The Power of Three

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The Power of Three

The inspiration for this series began percolating more than 20 years ago. At that time, schools were mainly interested in professional development focused on narrative writing techniques since most state-developed writing assessments focused on narrative prompts.

Of course, I appreciated the opportunity to help educators teach the writing process. Yet, I strongly felt we were developing a very narrow view about the process of writing. Just ask most business leaders about the writing their industry requires. The ability to communicate clearly and effectively in business involves informational writing. This ability directly connects to thinking, reasoning, presenting, and justifying our ideas and opinions. Informational writing involves our organizational skills and connecting ideas into some logical or sequential patterns.

Our definition of writing needs to change. We need to embrace writing techniques in all subject areas. Writing across the curriculum requires a different set of skills. The good news is informational writing can be exciting. The real world and our vast technological resources offer so many wonderful opportunities for students to explore, observe, and understand everything that happens in this vast universe. We must connect informational writing techniques with all that we read, view, hear, and observe. Furthermore, we must provide strategies and techniques that will build confident writers for a wide variety of purposes and audiences.

My own definition of writing has certainly evolved. I write teacher manuals. The manuals I create are about procedures, techniques, and strategies. They involve breaking complex writing tasks into what I call "doable chunks." They are my attempt to translate what is often abstract theory into practical structure.

We also have much to learn from The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) NAEP assessments have been conducted in reading, mathematics, science, writing and other subjects since 1969. A new computer-based writing assessment was administered with eighth and twelfth graders in 2011. This new test reflected the need to integrate communication technologies into the ways students compose their writing. In fact, the major components of this new test revolve around a new definition of writing set forth under a new frame work:

> *Writing is a complex, multifaceted, and purposeful act of communication that is accomplished in a variety of environments, under various constraints of time, and with a wide variety of language and technological tools.*

Much of what is set forth in Common Core State Standards for Reading, Writing, and Language relates to this new definition. The tasks set forth in this new assessment were designed to measure three communicative purposes

- To persuade
- To explain
- To convey experience (real or imagined)

These three communicative purposes became the framework for the three divisions spelled out in the Common Core State Standards for Reading and Writing. While most writing programs place a significant priority on helping students convey real or imagined experience (narrative writing), we have deliberately chosen to focus on the first two purposes. The Power of Three is designed to provide students with explicit strategies and techniques that will help them develop confidence in their ability to present a wide variety of information clearly and effectively.

For shorter responses, precision is the key. Precise nouns and powerful verbs are the engines of shorter responses. Brevity and clarity can be modeled. Even the shortest responses can showcase higher level critical thinking.

Longer more detailed writing often involves more sophisticated patterns. Students must be taught how to use graphic organizers to support different organizational patterns. Students must be taught very specific techniques for converting the information on the graphic organizers into well-crafted paragraphs, essays, reports, and texts. Techniques for revising and editing all the patterns we teach must be introduced. Careful attention must be paid to powerful word choices, including transitional phrases that support the basic organizational patterns.

The greatest gift we can offer our students is a way to make sense of structure. There indeed is a basic pattern to most informational writing. I call this pattern "The Power of Three." Three facts, three details, or three arguments become the foundation for all informational and argumentative writing. These three facts, details or arguments form the body of a short constructed response, a structured paragraph, and a formal essay or report. This concept is fully developed in Our Three Modules.

Module One: Developing Short Constructed Responses and Note-taking Techniques

Module Two: Building Effective Paragraphs

Module Three: Designing Compelling Informative and Argumentative Writing

We offer a very practical approach for every type of written response. We often move too quickly to longer pieces of writing before we have mastered the basics. In other words, students need to master the sentence before they can construct a paragraph. When students can develop well organized paragraphs, they are then prepared to produce more complex writing such as essays and reports.

Moreover, we can deliver writing instruction with enthusiasm and excitement. We must provide direct instruction in all phases of the writing process. We can use color-coding techniques to create engaging word walls in all subjects. We can integrate cooperative learning into every stage of writing, from brainstorming to revising and editing.

