

An Examination of Using Graphic Organizers to Teach Writing: A case study

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Spring 2013

### Abstract

The purpose of this action research study was to determine whether or not using graphic organizers to teach writing would have an impact on first grade students' attitudes toward writing and proficiency in the areas of word choice and organization. This six-week study was guided by two primary research questions: 1) Does using graphic organizers impact students' attitudes towards writing? And 2) How does using graphic organizers impact students' ability to use word choice and organization in writing? Throughout the entirety of this study, two main sources were used to collect information. The sources that were used were: a survey about students' attitudes towards writing and independent student writing samples completed three times throughout the study. At the conclusion of the research study, results showed that graphic organizers are an effective teaching technique in writing. Students showed improved attitudes toward writing and their usage of word choice and organization improved.

### An Examination of Using Graphic Organizers to Teach Writing: A Case Study

Writing is a life skill that students must learn in order to communicate effectively in and out of school. “Writing is one of the most powerful tools we have for learning and for demonstrating what we know” (Santangelo & Olinghouse, 2009, p. 1). Studies show that when children are not taught how to write effectively, significant barriers in education, employment, and other life pursuits may occur (Chohan, 2011; Santangelo & Olinghouse, 2009). “It is terribly important for kids to read and write for reasons that people all over the world read and write, which is to communicate, to be delighted, and to laugh” (Calkins, 1994, p. 4). As an educator, one of the most important tasks is to introduce students to the written language and teach them how to use written language to communicate effectively.

This action research study focuses on the use of graphic organizers during writer’s workshop to help students organize their writing and improve word choice. Graphic organizers provide a visual representation for young writers. With the use of graphic organizers students will be able to organize their story with a beginning, middle, and end and learn to select words for their chosen topic. Graphic organizers provide a fun way for students to learn about the writing process.

This study stemmed directly from the researchers personal experiences as an educator for the past five years. As a first grade teacher, one of the major focuses within the classroom is writing instruction. It is the educators’ job to help students build confidence and find success as they begin learning about the writing process. Many students struggle with the ability to organize their writing and also show difficulty in incorporating creative word choice in their writing. The ultimate goal of this study was to help improve these key areas in an effort to help students become more effective, proficient writers and also enjoy the writing process.

This study intended to examine if using graphic organizers to teach writing will have an impact on first grade students attitudes in the areas of word choice and organization. This study was guided by the following questions: “Does using graphic organizers impact students’ attitudes towards writing?” and “How does using graphic organizers impact student’s ability to use word choice and organization in writing?”

Through the use of graphic organizers to teach writing, I hypothesized that my students would find a greater enjoyment in writing as well as improve abilities in the areas of organization and word choice within their writing. Findings from this study will inform teachers of the effectiveness of using graphic organizers to teach students the writing process.

### **Producing Life-Long Writers**

Teaching writing has changed over the years. In the past, writing was assigned and corrected rather than taught. Instead of putting focus on the process of writing, teachers focused on the final product of the writing (Jasmine & Weiner, 2007). Many educators find writing difficult to successfully teach to their students. Alber-Morgan, Hessler, and Konrad (2007) stated that teaching writing is just as complicated as writing itself. After the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2000*, teachers have felt more pressure to increase scores of students and become more responsible for their teaching (Karsbaek, 2011). As a result, educators attempt to provide the most effective method of teaching writing to their students.

Teaching writing is a very complex process. Research suggested that children be taught and become comfortable with the fact that writing involves taking risks and making mistakes (Calkins, 1994; Marten, Segraves, Thacker, & Young, 2005). Writing often encourages students to ‘step out of the box’ and think like a writer. This is often difficult for young writers to do. Effective writing teachers must reinforce the idea that learning involves practice: practice

provides opportunities for growth. Children need to be exposed to writing in a developmentally appropriate environment so that the writing process becomes valued, purposeful, pleasant, and productive (Kissel, 2008).

Teachers strive to teach and utilize students' enthusiasm, creativity, and eagerness to help them become strong writers that produce meaningful pieces of work. One approach suggested by researchers is writer's workshop. According to Calkins (1994), writer's workshop is an interactive approach to teaching writing. Writer's workshop serves as a framework for strategy instruction and uses a variety of teaching methods within a block of time. During writer's workshop students will learn to use their enthusiasm, creativity, and eagerness to become independent writers. Students make decisions about what to write and how to prepare their writing for publishing during the writer's workshop and the teacher becomes the facilitator (Marten et al., 2005). During a writer's workshop block of time students are found brainstorming, thinking about a topic, conferencing, writing drafts, and publishing.

Writer's workshop teaches students the writing process rather than the writing product (Karsbaek, 2011). Marten et al. (2005) conducted a study to describe what three first grade teachers and their students learned when engaged in the writing process during writer's workshop. The three teachers and their students were observed for one year. The researchers collected writing samples, anecdotal observations, and teacher and student interviews. From the data collected, the researchers found that a classroom that uses writer's workshop is interactive and engaging. As a result, students can write and can enjoy writing when it is taught in an encouraging and interactive way. This study concludes that writer's workshop encourages students to collaborate with one another as they work through the writing process (Marten et al., 2005).

Students find that when participating in writer's workshop, they become more comfortable with writing and even find it easier (Jasmine & Weiner, 2007). Ultimately, writer's workshop allows students to have free choice to select a topic and the tools it takes to make it happen, and results in helping them become life-long writers (Karsbaek, 2011; Kissel, 2008).

### **The Writing Process**

One of the important roles of a teacher during writer's workshop is to provide his/her students with effective mini-lessons to teach independent practice. Students must be provided with effective strategies to expand their skills and become independent writers (Sundeen, 2007). During writer's workshop, teachers teach students about the writing process through mini-lessons.

The writing process teaches and focuses on what real writers do (Karsbaek, 2011). Real writers engage in brainstorming, produce multiple drafts, edit writing, and revise writing many times before publishing. Santangelo and Olinghouse (2009) stated that the writing process emphasizes that writers learn by doing: that is engaging in daily writing opportunities. "The writing process enables us to show primary students what it's like to be a writer" (Culham & Coutu, 2009, p. 14). It allows students to choose topics, learn skills, and work through problems (Culham & Coutu, 2009). Writing is viewed as a cycle, not a program. Students are continuously progressing through the steps of the writing process: prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing. The writer will go back and forth between the steps before publishing their writing (Karsbaek, 2011). With writer's workshop, teachers have the opportunity to teach the process through mini-lessons and allow for independent growth during writing time.

## **Organization**

One of the steps of the writing process is prewriting or planning. Young students, who are able to think of stories about their lives, often struggle with the ability to independently plan and organize the story, which is a very important part of the writing process. Culhan (2005) states that all writing begins with having something to say, therefore teachers should spend time helping young writers figure out what they want to say. It is essential for students to draw upon experiences, observe what's going on around them, and ask questions. The prewriting stage helps students figure out the possibilities for writing (Culhan, 2005).

Once a child has an idea for writing, they need to learn how to organize the idea into a written story. Organization is “structuring information so that it makes sense to the reader” (Culhan, 2005, p. 101). Culhan (2005) suggests teachers use well-written picture books, early chapter books, magazine articles, and non-fiction books to show students the organizational craft. “Writers who read and are read to a lot know what effective organization looks like even before they are able to create conventional text themselves” (Culhan, 2005, p. 102). Santangelo and Olinghouse (2009) suggest the use of graphic organizers to encourage the generation of ideas and improve the organizational structure in students’ writing.

