

POW Writing Strategy

Type of Writing Supported:
Informational

Grade Level: **Grades 1-8**
Elementary to Middle School

Stage of Writing Supported:
Planning

PURPOSE:

What does this strategy help students do?

POW helps students apply a consistent writing approach across subjects and genres. It supports self-regulation and serves as a foundation for more advanced strategies like TREE, WWW, and C-SPACE. Its short acronym makes it easy to remember, especially for students who benefit from simple, accessible tools

Why is this strategy effective?

It is a memorable acronym which serves as a cognitive anchor. Acronyms like COPS serve as mnemonic devices, helping students retain and recall complex processes more easily.

P

Pick Ideas

Brainstorm and plan what to write about.

O

Organize

Organize your notes by story part or section. Choose several possible ideas for each part.

W

Write

Write and say more about the topic.

POW Strategy: Case study

Case Study: Ms. Rivera's 7th Grade Class Uses POW to Improve Paragraph Writing

Ms. Rivera teaches 7th grade language arts at a middle school where many students are writing below grade level. Knowing that many of her students enjoy topics like video games, sports, and music, she decided to introduce the POW strategy—Pick your idea, Organize your notes, Write and say more—to help them write better paragraphs.

Day 1: Introducing POW

On the first day, Ms. Rivera wrote “POW” in big letters on the whiteboard and explained each step clearly. She said, “POW will help you write great paragraphs. P stands for Pick your idea, O for Organize your notes, and W for Write and say more.” She modeled the strategy using the topic “My favorite video game.” As she talked aloud, she jotted down notes on the board: “fun gameplay,” “cool graphics,” and “playing with friends.” Then she wrote a paragraph based on those notes.

She invited students to choose their own topics. Most picked familiar subjects like basketball, music, or pets. Ms. Rivera noticed that several students wanted to start writing right away, so she stopped the class and said, “Remember, organizing your notes is like making a map before you write. Let’s take time to do that.”

To help, she handed out a simple graphic organizer and modeled how to break ideas into bullet points. One student, Jamal, said, “I like picking my idea, but I forget what to say next.” Ms. Rivera responded warmly, “That’s why we organize! Your notes help you remember what to write.”

By the end of the lesson, Jamal’s paragraph read:

“My favorite sport is basketball. I like dribbling the ball fast. Shooting baskets is fun. I like playing with my team.”

Ms. Rivera wrote a note on his paper: “Great job picking your idea and organizing notes! Next time, add more details about why you like dribbling or teamwork.”

Day 2: Guided Practice

The next day, Ms. Rivera began by reviewing POW. “P is pick your idea, O is organize your notes, and W is write and say more,” she reminded them. Students picked new topics, and Ms. Rivera walked around helping them fill out their organizers.

She noticed some students still wrote very short paragraphs, so she held brief conferences, asking questions like, “What else can you tell me about your idea?” and “Can you add an example or explain why you feel that way?” One student, Maya, wrote about hip hop music:

“I like hip hop music because it has cool beats. It makes me want to dance with my friends. Dancing is fun and makes me happy.”

Ms. Rivera praised her: “Excellent! Adding feelings and examples makes your paragraph interesting.”

POW Strategy: Case study

Day 3: Independent Writing and Celebration

On day three, Ms. Rivera started class with celebration. She said, “Celebrate!!!! You did it! You used POW to create a great paragraph. If time allows, try writing another one today. If not, we’ll keep practicing tomorrow!”

Students eagerly chose topics like favorite movies and pets. Ms. Rivera supported those who needed extra help organizing notes but encouraged independence.

One student, Carlos, wrote:

“My dog is the best pet because he is very friendly. He likes to play fetch with me every day. He also protects me when I feel scared.”

Ms. Rivera wrote on his paper: “Wonderful paragraph! You picked a clear idea, organized your notes well, and wrote with great detail. Keep up the good work!”

Teacher Reflection

Ms. Rivera reflected that POW gave students a clear and manageable way to approach writing. The biggest challenge was helping students slow down to organize their thoughts before rushing to write. Modeling the organizer several times and individual conferences were key. She was encouraged by the students’ growing confidence and plans to keep using POW regularly. Celebrating every small success kept students motivated.

Summary

- Students responded well to choosing topics relevant to their interests.
- Many needed support organizing ideas before writing.
- Teacher modeling and graphic organizers helped students stay focused.
- Positive, specific feedback encouraged students to add details.
- Celebrations boosted student confidence and engagement.

POW Strategy: Adaptations

Adaptation: Guided Brainstorming for "P" (Pick my idea)

- **Why it's Effective:** Students with LDs may struggle with divergent thinking, generating ideas, or recalling relevant information from memory. Providing a structured starting point reduces cognitive load and helps them initiate the "Pick my idea" phase without feeling overwhelmed by a blank page.
- **How to Do It:**
 - For **"P" (Pick my idea)**: Instead of just saying "Pick your idea," **provide a short list of 2-3 high-interest, pre-selected topics** for students to choose from, or offer a topic starter (e.g., "Write about a time you felt proud," "Explain your favorite animal," "Describe a place you love").
 - Then, provide an **"Idea Web with Categories"** graphic organizer for the brainstorming itself. For example, if the topic is "My Favorite Animal," the web could have pre-labeled branches like "Appearance," "What it eats," "Where it lives," "Why I like it." This helps students generate ideas within specific, manageable categories rather than an open-ended brainstorm.
 - **Model:** "For 'P,' I'm going to choose 'My Favorite Animal.' Now, to pick my ideas, I'll use this web. First, I'll think about its appearance... then what it eats..."

