invite different organizational patterns, stronger transitions, and decisions about where to address the opposing side for the greatest clarity.	The student becomes strategic about structure, pacing, and reader needs.
◆ Reflective (Highly Independent)	The student intentionally sequences ideas for effect, anticipates reader questions, varies structure to fit the issue, and revises the whole line of argument when one part changes.	Use complex issues, authentic audiences, and source sets. Ask the student to defend the organizational plan and revise it after evaluating reader impact.	Transfer intentional argument design across forms, audiences, and levels of complexity.

T — Thinking

Does the student explain how and why the evidence supports the reasons and claim instead of merely repeating the source?

Thinking level	What the student answer/work shows	Teacher move to grow thinking	Evidence that the student is ready to move up
• Foundational (Beginning)	Thinking is absent or simply repeats the evidence or claim. The student may write “This proves it” without explaining what the evidence shows or why it matters.	Explicitly contrast evidence with thinking. Use oral “This shows... because...” practice and one causal question at a time: “So what?” “How does that help the claim?”	The student recognizes an explanation and attempts one connection beyond repetition.
■ Emergent (Developing)	The student can identify a strong explanation and may use a frame, but written thinking remains brief, general, formulaic, or partly repetitive.	Keep a partial frame but require the student’s own words. Ask “What changed, caused, allowed, or demonstrated?” and “Why would that matter to a reader?”	The student produces a clear evidence-to-reason explanation with support in Part 2.
▼ Visible (Engaging)	The student explains evidence in the organizer and makes reasoning visible, but the explanation may be one-layered or disappear in the independent response.	Fade the frame and require a second layer of reasoning. Mark evidence and thinking in different ways to check that both jobs are present.	The student independently links evidence → reason → claim in Part 3.
▲ Independent (Independent)	The student independently explains how evidence proves a reason and strengthens the claim without merely retelling the source.	Push depth through cause/effect, comparison, conditions, tradeoffs, and why the evidence is especially convincing or limited.	The student becomes analytical and strategic in the reasoning.
◆ Reflective (Highly Independent)	The student builds layered reasoning, weighs tradeoffs and limitations, connects evidence to multiple ideas, and revises the explanation when the claim or counterargument changes.	Use paired evidence, competing interpretations, and metacognitive reflection. Ask the student to compare surface reasoning with deeper reasoning and justify the difference.	Transfer analytical thinking to complex evidence, unfamiliar issues, and authentic decisions.

U — Understanding Others (Counterargument)

Does the student represent an opposing viewpoint accurately, fairly, and specifically enough to be meaningfully answered?

Thinking level	What the student answer/work shows	Teacher move to grow thinking	Evidence that the student is ready to move up
• Foundational (Beginning)	The opposing side is ignored, misrepresented, or dismissed with language such as “They are wrong.” The student may not identify a real concern.	Use two-column “My side / Other side” sorts. Model neutral language and ask, “What is the strongest reasonable concern someone could have?”	The student can identify one plausible opposing concern without insulting or changing it.
■ Emergent (Developing)	The student writes “Some people disagree” or names the other side vaguely. The wording may be loaded, incomplete, or dependent on a frame.	Provide a partial counterargument frame and ask for the reason behind the concern. Replace judgment words with accurate, neutral wording.	The student states a specific, fair counterargument in Part 2.
▼ Visible (Engaging)	The student accurately states one opposing concern in the structured task, but the concern may be underdeveloped or omitted from independent writing.	Fade the frame. Ask the student to explain why a reasonable person might value that concern and where it belongs in the argument.	The student independently represents a plausible opposing viewpoint in Part 3.
▲ Independent (Independent)	The student fairly explains an opposing concern, including the reason or value behind it, without weakening or caricaturing the other side.	Increase complexity by asking for the strongest counterargument, multiple stakeholder perspectives, or conditions under which the other side may be right.	The student begins to compare perspectives and identify underlying values or assumptions.
◆ Reflective (Highly Independent)	The student identifies and synthesizes multiple perspectives, distinguishes stronger from weaker counterarguments, and understands the conditions or values driving each view.	Use authentic stakeholder roles and nuanced issues. Ask the student to explain how understanding the other side should refine the claim or response.	Transfer perspective-taking across complex, contested, and unfamiliar issues.