## **Word Choice**

If a writer has successfully done their work in the prewriting stage, than the writer will be anxious to get started writing. When a student begins drafting their writing, they see the idea in their mind and are ready to write it down on paper (Culhan, 2005). When drafting a piece of writing, students are encouraged to just simply write. When students have finished drafting, they learn the role of revision to make their writing more interesting. According to Culhan (2005), revising is:

‘seeing again.’ That means working with the idea until it is clear, organizing with a sense of order, selecting words that are accurate and specific to the topic, making sure our voice is appropriate for the audience, listening for the flow of the words and sentences, and changing them when the melody breaks down. (p. 57)

When teaching students how to revise their writing, the use of graphic organizers, modeling, and practice will help young writers successfully produce a piece of writing ready to publish.

### **Graphic Organizers**

Graphic organizers can be used to encourage students to plan and brainstorm their topic before beginning to write. “A graphic organizer is a visual representation of knowledge, a way of structuring information, and of arranging essential aspects of an idea or topic into a pattern using labels” (Egan, 1999, p. 641). Graphic organizers provide a visual representation of key details and ideas for students who have difficulty organizing information (Baxendell, 2003). As a result, graphic organizers have become a vital role in many classrooms.

Although graphic organizers can be very successful when teaching students the writing process, teachers must learn to be cautious when choosing graphic organizers to incorporate into writer’s workshop. Baxendell (2003) suggests that graphic organizers be consistent, coherent, and integrated in creative ways to show success in student’s learning.

Graphic organizers should be presented in a creative way. Students are more likely to use graphic organizers independently if they are introduced in an exciting, creative way (Baxendell, 2003). Egan (1999) stated that graphic organizers will not be an effective teaching method unless they are clear and straight forward. The graphic organizers must be easily understandable. Poorly constructed graphic organizers will cause students to become confused and disorganized in their understanding (Baxendell, 2003). Most importantly, when using

graphic organizers to teach writing, teachers must model and experience the instructional task before requiring young writers to use it independently (Egan, 1999).

Graphic organizers can prove to show success in all areas of academics when implemented carefully. Before using graphic organizers teachers must give careful consideration to their own preparation and provide sufficient modeling before placing the expectation on the student. Graphic organizers are used most effectively when students are allowed to work cooperatively in pairs or groups.

The writing process can be a difficult task to master. By learning how to organize their thoughts and carefully choose words for their writing through the use of graphic organizers, students can learn to comprehend difficult academic standards, such as the writing process (Baxendell, 2003).

### **Student attitudes towards writing**

Learning to write is an activity that children engage in throughout their elementary school years. Literacy skills, reading and writing, are essential skills for success in today's world (Calkins, 1994; Chohan, 2011; Santangelo & Olinghouse, 2009). Educators play a major role in developing and enhancing these literacy skills. It is important for teachers to provide students with interesting, authentic, and meaningful literacy experiences (Chohan, 2011). When these types of literacy experiences are provided for students they become more engaged and interested in their learning. According to Chohan (2011), writing is best learned when children are engaged, allowed to organize their thoughts, and reflect on their own experiences.

Teachers often do not perceive themselves as writers, which make it difficult to provide effective writing instruction (Nauman, Stirling, & Borthwick, 2011). When teachers do not enjoy and practice writing themselves, their responses can be confusing to young writers. This

can cause writers to become discouraged and the students' motivation will suffer (Nauman et al., 2011). Modeling your love for writing in front of students provides valuable opportunities for students to be engaged and motivated in writing (Kissel, 2008).

“Teachers face an uphill battle when attempting to maintain children’s positive attitudes towards writing” (Cohan, 2011, p. 40). Research has shown that writing proficiency is more natural for girls than boys; therefore the gap between writing performance is not closing (Chohan, 2011). It is important for teachers to take this into consideration when providing writing instruction to his/her students. Writing techniques that work for girls, may not work for boys. In addition to the gap between boys’ and girls’ writing proficiency, students with learning difficulties may experience more difficulty in their knowledge of writing (Brouwer, 2012). In order to keep all students interest in writing, it is important for teachers to find the best method of writing instruction that works for his/her classroom.

Teachers must provide students with consistent writing tasks and writing interventions to gain the students’ interest. To prevent further gaps between students, teachers should focus on building motivation to write. When students are motivated to write they will work on closing the gap in writing performances. According to Chohan (2011), providing students with effective teaching strategies and engaging opportunities to write successfully can make major differences in students’ attitudes towards writing.

Learning to become a writer is a necessity to be able to communicate effectively in today’s society. It is important for educators to recognize this and be ready to provide all students with the opportunity to learn to become a life-long writer. When students have the opportunity to participate in writer’s workshop and use a variety of graphic organizers, writing becomes enjoyable and creative. When young writers are given the opportunity to practice

writing, they become more comfortable and confident in the writing process. Teaching writing through the use of graphic organizers during writer's workshop is meaningful and worthwhile, because it effectively shows student's growth in regards to his/her writing abilities (Egan, 1999; Marten, et al., 2005). This is one way to create a life where children love writing. Teachers can prevent writing failure with young children when successful, meaningful ways of teaching are used.

## **Method**

### **Participants and Setting**

The participants of this study were selected from a first grade classroom based on the results of a baseline writing sample. Of 22 students, five students were selected to participate in the study: two males and three females. Three out of the five students chosen scored a three in the craft category and two out of five students scored a one in the craft category. All five of the students chosen scored a two in the composing category of the writing rubric. These were the lowest scores of the 22 students in the class. Each student that participated in the study was given a code letter to be represented by (Student A, Student B, Student C, Student D, and Student E).

The mean age of the participants involved was 6.6 years old. All of the participants were White Caucasian. At the time of the study all participants were healthy (no noted impairments). Student E was diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). All students participating in the study were English speaking. Student D and Student E receive free and reduced lunch.

The study took place in a rural school in central Illinois with a building population of 539 students. The school has 23 classrooms ranging from first grade to third grade. The building has

a low income rate of 42.3%. The demographics of the school are 89.9% Whites, 3.7% Multiracial, 3.0% Blacks, 2.2% Asian, 0.9% Hispanic, and 0.4% American Indian.

The five participants were selected based solely upon his/her writing abilities at the beginning of the study. A writing sample was taken from every student in the classroom. Of the 22 students, five students were selected as a result of their writing score based on the writing rubric. The five students that scored the lowest lacked the ability to organize their writing and select words appropriate for their topic. The selected participants' scored the lowest in the craft and composing categories of the writing rubric used throughout the study.

### **Data Source and Research Materials**

The study used two instruments: a writing rubric (Appendix A) and a survey about students' attitudes towards writing (Appendix B). The writing rubric was developed by first grade teachers in the school. The writing rubric allows teachers to assess student writing in the areas of composing, craft, conventions, and participation. The writing attitude survey allows teachers to understand student's attitudes and feelings about writing.

#### **Writing rubric.**

The writing rubric is broken down into four categories: composing, craft, conventions, and participation. The categories are broken down into a scoring of one through four: four being proficient and one being below average in that category. For the purpose of this study, only two categories were used. The two categories used in the study were composing and craft. The researcher chose to only focus on these two areas of the writing rubric because first grade students need the most practice learning how to organize their writing and select words and sentences for their writing.

The composing category analyzes how students organize their writing. A student proficient in the area of composing is able to write a story with a beginning, middle and end, elaborates and uses interesting word choices for specific examples and descriptions. A student needing improvement in the area of composing does not write stories with a beginning, middle and end, tends to write off topic and shows little attempt at elaboration.