Most importantly, while many writing programs may be aligned to Common Core Standards, our program is custom-created to offer a more step-by-step approach for integrating Common Core Reading, Writing,

Language, and Literacy Standards into everyday practice. We specialize in the "how-to" of writing instruction. While many popular writing programs focus primarily on techniques for Narrative Writing, we chose to focus on Informative and Argumentative Writing. We certainly agree with the strong emphasis that the Common Core Standards place in these two areas.

It is our hope that educators will find these manuals useful and practical. Everything presented has been used in real classrooms with real teachers and students. The districts that use our professional development services and materials have often made significant gains in state-developed and in district-developed writing assessments. We also help students succeed on national tests. For example, we have helped many high school students master the persuasive essay on the current ACT Exam. But most importantly, the techniques we offer prepare students for the real world. Our ability to communicate effectively is a key element to business and personal success.

BASIC ORGANIZATIONAL PATTERNS

- Sequential/enumerative
- Descriptive
- Definition
- Illustration
- Classification
- Question/answer
- Problem/solution
- Compare/contrast
- Cause/effect
- Persuasive/argumentative

These are the basic organizational patterns found in most informational material. Textbooks, technical manuals, procedural explanations follow these basic patterns. We need to understand them, recognize them, and use them to produce informational writing.

These patterns can guide us as we write:

- Short constructed responses
- Effective paragraphs
- Essays
- Reports
- Research

CONNECTING READING AND WRITING

Basic Informational Structures and Features:

- Titles
- Headings
- Photographs
- Models
- Illustrations
- Charts
- Graphs
- Timelines
- Maps

Features:

- Footnotes
- Bibliographies
- Introductions
- Summaries
- Conclusions

Appendices

NONFICTION WRITING PRINCIPLES

- Reading and writing are connected.
- Nonfiction reading and writing shapes our knowledge base in all subject areas.
- We can demonstrate our knowledge without writing skills.
- Nonfiction writing is clear and precise.
- Nonfiction writing can be exciting and creative.
- Informational writing prepares us for life.

OUR LIVING LANGUAGE IS A PROGRESSION

Research

Essays/Reports

Paragraphs

Sentences

Words

Sounds
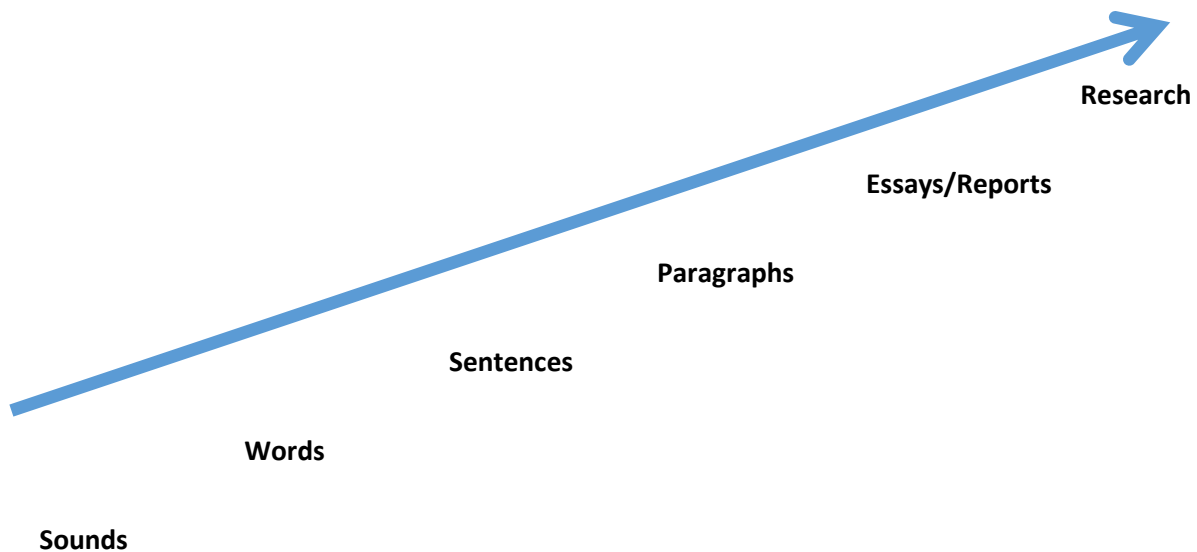
THE POWER OF THREE – THE FOUNDATION FOR ALL INFORMATIONAL WRITING

