Hitting a baseball isn’t easy. Neither is learning with academic texts. Students often struggle with reading and writing in the content areas in the same way that many of us might struggle with hitting a baseball. When Reggie Jackson, now a Hall of Famer, played with the New York Yankees, he wrote a book on the art of hitting a baseball. In the book, Jackson asserts, “If you can’t read, you can’t hit.” He explains how he must be able to “read” several kinds of information in a fraction of a second to be successful as a hitter. His brain almost instantly must anticipate and process the type of pitch, its speed, and the rotation on the ball so that he can time his stride and the swing of the bat. To do this with reasonable success, Jackson has developed a repertoire of strategies for “reading” the rotation on the ball and the speed of the pitch. He has learned, for example, not to watch the pitcher’s hand if he wants to see the ball early. He also knows the value of predicting the type of pitch that might be thrown in certain game situations.

Struggling readers and writers, like struggling hitters, often lack strategies—the kinds of

Teachers respond to the literacy needs of struggling readers and writers by scaffolding instruction so that students become confident and competent in the use of strategies that support learning.
strategies necessary to learn effectively with text. One of the realities facing teachers across all content areas today is that many students make little use of reading and writing as tools for learning. Either they read or write on a superficial level or find ways to circumvent content literacy tasks altogether. Yet the ability to read and write well is one of the keys to independent and lifelong learning.

When students struggle with content literacy tasks, teachers are in much the same position as hitting coaches. Through our instructional support, we can build students’ confidence and competence as readers and writers by showing them how to read and write strategically and how to use literacy to think deeply about texts. When teachers assume the roles of coaches, they make explicit what good readers and writers do to cope with the kinds of problems they encounter in academic contexts.

As teachers, how can we “step up to the plate” and be responsive to the literacy needs of struggling learners while maintaining high content standards? The organizing principle of this chapter builds on teachers’ abilities to provide explicit instruction in the use of literacy strategies: **Teachers respond to the literacy needs of struggling readers and writers by scaffolding instruction so that students become confident and competent in the use of strategies that support learning.**

**Chapter Overview**

**STRUGGLING READERS AND WRITERS**

**THE CONSEQUENCES OF STRUGGLING WITH TEXT**
- Low Achievement
- Learned Helplessness

**EXPLICIT INSTRUCTION IN THE USE OF STRATEGIES**

**METACOGNITION AND LEARNING**
- Strategic Reading
  - Think-Alouds
  - Question-Answer Relationships (QARs)
- Reciprocal Teaching

**STRATEGY INSTRUCTION**
- Discovering
- Drafting
- Revising

**Response Journal**

What are some “first thoughts” and reactions that you have related to the organizing principle of this chapter?
Even skilled readers struggle with reading at some time, in some place, with some text. A good reader on occasion will get lost in the author's line of reasoning, become confused by the way the text is organized, or run into unknown words that are difficult to pronounce let alone define. Perhaps main ideas are too difficult to grasp or the reader simply lacks prior knowledge to make connections to the important ideas in the text. Regardless of the comprehension problem, often it's only temporary. The difference between good readers and poor readers is that when good readers struggle with text, they know what to do to get out of trouble. When a text becomes confusing or doesn't make sense, good readers recognize that they have a repertoire of reading strategies that they can use to work themselves out of the difficulty. Struggling readers, however, have trouble figuring out what to do.

Skilled writers, like skilled readers, have a repertoire of strategies at their command. A clean sheet of paper or a blank computer screen is the writer's call to work. Getting started, however, can be difficult, even terrifying. How do you respond to the question, “What do you do when you write?” Here's what an experienced teacher and graduate student has to say:

When faced with the task of writing, I immediately think of all the other things I need to do. Like clean the attic. Oh and the basement, too, because it's really dirty. Then I remember that root canal surgery I've been putting off. I call the dentist. Of course, I can't write while I'm waiting for the appointment because I'm too nervous. Then certainly I can't write after the surgery, because I need to recuperate with lots of rest. Then I decide to make a list of all the animals Noah took onto the ark. Of course, I have to copy it over because they went two by two. . . . (Topping & McManus 2002, p. 104)

Many a good writer has struggled with getting started. Some procrastinate until their backs are up against the wall. Others come to grips with the blank computer screen or clean sheet of paper by performing one or
more starting rituals: Pencils are sharpened; the desktop is cleared of clutter; the refrigerator is raided once or twice. Eventually, however, the first words are put on paper, and everything that has occurred to this point (all of the mental, emotional, and physical gymnastics a writer experiences) and everything that will happen toward completion of the writing task can best be described as a writing process. Good writers learn how to regulate and control the process. Struggling writers, however, have trouble figuring out what to do.

The Consequences of Struggling with Text

Throughout this book, we argue that the real value of literacy lies in its uses. Whether we use reading or writing to enter into the imaginative world of fiction; learn with academic texts; meet workplace demands; acquire insight and knowledge about people, places, and things; or understand or create a graphic on an Internet Website, readers and writers, to be successful, must use and adapt strategies to meet the demands of the task at hand. Reading and writing aren’t as much a struggle as they are a challenge for those literacy users who know what to do.

For example, let’s take a closer look at the act of reading as a challenge or a struggle. We developed the following passage to demonstrate how easy it is for good readers to experience what it means to struggle with reading. More often than not, a good reader will approach the passage as a challenge and use a repertoire of reading strategies to construct meaning from the text. The passage, in the form of a short parable, poses a particular problem for readers as it tells the story of a king with kind but misguided intentions.