Adaptation: Segmented Graphic Organizers for "O" (Organize my notes)

- **Why it's Effective:** The "Organize my notes" step can be challenging for students with LDs who struggle with sequencing, hierarchical thinking, or maintaining focus on a larger structure. Breaking the organizer into smaller, distinct sections with clear visual cues helps them manage information chunk by chunk.
- **How to Do It:**
 - For **"O" (Organize my notes)**: Design the graphic organizer with **clearly delineated boxes or sections for each main part of the intended writing piece** (e.g., "Introduction Idea," "Body Paragraph 1 Idea," "Body Paragraph 2 Idea," "Conclusion Idea" for a paragraph). Each section should have limited space for notes, encouraging conciseness.
 - Use **color-coding** for each section (e.g., blue for introduction, green for body 1, yellow for body 2, red for conclusion) that matches an anchor chart.
 - Include **simple icons** next to each section (e.g., a lightbulb for the introduction, a paragraph symbol for body paragraphs).
 - **Model:** "For 'O,' I'm using this organizer. See the blue box for my introduction idea? I'll put my main point about reading there. Then the green box for my first supporting detail..."

POW Strategy: Adaptations

Adaptation: "Sentence Starters + Word Banks" for "W" (Write and say more)

- **Why it's Effective:** Students with LDs often face challenges with expressive language, vocabulary retrieval, and sentence construction. Providing pre-fabricated sentence beginnings and relevant vocabulary reduces the burden of starting and helps them elaborate on their organized ideas.
- **How to Do It:**
 - For "W" (Write and say more): Provide a handout or digital document with **sentence starters linked to the type of elaboration needed.**
 - To introduce an idea: "My main idea is..." "I want to explain..."
 - To add details: "One detail is..." "For example..." "This shows that..."
 - To explain: "This means..." "Because of this..."
 - Alongside the sentence starters, provide a **"Word Bank"** specific to the writing topic, including key vocabulary and descriptive adjectives/verbs.
 - **Model:** "Now for 'W.' I'm looking at my 'Organize' notes. My first point is 'Reading is relaxing.' I'll use the sentence starter 'My main idea is...' and add words from my word bank like 'calming' and 'peaceful.' So, 'My main idea is that reading is a very calming and peaceful activity.'"

Adaptation: "Chunking" the POW Process with Micro-Checklists

- **Why it's Effective:** The entire POW process, even with its three steps, can still feel overwhelming for students with LDs who struggle with multi-step directions and task initiation. Breaking it down into even smaller, sequential "chunks" with mini-checklists reduces cognitive overload and provides a clearer path to completion.
- **How to Do It:**
 - Instead of teaching all of POW in one go or expecting full completion of each step immediately, **introduce and practice one POW step at a time over multiple sessions.**
 - For each session, provide a **"Micro-Checklist"** for only that step.
 - For "P" day: "I picked my main idea. I brainstormed 3 details."
 - For "O" day: "I put my main idea in the center. I organized my details under it."
 - For "W" day: "I wrote my main idea sentence. I added 2 details from my notes."
 - **Model:** "Today, we are only focusing on 'P' – Pick my idea. Look at your micro-checklist. My goal is to pick my idea and brainstorm 3 details. Let's do that first."

POW Strategy: Troubleshooting

ISSUE/ CHALLENGE	WHAT TO DO
Students Struggle to Pick a Main Idea	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Prompt with simple, relatable topics (pets, favorite foods, hobbies).• Use sentence starters like “I want to write about ___” or “My favorite ___ is ___ because...”• Model several examples aloud to show how to choose a clear, focused idea.
Students Have Trouble Organizing Details	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Use the POW graphic organizer visually and guide them to fill each box step-by-step. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pair students to discuss details aloud before writing to build confidence.
Students Write Very Short or Vague Sentences	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Introduce “Say More” question prompts to deepen ideas (Why? How? Examples?).• Model expanding sentences by adding reasons or examples.• Provide sentence starters for elaboration, e.g., “This is because...,” “For example...,” “Also...”
Students Have Difficulty Revising and Adding Details	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use guided questions during revision: “Can you tell me more about this?” or “What else should your reader know?”• Offer one-on-one support or small group mini-lessons on elaboration.
Students Get Overwhelmed by the Writing Process	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Set clear time limits for each step to keep focus.• Celebrate small successes like completing the organizer or writing the first sentence.
Students Resist Peer Review or Give Unhelpful Feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Model kind, specific feedback using examples.• Provide sentence frames for giving feedback, e.g., “I liked how you...,” “You could add more about...”• Reinforce the idea that peer review helps everyone become better writers.
Struggling Writers Need More Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Allow use of drawing or bullet points to organize ideas before writing.• Provide additional sentence starters or word banks.• Pair with a peer buddy or offer extra teacher check-ins during writing time.

Publication Details

Contributors

Carrie Hammye

USD 327

Ellsworth, KS

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

Design and Production

Jenica Stock

Graphic Design

Amber Glover

Content Creation

Sydney Lewis

Development Support

Bridget Smith

Development Support

Samantha Goldman

Project Oversight

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

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