

HOW-TO GUIDE:

STAR Writing Strategy

Type of Writing Supported:
Informational

Grade Level: **Grades 4-8**
Upper Elementary to Middle School

Stage of Writing Supported:
Planning and Drafting

PURPOSE:

What does this strategy help students do?

- Organize short written responses to text-based questions
- Incorporate textual evidence effectively
- Explain and analyze evidence clearly

Why is this strategy effective?

- Provides a clear structure for students to follow
- Encourages deeper thinking and analysis
- Builds confidence in writing with evidence

S

Set Up

Set up your answer by restating the question in your own words

T

Text Evidence

Text Evidence: Use a quote or paraphrase from the text

A

Analyze

Analyze the evidence by explaining how it supports your answer

R

Restate

Restate your main idea or wrap up your response

TIPS FOR IMPLEMENTATION:

How to Introduce:

- Model a full STAR response with a think-aloud.
- Build an interactive anchor chart with sentence starters and student examples.

Scaffolding:

- Color-code each STAR step (yellow, blue, green, orange).
- Provide graphic organizers with icons and space for each step.
- Post mini anchor charts for each STAR part.
- Offer fill-in-the-blank templates for beginners.
- Create STAR cards/bookmarks with frames and examples.

Practice Ideas:

- Partner writing: A = Set Up + Text, B = Analyze + Restate, then revise.
- Rotate through STAR stations to build a full response as a class.
- Use quick STAR exit tickets or scaffolded reading prompts for daily practice.

DO'S

- ✓ Teach each step explicitly using think-alouds and real examples
- ✓ Use direct quotes and paraphrasing practice
- ✓ Give feedback on each component (S, T, A, R)
- ✓ Create visual supports like anchor charts, graphic organizers, and color-coded checklists
- ✓ Incorporate peer discussion

DON'TS

- ✗ Don't skip the modeling phase
- ✗ Don't assume students can analyze without support
- ✗ Don't accept vague, unsupported answers
- ✗ Don't introduce STAR as one big chunk

STAR Strategy: Tips for Implementation

Strategy Overview

Step	Action	Guiding Question
Set Up	Set up your answer by restating the question in your own words	What is the question asking me? How can I turn it into a statement?
Text Evidence	Text Evidence: Use a quote or paraphrase from the text	What part of the text supports my answer?
Analyze	Analyze the evidence by explaining how it supports your answer	Why does this evidence matter? What does it show?
Restate	Restate your main idea or wrap up your response	How can I conclude my response clearly?

Tips for Implementation

Letter	Purpose	Teacher Moves	Student-Friendly Language
S = Set Up	Clearly state the main answer to the question	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Use sentence frames like: "It is important to ___ because..."Provide examples and non-examplesModel think-alouds with simple prompts	"Start by answering the question in one clear sentence."
T = Text Evidence	Support the answer with a fact or example	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Teach how to "look back" in textsProvide sentence starters: "For example...", "The text says..."Offer visuals or anchor texts with labeled evidence	"Find proof from a reading, video, or lesson."
A = Analyze	Explain why the evidence matters	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Use color-coded sentence starters: "This shows...", "This means..."Model how one piece of evidence supports their pointShow student examples that explain thinking	"Tell what your evidence means and why it matters."
R = Restate	Wrap up by restating their answer differently	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Offer frames like: "That's why...", "In conclusion..."Point out how restating helps reinforce argumentsCreate sentence puzzles for students to rebuild restatements	"Say your answer again in a new way to finish strong."

Model STAR in Action: Think-Aloud Demo

- Prompt: "Why is it important to recycle?"
 - S – Set Up: "It is important to recycle because it helps protect the environment."
 - T – Text Evidence: "For example, recycling one ton of paper saves 17 trees and over 7,000 gallons of water."
 - A – Analyze: "This shows that recycling reduces the need to cut down trees and use natural resources, which helps keep ecosystems healthy."
 - R – Restate: "That's why recycling is a simple but powerful way to take care of our planet."
- Tip: Use visual icons for STAR steps (star, book, magnifying glass, echo) and create editable bookmarks or editing checklists so students don't forget a piece.

STAR Strategy: Tips for Implementation

Extra Supports for Struggling Writers

- **Color-Coded Sentence Frames:** Each part of STAR is a different color, helping students build layered responses
- **Mini Anchor Charts:** Break each step into its own chart and post around the room
- **Fill-in-the-Blank Templates:** Great for beginners learning structure before generating their own ideas
- **Peer STAR Stations:** Set up each step as a classroom station—students rotate and build each part together
- **Student STAR Cards:** Make small reference cards for folders or journals with examples + sentence starters

Interactive Anchor Chart

- To make an interactive anchor chart for the STAR strategy, divide a large poster or chart paper into four sections: S (State your answer), T (Tell or cite evidence), A (Analyze or explain), and R (Restate your answer). In each section, add sentence starters like “I believe...” or “For example...” to help students get started. Include a sample response to a question like “Why is it important to recycle?” and break it into the STAR parts. Make it interactive by letting students add their own sentence starters or examples on sticky notes. You can also have them sort example sentences into the correct STAR section. This chart becomes a living tool that students can refer to during writing time.