THE KINGDOM OF KAY OSS

Once upon a time in the land of Serenity, there ruled a king called Kay Oss. The king craved approval. More than anything else, he wanted to be liked by all of his people.

So one day the bmxvxolxnt dxspot dxcidxd that the bxst way to bx likxd was to frxx his pxoplx from thx svxat and toil of work. Hx dxcrxxd that no onx in Sxrxnity would vxr again bx hxld accountablx for thxir xndxavors.


Xvxn thx jxstxrs, whq prqvvdxd z wxlcmnx rxspvtx frqm thx fqrzmzlvtxvxs qf thz kvng’s czurt, stqppxd clqwnvng zrqund. Thx kvng’s knvghts, whq wvrx vxry wvxs, did nqt wnt to zct zgzvnst thx kvng’s wvlxs. Sq thxy put thxvr shvngng zrnxr vn stqrgzg znd dvsznntxld thx rzundzblx. “Zt lxzst thxrv wxll be nz mrqx bqrnvng mxxtvngs,” thxy svghxd wvth rdlxvf.

Wzs thx kvng whq wzntxd tq bx lvkxd by xvxrqnx a gqqd nzturxd rulxr? Qr wzst hx mxrxly fqqlhzrty? Qnly tvmx wqud txll.

(continued)
In order to comprehend text successfully, skilled readers must be able to **decode** or pronounce words quickly and accurately; read with **fluency**; activate **vocabulary knowledge** in relation to the language of the text; and put into play **cognitive** and **metacognitive** strategies to understand what they are reading. As Figure 3.1 suggests decoding, reading fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension are interrelated processes. If readers have trouble decoding words quickly and accurately (e.g.,
English language learners are students whose first language is other than English. They are often referred to as language minority students because they are nonnative speakers of English. Some English language learners struggle with reading and writing tasks in content area classrooms for a variety of complex reasons, not the least of which is their ability to use language processes such as reading, writing, speaking, and listening in academic contexts to communicate.

In *The Crosscultural, Language, and Academic Development Handbook*, Diaz-Rico and Weed (2002) capture the dilemma faced by content area teachers and schools who are unprepared to work academically with “the growing number of second language students flooding the nation’s schools” (p. 115). A teacher’s poignant journal entry reflects the frustration of teachers as well as students in one high school:

School started the day after Labor Day. Our enrollment suddenly included 150 Hmong who had recently immigrated to our school district. We had neither classrooms nor teachers to accommodate such a large influx, and no one was qualified to deliver instruction in Hmong. By October, it was obvious that our policy placing these students in regular content classes was not working. The students were frustrated by their inability to communicate and keep up with the class work and teachers felt overwhelmed and inadequate to meet the needs of students who were barely literate and did not know English. A typical student was Khim, who, though better off than most Hmong because she could communicate her basic needs in English, could not cope with the reading and writing demands of eleventh-grade history, math, and science. (Diaz-Rico & Weed 2002, p. 115)

By mid-October of the school year, the high school teachers expressed their discontent at a faculty meeting and their resolve to change business as usual. The teachers recognized that they needed “a new approach” for language minority students in their school.

The discontent and frustration of these teachers is no different from that of many content area teachers who are not prepared to meet the academic and language needs of immigrant students in their classrooms. Much of what we discuss in this chapter applies to language minority as well as language majority students (native speakers) who struggle with reading and writing. In either case, students who struggle with texts cannot be left to “sink or swim” in content learning situations. They need “new” approaches—alternatives to “assign-and-tell” instructional routines—that scaffold instruction in the use of speaking, listening, reading, and writing strategies.

In the next chapter, we focus specifically on the academic and literacy needs of English language learners who struggle with literacy and learning in the core curriculum. English language learners need to develop communicative competence (Brown 1987; Hymes 1972) where the focus is on using language in social contexts. Our instructional emphasis will be the same as it is in this chapter. An important aspect of communicative competence is building strategic knowledge, insights, and skills related to language use in content learning situations: Knowing when, where, and how to use reading, writing, speaking, and listening strategies appropriately in instructional contexts requires students to negotiate meanings as well as interact and collaborate with other students.
analyzing and recognizing sound–letter relationships), it will slow down their ability to read fluently in a smooth, conversational manner. Moreover, if they struggle to decode words accurately, various reading errors (e.g., mispronunciations, word omissions, and substitutions), if significant, will cause cognitive confusion and limit readers’ abilities to bring meaning and conceptual understanding to the words in the text.

When readers struggle, the act of reading no longer becomes automatic. As you read The Kingdom of Kay Oss, did the substitution of consonants x, z, q, and v for the vowels e, a, o, and i cause you to struggle as a reader? Perhaps. The progressive substitution of the consonants for vowels undoubtedly slowed down your ability to read in a smooth, conversational manner and may even have affected your accuracy in recognizing some words. Just think about some of the students in classrooms today who struggle with reading. They may experience difficulty because they read in a slow and halting manner, word-by-word, and have trouble recognizing words quickly and accurately. They spend so much time and attention on trying to “say the words” that comprehension suffers and, as a result, the reading process breaks down for them.

Did you find this the case with The Kingdom of Kay Oss passage? Probably not. Even though the substitution of consonants for vowels slowed down your rate of reading, chances are you were still able to comprehend the passage and construct meaning from it. This is because skilled readers do not use a single strategy to comprehend text. They know how to search for and construct meaning. Skilled readers have at their command multiple strategies for reading.

