nulla dies sine linea  Never a Day Without a Line. Horace 65-8 BC

Never hesitate to imitate another writer. Imitation is part of the creative process for anyone learning an art or a craft. Bach and Picasso didn't spring full-blown as Bach or Picasso; they needed models. This is especially true of writing. ~ William Zinsser

Words are sacred. They deserve respect. If you get the right ones, in the right order, you can nudge the world a little. ~ Tom Stoppard

Exercise the writing muscle every day, even if it is only a letter, notes, a title list, a character sketch, a journal entry. Writers are like dancers, like athletes. Without that exercise, the muscles seize up. ~ Jane Yolen

If you tell your students what to say and how to say it, you may never hear them, only the pale echoes of what they imagine you want them to be. ~ Donald Murray
Eleven Elements of Effective Adolescent Writing Instruction

Writing Next: Effective Strategies to Improve Writing of Adolescents in Middle and High Schools, a report to the Carnegie Corporation of New York, 2007.

This report identifies 11 elements of current writing instruction found to be effective for helping adolescent students learn to write well and to use writing as a tool for learning. It is important to note that all of the elements are supported by rigorous research, but that even when used together, they do not constitute a full writing curriculum.

1. **Writing Strategies**, which involves teaching students strategies for planning, revising, and editing their compositions

2. **Summarization**, which involves explicitly and systematically teaching students how to summarize texts

3. **Collaborative Writing**, which uses instructional arrangements in which adolescents work together to plan, draft, revise, and edit their compositions

4. **Specific Product Goals**, which assigns students specific, reachable goals for the writing they are to complete

5. **Word Processing**, which uses computers and word processors as instructional supports for writing assignments

6. **Sentence Combining**, which involves teaching students to construct more complex, sophisticated sentences

7. **Prewriting**, which engages students in activities designed to help them generate or organize ideas for their composition

8. **Inquiry Activities**, which engages students in analyzing immediate, concrete data to help them develop ideas and content for a particular writing task

9. **Process Writing Approach**, which interweaves a number of writing instructional activities in a workshop environment that stresses extended writing opportunities, writing for authentic audiences, personalized instruction, and cycles of writing

10. **Study of Models**, which provides students with opportunities to read, analyze, and emulate models of good writing

11. **Writing for Content Learning**, which uses writing as a tool for learning content material.
How do we lead students to own the qualities of strong argument writing?

- **Study forms** that will lead to success for all students (letter, list essay, editorial, blog, podcast, digital commentary, documentary)
- **Students who choose** their passions write better
- **Define the audience** who will read their work
- **“Several laps around the track”** allow students to practice their skills, then repeat what they’ve learned and improve, then begin to move beyond form to larger understandings of the qualities of argument (repetition = retention.) During one unit of study in argument, students might create 3-4 texts that represent different forms, but the similar understandings about the qualities of argument
- **Frequently study texts** and notice qualities, list, & evaluate during the unit, adding to class understandings & the practice of analytical reading
- **Create anchor charts** of understandings for your classroom that remain in place throughout the unit—anyone should be able to walk into your classroom and know what you’re studying and how today connects to yesterday & tomorrow
- **Frame the year of study** for students, showing how qualities of writing and skills and forms are related to each other & how students will gather skills and larger understandings

Quick Writes:

- Use poetry that presents a position or argues a point—short texts, big messages—because poetry reinforces the idea that there are many forms of writing that argue = a bigger picture of the genre and the way all writing is connected
- Use charts, tables, and graphs to practice writing from information that supports ideas with evidence, not just emotion
- Use controversial, local issues to help students connect to the thinking they are already doing & focus on how to support their thinking with reason
- Quickly write in imitation of a mentor text form (like “6 Things You Should Know About” from ESPN magazine); day two take one element of the quick write and expand it
- Quick writing is effective for partners; collaborative writing is a powerful teaching tool
- Revise quick writing “make it better” as daily practice in rereading & attention to craft

Revision focus:

- Reread your writing and find: your best phrases, lines; the line that is the heart of what you’re trying to say; a place where you can make it better writing; a place where you can add information to strengthen the idea; a place where you have more to say; then write just from that place...
- Practice introducing support for your idea through another source you quote. Pay attention to the duet of voices: source and writer
Sentence Study (can be chosen from mentor texts in unit):

