

**Executive Summary**

# **Strategies for Writers Learner-Verification Study**

**An independent study conducted by the University  
of Cincinnati Evaluation Services Center**

**STRATEGIES FOR**  
**writers**

**A Standards-Based Writing and Grammar Solution**

## The Study:

### Parameters:

During 2012–2013, more than 700 U.S. students took part in a quasi-experimental learner-verification study to determine the effectiveness of *Strategies for Writers* on improving students' writing skills. The research divided participating students in Grade 4 and Grade 7 into two sets of classrooms per grade level. One set of classrooms received *Strategies for Writers* and the other set used their schools' existing instructional materials.

### Independent Evaluation:

The writing of both sets of students in both grade levels was submitted to Educational Testing Services at the beginning and end of the school year. Educational Testing Services independently assessed the students' writing using their *Criterion*® system. Students wrote narrative, informative/explanatory, and opinion or argument essays; each was evaluated according to a 6-point rubric (1 = unsatisfactory; 6 = excellent).

### Participants:

Twenty-two schools in eight regionally diverse states took part in the study, and all 25 participating teachers had an average of a decade or more of experience in the classroom. Teachers in the *Strategies for Writers* classrooms received training on the program as well as all related materials, including online classroom management and student-facing instructional materials. At the end of the school year, all teachers completed a survey about their experiences using either *Strategies for Writers* or their existing instructional materials to teach writing. □

This one-year longitudinal study was conducted by the University of Cincinnati Evaluation Services Center.

## Students using *Strategies for Writers* had significant writing score gains.

Students in both Grade 4 and Grade 7 classrooms implementing *Strategies for Writers* improved their writing significantly over the 2012–2013 school year (Fig. 1).

Researchers compared students' scores by subtracting their pretest scores from their posttest scores to arrive at a gain score. These gain scores reflect how much a student improved over the course of the year.

### *Strategies for Writers* Gains in Grade 4 and Grade 7

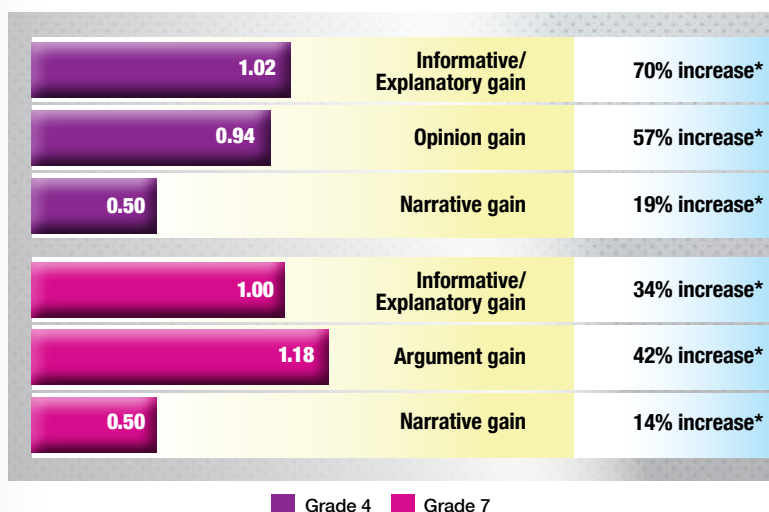


Figure 1. Average gains in writing scores in one school year for students using *Strategies for Writers*

\* Increases are calculated using the following formula:  
(posttest score - pretest score) ÷ pretest score = % increase

Students' scores were averaged to arrive at a mean gain score for each essay type. In all three text types, student mean scores improved significantly ( $p < .01$ ) over the school year. In Grade 4, students showed the greatest mean gains in informative/explanatory essays. Grade 7 students showed the greatest gains in argument writing.

## Students using *Strategies for Writers* made greater gains than students using other materials in college- and career-ready writing.

### *Strategies for Writers* students in Grade 4 increased their informative/explanatory writing skills more than students using other materials.

The pretest mean score of *Strategies for Writers* classrooms was 1.45, and the posttest mean score was 2.47. Students who used *Strategies for Writers* increased their scores by an average of 1.02 compared to students using other materials ( $p < .01$ ), whose average gain was 0.61 on the 6-point *Criterion* scale (Fig. 2).