R — Rebuttal

Does the student answer the opposing concern directly with evidence, reasoning, qualification, or a practical solution?

Thinking level	What the student answer/work shows	Teacher move to grow thinking	Evidence that the student is ready to move up
• Foundational (Beginning)	No rebuttal is present, or the response dismisses the other side with “They are wrong,” “I disagree,” or a repeated claim.	Place the counterargument and possible responses side by side. Ask, “What exact concern must be answered?” Model a respectful “Although...however...” response.	The student can recognize and attempt a rebuttal that addresses the concern rather than the person.
■ Emergent (Developing)	The student uses “however” or “but” but mainly repeats the claim, changes the subject, or gives an unsupported answer.	Underline the concern and require the response to use the same key words. Add one reason, evidence detail, condition, or solution that answers that exact concern.	The student writes a relevant rebuttal with support in Part 2.
▼ Visible (Engaging)	The student responds to the counterargument in the organizer, but the answer may be general, one-sided, or not fully supported in independent writing.	Fade the frame. Ask whether the rebuttal acknowledges any valid part of the concern and whether the evidence actually reduces or answers it.	The student independently answers a counterargument in Part 3.
▲ Independent (Independent)	The student directly answers the opposing concern with logical reasoning, relevant evidence, concession, qualification, or a workable solution.	Use stronger counterarguments and require the student to choose among rebuttal strategies. Ask how the rebuttal changes or strengthens the claim.	The student becomes strategic about concession, qualification, evidence, and response.
◆ Reflective (Highly Independent)	The student anticipates the strongest counterargument, concedes valid limitations, refines the claim when necessary, and answers the concern without oversimplifying it.	Use multiple counterarguments, incomplete evidence, and authentic audiences. Ask the student to evaluate whether the rebuttal fully resolves, narrows, or leaves a concern open.	Transfer nuanced rebuttal and claim refinement to complex arguments and real decisions.

E — Ending

Does the ending bring the argument to a purposeful close by reinforcing the claim and synthesizing the reasoning without introducing an unrelated new topic?

Thinking level	What the student answer/work shows	Teacher move to grow thinking	Evidence that the student is ready to move up
• Foundational (Beginning)	The response stops abruptly, ends with “That is all,” repeats an unrelated detail, or introduces a new idea that was never developed.	Sort endings into stops, summaries, new-topic endings, and purposeful closures. Orally complete: “Therefore, the reader should understand…”	The student recognizes a purposeful ending and writes a simple claim-based close with support.
■ Emergent (Developing)	The student restates the claim with “In conclusion,” but the ending is generic, repetitive, or dependent on a full frame.	Use a partial frame and ask the student to combine the claim with the strongest reason or decision. Remove unrelated new information.	The student produces a complete ending in Part 2 that fits the argument.
▼ Visible (Engaging)	The ending reinforces the claim and summarizes ideas in the guided task, but it may sound mechanical or lose connection to the independent argument.	Fade the conclusion frame. Ask the student to synthesize rather than list and to echo the exact decision the reader is being asked to make.	The student independently closes the complete argument without adding an unrelated topic.
▲ Independent (Independent)	The student independently reinforces the claim, brings the main reasoning together, and creates a clear sense of completion appropriate to the audience.	Increase intentionality through audience, tone, next steps, or a concise synthesis that prepares for significance without exaggeration.	The student begins to make deliberate ending choices and self-revise for effect.
◆ Reflective (Highly Independent)	The student crafts a purposeful, audience-aware ending that synthesizes the argument, may recommend a warranted next step, and aligns naturally with the significance.	Use authentic audiences and compare several possible endings. Ask the student to explain which ending best matches the purpose and evidence.	Transfer purposeful closure across formal arguments, letters, speeches, and multimodal presentations.

S — Significance

Does the student explain why the issue, decision, or principle matters beyond personal preference and the immediate passage?