Moreover, skilled readers use prior knowledge to construct meaning. Take another look at the last paragraph in the passage. As you read, “As time went on Serenity changed its name to Anxiety. There was total disorder and confusion in the kingdom, and it looked like this:” did the remainder of the text confuse you? Did you comprehend the author’s intent? Did you construct meaning for what seems to be a string of letters and words that make no sense? If you were reading strategically and monitoring comprehension, you probably made the inference that “it” referred to the land of Serenity and “this” referred to the string of seemingly senseless words that followed. These words convey no letter–sound or grammatical clues. They represent total confusion and disorder! By analogy, then, you may have inferred that the land of Serenity looked like it was in a state of total confusion and disorder much like the string of unknown words. Some of you may even have concluded that there is a word to describe what happened in Serenity a long time ago. The word is chaos.

If struggling readers can’t “say the words,” they usually give up on reading. But giving up on reading, or writing for that matter, is not without its consequences.

**Low Achievement**

The expression struggling reader or struggling writer often refers to low-achieving students who have major difficulties with reading and writing. They lack fluency; have limited vocabulary knowledge; have trouble decoding polysyllabic words;
make little sense of what they read; have difficulty getting words down on paper and organizing their thoughts; and have little control over the mechanics of writing, such as spelling, punctuation, and grammar. Struggling readers and writers typically score low on proficiency tests and are tracked in basic classes for most of their academic lives. They usually become resistant learners.

How students achieve as readers and writers reflects such factors as motivation, self-concept, prior knowledge, and the ability to use language to learn. For some struggling students, reading and writing are painful reminders of a system of schooling that has failed them. The failure to learn to read and write effectively has contributed to these students’ disenchantment with and alienation from school. Although struggling readers and writers may have developed some skills and strategies, they are often inappropriate for the demands inherent in potentially difficult texts. As a result, their participation in reading-related activities, such as writing or discussion, is marginal. Getting through text assignments to answer homework questions is often the only reason to read or write, if they read or write at all.

Learned Helplessness

Learned helplessness, an expression often associated with struggling readers and writers, refers to students’ perceptions of themselves as being unable to overcome failure. They usually sabotage their efforts to read or write by believing that they can’t succeed at tasks that require literate behavior. Their struggles with literacy tasks result from a lack of knowledge of and control over the strategic routines needed to engage in meaningful transactions with texts. Struggling readers and writers rarely take active roles in constructing meaning; they often remain passive and disengaged.

Not only do struggling readers and writers lack competence with the use of multiple strategies but they also lack confidence in themselves as literacy learners. As a result, they are often ambivalent about reading and writing and fail to appreciate what literacy can do for them. For one reason or another, learners who struggle with literacy tasks have alienated themselves from the world of print.

Low-achieving students may not be the only ones who struggle with content literacy tasks. Average and above-average students, who are usually on track to go to college, might also struggle with reading and writing without their teachers being cognizant of it. Often these students feel helpless about their ability to engage in literacy tasks, but go through the motions of “doing” school. Since 1992 periodic national assessments of reading and writing conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) show that the majority of U.S. students in grades 4, 8, and 12 have obtained at least basic levels of literacy. These assessments, known as the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) surveys for reading (NAEP: Reading 2003) and for Writing (NAEP: Writing 2002) reveal that most students are capable of reading and writing but have difficulty with more complex literacy tasks. For example, they may be able to read with some degree of fluency and accuracy but might not know what to do with text
beyond saying the words and comprehending at what is essentially a literal level of performance. In the classroom, these students may appear *skillful* in the mechanics of reading but aren’t *strategic* enough in their abilities to handle reading tasks at the interpretive and applied levels of comprehension.

Moreover, student performance on various NAEP writing tasks suggests that the majority of today’s students manage to just “get by” with academic writing tasks. Their writing, by and large, includes some supporting details, an organizational structure appropriate to the writing task, and reveals sufficient command of the mechanics of writing (spelling, grammar, punctuation, and capitalization). Yet it may lack audience awareness and sufficient elaboration to clarify and enhance the central idea of the writing. In addition, the majority of writers surveyed on NAEP: Writing 2002 did not demonstrate the ability to think analytically, critically, and creatively through their writing.

Students who struggle with literacy, regardless of ability level, often get lost in a maze of words as they sit down with a text assignment, write, or word process on a computer. The text doesn’t make sense to them in ways that permit them to think deeply about ideas. Reading and writing are strategic acts, which is another way of saying that successful readers and writers use *cognitive and metacognitive* strategies to understand and compose text. Explicit instruction facilitates the development and use of these strategies.

**Explicit Instruction in the Use of Strategies**

Teaching reading and writing explicitly in content areas builds students’ confidence as text learners as well as their competence in the use of literacy-related learning strategies. Explicit instruction shows students how to use literacy to think deeply about texts. Teaching reading and writing explicitly engages students in *metacognitive learning* in the use of literacy strategies.

**Metacognition and Learning**

Metacognition involves awareness of, knowledge about, regulation of, and ability to control one’s own cognitive processes (Brown, Bransford, Ferrara, & Campione 1983; Flavell 1976, 1981). Simply, it is our ability to think about and control our own learning. As teachers, we have metacognition in our particular subject areas. Translating our metacognition into lessons that students understand is the hallmark of effective content area teaching. Science teachers, for example, have a metacognition of science. They have knowledge about themselves as scientists; they have knowledge of the tasks of science; and they have the ability to monitor and regulate themselves when conducting experiments, writing results, or read-
ing technical material. Science teachers can monitor and regulate themselves because they know how to perform a set of core process strategies. They know how to observe, classify, compare, measure, describe, organize information, predict, infer, formulate hypotheses, interpret data, communicate, experiment, and draw conclusions. These are the same strategies a student taking a science course is expected to learn. A science teacher's job is to get students to think like scientists. The best way for students to learn to think like scientists is to learn to read, experiment, and write like scientists (L. Baker 1991).

