
Grouping Structures for Writing Instruction

*How whole group, small group, partner, and
individual work fit together inside a supplemental
writing support system*

THE WRITING ACADEMY®, LLC

Grouping Structures for Writing Instruction
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SECTION 1

A Shared Foundation, Not a Single Formation

Walk into a classroom that uses The Writing Academy®, LLC materials, and the first thing you are likely to notice is a whole-group lesson in action. A teacher stands at the front, guiding every student through the same passage, the same prompt, and the same thinking habit. This is not an accident. It is the deliberate starting point of a supplemental support system built on the principle that access to expert thinking belongs to everyone before any student is asked to practice alone.

Whole-group instruction is the foundation, but it is not the only structure a teacher uses. Throughout a module, students also work with partners during

the Discuss step of GRADUATE, rotate through stations during independent practice, and complete tracking sheets and workbooks on their own. The question is never "Which grouping structure is best?" The question is "Which structure serves this moment in the learning?"

This article explains the four grouping structures teachers encounter inside the materials: whole group, small group, partner, and individual. For each structure, it describes what a teacher does, what students do, and where that structure appears in the cluster modules, the GRADUATE lesson cycle, the implementation guide, and the station rotation model.

"A stable instructional foundation and responsive next steps are complementary responsibilities, not competing approaches."

"A Stable Foundation for Every Writer," The Writing Academy®, LLC

SECTION 2

Whole-Group Instruction: The 15-Minute GRADUATE Lesson

The core of every module is a 15-minute whole-group lesson built around Section 50 of the Teacher Lesson Plan. Inside that lesson lives Randi Whitney's GRADUATE Infinity Learning Cycle: **G**ather, **R**eveal, **A**tttempt, **D**iscuss, **U**se, **A**ward, **T**arget, **E**xplain. GRADUATE is a recurring instructional process, not a one-pass sequence. It cycles through explicit teaching, supported practice, and student application in a pattern designed

to make expert writing decisions visible to every learner.

This lesson is Tier One: the universal instructional foundation available to all students, not a particular level of student ability. The research article "A Stable Foundation for Every Writer" explains the reasoning: "Explicit teaching is an access practice." Making the thinking behind a thesis (central idea), a piece of evidence, or an explana-

tion visible means that a student who enters the lesson at any OnRAMP Thinking Level can see the destination, even if the path there requires differentiated support.

What Whole Group Looks Like in the Materials

During the **Gather** step, the teacher brings all students together. The Daily Deck and the Student Interactive Workbook are open. During **Reveal**, the teacher models the target skill for the entire class, thinking aloud about decisions a writer makes. During **Attempt**, students try the skill together. During **Discuss**, partners talk. During **Use**,

students apply the learning independently. During **Award**, the teacher recognizes visible effort. During **Target**, the teacher identifies specific next steps. During **Explain**, students articulate what they learned.

The 15 + 20 daily structure in the Grade 3 Implementation Guide makes the time explicit: 15 minutes for the Section 50 lesson taught with the Student Interactive Workbook and the Daily Deck, plus a separate 20-minute Standards Block for implementation practice and the Spelling, Editing, and Revising Slide Decks. Nothing from the implementation guide is taught inside those 15 minutes.

KEY IDEA

Whole-group instruction is not the same as identical instruction. Students share a common purpose while using different supports: an accessible passage, oral rehearsal, a carefully chosen sentence starter, or a visual organizer. The intellectual goal stays the same.

SECTION 3

Small-Group Instruction: Station Rotation and Targeted Reteach

After whole-group instruction establishes the shared foundation, small-group structures allow a teacher to respond to what each group of students actually needs. The materials support two forms of small-group work: the station rotation model and targeted reteaching using the OnRAMP Thinking Levels.

Station Rotation

Station rotation appears in the materials as a way to give students sustained, focused practice on different components of the writing process while the teacher pulls a small group for direct support.

A typical rotation includes a teacher-led station, an independent practice station (often using the Student Interactive Workbook or tracking sheets), a technology station (where the TEKS Companion app or other digital tools can live), and a reading station.

The teacher-led station is where targeted reteaching happens. Using evidence from tracking sheets, the teacher identifies students who need additional modeling or guided practice on a specific skill, such as selecting strong evidence using the CSI habit (Connect to the prompt, Support the

thesis (central idea), Infer more ideas) or writing an explanation using DEEP FACTS.