The craft category analyzes how students select words and sentences for their writing. A student proficient in the craft category carefully chooses words and their sentences show variety and fluency. A student needing improvement in the area of craft shows little evidence of sentence variety and words are not well thought out. This instrument was used three times during the study, at the beginning, during intervention and at the end. The writing rubric allowed the researcher to analyze student writing and determine if using graphic organizers improved students ability to use word choice and organization in their writing.

#### **Writing attitude survey.**

The second instrument used in the study was the student attitude survey. The survey titled, "How Do You Feel About Writing?" was given two times during the study, both pre and post intervention, in an attempt to see if using graphic organizers had an impact on students' feelings towards writing. Some of the questions included on the survey were: "Do you think writing is easy or hard?" "Do you get excited or nervous when it is time for writing?" "Do you think writing is fun or boring?" The survey used smiley faces to meet the understanding level of the participants.

#### **Student writing samples and graphic organizers.**

In addition to two instruments, the study also used independent writing samples from each of the five participants. Throughout the study, the students were asked to complete three

writing samples. The participants in the study had the opportunity to choose their topic for writing throughout the study. Student A wrote a story about taking a trip to Campus Pond, going to Disney World, and how he got his dogs. Student B wrote a story about going to school, going to their aunt's wedding, and Christmas. Student C wrote a story about playing their X-box, going to E-Bash, and going fishing. Student D's writing topics were, playing in the snow, going to grandmas, and taking their dog on a walk. Student E's writing topics were, taking care of dogs, going to the beach, and having a Valentine's Day party. These writing samples were evaluated and analyzed using the writing rubric to determine if the use of graphic organizers improved students' ability to organize and use word choice.

Throughout the study the participants used five different graphic organizers to plan and organize their stories. The graphic organizers used were titled, "Brainstorm Clusters" (Appendix C), "Tell More" (Appendix D), "Let's Get Started" (Appendix E), "Cycling Into Paragraphs" (Appendix F), and "Use All Your Senses" (Appendix G). These graphic organizers were used to produce two different writing samples during the study.

The researcher modeled how to use the graphic organizers by planning and organizing a story with the students help. The participants then used their own writing topic to brainstorm and plan using the graphic organizers. The graphic organizers provided the participants with a visual representation of what they were writing about.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

Data collection began the week of February 4, 2013. The students met with the researcher for 30 minutes, four days a week, during the writer's workshop block of time. The four days a week typically fell on Monday through Thursday. Writer's workshop is taught at the

same time every day, in the morning. The data collection period lasted for five weeks. The sixth week was used to finish the post intervention assessments.

The students worked at a small table in the classroom with the researcher. The students were given an attitude survey the first day of the study. They were asked to give their honest answers. The researcher read the survey out loud to the students. After completing the attitude survey, the students chose their writing topic.

The following day the researcher modeled how to use the graphic organizer, “Brainstorm Clusters” (See Appendix C). The researcher used the graphic organizer to brainstorm ideas about a topic. The next day students used the graphic organizer to begin brainstorming ideas about their topic. The students continued working on this graphic organizer the rest of the week with the researcher’s assistance.

During the second week, the researcher modeled how to use a new graphic organizer, “Tell More” (See Appendix D). The students and the researcher used the same writing topic as week one. On the first day, the researcher modeled how to use the graphic organizer to expand on their topic. The students worked on using the graphic organizer to give more detail about their about their topic for the following two days. On the fourth day the researcher modeled using the two graphic organizers, “Brainstorm Clusters” and “Tell More” to write a story.

At the beginning of the third week of the study, students spent time writing their story using the graphic organizers. They used the graphic organizers to include detail in their writing and organize their story with a beginning, middle, and end. After the students were finished writing their story, they were reminded to go back and edit and revise as needed. The students then picked out a new topic for writing. On the fourth day the researcher introduced a new

graphic organizer, “Let’s Get Started” (See Appendix E). The researcher used a new writing topic to begin planning for.

During week four the participants planned and organized a new writing topic using three different graphic organizers. On day one the students used their new writing topic to plan with the graphic organizer “Let’s Get Started”. This graphic organizer required the participants to visualize who was in their story, what were they doing, and where were they. The students worked on this graphic organizer during day one and day two.

On day three of week four, the researcher introduced a new graphic organizer, “Cycling Into Paragraphs” (Appendix F). This graphic organizer was modeled using the same writing topic. The participants completed this graphic organizer during days three and four. This graphic organizer helped the participants plan a beginning, middle, and end to their story.

At the beginning of week five, the students learned and used a new graphic organizer, “Use All Your Senses” (See Appendix G). The first day was used to model the graphic organizer. The participants used the graphic organizer with their writing topic on day two and day three. This graphic organizer had the participants think and draw about their topic, then write about their writing topic using describing words. This helped the students add detail to simple sentences. On day four of the fifth week the researcher modeled using the three graphic organizers, “Let’s Get Started”, “Cycling Into Paragraphs”, and “Use All Your Senses” to write a new story.

The sixth week was the final week of the study. The participants used the first three days of the week to finish writing their story adding detail from their graphic organizers. On day four, the participants took the attitude survey. The same attitude survey was used in week one of the study.

Figure 1 shows what graphic organizers were used throughout the study.

<b>Week</b>	<b>Type of graphic organizer used</b>
Week 1	Writing Attitude Survey “Brainstorm Clusters”
Week 2	“Tell More”
Week 3	“Let’s Get Started”
Week 4	“Cycling Into Paragraphs”
Week 5	“Use All Your Senses”
Week 6	Writing Attitude Survey

*Figure 1.* Type of graphic organizer used each week.

## **Data Analysis and Results**

### **Data Analysis**

For this study, data was analyzed quantitatively and using descriptive analysis. The writing attitude survey was carefully analyzed and evaluated in order to best answer research question one, “Does using graphic organizers impact student’s attitudes towards writing?” For research question two, “How does using graphic organizers impact student’s ability to use word choice and organization in writing?”, student writing samples and the writing rubric were used.

### **Attitude survey.**

The student writing attitude survey was completed prior to the intervention beginning and at the conclusion of the study in an effort to see whether or not using graphic organizers had an impact on student’s attitudes toward writing. The survey included five basic questions about writing (see Appendix B). The results of the pre and post writing survey are shown in Figure 2.

Writing Attitude Survey			
1. Do you think writing is easy or hard?	easy 	hard 	
<b>Pre intervention responses</b>	3	2	
<b>Post intervention responses</b>	5	0	
2. Do you get excited or nervous when it is time for writing?	excited 	nervous 	
<b>Pre intervention responses</b>	4	1	
<b>Post intervention responses</b>	3	2	
3. Do you think writing is fun or boring?	fun 	boring 	
<b>Pre intervention responses</b>	4	1	
<b>Post intervention responses</b>	4	1	
4. During writing, do you always try your very best?	Yes	No	Sometimes
<b>Pre intervention responses</b>	4	0	1
<b>Post intervention responses</b>	4	0	1
5. What is your favorite part about writing?	Planning	Writing	Sharing
<b>Pre intervention responses</b>	0	1	4
<b>Post intervention responses</b>	0	1	4

Figure 2: The number of participants scores from the writing attitude survey.

Question one on the writing survey asked participants if they think writing is easy or hard. On the pre intervention survey, three participants felt writing was easy, while two participants felt it was hard. After graphic organizers were used to teach writing, the participant’s attitudes toward writing showed a major change. On the post intervention survey, all five participants felt that writing was easy and no participants felt that writing was hard.

Question two on the writing survey asked participants if they get excited or nervous when it is time for writing. On the pre intervention survey given at the beginning of the study, four participants noted that they felt excited when it was time for writing and one participant felt nervous when it was time for writing. On the post intervention survey only three participants noted that they felt excited when it was time for writing and two participants noted that they felt nervous during writing time.