Mini Stories or Analogies

- Introduce STAR with a metaphor
 - STAR is Like a Movie Trailer: A good response is like a trailer that convinces someone to watch the whole movie.
 - S = Hook – You grab attention with your main idea.
 - T = Highlight Scene – You show a powerful moment (your evidence).
 - A = Voiceover – You explain why that moment matters.
 - R = Tagline – You end with a memorable restatement of your message.
 - “A trailer without a voiceover or a hook wouldn’t make sense—just like a response without STAR wouldn’t be complete.”

STAR Strategy: Tips for Implementation

Practice Ideas (Whole Class, Small Group & Independent)

- **Partner STAR Writing**

- Strategy: Build STAR responses in pairs to reduce cognitive load and promote peer scaffolding.

- **Partner A: Set Up + Text Evidence Builder**

- This student leads with the foundation of the response.

- Role 1: S = Set Up

- Writes a clear topic sentence or direct answer to the prompt
 - Uses sentence frames like: "I believe __ because..." "It is important to __ because..."

- Role 2: T = Text Evidence

- Finds or selects a fact, quote, or example from class readings, videos, or notes
 - Uses sentence starters like: "For example..." "According to the text..." "The video showed..."

- Support Ideas:

- May use a graphic organizer or quote bank provided by the teacher
 - Can underline or highlight evidence in the source material

- **Partner B: Analyze + Restate Specialist**

- This student builds meaning and wraps up the response.

- Role 3: A = Analyze

- Explains why the text evidence matters

- Uses analytical sentence starters like: "This shows..." "This means..." "This helps us understand..."

- Role 4: R = Restate

- Repeats the main idea in a new way to reinforce the argument
 - Uses restatement frames like: "That's why..." "In conclusion..."

- Support Ideas:

- May color-code the analysis and restate steps to ensure clarity
 - Uses peer or teacher feedback to strengthen meaning

- **Together: Team Revision Time**

- After both students complete their parts, they:

- Read the full paragraph aloud together
 - Check each STAR step with a bookmark or checklist
 - Revise confusing sentences, repetitive ideas, or missing components
 - Celebrate with an "I found all 4 STAR steps!" sticker or stamp

- This activity is continued on the next page

STAR Strategy: Tips for Implementation

- **Group Activity: STAR Response Comparison**
 - **Strategy: Rank & Reflect**
 1. Prepare: Share 2–3 sample STAR responses, ranging from basic to strong.
 2. Activity Steps:
 - In pairs or small groups, students read each sample aloud.
 - They rank them from weakest to strongest and justify their reasoning:
 - Which had the clearest Set Up?
 - Was the Text Evidence specific?
 - Did the Analyze sentence explain “why it matters”?
 - Did the Restate feel repetitive or fresh?
 3. Student Reflection: Ask students to answer: “What made the strongest response better?” “Which part of STAR is hardest for me?”
 - Bonus: Give students one weaker response and have them improve it using a STAR revision sheet.
 - **Teacher Tip: Model this process with sentence puzzles or magnetic sentence strips. This makes collaboration feel tactile, creative, and low-pressure.**
 - Use sentence frames or bookmarks for each role.
 - After building the full paragraph, partners swap and revise each other’s work for clarity.
 - Offer starter prompts like “Why do communities need parks?” or “Why is reading important?”
 - Exit Tickets End a lesson with a quick STAR-based reflection. Example: “Why was teamwork important in today’s activity?”
 - Reading Passages + Scaffolded Questions Choose short, engaging texts and pose prompts that guide students through STAR. You might pre-highlight evidence to help with the A step.
 - Sticky STAR Stations Rotate through four writing stations, each focusing on one STAR component. Students can collaborate to build one response as a class.

STAR Strategy: Do's and Don'ts:

DO'S

✓ Teach each step explicitly using think-alouds and real examples

- Students need concrete models to internalize academic writing habits. Seeing your thought process demystifies it.

✓ Use direct quotes and paraphrasing practice

- Builds text evidence skills and helps students distinguish between their ideas and those in the source.

✓ Give feedback on each component (S, T, A, R)

- Students can revise more precisely when they know which part needs improvement—great for targeted mini-lessons.

✓ Create visual supports like anchor charts, graphic organizers, and color-coded checklists

- Helps students organize their thinking and provides accessible reference points during independent writing.

✓ Incorporate peer discussion before writing

- Talking it out helps students clarify thoughts and makes writing feel less intimidating.

✓ Celebrate growth (e.g., STAR badges or progression charts)

- Boosts confidence and motivates students to master each step.

✗ Don't skip the modeling phase

- Students often struggle silently without clear examples—especially those with learning differences.

✗ Don't assume students can analyze without support

- Middle schoolers benefit from guided questioning and sentence stems to build analytical thinking.

✗ Don't accept vague, unsupported answers

- Reinforces surface-level thinking and undermines the value of evidence-based writing.

✗ Introduce STAR as one big chunk

- Break it into digestible lessons—focus on one step at a time to avoid overload.

✗ Don't make STAR feel like a checklist

- Make STAR feel like a checklist
Keep it purposeful—connect each step to communication goals (e.g., convincing a reader, explaining a viewpoint).

✗ Use STAR only in isolated writing tasks

- Embed it across subjects (e.g., science reflections, social studies responses) to reinforce transfer.

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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Learn More

 WritingClassroom.org

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