Showing students how to think like scientists, historians, literary critics, mathematicians, health care professionals, artists, or auto mechanics puts them on the road to independent learning. Students need to know the whats, whys, hows, and whens of strategic reading and writing. They should know enough to be able to recognize the importance of (1) using multiple strategies, (2) analyzing the literacy task before them, (3) reflecting on what they know or don't know about the topic to be read or written about, and (4) devising plans for successfully completing the literacy task and for evaluating and checking their progress in accomplishing the task (Brown 1978).

Metacognition has two components. The first is metacognitive knowledge; the second is regulation. Metacognitive knowledge includes self-knowledge and task knowledge. Self-knowledge is the knowledge students have about themselves as learners. Task knowledge is the knowledge they have about the skills, strategies, and resources necessary for the performance of cognitive tasks. The second component, self-regulation, involves the ability to monitor and regulate the reading and writing process through strategies and attitudes that capitalize on metacognitive knowledge (Baker & Brown 1984). Self- and task knowledge and self-regulation are interrelated concepts. The former are prerequisites for the latter. Together, self-knowledge, task knowledge, and self-regulation help explain how readers and writers can begin to assume responsibility for their own learning.

Self- and Task Knowledge
Teachers need to know if students know enough about their own reading and writing strategies to approach content area text assignments flexibly and adaptively. Different text assignments, for example, may pose different problems for readers to solve. For this reason, when they are assigned text material, students must be aware of the nature of the reading task and how to handle it. Is the student sophisticated enough to ask questions about the reading task? To make plans for reading? To use and adapt strategies to meet the demands of the text assignment? Or does a student who struggles with text approach every text assignment in the same manner—plowing through with little notion of why, when, or how to read the material? Plowing through cumbersome text material only once is more than students who struggle with reading can cope with. The prospect of rereading or reviewing isn't a realistic option for them. However, teachers are in a position to show students that working with the material doesn't necessarily entail the agony of slow, tedious reading.
Self-Regulation and Monitoring

To be in control of reading and writing, students must know what to do when they have trouble. This is what comprehension monitoring and self-regulation are all about. Do students have a repertoire of strategies within reach to get out of trouble if they become confused or get off track when they are reading or writing?

Linda Baker (1991) recommends six questions for students to ask themselves when they read to help monitor their comprehension:

1. Are there any words I don’t understand?
2. Is there any information that doesn’t agree with what I already know?
3. Are there any ideas that don’t fit together because I can’t tell who or what is being talked about?
4. Are there any ideas that don’t fit together because I can’t tell how the ideas are related?
5. Are there any ideas that don’t fit together because I think the ideas are contradictory?
6. Is there any information missing or not clearly explained? (p. 10)

Strategy Instruction

Strategy instruction helps students who struggle with text become aware of, use, and develop control over learning strategies (Brown & Palincsar 1984). Explicit teaching provides an alternative to “blind” instruction. In blind instructional situations, students are taught what to do, but this is where instruction usually ends. Although directed to make use of a set of procedures that will improve reading and studying, students seldom grasp the rationale or payoff underlying a particular strategy. As a result, they attempt to use the strategy with little basis for evaluating its success or monitoring its effectiveness. Explicit instruction, however, attempts not only to show students what to do but also why, how, and when. Pearson (1982) concludes that such instruction helps “students develop independent strategies for coping with the kinds of comprehension problems they are asked to solve in their lives in schools” (p. 22).

Strategy instruction has several components: assessment, explanation and awareness, modeling and demonstration, guided practice, and application. By way of analogy, teaching students to be strategic readers provides experiences similar to those needed by athletes who are in training. A coach (the teacher) is needed to provide feedback, guide, inspire, and share the knowledge and experiences that she or he possesses.

Assess What Students Know How to Do

The assessment component of strategy instruction is tryout time. It gives the teacher an opportunity to determine the degree of knowledge the students have
about a strategy under discussion. Moreover, assessment yields insight into how well the students use a strategy to handle a reading task. For these reasons, assessing the use of a strategy should occur in as natural a context as possible. Assessment can usually be accomplished within a single class period if these steps are followed:

1. **Assign students a text passage of approximately 500 to 1,500 words.** The selection should take most students ten to fifteen minutes to read.

2. **Direct students to use a particular strategy.** For example, suppose the strategy involves writing a summary of a text selection. Simply ask students to do the things they normally do when they read a passage and then write a summary of it. Allow adequate time to complete the task.

3. **Observe the use of the strategy.** Note what students do. Do they underline or mark important ideas as they read? Do they appear to skim the material first to get a general idea of what to expect? What do they do when they begin actually constructing the summary?

4. **Ask students to respond in writing to several key questions about the use of the strategy.** For example, What did you do to summarize the passage? What did you do to find the main ideas? Did you find summarizing easy or difficult? Why?

**Create Strategy Awareness and Explain Procedures**

Assessment is a springboard to making students aware of the **why** and **how** of a study strategy. During the awareness step, a give-and-take exchange of ideas takes place between teacher and students. As a result, students should recognize the **rationale** and **process** behind the use of a strategy. To make students more aware of a learning strategy, consider the following activities:

1. **Discuss the assessment.** Use your observations and students’ reflective responses to the written questions.

2. **Set the stage by leading a discussion of why the strategy is useful.** What is the payoff for students? How does it improve learning?

3. **Engage in activities that define the rules, guidelines, or procedures for being successful with the strategy.**

4. **Have students experience using the strategy.** They can practice the rules or procedures on a short selection from the textbook.