For question three, participants chose whether they thought writing was fun or boring. The participants all had the same response to this question on the pre and post intervention survey. Four participants felt that writing was fun and one participant thought that writing was boring on both the pre and post intervention writing survey.

Question four asked participants if they always tried their very best during writing. The results of this question were also the same on the pre and post intervention survey. Four participants noted that they always try their best during writing, zero participants noted that they do not try their best, and one participant noted that they sometimes try their best during writing. Each participant had the same answer on the post intervention survey that they had on the pre intervention survey.

For question five, participants had to choose whether they liked planning their story, writing their story, or sharing their story best. On the pre intervention survey none of the participants noted that they liked planning their story the best. The participants had the same opinion about planning their story on the post intervention survey. One participant noted that writing a story was their favorite part about writing on both the pre and post intervention survey. Four participants noted that their favorite part about writing was sharing their story. The participant's favorite part about writing did not change on the pre and post intervention survey.

**Writing rubric.**

The writing rubric was administered at the beginning of the study, during the study, and at the conclusion of the study. At the beginning of the study, a baseline writing sample was collected. The researcher used the writing rubric to score the participants writing in the areas of composing and craft. To score a four in the area of composing, participants are able to organize their writing with a beginning, middle, and end, use interesting word choice and descriptions, and elaborate throughout their story. To score a four in the area of craft, participants are able to use sentences with variety and fluency, and carefully choose specific words for their story.

The researcher analyzed participants’ writing samples three times during the study. The writing rubric was used to score each of the participants’ writing samples in the areas of composing and craft. The results of the participants’ writing samples, using the writing rubric, in the areas of composing and craft are shown in Figure 3 and Figure 4.

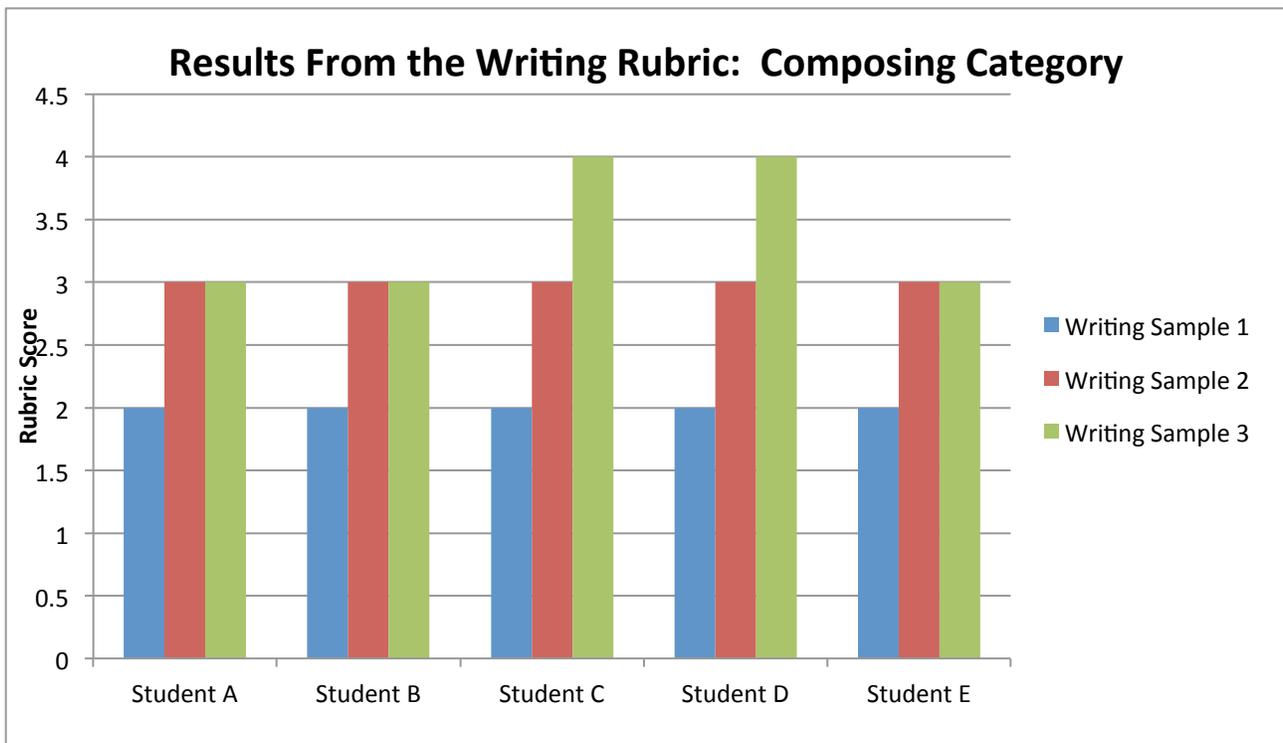


Figure 3. Participants results from the composing category of the writing rubric.

Figure 3 shows the results from the composing category of the writing rubric for each participant's writing samples. Writing Sample 1 was the writing sample taken at the beginning of the study. All participants scored a two in the composing category of the writing rubric. This means that each participant used in the study lacks the ability to organize their writing. They show little attempt at elaboration, and tend to digress and write off topic.

The writing rubric was used again during the intervention to check the participants' progress. The participants learned and used two graphic organizers to plan and organize a story. After analyzing the participants writing samples (Writing Sample 2) using the writing rubric, all of the participants had the same score in the composing category. All five participants scored a three on their second writing sample in the composing category. This means that the participants writing showed some organization, they stayed on topic throughout the paper, and they showed some elaboration in their writing. All participants showed some growth in their ability to compose a story.

At the end of the study, participants produced a final writing sample (Writing Sample 3) to answer the research question, "How does using graphic organizers impact student's ability to use word choice and organization in writing?" Before this writing sample was analyzed, the participants learned and implemented three new graphic organizers to plan and organize a new story. The researcher used the writing rubric to analyze the participants writing. Three participants did not make any growth on the post intervention writing sample. Three participants scored a three in the composing category. This means that the participant's writing showed some organization, they stayed on topic throughout the paper, and they showed some elaboration in their writing. Two participants showed growth in their ability to compose a story. After using graphic organizers to write a story, these two participants were able to organize their writing with

a beginning, middle, and end, stay on topic throughout their paper, and elaborate throughout their story.

All five participants showed growth in their ability to organize a story throughout the study. Three out of five students improved their composing score by one point and two out of five students improved their composing score by two points. Before the intervention began, all five participants lacked the ability to organize a story, often wrote off topic, and showed little attempt at elaboration. After six weeks of implementing graphic organizers to write, all five participants were able to write a story that showed organization, stayed on topic throughout their story and showed elaboration through their writing.

