

THE WRITING ACADEMY®, LLC

THE WRITING MATRIX

A Professional Learning Session for Teachers



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Today's Roadmap

- **Understand the Matrix** — levels, dimensions, and the cognitive address
- **Find the Address** — read tasks, answer choices, and written responses
- **Teach the Next Move** — one level to the right, then group by need
- **Put It Into Practice** — a routine you can use on Monday

Why a Score Is Not Enough

- A score tells us **how many** — not **where the thinking stopped**.
- Two students can earn the same score and need completely different lessons.
- The struggle could be recall, evidence, reasoning, or organization.

Ask: “Where did the student’s thinking stop?”

Cognitive Address

=

Dimension

+

Level

- **Dimension** — the kind of thinking the task asks for.
- **Level** — how fully, precisely, and independently the student shows it.
- The address belongs to the **demonstrated thinking** — and it is temporary.

The Five Thinking Levels



Foundational

Recognize, locate,
notice



Emergent

Begin, identify, partly
connect



Visible

Show and explain



Independent

Initiate, select, carry out



Reflective

Evaluate, synthesize,
transfer, create

The Four Dimensions

TAUGHT

Use what has been learned

TAP

Select and use evidence

THINK

Develop meaning and reasoning

TOGGLE

Explain relationships

Every task lives in one dimension — in question form or prompt form.

Find the Cognitive Address

- **Analyze the task** — what thinking is really being asked?
- **Study the response** — find the highest level shown *consistently*.
- Strong thinking counts even when spelling or punctuation is still developing.

The address belongs to the thinking, not to the child.

Use Answer Choices to Guide Instruction

- “Wrong” answers are not all equally wrong — each is a believable misconception.
- A repeated distractor is a **clue** to what to teach next.
- A pattern across items gives a more accurate placement.

Read a Response Through Three Lenses

Handout p. 9

Cognition

Does the thinking answer the
prompt?

Composition

Is the build clear and developed?

Conventions

Are the mechanics in place?

*Separating the lenses points to the **right** next lesson.*

Teach One Level to the Right

- Aim for the **next address** — the smallest level of thinking that comes next.
- Not across the whole matrix — one clear, teachable move.
- **Model** the difference → **guide** practice → **release** support.

Group by What Students Need Next

- Group by the **shared next move** — never by a permanent label.
- A group forms because its students need the same move...
- ...and it **dissolves** once they have it.

The Five-Step Teacher Routine

- **1. Find** the current cognitive address.
- **2. Name** the next address (one level to the right).
- **3. Decide** what the student needs to pack up.
- **4. Teach** the move — model, then guide.
- **5. Check** for growth with a fresh task.

The response: names the character's decision and gives one quote — but does not explain how it proves significance.

Dimension: THINK

Now: Emergent

Next: Visible

The move: a sentence frame that connects evidence to reasoning — compare a response that “states” to one that “explains.”

YOUR NEXT MOVE

One small change.

What will you change in your feedback or grouping this week?



Find the address — teach the next move.

The Empty Garden Bed

When Mrs. Carter's class returned from spring break, they noticed one of the school garden beds was almost empty. Several small plants had dried out because no one had watered them during the unusually warm week. At first, the students wanted to pull everything out and start over. Then Ella noticed that three tomato plants still had green leaves near the bottom. She suggested they water them, remove the damaged leaves, and give the plants a few days before deciding. By the next week, two plants had begun growing new leaves — the garden taught them something a worksheet could not: sometimes it is worth giving something another chance before deciding it cannot recover.

Example — The Prompt & Three Responses

THINK Prompt: Explain why Mrs. Carter says the students learned something the garden could teach that a worksheet could not. Use evidence.

Read only the **first sentence** each student wrote.

- **Lane:** "...they experienced how patience can reveal possibilities that are easy to miss when we judge too quickly."
- **Jake:** "...the tomato plants started growing new leaves after the students took care of them."
- **Luke:** "...seeing the damaged plants recover helped them understand why giving something another chance can be worthwhile."

Example — The Answer Key

Jake

Emergent — a relevant reason, but
stays close to what happened

Luke

Independent — connects the event
to the lesson and explains why

Lane

Reflective — states a broader
principle beyond the event

The number of words does not determine the level of thinking.

Example — What the Teacher Does Next

- **To Jake:** “You told me what happened. Now explain what the students *understood* because it happened.”
- **To Luke:** “Where else could this idea apply — and when might a second chance *not* be best?”
- **To Lane:** “Is giving something another chance always wise? What evidence would help someone decide?”

Where did the thinking stop, and what is the smallest move that takes it one level farther?

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Thank You

The Writing Matrix — discovering a student's cognitive address



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