Awareness and explanation provide students with a clear picture of the learning strategy. The **why** and **how** are solidly introduced, and the road has been paved for more intensive modeling and demonstration of the strategy.
One way to help struggling readers self-assess and think about what they do when they read is to have them take the Metacognitive Reading Awareness Inventory (Miholic 1994). Correct responses to each item on the inventory are marked with a +, whereas “incorrect” responses are marked with a –. Teachers who use the inventory with a class should be sure to cover the + and – row. Not only does the inventory pique students’ curiosity about strategic learning but it also gives them a concrete idea of important strategies.

When struggling writers have difficulty, the teacher is in a strategic position instructionally to ask problem-solving questions that will help them monitor the writing process. These questions should model what a skilled writer—for example, the teacher—does to resolve problems related to different aspects of the writing or the process itself. These questions can help students to think about the nature of the writing task or focus on specific problems that students are having with their writing. Questions may center on the purpose of the writing, content, organization, audience awareness, or language and style issues: Where is my writing headed? Am I trying to do too much or too little? Will the reader of my writing be able to visualize the subject? Are there parts in my writing that are confusing? Are my main points in order? Is my paper interesting and readable? Is my “voice” and personality in the writing? As we will see later in the chapter, other instructional strategies, including teacher-led and peer-led conferences and response groups, are useful in showing students how to control and monitor their writing.

**METACOGNITIVE READING AWARENESS INVENTORY**

There’s more than one way to cope when you run into difficulties in your reading. Which ways are best? Under each question here, put a checkmark beside all the responses you think are effective.

1. What do you do if you encounter a word and you don’t know what it means?
   + a. Use the words around it to figure it out.
   + b. Use an outside source, such as a dictionary or expert.
   + c. Temporarily ignore it and wait for clarification.
   – d. Sound it out.

2. What do you do if you don’t know what an entire sentence means?
   + a. Read it again.
   – b. Sound out all the difficult words.
   + c. Think about the other sentences in the paragraph.
   – d. Disregard it completely.

3. If you are reading science or social studies material, what would you do to remember the important information you’ve read?
   – a. Skip parts you don’t understand.
   + b. Ask yourself questions about the important ideas.
   + c. Realize you need to remember one point rather than another.
   + d. Relate it to something you already know.
4. Before you start to read, what kind of plans do you make to help you read better?
  – a. No specific plan is needed; just start reading toward completion of the assignment.
  + b. Think about what you know about the subject.
  + c. Think about why you are reading.
  – d. Make sure the entire reading can be finished in as short a period of time as possible.

5. Why would you go back and read an entire passage over again?
  + a. You didn't understand it.
  – b. To clarify a specific or supporting idea.
  + c. It seemed important to remember.
  + d. To underline or summarize for study.

6. Knowing that you don't understand a particular sentence while reading involves understanding that
  + a. the reader may not have developed adequate links or associations for new words or concepts introduced in the sentence.
  + b. the writer may not have conveyed the ideas clearly.
  + c. two sentences may purposely contradict each other.
  – d. finding meaning for the sentence needlessly slows down the reader.

7. As you read a textbook, which of these do you do?
  + a. Adjust your pace depending on the difficulty of the material.
  – b. Generally, read at a constant, steady pace.
  + d. Continually make predictions about what you are reading.

8. While you read, which of these are important?
  + a. Know when you know and when you don't know key ideas.
  + b. Know what it is that you know in relation to what is being read.
  – c. Know that confusing text is common and usually can be ignored.
  + d. Know that different strategies can be used to aid understanding.

9. When you come across a part of the text that is confusing, what do you do?
  + a. Keep on reading until the text is clarified.
  + b. Read ahead and then look back if the text is still unclear.
  – c. Skip those sections completely; they are usually not important.
  + d. Check to see if the ideas expressed are consistent with one another.

10. Which sentences are the most important in the chapter?
  – a. Almost all of the sentences are important; otherwise, they wouldn't be there.
  + b. The sentences that contain the important details or facts.
  + c. The sentences that are directly related to the main idea.
  – d. The ones that contain the most details.

Model and Demonstrate Strategies

Once the why and a beginning sense of the how are established, the students should receive careful follow-up in the use of the strategy. Follow-up sessions are characterized by demonstration through teacher modeling, explanations, practice, reinforcement of the rules or procedures, and more practice. The students progress from easy to harder practice situations and from shorter to longer text selections. The following activities are recommended:

1. *Use an overhead transparency to review the steps students should follow.*
2. *Demonstrate the strategy.* Walk students through the steps. Provide explanations. Raise questions about the procedures.
3. *As part of a demonstration, initiate a think-aloud procedure to model how to use the strategy.* By thinking aloud, the teacher shares with the students the thinking processes he or she uses in applying the strategy. Thinking aloud is often accomplished by reading a passage out loud and stopping at key points in the text to ask questions or provide prompts. The questions and prompts mirror the critical thinking required to apply the strategy. Once students are familiar with the think-aloud procedure, encourage them to demonstrate and use it during practice sessions. Later in the chapter we explain in more detail the role that think-alouds play in modeling strategies.

Provide Guided Practice

Use trial runs with short selections from the textbook. Debrief the students with questions after each trial run: Did they follow the steps? How successful were they? What caused them difficulty? Have them make learning-log entries. Often, a short quiz following a trial run shows students how much they learned and remembered as a result of using the study strategy.

The practice sessions are designed to provide experience with the strategy. Students should reach a point where they have internalized the steps and feel in control of the strategy.