- This work is ideal for partners—collaborative writing is one of 11 best strategies for teaching adolescents writing skills (Writing Next)
- Practice skills like quotations of sources
- Mentor students to samples from texts you study together during this unit: zoom in on one sentence & practice together
  - Example: sentences that group information
    - “Dash and description” (zooms in on details that show (a narrative skill that is often used in argument); the dash creates emphasis)
    - I stared at my father’s photograph—his thin face stern, lips latched tight, his eyes peering permanently to the right. ~Paul Fleischman, Seedfolks.
    - I walked to the run-down market—dirty white walls, roof sinking in, the door constantly swinging against the wall, and wondered why this was the only place to buy milk within a mile of the school.
- Strong opening and closing lines—collect, practice, share
- Study frames for essays (images, ideas, questions)
- Transition phrases and sentences

Mentor Texts:

- It makes a difference when a student (or the entire class) chooses a text as a mentor—makes the deliberate decision to mentor their writing to the model
- Choose anchor texts for whole class to read closely together that are good models of the argument you want students to write
- Mix published author texts with grade level strong student texts
- Your process in writing an argument including your rough draft (even unfinished) can be an anchor text for the class to study, best if created recently
- Consider the study one author’s work through several texts = Mentor Author
- Teach students how to annotate what they see in a text by showing them how you annotate the craft of a mentor text
- Read, analyze (study), write and share together—your model is critical at every stage of the process

Goals for collaborative writing or independent practice:

- When in the unit will students be ready for independent/collaborative work time?
- How many days per week/minutes per day for this writing time?
- What are your exit tickets or other expectations for productivity?
- Structure and manage individual & small group conferences so you can teach into the intentions of individual students—your most powerful teaching opportunity
- Define your expectations for peer work, lead students in this work

Assessment opportunities:

- Quick writes/notebook grades = good faith effort to write & revise
  - Evidence of revision, sentence imitations, write the entire time to build stamina
- Annotations on a mentor text can highlight particular understandings
- Collaborative work on sentence imitation, revision, or annotation of texts
- Exit slips at the end of class to clarify learning: one sentence to show...
• Writing conferences (teacher or peer) are assessment opportunities, keep records
• For YOU: the unit plan; which mentor texts were successful; which quick write invitations produced greatest engagement; the productivity of workshop time

Final product (last draft) evaluation:
• Will you grade content, process, and mechanics separately?
• Will particular focus skills be graded with more weight than others?
• Will you use a rubric or a list of qualities to define expectations?
• Optional but important student self-assessment questions:
  o How did you find your topic? Where did you find evidence to support your position? (Students should name what they’ve learned about process)
  o What did you learn from a mentor text that helped you write with more purpose and skill? (Students will transfer process of mentoring to writers)
  o How did conferences (teacher, peer) assist in your development as a writer? (Excellent opportunity for teacher feedback & reflection)
  o Discuss your drafting and revision process. (Students highlight revisions)
  o Considering the qualities of strong argument writing that we discussed in class, how would you evaluate this piece of your writing? (Reflection on skill)
  o If you had weeks more to spend working on this piece, how would you improve it? (Writing is not finished, it’s just due.)

Readers are rarely persuaded—at least in the intellectual world—by emotion.
Appeal to reason, base your position on documented evidence presented in a logical order.
If you use another writer’s words as your own, you have committed a major—perhaps the major—intellectual crime. The responsible writer—student or professional—gives credit for the specific words, information, and ideas that belong to someone else.

~Donald Murray, Write to Learn, 1999
Deepening Understanding of Content & Increasing Independence in Writing

**Goal:** Develop writing that is informative and persuasive, complete, supported with evidence, clear, smart, and balanced. It advances the conversation within the discipline and demonstrates facility with its conventions... confidence in writing is demonstrated in word choice, tone, and clarity in multiple genres (from feature articles to essays and arguments).

**In writing process this means:** how a student develops an idea, understands what information is needed to support it, then organizes, analyzes and refines writing in response to the needs or questions of a real or imagined audience with limited teacher direction.
Loss of one hand.

Deafness in both ears.

Loss of one hand and one foot.

Loss of both legs at the region of the knee.

Loss of both arms at the region of the elbow.

Loss of both arms so near the shoulder that it prevents the use of a prosthetic appliance.

Paralysis of both lower extremities (paraplegia) along with bowel and bladder incontinence.

Disabilities serious enough that the veteran needs advanced levels of aid and attendance.

Special Monthly Compensation

$100

$700 - 900

$1,000 - $1,300

$1,600 - $1,900

$2,100

$5,300
Harper's Index

Help students write from information. Not only does this require deeper reading in order to analyze what exactly is being said, but transferring that understanding into sentences that can support a claim is a foundational skill for writing well in argument. Helping students write from factual information is challenging, so I first model how I might write from one of the examples. I show them how I break down the information to understand what the statement is saying and then transfer it into words to support a claim. I then have them talk and write together in pairs before attempting to do this on their own.