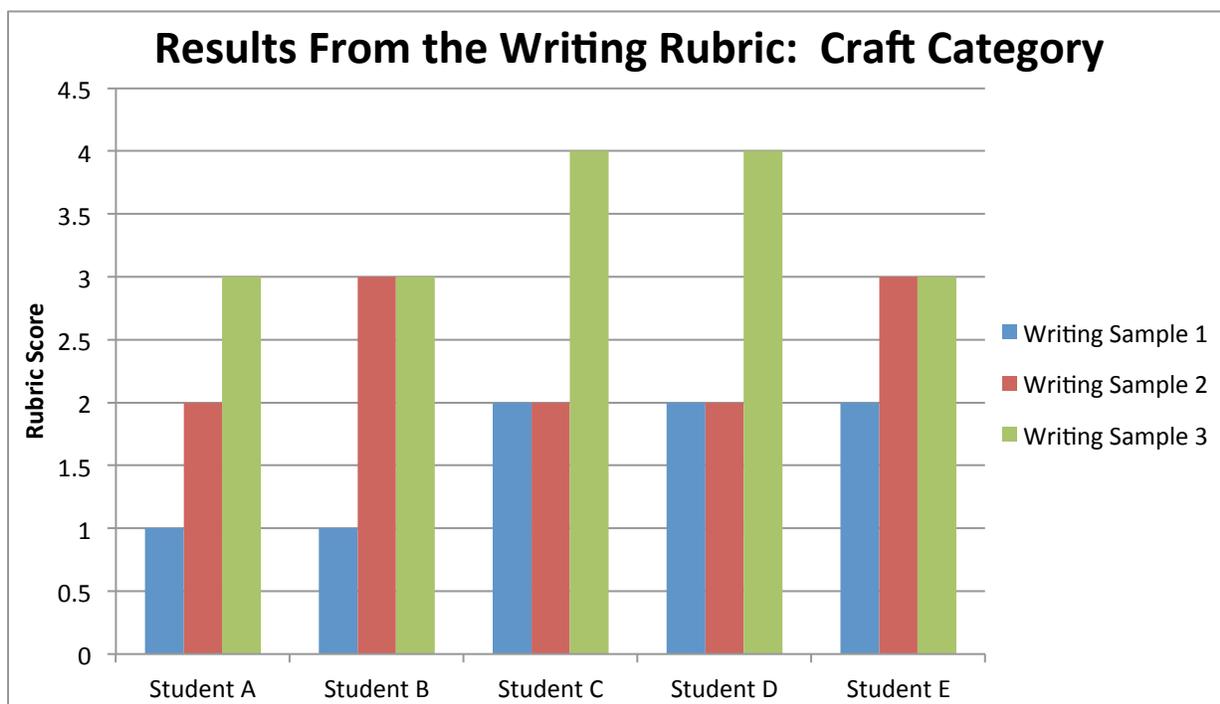


Figure 4. Participant’s results from the craft category of the writing rubric.

Figure 4 shows the results from the craft category of the writing rubric for each participant’s writing samples. Writing Sample 1 is the writing sample taken at the beginning of the study. Student A and Student B scored a one which means their writing used words that

were not specific and showed no variety of sentences. Student C, Student D, and Student E scored a two. Their writing showed little evidence of sentence variety and their words were not well thought out.

The writing rubric was used again during the intervention to show the participants progress in the craft category. The results from the second writing sample (Writing Sample 2) showed that Student A, Student C, and Student D scored a two in the craft category. These participants showed little evidence of sentence variety and their words were not well thought out. Student B and Student E scored a three in the craft category. These participants used sentence variety and specific words in their writing. The writing scores from the first two writing samples (Writing Sample 1 and Writing Sample 2) show that Student C and Student D made no progress in their ability to use word choice in their writing. The Student A, Student B, and Student E showed growth between Writing Sample 1 and Writing Sample 2.

After implementing graphic organizers to write stories, the researcher collected and scored a post intervention writing sample (Writing Sample 3). The post intervention writing sample showed that Student A, Student B, and Student E scored a three in the craft category. This means they are able to use sentence variety and specific words in their writing. Student B and Student E did not show any growth from the previous writing sample. Student A did make growth from the previous writing sample. Student C and Student D scored a four in the craft category on the post intervention writing sample. These participants carefully chose words for their story and showed sentence variety in their writing. Both of these students showed major growth in their word choice at the end of the intervention.

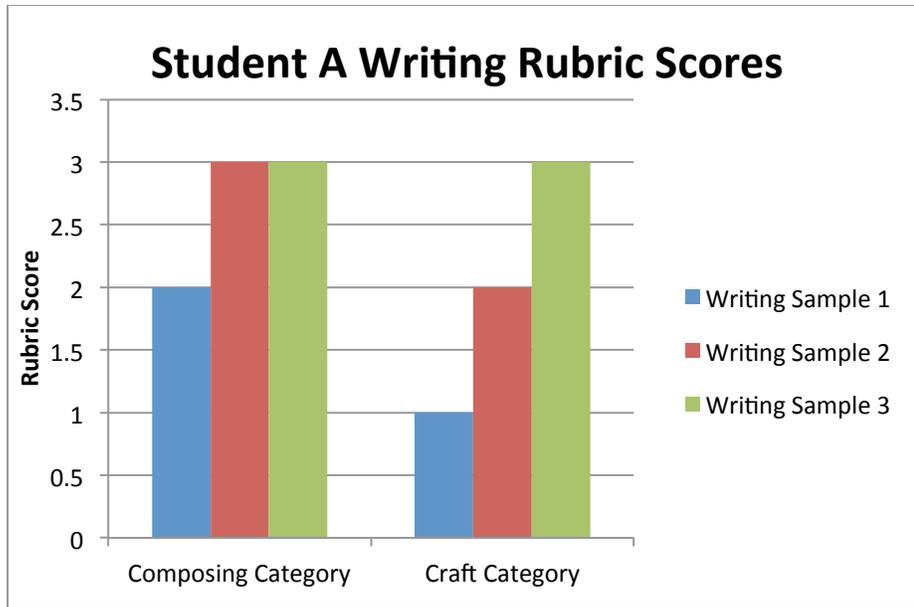


Figure 5. Student A writing sample scores

Figure 5 shows the results of the pre intervention writing sample, during intervention writing sample, and post intervention writing sample for Student A. Student A showed growth in both the composing and the craft category after the implementation of graphic organizers. In the composing category, Student A did not show any growth between Writing Sample 1 and Writing Sample 2. On both writing samples, Student A scored a three. In the craft category, Student A showed growth between each writing sample. On the pre intervention writing sample, Student A scored a one, on the during intervention writing sample they scored a two, and on the post intervention writing sample they scored a three.

