

FUEL Writing Strategy

Type of Writing Supported:

Informational, Argumentative/Persuasive,
Text-Based Response

Grade Level: **Grades 4-9**
Elementary to Middle School

Stage of Writing Supported:
Planning, Drafting & Revising

PURPOSE:

What does this strategy help students do?

Write clear, focused paragraphs with strong topic sentences, relevant evidence, logical transitions, and fully developed ideas.

Why is this strategy effective?

FUEL is effective for writing in ELA, science, social studies, and beyond because it teaches a transferable structure for thinking and writing clearly in any subject.

F

Fact

Topic Sentence: What is the main idea or claim I want to make?

U

Understanding

Explanation: How can I explain or give background on my topic?

E

Evidence

Support: What example, fact, quote, or data supports my idea?

L

Link

Conclusion: How does this connect to my main idea or next paragraph?

TIPS FOR IMPLEMENTATION:

How to Introduce:

- Model each FUEL step with think-alouds.
- Create a visual anchor chart for reference.
- Show strong vs. weak paragraph examples.
- Guide students through interactive practice.

Scaffolding:

- Break writing into four clear steps.
- Use visuals, prompts, and tech tools to support each step.
- Scaffold understanding with structured choices and templates.
- Build confidence through routine, modeling, and flexibility.

Practice Ideas:

- Start each day with a quick FUEL-based warm-up like an exit slip or short write. Have students revisit and improve a previous paragraph using the FUEL checklist.

DO'S

- ✓ Teach and model each FUEL step
- ✓ Use visuals and color cues
- ✓ Support with tools and choices
- ✓ Reinforce FUEL daily through warm-ups or revision tasks
- ✓ Praise progress and effort

DON'TS

- ✗ Don't treat FUEL as a rigid formula
- ✗ Don't skip modeling each step
- ✗ Don't rush into full paragraphs
- ✗ Don't assume students can find evidence alone

FUEL Strategy: Do's and Don'ts

DO'S

✓ Teach Each Step Explicitly

- Introduce each FUEL step clearly before expecting students to use it independently.

✓ Model Examples Frequently

- Show how strong paragraphs follow the FUEL format through regular modeling.

✓ Use Visual Organization

- Apply color-coding or labels to help students structure their writing.

✓ Encourage Checklist Use

- Have students use FUEL as a checklist during writing and revision.

✓ Differentiate Support

- Provide sentence frames, graphic organizers, and peer support based on student needs.

✓ Praise Effort and Progress

- Celebrate when students begin using evidence and linking ideas effectively.

DON'TS

✗ Don't Treat FUEL as a Script

- Use it as a flexible structure to support creativity, not limit it.

✗ Don't Skip Modeling

- Show each FUEL step clearly so students know what it looks like in action.

✗ Don't Rush Full Paragraphs

- Let students practice each part before expecting full responses.

✗ Don't Assume Evidence Skills

- Provide guided practice to help students find and explain text evidence.

✗ Don't Ignore the Link Step

- Teach students to connect ideas clearly to strengthen their writing.

FUEL Strategy: Tips for Implementation

When to Use the Strategy.

- Select a short, engaging reading passage and a writing prompt that connects to students' interests or prior knowledge.
- Explain the purpose of the FUEL strategy—emphasize that it helps organize ideas, clarify thinking, and strengthen evidence-based writing.
- Introduce the FUEL acronym and define each part: Focus, Understand, Evidence, Link. Use simple language and relatable examples.
- Prepare visual supports like anchor charts, sentence strips, or digital slides to reinforce each step.
- Gather sample paragraphs that show both strong and weak writing to spark discussion and comparison.
- Plan scaffolds such as sentence starters, graphic organizers, or peer support to meet diverse learning needs.
- Create a classroom environment that values effort, experimentation, and growth—especially when trying new strategies.

Before You Introduce the Strategy.

- Model the strategy using a think-aloud. Write a paragraph in front of students, pausing to explain you're thinking at each FUEL step.
- Use a classroom anchor chart to visually reinforce the strategy. Refer to it often and encourage students to use matching color-coding in their own writing.
- Share real examples of student writing. Highlight what makes a paragraph strong and discuss common pitfalls when FUEL steps are missing.
- Engage students in shared writing activities. Build paragraphs together as a class, identifying each FUEL component as you go.
- Use interactive tools like sentence sorting, digital slides, or collaborative worksheets to help students practice identifying and applying each step.
- Encourage students to use the FUEL strategy as a checklist during drafting and revision. This builds independence and self-monitoring.
- Differentiate instruction by offering targeted supports—such as sentence frames, small group coaching, or peer feedback—to help all students succeed.