Number of people killed in mass shootings in the United States last year: 66

Number killed by Muslim-American terrorists since September 11, 2001: 33

Percentage of movies that led the U.S. box office for at least one weekend in 2011 that featured Apple products: 42

Portion of all North American Internet traffic accounted for by videos streamed from Netflix: 1/4

Percentage of U.S. population that is foreign-born: 13

Percentage that was foreign-born in 1913: 15

Factor by which energy drink-related emergency room visits have increased in the past eight years: 14

Number of reports of record-high temperatures by U.S. cities in 2012: 362

Number of reports of record lows: 0

Percentage change since 1969 in the portion of U.S. schoolchildren who walk or bike to school: -76

Percentage change since 1992 in the portion of U.S. women who diet: -12

Percentage of U.S. women who believe they have a personal responsibility to help the worse off: 42

Of U.S. men: 27
Average salary subjects in a September study offered a fictional woman applying for a U.S. university laboratory position: $26,508

Average salary they offered a fictional man with identical credentials: $30,328

Percentage of U.S. children who save their allowance money, according to a survey of American parents: 1

Percentage change in the likelihood a child will eat an apple from the school cafeteria if the apple has an Elmo sticker on it: +68

Projected year by which more than half of Americans will be obese: 2030

Average number of times each week U.S. surgeons operate on the wrong patient or body part: 40

Average SAT score (out of 2400) of students from households with an income below $20,000: 1322

From households with an income above $200,000: 1722

Percentage of British teens who say they are embarrassed to be seen reading: 17

Percentage change in the past twenty-five years in the Consumer Price Index: +41

In the price of beer: +40

Of books: -1

Number of students currently attending the thirteen Washington, D.C., public schools expected to close this year: 2,633

Number of them who are white: 2

Percentage of U.S. college graduates who are women: 51.1

Of Fortune 500 CEOs who are: 4.2

Percentage change since 1970 in the portion of U.S. children growing up in single-parent households: +133

The source of this information is harpers.org, which publishes the index every month.
Some Harsh Sentences Prove Unjust
By Leonard Pitts Jr. lpitts@MiamiHerald.com

This opening makes me feel like I'm entering a conversation which is about a genre in which I'm adding your voice to a debate.

The parallel structure is a list of evidence but also links all of the evidence together.

So the people got sick of it, all those criminals being coddled by all those bleeding heart liberal judges with all their soft-headed concern for rights and rehabilitation. And a wave swept this country in the Reagan years, a wave ridden by pundits and politicians seeking power, a wave that said, no mercy, no more.

From now on, judges would be severely limited in the sentences they could hand down for certain crimes, required to impose certain punishments whether or not they thought those punishments fit the circumstances at hand. From now on, there was a new mantra in American justice. From now on, we would be "tough on crime." A summary of what happened—sustinct:

1. We got tough on Jerry DeWayne Williams, a small-time criminal who stole a slice of pizza from a group of children. He got 25 years.

2. We got tough on Duane Silva, a guy with an IQ of 71 who stole a VCR and a coin collection. He got 30 to life. A tragedy, a bigger crime.

3. We got tough on Dixie Shanahan, who shot and killed the husband who had beaten her for three days straight, punching her in the face, pounding her in the stomach, dragging her by the hair because she refused to have an abortion. She got 50 years.

4. We got tough on Jeff Berryhill, who got drunk one night, kicked in an apartment door and punched a guy who was inside with Berryhill's girlfriend. He got 25 years.

Is this possible? One punch = 25 years? This is so outrageous his argument is won for me, and I'm ready to read his next bit of evidence.

Now, we have gotten tough on Marissa Alexander. She is the Jacksonville woman who said her husband flew into a violent rage and tried to strangle her when he found text messages to her first husband on her phone. She said she fled to her car, but in her haste, forgot her keys. She took a pistol from the garage and returned to the house for them. When her husband came after her again, she fired—into the ceiling. The warning shot made him back off. No one was hurt. I'm relieved. No one hurt. Must mean a light sentence—But I wonder because of the earlier evidence, so I keep reading.
Like Shanahan before her, Alexander was offered a plea bargain. Like Shanahan, she declined, reasoning that no one would convict her under the circumstances. Like Shanahan, she was wrong.