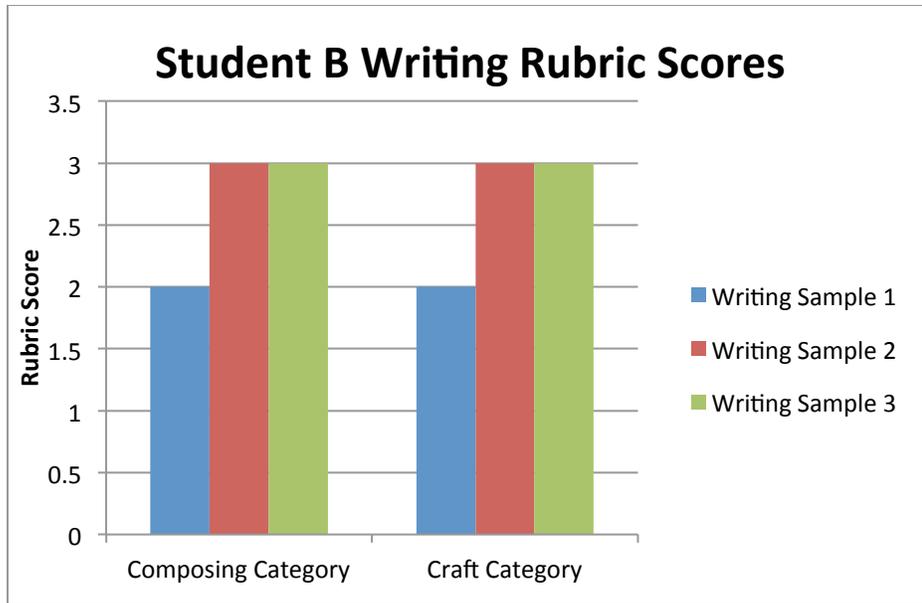
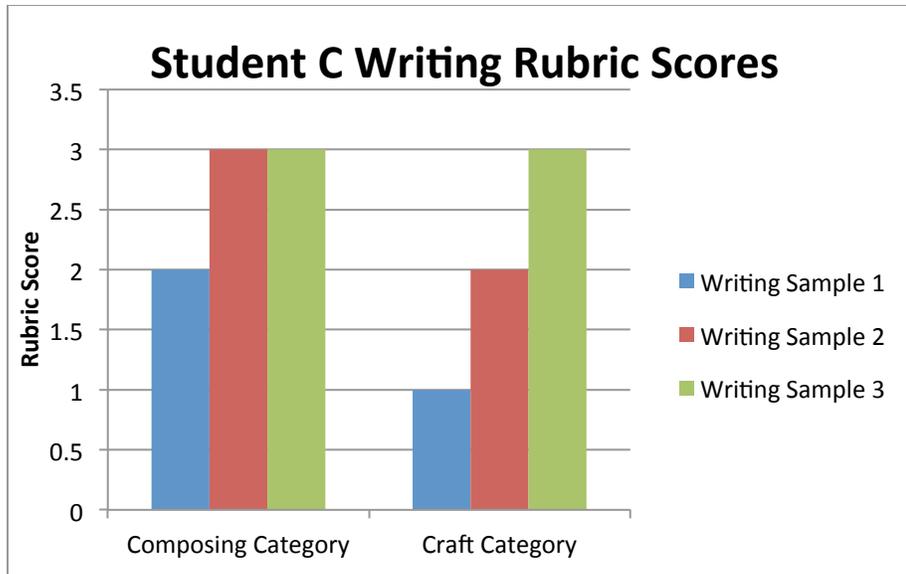


Figure 6. Student B writing sample scores.

Figure 6 shows the results of the pre intervention writing sample, during intervention writing sample, and post intervention writing sample for Student B. Student B showed growth in both the composing and craft category of the writing rubric. In the composing and craft category, Student B scored a two on the writing rubric on the first writing sample. Student B scored a three in the composing and craft category on the writing second and third writing sample. Student B also showed growth from the pre intervention writing sample and the post intervention writing sample.



*Figure 7.* Student C writing sample scores.

Figure 7 shows the results of the pre intervention writing sample, during intervention writing sample, and post intervention writing sample for Student C. Student C also showed growth in both the composing and craft category after implementing graphic organizers. In the composing category, Student C showed growth between Writing Sample 1 and Writing Sample 2. However, their score for the composing category remained the same between Writing Sample 2 and Writing Sample 3. For the craft category, Student C showed major growth in their ability to select words for their story after implementing graphic organizers. Before the intervention began, Student C scored a one in the craft category. After using of graphic organizers to plan and organize a story, Student C scored a three in the craft category.

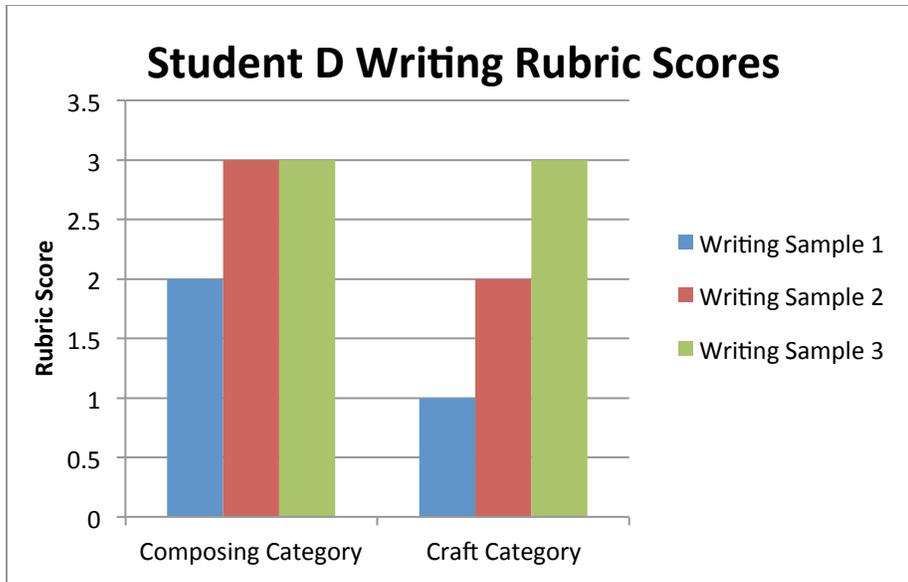


Figure 8. Student D writing sample scores.

The results of the pre intervention writing sample, during intervention writing sample, and post intervention writing sample for Student D are shown in Figure 8. Before the intervention began, Student D scored a two in the composing category and a one in the craft category. At the end of the intervention, Student D was able to show growth, the composing score went up by one point and the craft score went up by two points. .

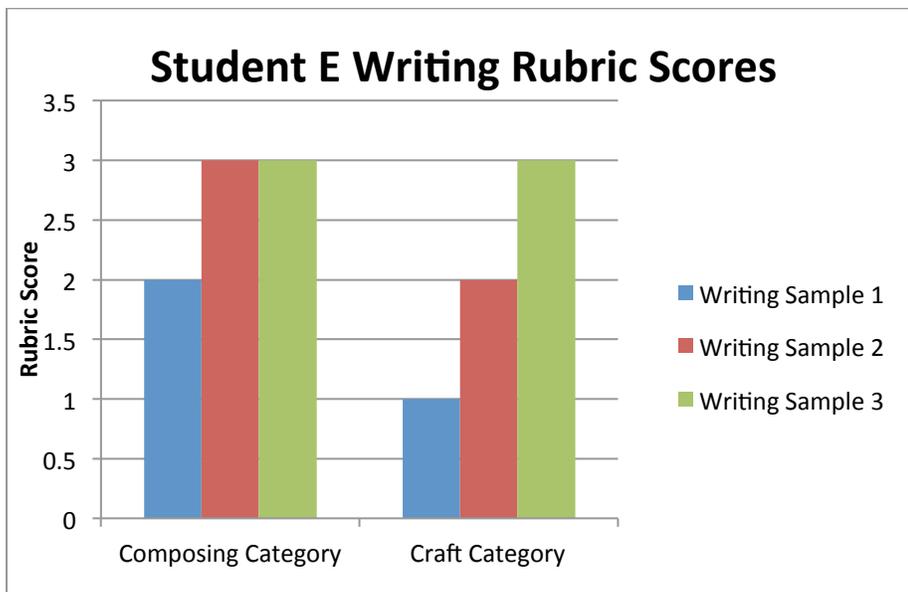


Figure 9. Student E writing sample scores.

Figure 9 shows the results of the pre intervention writing sample, during intervention writing sample, and post intervention writing sample for Student E. Like the other participants, Student E showed growth in the composing and craft category of the writing rubric. Student E showed the most growth in their ability to choose words (craft) for their story. On the pre intervention writing sample, Student E scored a one in the craft category. On the during intervention writing sample, Student E raised the score by one. On the post intervention writing sample, Student E continued to show growth and scored a three in the craft category.

### **Findings and Implications**

#### **Findings**

The overall findings from the attitude survey showed that after implementing graphic organizers into their writing, writing became easier for all of the participants. However participants did not become more excited about writing. Data from the writing rubric reported that all the participants showed growth in their ability to organize their story and carefully choose words for their writing.