Apply Strategies

The preceding components of strategy instruction should provide enough practice for students to know why, how, and when to use the study strategies that have been targeted by the teacher for emphasis. Once students have made generalizations about strategy use, regular class assignments should encourage its application. Rather than assign for homework a text selection accompanied by questions to be answered, frame the assignment so that students will have to apply the strategies they are learning.

In the next section, we explain several research-based instructional practices that create frameworks for explicit instruction in the use of text comprehension strategies (Report of the National Reading Panel 2000). Throughout this book, other in-
structional practices will be developed in the use of text learning strategies for vo-
cabulary, comprehension, discussion, writing, and study.

**Strategic Reading**

Readers who struggle with texts are usually unaware of strategies that will help them construct meaning. Teachers can use think-alouds, reciprocal teaching, and question–answer relationships (QARs) to scaffold students’ use of comprehension strategies.

**Using Think-Alouds to Model Comprehension Strategies**

In think-alouds, teachers make their thinking explicit by verbalizing their thoughts while reading orally. Davey (1983) explains that this process helps readers clarify their understanding of reading and their understanding of how to use strategies. Students will more clearly understand the strategies after a teacher uses think-alouds, because they can see how a mind actively responds to thinking through trouble spots and constructing meaning from the text. 

Davey (1983) suggests five basic steps when using think-alouds. First, select passages to read aloud that contain points of difficulty, ambiguities, contradictions, or unknown words. Second, while orally reading and modeling thinking aloud, have students follow silently and listen to how trouble spots are thought through. Third, have students work with partners to practice think-alouds by taking turns reading short, carefully prepared passages and sharing thoughts. Fourth, have students practice independently. Use a checklist similar to the one shown in Figure 3.2 to involve all students while verifying use of the procedures. Finally, to encourage transfer, integrate practice with other lessons and provide occasional demonstrations of how, why, and when to use think-alouds. Five points can be made during think-alouds:

1. *Students should develop hypotheses by making predictions.*

2. *Students should develop images by describing pictures forming in their heads from the information being read.*

3. *Students should link new information with prior knowledge by sharing analogies.*

4. *Students should monitor comprehension by verbalizing a confusing point.*

5. *Students should regulate comprehension by demonstrating strategies.*

Let’s look at how each of these points can be modeled in a middle school earth science class.
Develop Hypotheses by Making Predictions

Teachers might model how to develop hypotheses by making predictions from the title of a chapter or from subheadings within the chapter. Suppose you were teaching with an earth science text. You might say, “From the heading ‘How Minerals Are Used,’ I predict that this section will tell about things that are made out of different minerals.” The text continues:

Some of the most valuable minerals are found in ores. An ore is a mineral resource mined for profit. For example, bauxite (BAWK-sight) is an ore from which aluminum is taken. Iron is obtained from the ore called hematite (HEE-muh-tight). Bauxite and hematite are metallic minerals.

Metallic minerals are metals or ores of metals. Gold, iron, and aluminum are examples of metals. Metals are important because of their many useful properties.

One useful property of many metals is malleability (mal-ee-uh-BIL-uh-tee). Malleability is the ability to be hammered without breaking. Malleability allows a metal to be hammered into thin sheets.

Develop Images

To model how to develop images, at this point you might stop and say, “I have a picture in my head from a scene I saw in a movie about the Old West. I see a blacksmith pumping bellows in a forge to heat up an iron horseshoe. When the iron turns a reddish orange, he picks it up with his tongs, and he hammers. The sparks fly, but slowly the horseshoe changes shape to fit the horse’s hoof.” The text continues:

Another property of many metals is ductility (duk-TIL-uh-tee). Ductility is the ability to be pulled and stretched without breaking. This property allows a metal to be pulled into thin wires.
Share Analogies
To model how to link new information with prior knowledge, you might share the following analogies. “This is like a time when I tried to eat a piece of pizza with extra cheese. Every time I took a bite, the cheese kept stretching and stretching into these long strings. It is also like a time when I went to the county fair and watched people make taffy. They got this glob of candy and put it on a machine that just kept pulling and stretching the taffy, but it never broke.” The text continues:

Metals share other properties as well. All metals conduct heat and electricity. Electrical appliances and machines need metals to conduct electricity. In addition, all metals have a shiny, metallic luster.

Monitor Comprehension
To model how to monitor comprehension, you can verbalize a confusing point: “This is telling me that metals have a metallic luster. I don’t know what that is. I’m also confused because I thought this section was going to be about things that are made out of different minerals. This is different from what I expected.”

Regulate Comprehension
To model how to correct lagging comprehension, you can demonstrate a strategy: “I’m confused about what metallic luster means, and I don’t know why the authors are talking about this when I expected them to talk about stuff made out of minerals. Maybe if I ignore the term metallic luster and keep on reading, I’ll be able to make some connections to what I expected and figure it all out.” The text continues:

Very shiny metals, like chromium, are often used for decorative purposes. Many metals are also strong. Titanium (tigh-TAY-nee-um), magnesium (mag-NEE-zee-um), and aluminum are metals that are both strong and lightweight. These properties make them ideal building materials for jet planes and spacecraft.

“Oh, they’re talking about properties of metals that make them especially good for making certain things, like aluminum for jets because it is strong and lightweight. Now I understand why they’re talking about properties. I’ll bet chrome and chromium are just about the same, because I know chrome is the shiny stuff on cars. I think metallic luster must mean something like shiny because chromium reminds me of chrome.”