## Why “college- and career-ready?”

The Common Core State Standards include narrative writing but emphasize informative/explanatory and opinion or argument writing with increasing grade levels. These modes are key components of the CCSS writing standards in Grades 6–8 for literacy in history, social studies, and technical subjects; they also dominate all of the CCSS high school standards for writing.

Earlier instruction and practice in the process of writing opinion, argument, and informative/explanatory essays can help students succeed in secondary education and beyond. ■

### Grade 4 Informative/Explanatory Gain

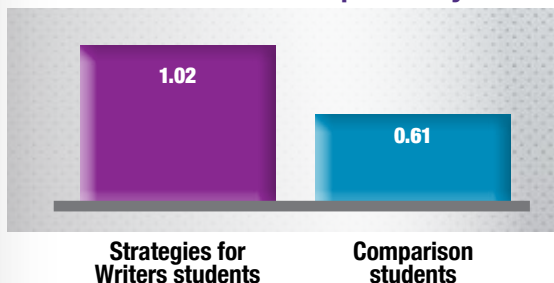


Figure 2. Gains in Grade 4 students’ informative/explanatory writing scores on a six-point scale

Grade 4 students using other materials—stand-alone writing programs (including *Write Source*™ and *Units of Study*™) and basal reading programs (including *Journeys*™ and *Treasures*™)—made numerically smaller gains than *Strategies for Writers* students at 0.61 and 0.28, respectively.

***Strategies for Writers* students in Grade 4 increased their opinion writing skills more than students using other materials (Fig. 3).** Classrooms that used *Strategies for Writers* showed numerically larger average gains in mean writing scores in opinion essays compared to classrooms using other materials (0.94 versus 0.77).

### Grade 4 Opinion Gain

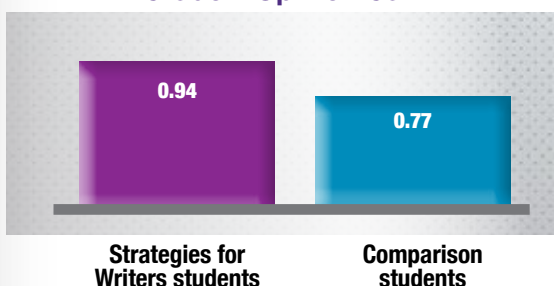
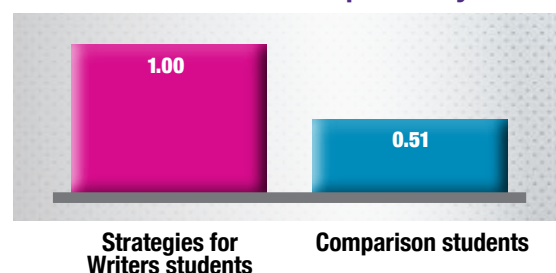


Figure 3. Gains in Grade 4 opinion writing scores on a six-point scale

*Strategies for Writers* students showed significantly greater gains ( $p < .01$ ) in mean opinion writing scores compared to the students in classrooms using other published, stand-alone writing programs materials (0.94 versus 0.77). In addition, *Strategies for Writers* students had numerically larger gains in mean opinion writing scores compared to students in classrooms using basal reading programs (0.94 versus 0.53).

Grade 7 *Strategies for Writers* classrooms also exhibited significant gains in informative/explanatory and argument writing. Classrooms using *Strategies for Writers* saw mean score gains 0.49 and 0.73 points higher ( $p < .01$ ) in informative/explanatory and argument writing than those of classrooms using other materials (Fig. 4). Students in classrooms using *Strategies for Writers* showed especially remarkable gains in argument writing skills.

