

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

STAR Strategy: Case study

Case Study: Supporting Jaden with the STAR Strategy

Jaden is a seventh-grade student who often struggles with organizing his ideas in writing. His responses tend to be vague and lack supporting details, and he avoids using text evidence, despite showing strong verbal reasoning skills during class discussions. He also has limited writing stamina and often becomes discouraged when faced with extended writing tasks. Jaden is passionate about social justice topics and responds well to visuals and structured support.

Before the STAR strategy was introduced, Jaden responded to the prompt "Why is Martin Luther King Jr. an important leader?" with a brief and underdeveloped answer: "He did a lot for civil rights. He gave speeches and helped people." This writing sample lacked analysis, structure, and evidence, even though he had previously expressed insightful ideas during the class discussion on the same topic.

To support Jaden, his teacher began implementing the STAR strategy (Set Up, Text Evidence, Analyze, Restate) through a series of scaffolded lessons. Over the course of three instructional days, the teacher gradually introduced the STAR writing strategy using scaffolded modeling and collaborative practice. On Day 1, the teacher used a think-aloud approach to model each step of STAR—Set Up, Text Evidence, Analyze, and Restate—responding to a different prompt while building a color-coded anchor chart. Each part of the response was written in a distinct color and paired with a visual icon to help students connect structure with meaning. Jaden, a struggling writer, engaged actively by identifying each STAR component and using the color cues to make sense of the model. On Day 2, the focus shifted to guided practice. Jaden used a graphic organizer that broke the response into four parts, each with sentence starters and built-in supports. Before writing, he rehearsed his ideas verbally with the teacher, allowing him to clarify his thinking and receive feedback in real time. This verbal rehearsal reduced writing pressure and boosted his confidence. By Day 3, Jaden was ready to co-write a STAR response with a partner. The pair divided the workload, with Jaden drafting the Set Up and Text Evidence, while his partner focused on Analyze and Restate. They worked together to revise their full paragraph, checking for clarity, structure, and complete reasoning. Through modeling, supported rehearsal, and peer collaboration, Jaden moved from passive observer to confident contributor, gradually internalizing each step of the STAR strategy. After two weeks of explicit instruction, Jaden's improved response to the original prompt included clear reasoning and text evidence: "Martin Luther King Jr. is an important leader because he changed how people think about civil rights. He believed everyone should be treated fairly, no matter their race. The article says, 'He led peaceful marches and gave powerful speeches like "I Have a Dream."' That's why many people still look up to him and celebrate his leadership today." His writing showed a stronger understanding of structure, thoughtful reasoning, and evidence integration.

To support Jaden's development, his teacher introduced a layered series of instructional scaffolds aligned with the STAR strategy. One of the most effective tools was the color-coded anchor chart, which visually broke down each STAR component. By assigning distinct colors—yellow for Set Up, blue for Text Evidence, green for Analyze, and orange for Restate—and pairing each with a simple icon, the chart gave Jaden a tangible reference point to understand structure. This visual clarity helped reduce cognitive overload and allowed him to make immediate connections between each part of the paragraph.

STAR Strategy: Case study

Case Study: Supporting Jaden with the STAR Strategy Continued...

The teacher then used think-aloud modeling, writing a sample paragraph while verbalizing the decision-making process behind each sentence. This provided Jaden with access to the internal logic of writing, making abstract writing moves visible and replicable. During this modeling, Jaden actively participated by identifying STAR steps and discussing how they functioned, which further strengthened his comprehension of structured writing.

The next layer of support was a graphic organizer customized for STAR. This tool divided the writing task into manageable chunks and provided sentence stems for each part. These frames served as linguistic scaffolds, allowing Jaden to insert his ideas into structured templates rather than starting from scratch. For example, prompts like “For example, the article says...” and “This shows that...” helped Jaden integrate evidence and develop analysis in a way that felt achievable. Additionally, the organizer likely used matching colors to reinforce the anchor chart and support transfer between visual tools.

A key moment in Jaden’s development was the use of verbal rehearsal with his teacher before writing. By speaking his ideas aloud and receiving real-time feedback, he was able to clarify thinking and revise before committing anything to paper. This strategy worked especially well for Jaden, whose verbal reasoning was stronger than his writing stamina. The verbal rehearsal reduced pressure and built a bridge between spoken and written expression.

Finally, on Day 3, Jaden benefited from peer collaboration during co-writing. He was responsible for Set Up and Text Evidence while his partner focused on Analyze and Restate. This division allowed Jaden to concentrate on a smaller portion of the response and experience success within a shared task. Through revision and joint checking, both students refined the paragraph and used the STAR checklist to ensure each component was present. This collaborative model helped Jaden internalize the strategy by building it alongside a peer.