- Three facts
- Three details
- Three specific examples
- Three recommendations
- Three suggestions

The Power of Three will help students develop all kinds of writing including:

- Powerful short constructed responses
- A wide variety of paragraphs (sequential, descriptive, cause and effect, comparative, and persuasive)
- Compelling longer texts (reports, essays, research)

THE BLUEPRINT BASICS

Writing Chants

- Writing is not a subject. Writing is a way of thinking.
- We read, write, speak, and listen in every subject.
- Writing is talk written down.
- If I can talk a lot, I can write a lot!
- We can demonstrate our knowledge in all subjects with our written responses.
- Writing in the content areas prepares us for the writing that the world of work requires.

WRITING TERMS

Constructed Responses

- Short, clear, concise
- Require a few sentences

Extended Responses

- Somewhat longer
- Require more detail
- Options include
  - Three to four sentences
  - A paragraph
  - A bullet list
  - Multiple paragraphs

T
I
P

Use Power Verbs!

Practice the Power of Three!

THE CORE COLOR – CODING PROCESS

Color-coding the major parts of speech is a key component in all of our programs. Our color-coding system helps students compose a wide variety of written responses more effectively. We highly recommend using the following color-coding system:

nouns - purple	**verbs - green**
adjectives - hot pink or red	**adverbs - blue**

This system can be used in all types of writing experiences. Every complete sentence should include precise nouns and powerful verbs (your purple and green words). We make our sentences more interesting by adding adjectives and adverbs (your hot pink and blue words).

We suggest creating word walls using this system in all subject areas for all grade levels. We also use this system to create word tubs in the early elementary grades. In other words, nouns would be on index cards or colored paper in a noun box or tub, verbs would be on index cards or colored paper in a verb box or tub, and likewise for the adjectives and adverbs. The good news is colored pens are widely available today. We encourage schools to use colored pens or pencils along with creating colorful word walls.

Research supports the use of word walls in all classrooms. With our color-coding system, word walls become more effective because students begin to understand the relationship between the four major parts of speech and successful writing techniques. This approach also encourages students to experiment using the parts of speech in different positions in sentences resulting in greater variety in sentence structure.

Brain research also supports the use of color in all classrooms. By using our color-coding systems, students are having fun while they are engaged in composing effective writing in all subjects.

*A note about adjectives: We recommend using hot pink for adjectives on word walls and in word tubs. However, it is not easy to find pink pens so we suggest using red pens for written activities.

Stage One: Whole Group Instruction

This stage involves direct instruction. The teacher must model the particular skill students are to master as a whole group process. Each step is modeled in front of the class. Ample time is given for EVERYONE to succeed in the process. There is no failure.

Stage Two: Small Group Writing

This stage involves allowing students to work together to produce a collaborative piece of writing. The groups should never exceed three students. The teacher needs to ensure that there is diversity in each small group. In other words, whenever possible, there should be a more advanced student, an average student, and a student who struggles in each group. This process could also be engaged in pairs where a more advanced student and a struggling student are partners. Each group must share their rough drafts in the whole group setting. This enables students to directly learn strategies from each other. This process can eliminate some of the need for individual writing conferences. In this way, all students benefit from hearing and understanding that there are several methods that can be used to develop the same topic.