FUEL Strategy: Tips for Implementation

How To Introduce the Strategy

Strategy	Purpose	Key Actions
Model the Strategy (Think-Aloud)	Show how to apply each FUEL step in real time	<p>Choose a short, familiar reading passage and prompt</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Model each FUEL step aloud:<ul style="list-style-type: none">◦ Restate the question for Focus◦ Identify key words for Understand◦ Find a supporting detail for Evidence◦ Explain the connection for Link• Write the paragraph in front of students• Pause at each step to explain your thinking
Anchor Chart (Visual Reference)	Provide ongoing visual support for each FUEL step	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Create a classroom anchor chart featuring the FUEL acronym with brief descriptions of each step• Use color-coding to differentiate each FUEL component• Encourage students to use matching colors in their own writing• Display the chart prominently in the classroom• Refer to the chart regularly during writing lessons
Use Real Examples	Help students recognize strong vs. weak writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Share one paragraph that clearly follows the FUEL format• Share one paragraph that lacks focus or evidence• Discuss why the strong example is effective• Highlight where the weak example falls short
Student Interaction (Build it Together)	Increase engagement and deepen understanding through guided practice.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Present a writing prompt and brainstorm ideas as a class• Build each paragraph together using FUEL steps (Focus, Use of evidence, Explanation, Link)• Sort sentences into FUEL categories using strips or slides• Have students work in pairs to identify FUEL parts in sample paragraphs• Provide sentence starters and other scaffolds to support independence

FUEL Strategy: Tips for Implementation

The Scaffolding Framework

The FUEL framework is a structured approach to help students write effective paragraph responses. It breaks down the process into four key steps, each with specific scaffolding techniques.

1. Focus (Topic Sentence)

Goal: Help students clearly restate the prompt and answer it with a topic sentence

Scaffolds:

- **Sentence Frames:** Provide sentence starters like, "The story is about ___ because ___," or "I think ___ because ___."
- **Prompt Highlighting:** Use color-coding or underlining to identify keywords in the question.
- **Word/Picture Banks:** Use visuals for key topic words to aid in word retrieval.
- **Voice Input Templates:** Offer sentence starters that students can speak into a device.
- **Click-to-Choose Tools:** Allow students to select sentence parts from dropdowns or buttons.
- **Accessible Graphic Organizers:** Provide digital planners with audio instructions or large clickable fields.

2. Understand (Clarify Key Words)

Goal: Help students recognize and define the important words in the question.

Scaffolds:

- **Simplified Questions:** Rephrase prompts in simpler language. For example, change "What is the main idea of the passage?" to "What is the big idea of the story?"
- **Visual Glossaries:** Create a page of visual definitions for common question words like "describe" or "explain."
- **Matching Tasks:** Have students match keywords to pictures or definitions before they begin writing.
- **Audio Glossary:** Provide audio definitions of question words.
- **Drag-and-Drop Word Matching:** Allow students to match words to images or definitions without handwriting.

3. Evidence (Support with Text Details)

Goal: Help students find and use quotes or paraphrased details from the text.

Scaffolds:

- **Color-Coded Text:** Highlight parts of the text that correspond to different parts of the question.
- **Pre-selected Evidence:** Offer two to three choices of relevant evidence for students to select from.
- **Sentence Starters:** Give phrases like, "In the story it says, '___'," or "One part that shows this is ___."
- **Text-to-Speech Tools:** Allow the text to be read aloud for easier comprehension and selection.
- **Voice-Recorded Evidence:** Students can record themselves stating the evidence to bypass writing barriers.

FUEL Strategy: Tips for Implementation

4. Link (Explain Your Thinking)

Goal: Help students connect the evidence to the main idea.

Scaffolds:

- **Cause-Effect Icons:** Use a chain or arrows to visually represent cause and effect.
- **Sentence Starters:** Provide sentences like, "This means ___ because ___," or "This shows that ___."
- **"Why Does It Matter?" Prompts:** Add verbal or visual cues, such as a question bubble with the word "Why?," to prompt deeper thinking.
- **Audio Prompts:** Use a verbal cue in a digital organizer, such as, "Tell me why that quote is important."
- **One-Click Starters:** Allow students to tap a button to insert transition phrases.

Icons and Visual Supports

Using consistent icons and colors can create a strong visual anchor for each step for the FUEL process.

Step	Symbol	Visual Cue	Color
Focus	Lightbulb	Main idea or topic.	Blue
Understand	Magnifying Glass	Digging for keywords.	Green
Evidence	Open Book	Text support/quotes.	Yellow
Link	Chain Link	Connecting ideas.	Red

FUEL Strategy: Tips for Implementation

Key Strategies for Scaffolding

- **Chunking:** Introduce one step of the FUEL framework at a time. Use a "Today we're only working on..." approach to reduce cognitive overload.
- **Visual Schedules and Timers:** Use visual countdowns and task strips to help with time management and keep students on track.
- **Movement and Breaks:** Incorporate frequent breaks and movement-based activities to help regulate attention.
- **Structured Templates:** Use color-coded templates with bold headings and icons to provide a clear, predictable structure.
- **Choice and Engagement:** Allow students to choose which step to do first, whether to write or type, or which prompt to respond to.
- **Verbal Prompts:** Use frequent teacher check-ins with quick questions like, "What step are you on now?" to provide encouragement and keep students on track.
- **Multiple Modalities:** Offer a variety of ways for students to respond, including typing, voice recordings, or drawing.
- **Assistive Technology:** Utilize tools like text-to-speech, speech-to-text, and adapted keyboards to reduce barriers to writing.
- **Consistent Routine:** Maintain a daily routine using the same FUEL structure to build familiarity and confidence.
- **Model and Think Aloud:** Explicitly model how to use each step of the framework, showing both strong and weak examples.

Publication Details

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What is the writing classroom?

The Writing Classroom was developed to help educators apply effective, evidence-based writing interventions. Originating at the University of Kansas with funding from the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs, this initiative supports instructional strategies for all students, especially those who struggle with writing.

What is AI SCORE?

AI-SCORE enhances writing competency for students with learning disabilities by:

- Integrating evidence-based instructional strategies
- Providing immediate AI-generated feedback
- Personalizing the writing process to improve outcomes

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