OnRAMP and Thinking Levels

OnRAMP (Recognize And Map Progress) gives teachers a language for describing where a student is and what the student's next step looks like. The five Thinking Levels, also called Reference Performance Level Descriptors (RPLDs), are Foundational, Emergent, Visible, Independent, and Reflective. These are not fixed ability groups. They describe a student's current position on a specific skill, and a student can be at different levels for different skills.

During small-group instruction, a teacher might work with a group of students whose evidence citation is at the Foundational level, using sentence starters such as "The text says..." and "In the story..." to build the habit of introducing the source before quoting. Meanwhile, students at the Independent level are working on their own, using higher-utility verbs such as "argues," "contends," and "establishes" without a sentence frame.

The Evidence Citation Stems anchor chart (used in Cluster 1, Module 1) lays out this progression explicitly: each Thinking Level has its own suggested stems for introducing the source, bringing in the evidence, and tying the evidence to the claim.

Where Small-Group Structures Live in the Materials

- **Station rotation guides** in the teacher resources
- **Section 50 of the Teacher Lesson Plan** (the teacher-led small group targets the same skill the whole class practiced)
- **OnRAMP Thinking Levels** and Evidence Citation Stems anchor chart
- **Tracking sheets** for each Standards Slide Deck set (Spelling, Editing, Writing, Evidence, Explanation)
- **Substitute plans** that keep station rotation running even when the regular teacher is absent

SECTION 4

Partner Work: The Discuss Step

Partner work is embedded directly into the GRADUATE cycle through the **Discuss** step. After students Attempt the skill, they turn to a partner and talk about what they tried. This is not incidental conversation. It is a deliberate moment for students to rehearse their thinking out loud before they are asked to write independently.

Oral rehearsal is one of the strongest bridges between thinking and writing, and it is especially im-

portant for English learners and students whose oral language proficiency is still developing. TEKS 3.1(C) asks students to "speak coherently about the topic under discussion, employing eye contact, speaking rate, volume, enunciation, and the conventions of language to communicate ideas effectively." The Discuss step in GRADUATE is where that standard lives in daily practice.

The teacher's role during Discuss is to circulate, listen, and gather formative data. Which pairs are naming strong reasons? Which pairs are still restating the prompt instead of answering it? The Award and Target steps that follow Discuss use this information directly: Award recognizes specific, visible evidence of the target skill; Target names the next instructional move.

SECTION 5

Individual Work: Use, Workbooks, and Tracking Sheets

Individual work is where students demonstrate what they can do without support. In the GRADUATE cycle, the **Use** step is the moment of independent application. The teacher has modeled, students have attempted and discussed, and now each student writes on their own. This is the evidence the teacher reads to make decisions about Award and Target.

Outside the GRADUATE lesson, individual work takes several forms:

Student Interactive Workbooks. Each cluster has a student workbook that matches the Teacher Lesson Plan module by module. Students write directly in the workbook, completing practice activities that mirror the whole-group lesson. The workbooks build from guided tasks early in a cluster to more independent tasks later, following the progressive stamina model (Module 1 = Low stamina, Module 4 = Very High).

Beyond the GRADUATE Lesson

Partner structures also appear in the Standards Block. Day 3 of the five-day implementation cycle in the Grade 3 Implementation Guide devotes 15 minutes to a partner or small-group game, plus a 2-minute individual exit. Partner games and sorting activities in the Spelling, Editing, and Revising decks give students a reason to talk about language patterns with a peer.

Tracking Sheets. Every Standards Slide Deck set (Spelling, Editing, Editing Part Two, Revising, Writing, Evidence, Explanation) has a matching student tracking sheet. Students complete items independently during Days 4 and 5 of the implementation cycle, and the teacher uses the results to plan feedback and retrieval for the next cycle.

Day 4 of the Implementation Cycle. The Grade 3 Implementation Guide describes Day 4 as "3 min reminder/retrieval; 14 min independent assigned items; 3 min self-check or conference." This is protected individual practice time. The self-check or conference at the end gives the teacher a window for brief one-on-one conversations without pulling students out of their practice.

Assessments. Formal section assessments in the Standards Block are individual work by design: about 2 minutes of directions followed by 16 minutes of independent work and 2 minutes of review.