Altogether, these scaffolds—visual icons, color-coded anchor charts, sentence starters, graphic organizers, verbal rehearsal, and peer collaboration—worked in concert to support Jaden’s learning. Each tool played a role in increasing accessibility, reducing cognitive load, and reinforcing structure, allowing him to move from vague, unsupported responses to organized paragraphs that used evidence and analysis. With these supports in place, Jaden’s confidence blossomed, and he began to articulate his ideas with clarity and purpose.

When asked to reflect, he said, “It helps me know what to say first. The quote part makes it sound smarter.” Going forward, the teacher planned to build on his progress by introducing a STAR-focused rubric and integrating STAR writing into other content areas where Jaden’s interests could shine. With the right support and engaging topics, Jaden’s writing continued to grow in confidence and clarity.




STAR Strategy: Adaptations

Using Visuals or Icons for STAR Strategy Steps

Why It Works

- Visuals act as cognitive anchors, making abstract processes like textual analysis or restatement concrete and accessible. For students with limited writing stamina, language barriers, or executive functioning challenges, pairing each STAR step with an image boosts memory retention, recognition, and transfer. It also creates cross-modal learning links—students can see it, say it, and write it.

Visual Icon Suggestions for STAR

STAR Step	Symbol	Meaning	Visual Cue
S = Set Up	Speech Bubble 	Start with your answer or opinion	Represents student voice and focus
T = Text Evidence	Lightbulb 	Pull a fact, quote, or detail	Represents understanding or idea from the text
A = Analyze	Magnifying Glass	Explain why your evidence matters	Symbolizes deeper thinking and insight
R = Restate	Repeat Arrow 	Repeat your answer in a new way	Indicates summary, echoing ideas with clarity

Tip: Use classroom posters, anchor charts, and desk reference cards with these icons and brief definitions students can memorize over time.

STAR Strategy: Adaptations

How to use Color Coded Mentor Sentences with STAR Strategy



Why It Works

- Mentor sentences model strong writing. Sentence frames guide student responses. When paired and color-coded by STAR step, students can:
 - Visually distinguish writing parts
 - See how a complete response is built
 - Mix and match sentence parts like a puzzle
 - Generate their own response based on strong models

Step-by-Step Implementation

1. Create Mentor Sentences for Each STAR Step

- Write short, student-friendly samples based on a common prompt (e.g., “Why is it important to stand up for others?”).

Step	Example Mentor Sentence	Color	Visual Cue
Set Up	“It’s important to stand up for others because it helps create fairness.”	 Yellow	Represents student voice and focus
Text Evidence	“For example, Rosa Parks’ actions led to major changes in civil rights laws.”	 Blue	Represents understanding or idea from the text
Analyze	“This shows that one person’s bravery can inspire others to fight injustice.”	 Green	Symbolizes deeper thinking and insight
Restate	“That’s why standing up for others makes a difference in the world.”	 Orange	Indicates summary, echoing ideas with clarity





2. Design Mix-and-Match Cards

- Print each mentor sentence on its own color-coded card, or cut strips for interactive notebooks. Students use them to:
 - Match sentence parts to the correct STAR step
 - Rearrange shuffled cards into a cohesive paragraph
 - Compare mentor sentence sets (strong vs. weak)
- Bonus: Offer blank color-coded cards with sentence frames so students can write their own version to “replace” the mentor sentence.

STAR Strategy: Adaptations

3. Create a Guided Sentence Frame Bank

- For each STAR step, provide sentence starters students can choose from as they develop their own response.

Step	Sentence Frames	Color	Visual Cue
Set Up	"I believe ___ because..." "It's important to ___ due to..."	 Yellow	Represents student voice and focus
Text Evidence	"For example, the article says..." "One example is when..."	 Blue	Represents understanding or idea from the text
Analyze	"This means..." "This shows..." "This helps explain why..."	 Green	Symbolizes deeper thinking and insight
Restate	"That's why..." "In conclusion..." "Clearly..."	 Orange	Indicates summary, echoing ideas with clarity

- Pair these frames with mentor sentences to help students see how to move from sentence starters to full ideas.

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STAR Strategy: Troubleshooting

ISSUE/ CHALLENGE	WHAT TO DO	HELPFUL PROMPTS
Students skip analysis	Model deeper thinking with examples	“Why is this quote important?” “What does this show?”
Responses are too short	Encourage elaboration with sentence starters	“This shows that...” “This means...”
Students struggle to find evidence	Pre-select quotes or highlight key parts of the text	“Look for where the author shows...”

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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[ProjectAIScore.org](https://projectaiscore.org)

[KUCRL.KU.edu/aplm-online](https://kucrl.ku.edu/aplm-online)

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