

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?

FUEL Strategy: Case study

Case Narrative: Teaching FUEL in a 6th Grade Classroom

Teacher: Ms. Rivera

Grade: 6th Grade

Subject: English Language Arts

Class Profile: 24 students, including English Language Learners (ELLs) and several students with IEPs focused on writing goals.

Lesson Goal: Teach students how to write a clear, structured paragraph using the **FUEL** strategy:

How Ms. Rivera Teaches Each Step of FUEL

1. Explicit Introduction with Modeling

At the start of the lesson, Ms. Rivera introduces the **FUEL anchor chart**, hanging front and center. She writes each part of the acronym in bold letters, along with guiding questions:

Prompt: Should students be allowed to have phones in school?

- **F – Focus:** “What is my answer to the question?”
 - *Write your topic sentence.*
- **U – Understand:** “Why does this matter?”
 - *Explain what you're thinking or define the issue.*
- **E – Evidence:** “What proves it?”
 - *Use a fact, quote, or example.*
- **L – Link:** “How does it all connect?”
 - *Wrap up your paragraph or restate your point.*

FUEL Strategy: Case study

2. Model Paragraph (Think-Aloud)

Before students write about phones, Ms. Rivera models a paragraph on a different topic:

Prompt: *Why is exercise important?*

She narrates each part of the paragraph as she writes:

- **Focus:** *“Exercise is important because it keeps your body and mind healthy.”*
- **Understand:** *“When people don’t move around enough, they can feel tired, stressed, or get sick more easily.”*
- **Evidence:** *“According to KidsHealth.org, children who exercise daily sleep better and do better in school.”*
- **Link:** *“This shows that exercise helps you succeed in both your health and learning.”*

She uses color-coding on the projector to label each part, helping visual learners connect the labels to the structure.

Guided Practice: Planning with the FUEL Organizer

Ms. Rivera passes out a graphic organizer that has a box for each part of the FUEL structure. Together, the class brainstorms reasons for and against having phones in school.

Then, students pair up to draft ideas for their own paragraphs.

Examples from the brainstorm:

- **For phones:** *“Students can call home in emergencies,” “Phones can be learning tools.”*
- **Against phones:** *“They’re distracting in class,” “People might cheat or use them inappropriately.”*

FUEL Strategy: Case study

Ms. Rivera supports students by:

- Providing sentence starters like:
 - “One reason I believe...”
 - “This matters because...”
 - “For example...”
 - “This proves that...”
- Giving **vocabulary word banks** for ELL students (e.g., "distraction," "access," "emergency").
- Sitting with students who have writing IEPs to scribe or help them break ideas into smaller chunks.

FUEL Strategy: Adaptations

Differentiating the FUEL Writing Strategy

To make the FUEL writing strategy accessible and effective for a wide range of learners, here are some thoughtful adaptations and differentiation ideas:

- **Sentence Starters**
 - Provide structured prompts for each part of FUEL (e.g., “One reason is...”, “This means that...”, “For example...”, “This shows...”).
- **Graphic Organizers with Visuals**
 - Use icons or symbols (🧠 for understanding, 📄 for evidence, 🔗 for link) to help students remember each step.
- **Chunk the Task**
 - Break the paragraph into one step per day—write the “F” sentence one day, then move to “U”, and so on.
- **Collaborative Writing**
 - Allow students to brainstorm or draft in pairs or small groups before writing independently.
- **Word Banks**
 - Include vocabulary related to the writing prompt and common academic words for each FUEL step.
- **Model Paragraphs with Annotations**
 - Highlight each FUEL part using colors or labels in mentor texts.
- **Language Scaffolds**
 - Offer frames like “This means...”, “According to...”, and “This connects to...” for academic expression.
- **Checklist or Self-Assessment Tool**
 - Students use a FUEL checklist during peer review or before turning in their paragraph.
- **Cross-Curricular Application**
 - Apply FUEL to content areas like science, social studies, or health for evidence-based writing tasks.
- **Digital Adaptations**
 - Use Google Slides or Docs templates with text boxes for each FUEL part to support typing and planning.

FUEL Strategy: Troubleshooting

Issue/Challenge	What to Do	Helpful Prompts
Students don't understand what "Fact" means	Clarify that it means the main idea or claim for the paragraph	"What are you trying to prove or explain?" "What is this paragraph about?"
Students skip the "Understanding" step	Model adding explanations or background info before evidence	"Why is this fact important?" "How can you explain this in your own words?"
Evidence is weak, vague, or missing	Teach how to use quotes, data, or examples from texts or experiences	"Can you find a quote or fact that supports your idea?" "What's your proof?"
Students repeat the evidence in the "Link" sentence	Show how to connect back to the topic or move the paragraph forward	"What does this evidence show?" "How does this connect to your main idea?"
Paragraphs feel robotic or overly formulaic	Encourage variation in sentence starters and transitions	"Try combining two FUEL steps into one strong sentence." "Can you add voice?"
Students forget one or more steps	Use a visual checklist or FUEL graphic organizer during drafting	"Did you include F, U, E, and L?" "Point to each part in your paragraph."

Publication Details

Contributors

Mary Grace Windle

Cincinnati Public
Cincinnati, OH

Project Leadership

Sean J. Smith, PhD

APLM Principal Investigator

AI SCORE Principal Investigator

Samantha R. Goldman, PhD

AI SCORE Co Principal Investigator

Suzanne Myers, EdD

APLM Co Principal Investigator

Amber Rowland, PhD

APLM Co Principal Investigator

Jocelyn Washburn, PhD

APLM Co Principal Investigator

Learn More

 WritingClassroom.org

 ProjectAIScore.org

 KUCRL.KU.edu/aplm-online

Design and Production

Jenica Stock

Graphic Design

Sydney Lewis

Development Support

Bridget Smith

Development Support

Samantha Goldman

Project Oversight

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.