### Grade 7 Informative/Explanatory Gain



### Grade 7 Argument Gain

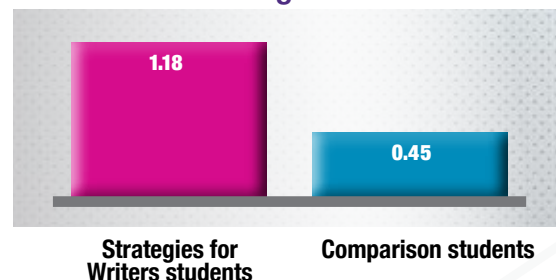


Figure 4. Grade 7 student gains in college and career writing readiness on a six-point scale

**Students using *Strategies for Writers* increased their narrative writing skills.**

**In both Grade 4 and Grade 7, students using *Strategies for Writers* increased their mean narrative scores by 0.50 points over the school year.** Comparison classrooms in Grade 4 that used a stand-alone writing program increased their average narrative scores by only 0.03 (for all comparison classrooms, 0.86), and Grade 7 comparison classrooms overall showed a 0.44 gain in their narrative scores.

## Informational text is key to CCSS.

Proposed assessments of the Common Core State Standards will measure students' knowledge, skills, and understanding essential to achieving college and career readiness. Thus they emphasize students' ability to write effectively in response to complex texts and to use written sources to support their views.

Following the CCSS, these assessments will make informational content the base of their longer writing tasks, and students will be expected to gather evidence from the content provided in order to write comparisons, inferences, and conclusions about what they have read. ■

"I had a **wonderful experience implementing *Strategies for Writers***, and my kids' writing pieces and language and mechanics were better than the other 4th grade classes'."

— Pam McAndrews  
Grade 4 teacher  
Jefferson County Public Schools  
Louisville, KY

## Teachers agree that *Strategies for Writers* supports Common Core State Standards and 21st century literacies.

100% of teachers using *Strategies for Writers* agreed with the statement "*Strategies for Writers* is very effective in helping teachers teach writing." In addition, all teachers also agreed or strongly agreed that the program helped them become better writing teachers.

Teachers using *Strategies for Writers* rated the program higher than teachers using other materials rated their programs. All teachers were surveyed at the end of the school year to gauge their experiences teaching writing.

### Materials' Effectiveness in Supporting. . .

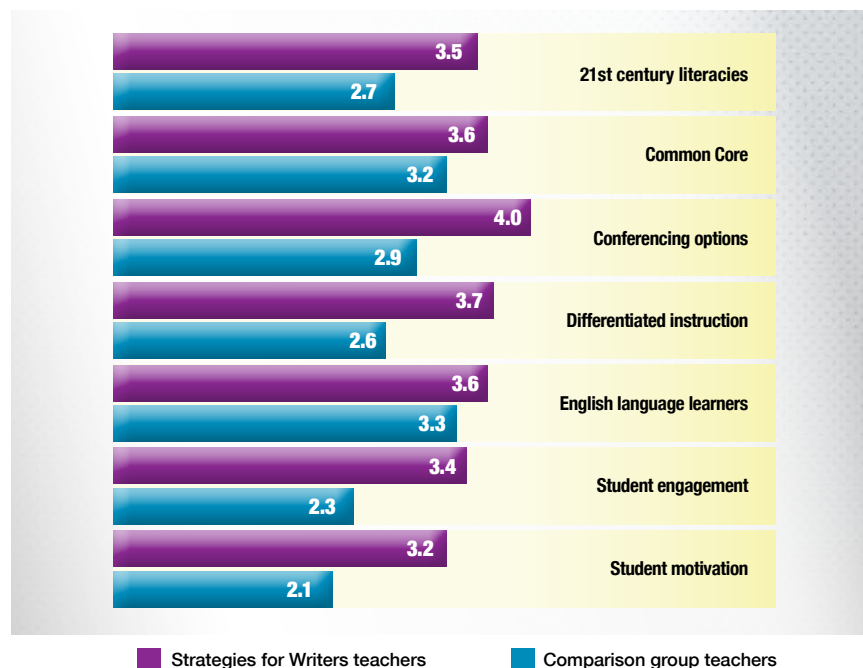


Figure 5. Teachers' ratings of programs' effectiveness

Compared to teachers using other materials to teach writing in the classroom, *Strategies for Writers* teachers thought the program was more effective in a wide variety of areas, including its ability to engage students and in allowing them to meet all students' needs (Fig. 5). Teachers responded on a 4-point scale where 4 meant "very effective."

For more information and samples of *Strategies for Writers* visit [www.zaner-bloser.com/strategiesforwriters](http://www.zaner-bloser.com/strategiesforwriters)