Think-alouds are best used at the beginning of lessons to help students learn the whats and hows of constructing meaning with text. The next teaching strategy, reciprocal teaching, is an excellent follow-up to think-alouds. Reciprocal teaching helps students learn how to apply the strategy learned during a think-aloud so that they can understand the author’s message.
Using Reciprocal Teaching to Model Comprehension Strategies

When using reciprocal teaching, you model how to use four comprehension activities (generating questions, summarizing, predicting, and clarifying) while leading a dialogue (Palinscar & Brown 1984). Then students take turns assuming the teacher’s role. A key to the effectiveness of this strategy is adjusting the task demand to support the students when difficulty occurs. That is, when students experience difficulty, you provide assistance by lowering the demands of the task. As the process goes on, you slowly withdraw support so that students continue learning. When planning a reciprocal teaching lesson, there are two phases. The first phase has five steps:

1. Find text selections that demonstrate the four comprehension activities.
2. Generate appropriate questions.
3. Generate predictions about each selection.
4. Locate summarizing sentences and develop summaries for each selection.
5. Note difficult vocabulary and concepts.

In the second phase, decisions are made about which comprehension activities to teach, based on the students’ needs. It also helps determine students’ present facility with the activities so that you are prepared to give needed support during the process. Once students are familiar with more than one strategy, reciprocal teaching can be used to model the decision-making process about which strategy to use.

Using Question–Answer Relationships (QARs) to Model Comprehension Strategies

In Chapter 1, we highlighted the importance of prior knowledge in text comprehension as well as the match between the types of questions asked and levels of comprehension. As an instructional practice, question–answer relationships (QARs) make explicit to students the relationships that exist among the type of question asked, the text, and the reader’s prior knowledge. In the process of teaching QARs, you help students become aware of and skilled in using learning strategies to find the information they need to comprehend at different levels of response to the text (Raphael 1982, 1984, 1986).

The procedures for learning QARs can be taught directly to students by reading teachers and can be reinforced by content area specialists. Keep in mind, however, that students may come to your class totally unaware of what information sources are available for seeking an answer, or they may not know when to use different sources. In this case, it is worth several days’ effort to teach students the
relationship between questions and answers. It may take up to three days to show students how to identify the information sources necessary to answer questions. The following steps, which we have adapted for content area situations, are suggested for teaching QARs:

1. **Introduce the concept of QARs.** Show students a chart or an overhead transparency containing a description of the four basic question–answer relationships. (We recommend a chart that can be positioned in a prominent place in the classroom. Students may then refer to it throughout the content area lessons.) Point out the two broad categories of information sources: “In the text” and “In your head.” Figure 3.3 is adapted from a chart recommended by Raphael (1986).

2. **Begin by assigning students several short passages from the textbook.** (These should be no more than two to five sentences in length.) Follow each reading with one question from each of the QAR categories on the chart. Then discuss the differences between a “right there” question and answer, a “think and search” question and answer, an “on your own” question and answer, and an “author and you” question and answer. Your explanations should be clear and complete. Reinforce the discussion by assigning several more short text passages and asking a question for each. Students will soon begin to catch on to the differences among the four QAR categories.

3. **Continue the second day by practicing with short passages.** Use one question for each QAR category per passage. First, give students a passage to read along with questions and answers and identified QARs. Why do the questions and answers represent one QAR and not another? Second, give students a passage along with questions and answers; this time they have to identify the QAR for each. Finally, give students passages, decide together which strategy to use, and have them write their responses.

4. **Review briefly on the third day.** Then assign a longer passage (75 to 200 words) with up to six questions (at least one each from the four QAR categories). First, have students work in groups to decide the QAR category for each question and the answers for each. Next, assign a second passage, comparable in length, with five questions for students to work on individually. Discuss their responses either in small groups or with the whole class. You may wish to work with several class members or colleagues to complete the QAR activity in Box 3.3. It was developed by a high school English teacher as part of a short story unit.

5. **Apply the QAR strategy to actual content area assignments.** For each question asked, students decide on the appropriate QAR strategy and write out their answers.
Where Are Answers to Questions Found?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In the Text:</th>
<th>In Your Head:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Right There</strong>&lt;br&gt;The answer is in the text. The words used in the question and the words used for the answer can usually be found in the same sentences.</td>
<td><strong>Author and You</strong>&lt;br&gt;The answer is not in the text. You need to think about what you know, what the author says, and how they fit together.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Think and Search</strong>&lt;br&gt;The answer is in the text, but the words used in the question and those used for the answer are not in the same sentence. You need to think about different parts of the text and how ideas can be put together before you can answer the question.</td>
<td><strong>On Your Own</strong>&lt;br&gt;The text got you thinking, but the answer is inside your head. The author can't help you much. So think about it, and use what you know already about the question.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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CHAPTER 3: STRUGGLING READERS AND WRITERS

RESEARCH-BASED BEST PRACTICES

QAR Awareness in a High School English Class

A high school English teacher develops students' awareness of QARs with the following guided practice activity. The teacher selects an excerpt from Richard Wilbur's *A Game of Catch* and asks students to answer a set of questions about the excerpt. The students are also asked to identify the QAR associated with each question.

"Got your glove?" asked Glennie after a time. Scho obviously hadn’t.

"You could give me some easy grounders," said Scho. "But don’t burn ‘em."

"All right," Glennie said. He moved off a little, so the three of them formed a triangle, and they passed the ball around for about five minutes, Monk tossing easy grounders to Scho, Scho throwing to Glennie, and Glennie burning them into Monk. After a while, Monk began to throw them back to Glennie once or twice before he let Scho have his grounder, and finally Monk gave Scho a fast, bumpy grounder that hopped over his shoulder and went into the brake on the other side of the street.