Thinking level	What the student answer/work shows	Teacher move to grow thinking	Evidence that the student is ready to move up
• Foundational (Beginning)	The response ends with personal preference, a vague moral, or no explanation of why the issue matters beyond “I want this.”	Teach preference versus significance. Ask orally: “Who else is affected?” “What larger school value is involved?” “Where else could this principle matter?”	The student recognizes significance and attempts one broader connection.
■ Emergent (Developing)	The student attempts a broader idea, but it may be generic, exaggerated, inspirational without support, or closely tied to the immediate topic.	Use temporary significance categories—learning, fairness, safety, responsibility, community, future decisions—then require the student to connect the category to the argument.	The student produces a relevant broader connection with support in Part 2.
▼ Visible (Engaging)	The student extends beyond the passage in the structured task, but the connection may be general or only loosely connected to the independent reasoning.	Fade stems. Require “beyond this school” plus “why it matters,” and trace the significance back to the claim, reasons, and evidence.	The student independently develops a meaningful, relevant significance statement.
▲ Independent (Independent)	The student independently explains a larger lesson, implication, or principle that grows from the argument and matters to a broader audience or decision.	Increase sophistication through audience, real-world systems, long-term effects, and transfer to another context. Require the significance to be warranted, not merely inspiring.	The student becomes nuanced and intentional in extending the argument’s significance.
◆ Reflective (Highly Independent)	The student develops a nuanced, transferable significance statement, identifies limits or conditions, and explains how the issue reflects a broader principle or system.	Invite connections across disciplines, audiences, and civic decisions. Ask why the significance follows logically from the evidence and where the principle may not apply.	Transfer significance and synthesis to increasingly complex arguments and authentic public purposes.

How Teachers Move Students from One Thinking Level to the Next

The scaffold should change as the thinking changes

● Foundational → ■ Emergent

Goal: move from not yet demonstrating the skill to recognizing and attempting it.

Teacher move: model one argumentative decision at a time, use oral rehearsal, examples/nonexamples, sorting, and immediate feedback.

Teacher language:

“Watch how I decide what this part of the argument must do. Now tell me which example works better and why. Next, you try one with me.”

■ Emergent → ▼ Visible

Goal: move from recognition or partial attempts to generating the skill when the task names it.

Teacher move: remove answer choices, provide a targeted organizer or partial frame, ask guided questions, and require the student’s own idea.

Teacher language:

“You already recognize what this looks like. Now I want you to build one. I will give you the question, but the claim, reason, evidence, or response must come from you.”

▼ Visible → ▲ Independent

Goal: move from successful guided construction to transfer inside a complete argument without reminders.

Teacher move: fade labels and frames, require authentic writing, and check whether the skill appears when the teacher does not name it.

Teacher language:

“You can do this when I point to it. Now I am going to stop naming it for you. Show me where you decide it belongs in your own argument.”

▲ Independent → ◆ Reflective

Goal: move from competent independent use to strategic, intentional, audience-aware decision-making.

Teacher move: offer competing choices, ask for justification, increase source and issue complexity, and invite revision for effect.

Teacher language:

“You can already do this on your own. Now decide which version is strongest for this audience, revise intentionally, and explain why your choice improves the whole argument.”

Do Not Over-Scaffold Strong Strands

Important

If a student is ▲ Independent or ♦ Reflective in a strand, do not require repeated Foundational or Emergent practice for that same strand simply because another component is weaker. Preserve independence in the strong strand, target the weaker strand, and reconnect the two inside authentic argument writing.

Embedded Progress-Monitoring Tools

A second full diagnostic is not required

Strand	2–5 minute embedded check	What counts as growth
C — Claim	Give a new school issue and ask for one defensible claim in two sentences.	The student states a supportable position with less prompting and sustains it in the next short response.
R — Reasons	Provide a claim and ask the student to generate and rank two distinct reasons.	Reasons are relevant, nonoverlapping, and increasingly selected without a reason frame.
E — Evidence	Offer three source details and ask the student to select and justify the strongest evidence.	The student chooses specific proof, explains relevance, and eventually locates evidence without choices.
A — Argument	Give seven sentence strips representing the CREATURES™ moves and ask the student to sequence and justify them.	The student creates a coherent sequence, then transfers the structure without labeled strips.
T — Thinking	Give one reason and one evidence detail. Ask for the sentence that explains how the evidence supports the reason.	The explanation moves beyond repetition and appears without “This shows...” prompting.
U — Understanding Others	Give an issue and ask for the strongest fair concern from the opposing side.	The counterargument is specific, neutral, plausible, and increasingly independent.
R — Rebuttal	Provide one counterargument and ask for a respectful response using evidence, reasoning, or a condition.	The response directly answers the concern rather than repeating the claim.
E — Ending	Give a weak conclusion and ask the student to rewrite it without adding a new topic.	The ending synthesizes the claim and reasoning with less use of a conclusion frame.
S — Significance	Ask the student to turn “I like this plan” into a broader statement about why the decision matters.	The student connects the issue to a defensible larger principle and can transfer it to another context.