Stage Three: Independent Writing

Once students have mastered Stage One and Stage Two, they should be ready for Independent Writing. Again, students should be encouraged to share their written responses with their classmates. In this stage, students need to learn how to use checklists and rubrics for clarity. Helping students evaluate their own writing and the writing of their classmates is a key component of this stage.

Nouns - purple

map	mural	email
chart	document	text message
graph	survey	memo
bar graph	data	notice
picture graph	percentage	bulletin
line graph	statistics	forecast
scatter plot	chapter	news
illustration	book	selection
diagram	magazine	prediction
picture	web page	warning
photograph		

Top 12 Power Verbs (green)

explain	point out
demonstrate	compare
illustrate	contrast
describe	justify
identify	organize
represent	prove

Common Core Connections:
Explicit evidence and inferences – RI.6-8.1
Precise Language – W.6-8.2.d, WHST.6-8.2d

Step One

This (*map, picture, bar graph, pie chart, table*) about

_____

_____

_____ (*choose a power verb*) _____

_____

_____

Step Two

Provide more details, integrate or interpret data

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Step Three

Draw a conclusion, make an inference or formulate a prediction

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

explain	show	construct
justify	clarify	report
demonstrate	point out	formulate
compare	present	identify
contrast	illustrate	generalize
describe	observe	represent
gather	interpret	collect
solve	analyze	explore
count	summarize	design
add	conclude	infer
multiply	limit	deduct
subtract divide	measure	inform
calculate	list	examine
change	draw	

World's Top 10 Tourist Destinations in 2008

From Snapshot: The Visual Almanac of Our World Today

Step One - Use a precise noun and power verb to explain the purpose of the information.

*This **bar graph identifies** the ten top tourist destinations in 2008.*

Step Two - Provide more details, integrate or interpret data. Information must be accurate.

According to this bar graph *79.3 million people made France the leading country for tourists.*

Step Three - Draw a conclusion, make an inference or formulate a prediction.

Many landmarks like the Eiffel Tower and museums like the Louvre will most likely continue to attract millions of tourists every year.

❶   **Time Order Paragraphs**   **STEP 1:** PLAYING THE GAME

Deadly Waves

Time order paragraphs arrange ideas in a chronological /sequential order.
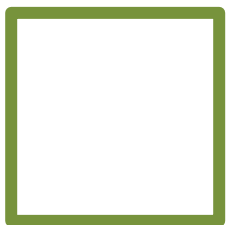
Common Core Connections:
Informational/Expository Writing – W.6-8.2a-f, WHST.5-8.2a-f
Present Information and Collaboration – SL. 6-8.1, SL.6-8.4

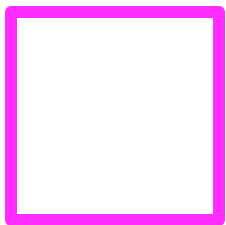# What caused the deadliest tsunami of modern times?
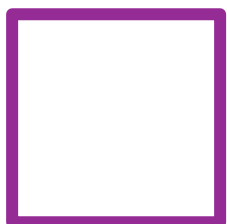
PURPLE

First of all, a massive earthquake shook the coast of Indonesia on December 26, 2004.

☐ GREEN

The earthquake caused two plates of the earth's crust to grind against each other.
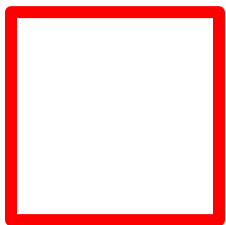
PINK

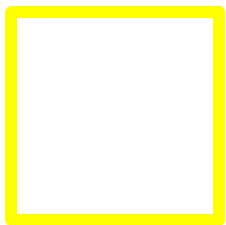Next, as the plates snapped, a tremendous amount of water was displaced in the Indian Ocean.

☐ BLUE

These waves, moving as fast as 500 miles per hour, were able to reach great heights when they reached the shore.

☐ RED

More than 250,000 people lost their lives and 1.7 million lost their homes in this catastrophe of epic proportions.