Earlier this month, Alexander got 20 years for aggravated assault. And like Shanahan, like Berryhill, Williams, Silva and Lord only knows how many others, she received that outlandish sentence not because the judge had a heart like Simon LeGree’s, but because he was constrained by so-called “mandatory-minimum” sentencing guidelines that tie judges’ hands, allowing them no leeway for consideration, compassion, context or common sense. In other words, they prohibit judges from judging.

Charles Smith, the judge who sent Shanahan away, put it best. He said the sentence he was required to impose “may be legal, but it is wrong.” Amen.

The Eighth Amendment prohibits “cruel and unusual punishment.” In a nation where we execute people based on no evidence save eyewitness testimony, it is hard to imagine what meaning that prohibition still holds. But assuming it means anything, surely it means you can’t draw a 20-year sentence for shooting a ceiling.

Except that Alexander just did. In restricting judges from judging, we have instituted a one-size-fits-all version of justice that bears little resemblance to the real thing. It proceeds from the same misguided thinking that produced the absurd “zero tolerance” school drug policies that get children suspended for bringing aspirin and Midol to class. In both cases, there is this silly idea that by requiring robotic adherence to inflexible rules we will produce desirable results.

By now, it should be obvious how wrongheaded and costly that reasoning was — and how urgently we need to roll back the wave that swept over us in the Reagan years. It is understandable that the nation wanted to get tough on crime.

But we have been rather hard on justice, too.

I have never heard this-like how the cliché is challenged with this plain common sense talk.

This essay makes me want to do something in response, even though he doesn’t ask me to.
what we notice on a rereading, once we understand the whole of the essay and can begin to examine the parts, first the meaning: a synthesis of the parts presented—comprehension—but if we want students to evaluate the argument presented, they’ll have to read and begin to question, notice writerly technique, reconsider evidence, and evaluate the overall impact of the whole.

**Cruel as it Is, We Somehow Go On**

- **general** to **specific**
  
  Sometimes, the earth is cruel.

That is ultimately the fundamental lesson here, as children wall, families sleep out of doors, and the dead lie unclaimed in the rubble that once was Port-au-Prince.

Sometimes, the rains fall and will not stop. Sometimes the skies turn barren and will not rain. Sometimes the seas rise and smack the shoreline like a fist. Sometimes the wind bullies the land. And sometimes, the land rattles and heaves and splits itself in two. Moves in increasing intensity and violence.

Sometimes, the earth is cruel. And sometimes, we do the same thing. We dig ourselves out. We weep and mourn, we recover and memorialize the dead, we rebuild our homes. And we go on. This is the price of being human. And also, arguably, the noblest expression, we hear an echo of the title, now it moves back to general—this includes all kinds of cruelties, not just natural disaster.

But what if it’s always your turn?

Surely some homeless, dust-streaked Haitian can be forgiven for thinking it is always Haiti’s turn this morning, two days after the poorest nation in the Western Hemisphere saw its capital city smashed by the strongest earthquake it has ever known, a 7.0-magnitude monster. Surely, the rest of us watching from afar, experiencing tragedy and devastation from the comfort of desk chairs and living room couches, are tempted to believe the same thing.

Bad enough, Haiti is wretchedly poor. Bad enough it has a history of political instability and colonialism, of being ignored by the major powers when it is not being exploited by them. Bad enough, all that, yet at the end of the day, those are disasters authored by human hands, by human greed, human corruption, human economic predation.

Sometimes, though, you have to wonder if the planet itself is not conspiring against this humble little nation.

The essay turns from we all agree here to the specifics of one case and his argument, that Haiti’s have had more than the rest of us... and it’s a hard argument to make because people like it into each other with stories of how hard life has been. He piles on the evidence to make his case. The power of words to communicate much more than information...
recent past — which makes this relevant & quite a list forward — why did he start here? Think of all the choices he made re: what to include/exclude.

Keeping it chronologic allowed us to organize as we read the details — we wonder why we didn’t know any of it.

People want the news to inform.

human words - human actions as describe the weather, the earth, which fits with its cruelty - a word that speaks of intention.

we can fight God, so we try to help others.

repeats [Dig out, Weep and mourn, Memorialize the dead. Rebuild. Go on] And show the world once again a stubborn insistence on living, despite all the cruelties of the earth, including the title, the [no-time cruel] is used — and cruelty has intent — it didn’t just happen, it wasn’t just a flood or an earthquake, it was more.

