

The Writing Locker Room

Mindset, emotional readiness, and pre-performance self-talk.

BIG IDEA

Writers often decide whether they can succeed before the pencil ever touches the page.

◎ TRAINING TARGET — STANDARDS CONNECTION

GRADE 3

Supports all composition standards by developing the self-regulation needed to use the writing process independently, and supports planning in **3.11(A)** through intentional prewriting readiness.

GRADE 4

Builds the confidence and self-regulation that sustain the longer planning and drafting of **4.11(A–B)**.

GRADE 5

Supports the independent self-management of the full process in **5.11**, so writers enter demanding tasks ready rather than anxious.

ELPS: c.1(A) & c.5(B) — using self-regulation and risk-taking to learn, and writing with newly acquired vocabulary, as credible self-talk lowers the affective filter for multilingual writers.

Before athletes compete, they gather in a place where equipment is checked, strategy is reviewed, and emotion is regulated. Writers need a mental locker room too. Students carry histories into every task — past grades, corrections, public comparisons, blank-page fear, and beliefs about whether they are "good writers." Those beliefs shape how long they persist and how willing they are to take risks.

The Writing Locker Room is the short, deliberate routine that helps a writer arrive at the page ready — settled, focused, and armed with one credible next move.

Focus, Structure, and Coherence

Building a draft that stays on course and works as a whole.

BIG IDEA

A strong draft is not a collection of good sentences. It is a coordinated piece in which every part serves the same purpose.

☉ TRAINING TARGET — STANDARDS CONNECTION

GRADE 3

3.11(B) develop drafts into a focused, structured, and coherent piece; **3.11(B)(i–iii)** purposeful introduction, conclusion, and engaging idea with relevant details.

GRADE 4

4.11(B) — sustain focus and coherent structure across a longer, multi-paragraph composition.

GRADE 5

5.11(B) — control focus, structure, and coherence deliberately across the whole piece.

ELPS: c.5(F) & c.5(G) — using cohesive devices and organizing writing so relationships between ideas are clear.

A team can have talented players and still perform poorly if each person runs a different play. Writing can contain interesting sentences and still confuse the reader when the ideas do not share a focus, follow a purposeful structure, or connect coherently. This chapter coaches the writer to make the whole piece work together.

Teach structure as a *choice linked to purpose*, not a fixed number of paragraphs. A three-paragraph composition can be coherent or confusing depending on the relationship among its ideas.

Teacher Script — Reading the Verbs Only

SAY

"What time frame is this paragraph in — past, present, or future? Let's name it first."

SAY

"Now let's read just the verbs, out loud, in order. Does the clock stay steady, or did we jump to another time by accident?"

► *Reading only the verbs makes tense shifts jump out, because the content isn't there to distract. When a verb lands on the wrong time, keep, revise, or explain it.*

" " = say word-for-word • ► = teacher direction (do not read aloud)

Training Routine — Check the Clock

1

Name the primary time frame of the paragraph or piece.

2

Circle the verbs.

3

Check each verb against the time frame and the subject.

4

Keep, revise, or explain any tense shift.

Locker Room Reflection

- Which irregular past-tense verbs cause my students the most difficulty?
- Can my students tell an accidental tense shift from a purposeful one?
- Do we use the timeline or verbs-only read to make shifts visible?

For the Coach — Teacher Tip

Let students read a paragraph using only the verbs. The bare sequence makes tense shifts far more obvious than reading full sentences, where the content can hide the pattern.

FINISH STRONG

When the verb clock is set and kept, the Fans always know when the action is happening — and the writer only shifts time on purpose.

Transfer to the WCR: narrative skill strengthens text-based responses when students explain events precisely and identify how a character changes. But a WCR must not become an invented story — students stay grounded in the provided text and prompt.

Training Routine

1

List three possible personal moments and choose the smallest meaningful one.

2

Map beginning context, central event, response, and outcome or reflection.

3

Draft the central moment with selected craft details.

4

Revise pacing so the most important moment receives the greatest attention.

Locker Room Reflection

- Do students choose moments, or broad topics?
- Which craft moves are purposeful rather than decorative?
- Does the ending grow naturally from the experience?

For the Coach — Teacher Tip

Tip. Use a "camera lens" gesture. Wide lens means broad summary; zoom lens means a developed scene. Ask students where the narrative should zoom and where it can move quickly.

FINISH STRONG

A personal narrative becomes powerful when the writer selects one meaningful performance from life, slows down the important moment, and shares the understanding that remained afterward.