To answer research question one, “Does using graphic organizers impact students’ attitudes towards writing?” the researcher used the writing attitude survey. On the pre intervention writing attitude survey only 60% of the participants noted that they thought writing was easy. On the post intervention writing survey 100% of participants noted that they thought writing was easy. However, when asked if they felt excited or nervous about writing, 20% of students felt nervous about writing before implementing graphic organizers and 60% of students felt nervous about writing after implementing graphic organizers. On the pre intervention survey, 80% of the participants felt excited about writing time. When given the post intervention survey, only 60% of participants noted feeling excited about writing time.

When asked if writing is fun or boring, the participants' responses did not change from the pre intervention survey and the post intervention survey. Eighty percent of participants noted that they felt writing was fun on both surveys given during the study. Participants also had no change in answers when asked if they try their best during writing time. Eighty percent of participants noted that they always try their best, while 20% noted that they only sometimes try their best. Implementing graphic organizers also had no effect on the participants' favorite part about writing. No participants noted that they liked planning their story best, 20% noted that writing the story was their favorite, and 80% noted that they enjoyed the sharing part about writing most.

To answer research question two, "How does using graphic organizers impact student's ability to use word choice and organization in writing?" the researcher used student writing samples and a writing rubric. On the pre intervention writing sample 100% of participants scored a two in the composing category of the writing rubric. At the end of the intervention, Student C and Student D showed growth in the composing category. Student C and Student D scored a four on the post intervention writing sample. This means that they raised their composing score by two points. The other participants also showed growth in their organization and improved their score to a three. The overall findings show that using graphic organizers to plan and organize a story improved participant's ability to organize a story with a beginning, middle, and end.

The results of the craft category were more varied. On the pre intervention writing sample, 60% of participants scored a three on the writing rubric, and 40% scored a two on the writing rubric. At the end of the intervention all of the participants showed growth in their ability to carefully choose specific words for their writing. Sixty percent of participants were

able to raise their writing rubric score to a three on the post intervention writing sample. Forty percent of participants made major growth and raised their craft score on the writing rubric to a four. The overall findings show that using graphic organizers for writing helped improve participants' ability to carefully choose specific words for their writing.

### **Limitations**

The limitations of this research project included the choice of graphic organizers and the scoring of the writing rubric. The participants used five different graphic organizers during the duration of the study. The researcher felt that this was too large of a number for the length of the study. Towards the end of the study, the participants were overwhelmed with information to put together a story with organization and specific word choice. The researcher also felt that if this study was replicated, one should be very cautious on what graphic organizers are chosen. Some of the graphic organizers were too lengthy for the participants, therefore caused some participants to become bored with the study.

The other noted limitation of this research study was the scoring of the writing rubric. The writing rubric that was used in this study only had a four point range to score the writing. This did not allow for room to show growth in the participants writing. The researcher had difficulty scoring the participants writing samples because of the small range. If this study was replicated, it is very important to use a writing rubric that has a wider range and allows the researcher to be more specific when scoring the participants writing samples.

### **Implications**

In this study, the use of graphic organizers showed a clear improvement of participants' ability to use word choice and organization in their writing. Using the graphic organizers required the participants to think about their writing before actually beginning their story. They

were able to take time to carefully think through their thoughts and organize their writing. Throughout the entirety of the study, participants were including more details within their writing and their writing samples grew in length as they were provided with graphic organizers to guide them.

Participants' attitudes towards writing did not drastically change throughout the study. By the end of the study, all of the participants thought writing was easy. At the beginning of the study, participants were excited about using graphic organizers to plan their story. However, the study was interrupted by school cancellations due to weather and by the end of the study, the participants appeared to be bored with the graphic organizers.

Some of the graphic organizers used throughout the story were challenging for some of the participants to complete. They did not understand how to use the graphic organizers and required extra guidance and support. Once the participants got the "hang" of how to use them they were able to complete them on their own.

### **Reflections and Action Plan**

#### **Reflections**

This study has impacted the researcher's teaching methods in that the researcher is more aware of what first grade students need in order to write with specific word choice and organization. This action research was of high interest to the researcher because the researcher is always looking to find the most effective, efficient way to help students become successful, proficient writers.

This study included the use of graphic organizers in an attempt to see an impact on student writing. The researcher is pleased with the outcome of the study, as the participants showed an increase in their usage/inclusion of the skills: word choice and organization. Not only

did using graphic organizers impact the participants' skill development, but it also had a direct impact on their attitudes towards writing; the participants became more comfortable, confident, joyful writers.

### **Action Plan**

This research study proved to have very positive results and effects on students' attitudes and skill development in regards to their writing. Therefore, the researcher plans to continue using graphic organizers to teach students writing skills, like organization and word choice. Each of the participants in the study showed growth in regards to their writing, so the researcher is excited to see the growth the other students can make.

When using graphic organizers to teach other writing skills, the researcher will carefully choose the type of graphic organizers to use to fit all students in the class. Depending on what writing skill is being taught, the proper graphic organizer must be chosen. It is important that only a few graphic organizers are used to teach one writing skill so that students do not become confused or overwhelmed.

Another area the researcher needs to analyze before continuing to implement graphic organizers is to look closely at the writing rubric used to score student writing. The writing rubric used in this study was very vague and did not show a wide range of ability. The researcher will develop a new writing rubric that is more specific and will show specific student growth.

The researcher plans to take the results of this study and share with peers and administration. Providing students with the most efficient, effective way to teach writing has been a target at the researcher's school for a long time. Teachers and staff are constantly collaborating on ways to teach writing. The positive outcome of this research study will help

teachers understand the effectiveness of using graphic organizers to teach students the writing process.

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Appendix A

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Writing Topic \_\_\_\_\_

1<sup>st</sup> Grade Assessment Rubric for Writing

	4	3	2	1
<b>Composing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Writing is well organized with a beginning, middle, ending.</li> <li>• Stays on topic throughout the paper.</li> <li>• Elaboration contains interesting word choices for specific examples and descriptions.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Writing shows some organization with a beginning, middle, ending.</li> <li>• Mostly stays on topic.</li> <li>• Some elaboration, although word choices are not specific.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Writing is not well organized and is missing a beginning or ending.</li> <li>• Tends to digress and write off topic.</li> <li>• Little attempt at elaboration.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No evidence of organization.</li> <li>• Does not stay on topic.</li> <li>• Does not elaborate.</li> </ul>
<b>Craft</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Words have been carefully chosen and specific.</li> <li>• Sentences show variety and fluency</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Words were chosen for the topic.</li> <li>• Some evidence of sentence variety.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Words are general and not well thought out.</li> <li>• Little evidence of sentence variety.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Words are not specific.</li> <li>• No variety of sentences.</li> <li>• Some are vague or awkward.</li> </ul>
<b>Conventions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All sentences are meaningful.</li> <li>• Uses correct capitalization and proper punctuation.</li> <li>• All "core" words are spelled correctly.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Most sentences are meaningful.</li> <li>• Uses correct punctuation most of the time. Most words are capitalized correctly, but uses some capitals where they are not needed.</li> <li>• Most "core" words are spelled correctly.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some sentences are meaningful.</li> <li>• Inconsistently uses capitalization and sometimes uses punctuation.</li> <li>• Some "core" words are spelled correctly.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sentences are not meaningful.</li> <li>• No attempt at capitalization and punctuation.</li> <li>• Numerous spelling errors including those that are "core" words.</li> </ul>
<b>Participation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Actively participates in Writer's Workshop routines.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participates in part of Writer's Workshop routines.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some participation in Writer's Workshop routines, but needs constant reminders.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Very little participation in Writer's Workshop routines.</li> </ul>

Appendix B

How do you feel about writing?