By LEONARD PITTS JR. lpitts@MiamiHerald.com

The value of a second reading is in increased comprehension, which allows for deeper thinking, but also in the implications for student writing. Study the best writing you can find so students internalize the power of repetition, word choice, the presentation of evidence in an argument, and the way a writer can include you in the thinking — make you a part of the argument. A great argument moves beyond the specifics of one case the myriad ways it plays out in our individual lives.
Dear readers,

Not everyone likes nonfiction. In fact, because of the heavy push after fourth grade for students to read dry, historical biographies, the love of and ability to read nonfiction books is greatly disappearing. I can sympathize. While I’ve always been an avid reader, for years I never touched a nonfiction book because they all conjured up images of boring history classes where I struggled to stay awake. But I’ll let you in on a secret: nonfiction books are not all awful.

My quiet introduction into the world of artfully-written nonfiction was rather humble. I first laid my hands on *Proust Was a Neuroscientist* in a used-items warehouse (like a giant garage sale) at the end of summer, two years ago. Amongst all the dusty, torn books from the early nineteen-hundreds was a pale blue hardcover with a funny looking pastry on the front. For just $1.50, I bought the book without even reading the dust jacket description.

I hid the book away on my bookshelf, not looking at it again until my AP English teacher required us all to find nonfiction books. In an attempt not to get stuck with some historical biography of a guy who did a thing once upon a time, I picked up *Proust Was a Neuroscientist*, figuring that a book about the links between creative thinkers and scientific developments would be much less dry. I didn’t expect that reading it would change my life.

*Proust Was a Neuroscientist* introduced me to two things: neuroscience, and nonfiction. I found Jonah Lehrer’s analytical descriptions of creativity and brain functioning to be so interesting that after copious amounts of research, I now plan on becoming a neuroscientist. In regards to the latter, Lehrer’s writing style showed me that nonfiction doesn’t have to be bland recitations of facts, but can be sarcastic and witty, and his topic showed me that nonfiction books aren’t just about topics you hated in school.

This was just the beginning of my dive into the world of nonfiction literature. In the past year and a half, I’ve read books such as *Eat, Pray, Love* and *Outliers*. I’ve learned more about a cause I greatly support, the organic farming movement, through reading Michael Pollan’s *Food Rules* and *In Defense of Food*. I’ve learned how to diagnose psychopathy through the retelling of Jon Ronson’s personal experiences in *The Psychopath Test*. I’ve found whole new topics of interest to me like travel, food, and statistics. Through reading these books I’ve noticed that my vocabulary has increased, my attention has increased, and I can remember details about these books months longer than I would have if they were textbooks. I’m actively learning and becoming a better analyzer through reading books I actually enjoy.

Reading nonfiction books hasn’t just benefitted me, but has been shown to help students throughout the whole country. While we’ve known about the benefits of independent reading for a while, it’s becoming known now that it’s not just how much students read, but also what they read that matters.
There have been a bunch of recent studies about how nonfiction reading influences student’s abilities. In the Common Core State Standards in 2010, a research study was cited showing that students who have a better grasp of nonfiction texts are more likely to earn a grade of a C or higher in college level courses (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers). Another study has shown that reading nonfiction helps students develop their background knowledge, which accounts for about 33% of the variance in student achievement (Marzano). Additionally, a Scholastic newsletter to teachers about nonfiction reading in the intermediate grades points out that “a variety of nonfiction texts may help students become better writers […] and prepare students for tests”. It also suggests that “reading a wide range of materials seems to affect students’ interests in reading overall”, as shown in a study by Nell Duke, an associate professor of Teacher Education and Learning at Michigan State University (Scholastic).

People in the English field seem to be in agreement. David Coleman, president of the College Board, argues that English classes focus too much on self-expression, and while that is important, it is rare “that someone says, ‘Johnson, I need a market analysis by Friday but before that I need a compelling account of your childhood.’” He argues that nonfiction reading helps students to develop their own expository writing skills and get a good handle on factual prose; i.e. ‘practice makes perfect’. English professor Sara Mosle thinks, “what schools really need isn’t more nonfiction but better nonfiction”. (Mosle)

If that weren’t enough evidence to convince you, then I would recommend picking up a nonfiction book and just diving in. If you’re still hesitant, don’t fret. There’s a nonfiction book for everyone, from the tale of a man and his dog in Marley and Me, to the psychologist who can predict whether a marriage will last in Malcolm Gladwell’s Blink. If you’re into history (and murder-mysteries), I’ve heard The Devil in the White City is fantastic, but if science is more your thing, reading about the hilarious experiments by people like Ben Franklin in Electrified Sheep by Alex Boese will keep you entertained for hours. Reading nonfiction can open your mind, introduce you to new topics, increase your vocabulary, improve your test scores… the possibilities are huge.

You won’t regret it,

Kayla Sulewski