CHOOSING THE RIGHT STRUCTURE

The question is not "whole group or small group?" but "what does the learning need right now?" New concepts and expert thinking belong to whole group. Differentiated practice and reteaching belong to small group. Oral rehearsal and peer accountability belong to partners. Independent evidence of learning belongs to the individual.

AT A GLANCE

Grouping Structures at a Glance

Structure	When to Use It	Where It Lives in the Materials	Teacher Role
Whole Group	Introducing new concepts; making expert thinking visible; establishing shared vocabulary and habits	Section 50 GRADUATE lesson (15 min); Daily Deck; Standards Block opener (Day 1)	Model, think aloud, guide the class through a shared task
Small Group	Targeted reteaching based on evidence; station rotation; differentiated practice by OnRAMP level	Teacher-led station in rotation; OnRAMP Thinking Levels; Evidence Citation Stems by level	Pull a targeted group; provide scaffolded support; use tracking data to decide who and what
Partner	Oral rehearsal; peer discussion; collaborative sorting or game activities	GRADUATE Discuss step; Standards Block Day 3 partner/game activities; Spelling/Editing deck games	Circulate, listen, gather formative data for Award and Target
Individual	Independent application; assessment; self-monitoring; building writing stamina	GRADUATE Use step; Student Interactive Workbooks; tracking sheets; Day 4 independent items; formal assessments	Observe, conference briefly, collect evidence to plan the next cycle

SECTION 6

How a Teacher Chooses

The materials do not prescribe a rigid schedule of grouping structures. Instead, the design makes the decision points visible. The GRADUATE cycle naturally moves from whole group (Gather, Reveal) through supported practice (Attempt, Discuss) to individual application (Use). A teacher

who follows this flow is already using three grouping structures in a single 15-minute lesson.

The choice becomes more deliberate during the Standards Block. The five-day implementation cycle in the Grade 3 Implementation Guide offers a built-in rotation: Day 1 is whole-group opener and

guided practice. Day 2 is extension with comparison of correct and incorrect choices. Day 3 is partner or small-group game. Day 4 is independent items. Day 5 is a fresh check or formal assessment. Each day has a suggested time structure, but the grouping is varied by design.

When a teacher notices, through tracking sheets or the Day 5 fresh check, that a cluster of students is struggling with a particular skill, the station rotation model creates time for a teacher-led small group. The teacher-led station targets the

same skill the whole class practiced, but with additional modeling, more accessible examples, and deliberate use of OnRAMP-level-appropriate sentence stems.

Substitute plans are another place where grouping structures are built into the system. Because the station rotation model can run with a substitute facilitating transitions, the regular teacher's absence does not have to mean a lost day of differentiated practice.

"Universal access remains a design commitment, not a promise that one lesson plan will serve every learner identically."

"A Stable Foundation for Every Writer," The Writing Academy®, LLC

SECTION 7

The Connection to Differentiation

Grouping structures and differentiation are not the same thing, but they work together. Differentiation answers "What does this student need?" Grouping structures answer "How will I organize the room to deliver it?"

The OnRAMP framework provides the differentiation logic. A student at the Emergent level needs more structured sentence frames, more teacher modeling, and more frequent checks. A student at the Reflective level needs opportunities to extend and connect ideas independently. The five-level Evidence Citation Stems chart shows exactly how this looks for one skill: each Thinking Level has progressively more sophisticated ways to introduce the source, bring in quoted evidence, tie the evidence to the claim, and select higher-utility verbs.

Grouping structures make it physically possible to deliver those different supports. Whole-group instruction sets the target for everyone. Small-group instruction lets the teacher provide targeted scaffolds. Partner work gives students a safe space to rehearse thinking. Individual work generates the evidence that tells the teacher whether to stay, reteach, or move on.

The GRADUATE cycle builds this flow into every lesson, so a teacher does not have to construct it from scratch. The progressive stamina design across modules (Module 1 is Low, Module 2 is Medium, Module 3 is High, Module 4 is Very High) adds another layer: early in a cluster, the teacher spends more time in whole-group and partner structures. Later in the cluster, individual structures carry more of the weight, because students

have built the stamina and the habits to sustain independent work.

A Supplemental Support System

The Writing Academy®, LLC provides additional instruction and additional practice alongside a campus or district's existing reading language arts core resource. It is not a STAAR/SST blueprint and does not replace core instruction. The grouping structures described in this article are designed to complement, not compete with, the grouping decisions a teacher already makes in the core block.

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