YELLOW

Use the following lines to write your time order paragraph. Make sure to indent the first sentence.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

We played and recorded a _____ paragraph (identify organizational pattern)

I exchanged my paragraph with _____(record partner's name)

Minor Editing

Did my partner indent the first sentence?	○ Yes ○ No
Did my partner misspell any words?	○ Yes ○ No
Did my partner misplace or omit any words or phrases?	○ Yes ○ No
Did my partner make punctuation errors (end punctuation, commas, semi colons, colons)	○ Yes ○ No
Did my partner make minor usage errors?	○ Yes ○ No

☐ Subject/verb agreement (is/are, was/were, have/has, don't, doesn't)

☐ Noun endings (plural and possessive)

☐ Verb endings (-ed, -ing)

☐ Verb endings (-ed, -ing)

Other Suggestions:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Use this page to write your final copy or enter the paragraph on a computer or tablet. Make sure you have edited your first draft before completing your final copy.

Title: _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

MASTERING LONGER WRITING

SEQUENTIAL WRITING: THE FOUNDATION

- Time Order Writings

INFORMATIVE/EXPLANATORY WRITING

Group One: Basic Descriptive Patterns

- Descriptive Writings
- Space Order Writing
- Illustration Writing
- Definition Writing
- Classification Writing

Group Two: Relationship Writing

- Compare/Contrast Writing
- Cause/Effect Writing
- Problem/Solution Writing

ARGUMENTATIVE WRITING

- Defending a Position/Opinion
- Analytical Writing (Examining both sides of an issue)

SEQUENTIAL WRITINGS

The purpose of a sequential writing is very logical in nature. We use the sequential writing as a starting point in our writing sessions. Mastering sequential writing will help students arrange ideas in an orderly fashion and, at the same time, introduce students to basic writing structure.

We suggest using sequential writings to explain the steps in an orderly process. This writing can be directly linked to the skills introduced in Module Two which includes our Time Order paragraphs, our Order of Climax/Importance paragraphs, and our Process paragraphs.

- places ideas in the order that they happen
- moves from present to past or past to present
- places events in a sequence (timelines/life cycles)
- explains how to make/create something (steps in a process)

Step 1 – The Definition ❶

- Places ideas in the order that they happen (sequence)
- Moves from present to past or past to present

Transitional words

at first	in the beginning	after a while	finally
first of all	meanwhile	in the end	from then on
the first step	later	over time	at long last

Suggestions

- my morning routine
- fixing breakfast
- playing a game
- following a recipe
- my school day
- after school activities
- caring for a pet
- riding a bike

- events in a nonfiction passage
- a family trip
- a day at the beach
- a trip to the zoo
- steps in solving a story problem for math
- steps in finding information for a report
- rules for a contest
- steps in a science experiment

> Common Core Connections:
> Introducing a Topic
>
> W.6-8.2a, WHST.6-8.2a

Basic Nouns

steps	operations regulations	solutions
directions	rules	likelihood
stages	conditions	success
ways	process	failure
tips	procedures	beliefs
advantages	directions	ability
disadvantages	suggestions	trouble
ideas	problems	instructions
models	examples	recipe

Basic Verbs

follow	include	succeed
use	contribute	notice
need	cause	build
require	affect	draw
find	design	grow
locate	build	repair
look	assemble	fix
appear	construct	begin
seem	guide	start
understand	create	continue
record	plan	create
identify	achieve	direct

Basic Adjectives

easy	serious	practical
hard	quick	effective
simple	slow	useful
difficult	last	successful
basic	final	realistic
complicated		

Basic Adverbs

first of all	moreover	ultimately
initially	almost	most importantly
at the beginning	furthermore	above all
at first	now	moreover
after a while	later	furthermore
the second stage	the third stage	as a result
as soon as	finally	all in all
shortly thereafter	at last	at long last
meanwhile	in the end	

Beginning Phrases

at first
at a first glance
first of all
the first step

in the beginning
initially
preparing involves
getting started includes

a beginning thought
the first step
a first look
from the very start

Middle Phrases

after a while
before you know it
the next stage
the middle step
meanwhile
within the (hour, etc.)

eventually
while
during
as soon as
somewhat later
just when

just about
you might notice
for the moment
at this moment
a closer look

Ending Phrases

at long last
in the end
at last

above all
in the future
now you know
these steps should
provide

following these tips will
as you can see
now you understand or
realize
these steps will

Common Core Connections:
Transitions – W.6-8.2c, WHST.6-8.2c

Step 1 – Choose an appropriate topic sentence for your prompt.

