

CDO Writing Strategy

Type of Writing Supported:

All Types

Grade Level: **Grades 2-12**
Elementary to High School

Stage of Writing Supported:
Revising and editing

PURPOSE:

What does this strategy help students do?

Students reflect on clarity and meaning, compare intent to expression, and revise with structured self-regulation.

Why is this strategy effective?

- Provides an explicit, tactile process to develop internal editing routines
- Demonstrates positive outcomes across diverse learners, including students with learning differences

C

Compare

Does this match my idea?

D

Diagnose

What doesn't sound clear or effective?

O

Operate

What can I do to fix it?

Does this now convey my intention clearly?

CDO Strategy: Case study

Who is using it:

Mr. Marcus, a 7th-grade English Language Arts teacher, is implementing the CDO (Compare, Diagnose, Operate) revising strategy with his students, a diverse group of 26 learners that includes students with IEPs, multilingual learners, and a range of writing proficiency levels. The class recently completed a unit on ecosystems and is now working on composing informative essays that explain the roles of producers, consumers, and decomposers.

Classroom context:

The students are in the middle of an informative writing unit. Students are drafting informative essays that explain how energy moves through a food web. This unit integrates science content and literacy objectives. Students have already conducted research and completed a planning organizer. Today's lesson focuses on revising body paragraphs for clarity and coherence using the CDO (Compare, Diagnose, Operate) strategy.

How the strategy is implemented:

Mr. Marcus begins class by displaying the CDO Anchor Chart and explaining that revision is not just about fixing mistakes—it's about making writing clearer and more helpful for the reader.

He models the CDO steps using a student-friendly example from a sample informative essay:

"Producers make food by using photosynthesis, and that's how energy starts."

He walks students through his thought process:

- Compare: "I wanted to clearly explain the role of producers. Does this sentence do that?"
- Diagnose: "It's too vague. I need more specific detail, and the phrase 'that's how energy starts' is unclear."
 - He selects the 'People may not understand this' evaluation card.
- Operate: He decides to add detail and clarify the scientific process:

"Producers, such as plants and algae, use sunlight to make their own food through photosynthesis, which begins the transfer of energy through the food web."

Mr. Marcus then distributes evaluation cards, revision checklists, and graphic organizers. Students are tasked with revising two sentences from their own drafts using the full CDO cycle. He encourages students to say their intended meaning aloud before comparing it to what they've written.

Some verbal prompts Mr. Marcus could use during this lesson:

"What did you want your reader to understand from that sentence?"

- (Used when students have written something vague or overly general)

"Say what you meant to write—without looking at your paper."

- (Encourages recall and authentic expression)

"Can you tell me, in your own words, what you were trying to say here?"

- (Supports students in rephrasing their ideas orally)

"Do the words on your paper match what you just said out loud?"

- (Facilitates comparison between intended meaning and actual sentence)

"If your reader never heard of a consumer or producer, would they understand this?"

- (Prompts consideration of audience understanding)

"What is this sentence trying to teach your reader?"

- (Connects to the informative writing purpose)

"Tell me what's most important about this part of the food web."

- (Helps students focus on relevant details)

CDO Strategy: Case study

Outcomes and student responses:

Students engage actively with the evaluation cards, with many remarking how helpful it is to focus on one sentence at a time. A student with language processing difficulties identifies that one of his sentences was “not useful to the paper” and replaces it with a more focused explanation.

Students revise sentences that previously included general statements like:

- *“Consumers eat food from the ecosystem.”*

To more informative, specific explanations like:

- *“Primary consumers, such as rabbits and insects, eat producers like grass and plants to gain energy.”*

During reflection, one student shares, “The CDO cards helped me know what was wrong with my sentence before I tried to fix it.” Another student explains, “I didn’t realize I could move parts of a sentence around to make it clearer.”

Mr. Marcus notes that overall, students' revised drafts demonstrate improved sentence variety, precision of information, and clarity of explanations, especially in paragraphs that explain complex scientific relationships.

TIDE Strategy: Troubleshooting & Adaptations

Issue/Challenge	What to Do	Helpful Prompts
Surface-level revision	Model deeper diagnosis through teacher think-aloud	“Why did I choose to add that? What does it clarify?”
Writing fatigue	Shorten sessions to 2–3 sentences at a time	“Just this one sentence- what did you mean?”
Student resistance	Use peer modeling and anchor charts	“Let’s compare with a partner for clarity.”

Ideas to Further Differentiate

Struggling writers:

- Use guided CDO mats with explicit prompts.

Small Group Strategy Table:

- Teacher or paraeducator gathers students for guided revision where they model each “operate” strategy and helps them practice with real sentences.

Modeled Examples with Blanks: EX: Original: “Plants give energy.”

- Fix: “Plants like _____ give energy through _____.”

Reduce Cognitive Load:

- Focus on just one sentence at a time instead of an entire paragraph.

Extra Modeling and Think-Alouds:

- With exaggerated pacing and verbalization of decisions.

Use of Technology:

- Text-to-speech tools or speech-to-text apps help students read and revise.

Offer Time Extensions:

- Allow more time for students who process information more slowly.

Sentence Starters for Oral Language:

- EX: “I was trying to say that...” “This sentence means...” “I want the reader to understand...”

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

Disclaimer: The contents of this publication were developed under a grant from the US Department of Education #H327F20008. However, those contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the US Department of Education, and you should not assume endorsement by the Federal Government. Project Officer, Anita Vermeer.