

# ***Strategies for Writers*** **Learner Verification Research**

## **Executive Summary**

### **Evidence-Based Research:** ***Strategies for Writers***

#### **The Zaner-Bloser Commitment and *Strategies for Writers***

In an effort to support the call for evidence-based or scientifically-based research, Zaner-Bloser has made a commitment to engage independent research agencies to conduct studies to verify that the use of Zaner-Bloser materials increases student achievement.

One of these independent studies measured the impact of *Strategies for Writers* on the improvement of students' writing performance. What follows is a summary of the first year's investigation, conducted in 2003–2004.

In very general terms, *Strategies for Writers*, hereafter referred to as SFW, may be described as a structured writing program that uses rubric-based instruction framed by a 3-step instructional plan: model, practice, and apply. It is designed to help students improve their writing skills in five modes: narrative, descriptive, expository, persuasive, and test writing.

#### **The Parameters of the SFW Study**

One requirement for evidence-based educational research is that it must involve a large number of student participants. The SFW study involved a total of 13 schools, representing 39 classes and 854 students. Pre-test writing assignments were administered to SFW and OTHER\* students in the fall of 2003; post-test writing assignments were administered in the spring of 2004. Pre- and post-test writing assignments were scored using the Educational Testing Service (ETS) online Criterion scoring system.

\*OTHER represents a variety of methods and materials.

Conducted by Marzano and Associates, Inc., Centennial, CO.

## What Questions Were Asked, and What Were the Results?

**Question #1:** What is the impact of SFW on student writing performance as compared to other methods of writing instruction?

The results of this study indicate that SFW students performed significantly better than students using OTHER materials in terms of the holistic analysis of their writing.

For instance, in any group of 100 students, when 50 students are taught using SFW and 50 students are taught using OTHER methodologies, only one of the students using OTHER materials would score higher on a holistic writing test (either standardized or state) than the 50 students who used SFW. In other words, SFW students would score higher than the OTHER students 49 times out of 50.

	Fall Testing	Spring Testing	Difference
SFW students	50 SFW students	50 SFW students	49 Scored Higher than OTHER students
OTHER students	50 OTHER students	50 OTHER students	1 Scored Higher than SFW students

These data reinforce the fact that students taught with SFW, when compared to students taught with OTHER materials, will score higher on holistic writing measures (standardized and state tests).

**Question #2:** Is the impact of SFW different at various grade levels?

This question addresses the possible differential impact of SFW if it is used at different grade levels. This study measures the impact at grades 4 and 6. In other words, does SFW work better at one grade than at another grade?

	SFW	OTHER	Difference
Grade 4	3.72	3.69	+.03
Grade 6	3.49	3.39	+.10

As shown in the above table, the post-test holistic scores indicate a .03 gain at 4th grade and .10 gain at 6th grade. This contrast is not statistically significant. However, what it does show is this: SFW has the same impact on students' writing as measured by a holistic writing tool at 4th grade and 6th grade. **Therefore it can be said that using SFW produces better scores, no matter what the grade level.**

**Question #3:** What is the impact of SFW on student writing performance as compared to other methods of writing instruction in different regions of the United States and different types of schools?

The results of this study clearly showed that SFW students exhibited higher mean scores than OTHER students in urban and suburban schools no matter what the region. The findings for adjusted holistic writing scores indicate that SFW students generally outperformed OTHER students in different demographic settings.

	SFW	OTHER	Difference in Mean Scores
Urban	3.70	3.38	+.32
Suburban	3.91	3.36	+.55

#### Question #4: What impact does teacher adherence to the protocol of SFW have on student performance?

Based upon individual teacher interviews, SFW teachers were placed into three groups—“high,” “medium,” and “low” implementers. “High” implementers were those teachers who most closely followed the methodology recommended by the publisher and “low” implementers were those teachers who did not follow the recommendations of the publisher. Six SFW teachers were classified as “high” implementers, six as “medium,” and three as “low” implementers. On a test of holistic writing, if all three groups are included, it could be predicted that students of teachers who used SFW would score **9.5 percent higher** than OTHER students on state or standardized writing assessments at the end of a year of instruction.

A case might be made that those SFW teachers rated as “low” implementers are not truly representative of the impact of SFW. Consequently, an analysis of holistic writing scores comparing subjects in SFW and OTHER classes was run excluding “low” implementers of SFW. The result was that the passing rate for SFW students increased from **9.5 percent to 10.5 percent** when “low” implementers were excluded from the study. To illustrate:

**Final Test Results**

	<b>SFW scores</b>	<b>OTHER scores</b>	<b>Difference</b>
Students of all teachers (implementers)	54.75%	45.25%	9.5%
Students of only “high”/“medium” (implementers)	55.75%	45.25%	10.5%

#### Summary

Students who were taught using SFW outperformed students whose teachers used OTHER programs, no matter how closely the teachers followed the suggested implementation plans.

All of the foregoing data has been excerpted from the complete final report from the first-year evaluation (2003–2004) of the SFW program. This final report can be found on the ZB website ([www.zaner-bloser.com](http://www.zaner-bloser.com)).

#### Conclusions

1. Given any group of 100 students, when 50 are taught using *Strategies for Writers* and 50 are taught using OTHER materials and/or methodologies, students taught using SFW will outperform students taught using OTHER materials 49 out of 50 times on holistic writing tests.
2. There are no differences in student performances between grade levels. *Strategies for Writers* will still produce the 49 to 1 ratio result.
3. It doesn't matter whether a school is urban or suburban. *Strategies for Writers* students will still score higher on holistic writing tests than students taught with OTHER materials or methodologies.
4. Students who were taught using *Strategies for Writers* outperformed students who were taught using OTHER materials no matter how closely teachers followed the implementation plan, but did even better when the plan was followed.

In general, this independent first-year (2003–2004) *evidence-based* research study found that using *Strategies for Writers* will produce **superior holistic writing scores (on standardized or state tests) compared to those produced by other writing materials and methodologies.**

More data related to specific elements of writing such as semantics, sentence combining, grammar, usage, and mechanics as indicators of why *Strategies for Writers* produces superior results will be part of the ongoing *Strategies for Writers* research (2004–2005) to be conducted by Marzano & Associates, Inc.



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