If you follow three basic steps, your _____ will be....

Have you ever had to _____?

There are a few steps everyone _____...

I'll always remember my mom's/dad's/teacher's advice about

_____.

Do you know the three common methods involved in _____?

It only takes a few minutes to _____.

Knowing what to do in _____ could (save your life, is extremely

important).

Preparing for _____ certainly...

Common Core Connections:
Introducing a Topic – W.6-8.2a, WHST.6-8.2a

Step 2 - A Brainstorm List/Steps Involved

Use these three lists to arrange the ideas you will present in a logical order

List 1 (first, the first step)	List 2 (next, the second step)	List 3 (finally, the third step)

Step 3 – Add more details to each list. This should involve more research.

Common Core Connections:
Developing the Topic – W.6-8.2.b, WHST.6-8.2b
Use Technology – W.6-8.6,WHST.6-8.6
Research and Relevant Sources – W.6-8.7, WHST.6-8.7,W.6-8.8,WHST.6-8.8

Step 4 – Formatting and Organization   Subtitles/Headings

- students create a title for each list
- these titles are used as subtitles and headings for each point made in comparative writing

> **T**
> **I**
> **P**
> - If the writing is hand written, these titles should be centered.
> - If the writing is composed on a computer, the subtitle should be centered and in bold print.

Illustrations/Graphics/Tables/Charts

Sequential writing comes alive with illustrations, diagrams, charts, tables, etc. Make sure to include them and to identify the source.

Detail 1 _____

- transition _____
- supporting details/examples from print and digital sources

Detail 2 _____

- transition _____
- supporting details/examples from print and digital sources

Detail 3 _____

- transition _____
- supporting details/examples from print and digital sources

Common Core Connections:
Formatting – W.6-8.2a,WHST.6-8.2a
Research/Relevant Information – W.6-8.7, WHST.6-8.7, W.6-8.8,WHST6-8.8

Step 5

Paragraph One (creative beginning when possible)
- Topic Sentence - Refer to Step One (introducing time order topic)
- Let audience know what to expect as they continue reading the rest of your writing.

Paragraph Two
- Transition
- Topic sentence for Point One
- Details/support/definitions for Point One

Paragraph Three
- Transition
- Topic sentence for Point Two
- Details/support/definitions for Point Two

T
I
P

This is a suggestion for basic structure. The nature of the topic will always determine the length of the writing.

Paragraph Four
- Transition
- Topic sentence for Point Three
- Details/support/definitions for Point Three

Paragraph Five/Concluding Paragraph
- Transition
- Topic Sentence
- Brief wrap-up
- Snappy/catchy ending sentence

Common Core Connections:
Developing the Topic – W.6-8.2b, WHST.6-8.2b
Formal Style – W.6-8.2e, WHST.6-8.2e
Clear Writing – W.6-8.4, WHST.6-8.4

Phase 2: Applying Style and Substance/Creative Beginnings

- A question
- A surprising fact

Make your first sentence creative!

Have you ever had to _____?

Do you know how to _____?

What would you do if a _____?

I'll always remember some great advice about _____

Surprising facts

It only take a few _____ to _____

Making a _____ is actually quite easy.

Knowing how to _____ could save a life

If you follow three rules/steps your _____

Add your own creative beginnings in the space below.