Use the smallest recheck that matches the target.

A short claim, one evidence–thinking pair, one counterargument–rebuttal exchange, one revised ending, or a three-minute conference can provide enough evidence to update the student’s strand level. Do not readminister the entire diagnostic unless a full new baseline is genuinely needed.

Progress-Monitoring Cycle

Instructional Cycle

Argumentative Diagnostic → CREATURES™ RPLD Profile → Target One or Two Strands → Provide Level-Matched Support → Short Embedded Writing Check → Reduce or Adjust Support → Update the Profile → Increase Independence

Quick Teacher Conference Record

Use this record for a brief strand-specific conference. Document one observable strength, one next thinking move, the temporary scaffold, and the evidence that will show readiness to move up.

Student / Date	Student: _____ Date: _____
Priority Strand / Current Level	Strand: C R E A T U R E S Level: ● Foundational ■ Emergent ▼ Visible ▲ Independent ◆ Reflective
Evidence I Saw	In the student work, I noticed: _____ _____ _____
Next Target / Scaffold / Recheck	Next thinking move: _____ Temporary support: _____ Recheck task and date: _____

Conference Language

"I can see that you can already _____. Your next thinking move is to _____. I am going to give you _____ support while you practice. I will know you are ready to move up when you can _____ with less support."

Update the Profile, Not the Child's Label

- Record the new strand level only when current work supports it.
- Allow different strands to move at different rates.
- Return students to mixed, authentic writing tasks after targeted practice so transfer can be observed.
- Use level names to describe current evidence and next instruction—not identity, ability, or potential.

Teacher Answer Key & Evidence Map

Recognition items support—but do not replace—writing evidence

Item	Answer	Primary evidence
P1	B	C — Claim
P2	C	R — Reasons
P3	B	E — Evidence
P4	D	A — Argument
P5	C	T — Thinking
P6	B	U — Understanding Others
P7	D	R — Rebuttal
P8	C	E — Ending
P9	B	S — Significance
1	C	C — Claim
2	B	C — Claim
3	B	R — Reasons
4	D	R — Reasons
5	C	E — Evidence
6	A	E — Evidence
7	D	A — Argument
8	B	A — Argument
9	C	T — Thinking
10	A	T — Thinking
11	B	U — Understanding Others
12	D	U — Understanding Others
13	C	R — Rebuttal
14	A	R — Rebuttal
15	B	E — Ending
16	D	E — Ending
17	C	S — Significance
18	B	S — Significance
28	C	Broad revising
29	B	Broad editing

Scoring Reminder

Do not convert the recognition-item total into the student's RPLD level. A student can answer every recognition item correctly and still be Visible rather than Independent if the skill appears only when choices, labels, or frames are provided. Independent and Reflective levels must be supported by student-generated argumentative writing.

Flexible Grouping by Strand

Group for the thinking move—not for a global “ability” label

A student may need a Foundational group for Rebuttal, a Visible group for Evidence, and an Independent conference for Claim. Build temporary groups around the exact component and release students as soon as new evidence supports less assistance.

● Foundational groups

explicit modeling, oral rehearsal, examples/nonexamples, concrete choices, and one decision at a time.

■ Emergent groups

remove answer choices, use partial frames, and require the student to generate one component with guided questions.

▼ Visible groups

fade the organizer and require transfer into a short authentic argument, paragraph, or counterargument–rebuttal exchange.

▲ Independent groups

preserve autonomy; use more complex issues, evidence sets, audiences, and strategic revision rather than repetitive worksheets.

◆ Reflective groups

increase nuance, competing perspectives, tradeoffs, source evaluation, public audience, and metacognitive justification.

Final Instructional Mindset

The CREATURES™ RPLD profile is a map for growth, not a label for the child. Identify the strongest evidence of current thinking, provide the least amount of support needed for successful next-level thinking, remove the support as independence develops, and keep the student engaged in meaningful grade-level argumentation throughout the process.