\*\*\*\*There are NO wrong answers. I want to know how you really feel about writing!\*\*\*\*

1. Do you think writing is **easy** or **hard**?



2. Do you get **excited** or **nervous** when it is time for writing?



3. Do you think writing is **fun** or **boring**?



4. During writing, do you always try your very best?

Yes

No

Sometimes

5. What is your favorite part about writing?

Planning a story

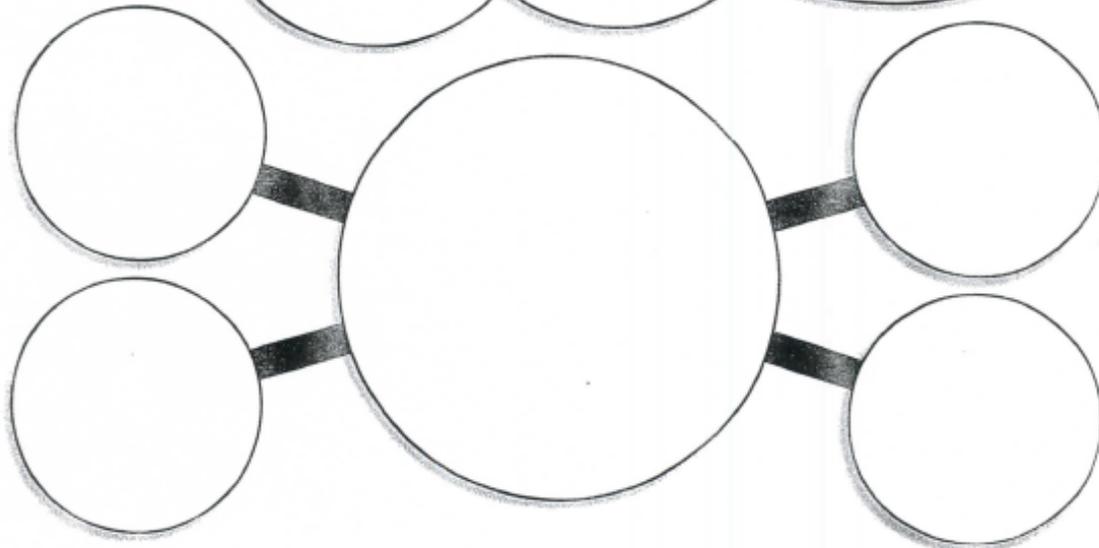
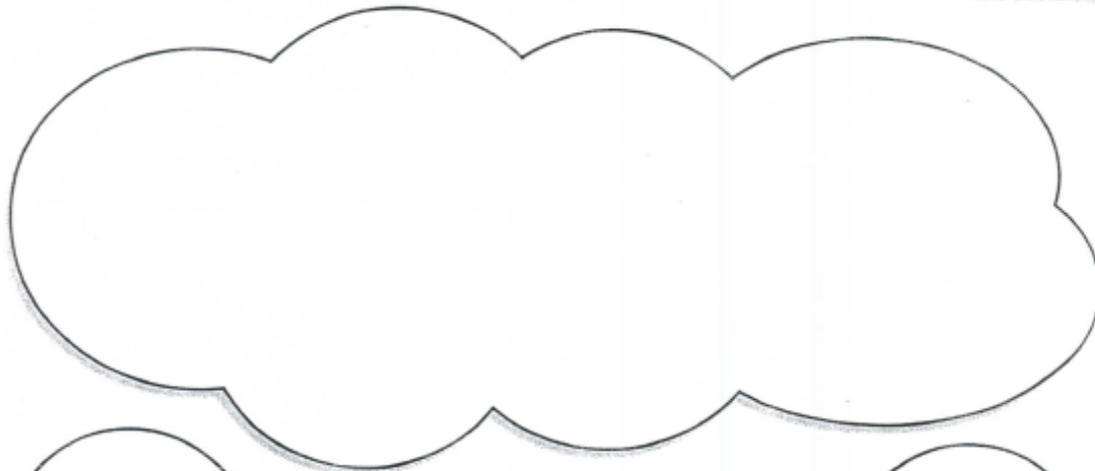
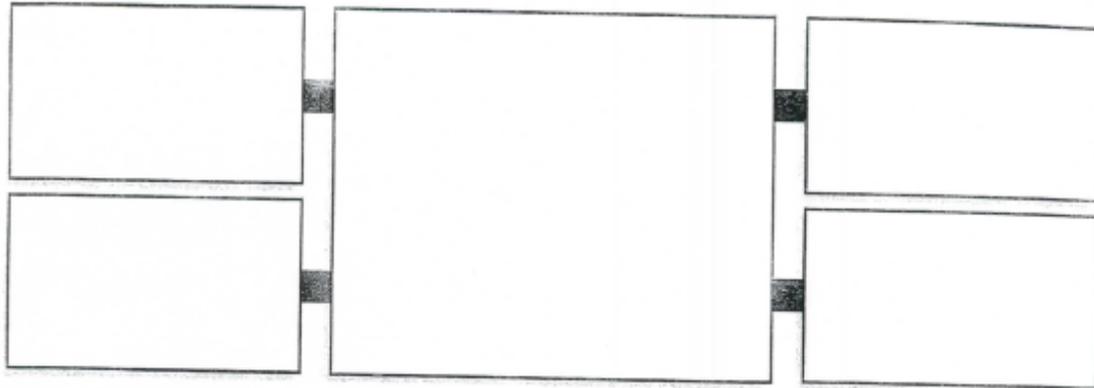
Writing a story

Sharing a story

Appendix C

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

# Brainstorm Clusters



**Appendix D**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

# Tell More



\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Where?	When?	Why?	How?



\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Reread your sentence. Does it make sense?**

Appendix E

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

# Let's Get Started

 Visualize

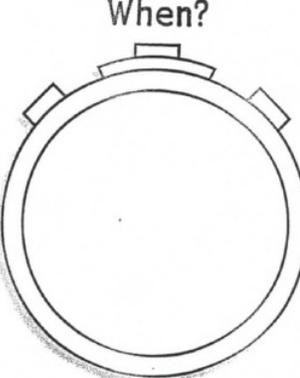
 Who?

 Why?

 What?

 Feelings

 Where?

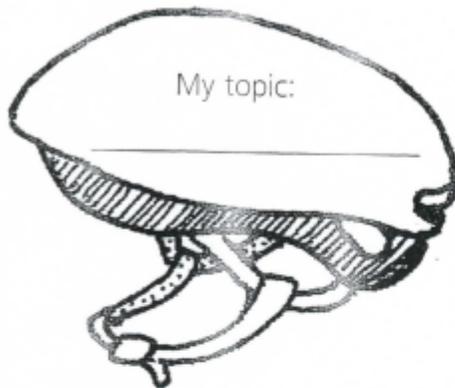
 When?

 Tell More

Appendix F

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Cycling Into Paragraphs**



Middle: Three important details about my topic:

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

End: I want my readers to remember this:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

On the back of this paper, write a five-sentence paragraph.  
Use these ideas and details. Be sure to indent.

Appendix G



Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_



# Use All Your Senses

Think about an object or a scene. What do you see?  
Draw a picture.



Write about your picture. Use describing words.

 I see these people:	
• _____	• _____
• _____	• _____
 I see these colors:	
• _____	• _____
• _____	• _____
 I can hear _____	
 I can smell _____	
 I can feel _____	
 I can taste _____	

On a new sheet of paper, write a description of your picture.  
Use your ideas from above.