_____

_____

_____

_____

Common Core Connections:
Introducing a Topic – W.3.2a, W.4.2a, W.5.2a
Formal Style – W.6-8.2e, WHST.6-8.2e

Mighty Middles

Subtitles/Headings

- students create a title for each list
- these titles are used as subtitles and headings for each point made in the body

> **T**
> **I**
> **P**
>
> - If the writing is hand written, these titles should be centered.
> - If the writing is composed on a computer, the subtitle should be centered and bolded.

For example: - Making a chocolate chip cookie's subtitles could include:

Step One: Gathering the Ingredients

Step Two: Preparing the Mixture

Step Three: Enjoying a Tasty Treat

For example: - Blizzard Safety subtitles could include:

Step One: Being Prepared

Step Two: Outdoor Safety

Step Three: Extreme Conditions/Snow Emergencies

Use the space below to list your subtitles and headings.

_____

_____

_____

Common Core Connections:
Formatting – W.6-8.2a, WHST.6-8.2a
Using Technology – W.6-8.5

Strong Endings

Useful sentence structures:

As you can see, making a _____

Understanding these basic steps will _____

The advantages of knowing these steps _____

Following these procedures will _____

T **I** **P**	Endings, like beginnings, should be short and sweet. The last paragraph of sequential writing should not introduce any new information. It should serve as a brief wrap-up of the major points presented. It should also call forth some action.

Powerful endings:

That's all it takes.

Now you're ready to _____.

Now you truly know everything about _____.

So that's how _____.

Following these steps is truly easy.

_____

_____

_____

Common Core Connections:
Concluding Statement/Section – W.6-8.2f, WHST.6-8.2f
Formal Style – W.6-8.2e,WHST.6-8.2e

Organization

☐ Does my first paragraph briefly introduce the purpose of my time order writing?

☐ Have I used a creative technique to introduce my topic?

☐ Do the paragraphs progress in a logical manner?

☐ Have I used transition words in my paragraphs?

☐ Does every paragraph support my topic with clearly expressed details/examples/definitions?

☐ Have I used headings and subtitles correctly in the body of my writing?

☐ Have I included illustrations or graphics to support my information?

☐ Is there a strong concluding paragraph that briefly summarizes my time order writing?

☐ Have I made my readers care about or take some kind of action about my topic?

Word Choice and Sentence Structure

☐ Is there a variety in my sentences? (word choice and length)

☐ Have I eliminated unnecessary details?

☐ Have I checked word choice and replaced weak choices with more effective choices? (use of Thesaurus, Word Walls, Power Verb Lists)

☐ Have I clearly defined any vocabulary words that my readers may need to know?

Resources

☐ I used print and digital information for my writing.

☐ I put the ideas in my own words.

☐ I used quotation marks when I copied facts directly.

☐ I provided a bibliography (list of sources) for my information.

Common Core Connections:
Revision and Editing – Anchor Standard Five

Punctuation

- [ ] paragraphs indented
- [ ] end punctuation
- [ ] capitalization
- [ ] commas
- [ ] quotation marks
- [ ] apostrophes

T I P — Use digital editing tools.

Spelling

- [ ] use dictionaries, glossaries, word wall lists
- [ ] checking for common errors (two, too, to; their, there, they're)
- [ ] use frequently misspelled word lists/tools

Proper Usage

Nouns

- [ ] singular and plural endings (s, es)
- [ ] unusual plurals (children, men, women, teeth)
- [ ] possessive endings (-'s,-s')

Verbs

- [ ] subject verb endings (-ed, -ing)
- [ ] irregular verbs (is/are, was/were, has/have, wrote, said)

Agreement
- [ ] noun/verb (The girls were excited about their soccer game.)
- [ ] pronoun/verb (He was thrilled when he won the Spelling Bee.)

Formal Language

- [ ] use standard English
- [ ] eliminate slang
- [ ] eliminate abbreviations used in text messaging (LOL, OMG)

Common Core Connections:
Conventions – L.6-8.1, L.6-8.2
Use Technology – W.6-8.6, WHST.6-8.6