"Not so hard," called Scho as he ran across to get it.

"You should’ve had it," Monk shouted. It took Scho a little while to find the ball among the ferns and dead leaves, and when he saw it, he grabbed it up and threw it toward Glennie. It struck the trunk of the apple tree, bounced back at an angle, and rolled steadily and stupidly onto the cement apron in front of the firehouse, where one of the trucks was parked. Scho ran hard and stopped it just before it rolled under the truck, and this time he carried it back to his former position on the lawn and threw it carefully to Glennie. (From "A Game of Catch," copyright 1953 by Richard Wilbur. Reprinted by permission of Harcourt, Inc. Originally appeared in *The New Yorker*, 1953.)

1. **Question:** What are the three boys doing?
   **Answer:**
   **QAR:**

2. **Question:** Why did Monk throw the ball so hard to Scho?
   **Answer:**
   **QAR:**

3. **Question:** Who was throwing the ball to Monk?
   **Answer:**
   **QAR:**

4. **Question:** How would you describe Scho’s throwing ability?
   **Answer:**
   **QAR:**

5. **Question:** How would you characterize Monk?
   **Answer:**
   **QAR:**

6. **Question:** Why do friends sometimes get frustrated with one another?
   **Answer:**
   **QAR:**

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   **QAR:**

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   **QAR:**

6. **Question:** Why do friends sometimes get frustrated with one another?
   **Answer:**
   **QAR:**
Once students are sensitive to the different information sources for different types of questions and know how to use these sources to respond to questions, variations can be made in the QAR strategy. For example, you might have students generate their own questions to text assignments—perhaps two for each QAR strategy. They then write down the answers to the questions as they understand them, except that they leave one question unanswered from the “think and search” category and one from the “on your own” or “author and you” category. These are questions about which the student would like to hear the views of others. During the discussion, students volunteer to ask their unanswered questions. The class is invited first to identify the question by QAR category and then to contribute answers, comments, or related questions about the material.

A second variation involves discussions of text. During question-and-answer exchanges, preface a question by saying, “This question is right there in the text,” or “You’ll have to think and search the text to answer,” or “You’re on your own with this one,” or “The answer is a combination of the author and you. Think about what the author tells us and what we already know to try and come up with a reasonable response.” Make sure that you pause several seconds or more for “think time.” Think time, or “wait time,” is critical to responding to textually implicit and schema-based questions. Gambrell (1980) found that increasing think time to five seconds or longer increases the length of student responses as well as the quality of their speculative thinking.

Once students are familiar with QARs, they can be used in combination with a variety of interactive strategies that encourage readers to explore ideas through text discussions.

Modeling comprehension strategies through think-alouds, reciprocal teaching, and QARs provides the instructional support that will help students do more than simply read the words on a page. These procedures scaffold students’ use of strategies that will help them read texts in a more thoughtful and thought-provoking manner.

Another dimension of strategy instruction involves showing students how to think strategically about the writing process as they engage in content area activities that culminate in finished written products. Strategic instruction helps struggling writers to develop “ownership” as they work collaboratively with the teacher and other students to solve problems that they are experiencing during the various stages of writing (Collins 1997).

**Strategic Writing**

One of the teacher’s first instructional tasks is to make students aware that the writing process occurs in stages (Kirby, Liner, & Vinz 1988). It’s the rare writer who leaps in a single bound from an idea-in-head to a finished product on paper. In this book, writing strategies are defined broadly within stages of writing. The stages may be defined broadly as *discovery, drafting,* and *revising* (Maxwell 1995). Table 3.1 presents an overview of these stages.
Within each of these stages, there are strategies at the command of writers that they can use to facilitate the process. As teachers, we can make struggling writers aware of these strategies, demonstrate how to use them, and provide students with guided practice in their use. There is a catch, however. Strategic writing instruction is not as simple as “giving” strategies to students (Collins 1997). Learning to write strategically involves a transaction between teacher and student, not a transmission from teacher to student. Students who struggle with writing must construct writing strategies that will work for them as they confront real problems in real writing situations. This is best facilitated under the watchful eye and coaching of the teacher. If this is the case, then, students will need time to write in class—and they must write often—for strategy instruction to make a difference in their control of the writing process.

As we make instruction explicit in the use of writing strategies, keep in mind that the stages in the writing process are by no means neat and orderly. Few writers proceed from stage to stage in a linear sequence. Instead, writing is a recursive process; that is to say, writing is a back-and-forth activity. As teachers we want to engage students in the use of discovery strategies to explore and generate ideas and
make plans before writing a draft, but once they are engaged in the physical act of composing a draft, writers often discover new ideas, reformulate plans, rewrite, and revise.

**The Discovery Stage: Generating Ideas, Planning, and Organizing**

What students do before writing is as important as what they do before reading. Discovery strategies involve planning, building and activating prior knowledge, setting goals, and getting ready for the task at hand. In other words, discovery refers to everything that students do before putting words on paper for a first draft. The term *prewriting* is often used interchangeably with *discovery*, but it is somewhat misleading because students often engage in some form of writing before working on a draft.

Discovery is what the writer consciously or unconsciously does to get energized—to get ideas out in the open, to explore what to say and how to say it: What will I include? What's a good way to start? Who is my audience? What form should my writing take? Scaffolding the use of discovery strategies in a classroom involves any support activity or experience that motivates a student to write, generates ideas for writing, or focuses attention on a particular subject. Students can be guided to think about a topic in relation to a perceived audience and the form that a piece of writing will take. A teacher who recognizes that the writing process must slow down at the beginning will help students discover that they have something to say and that they want to say it.

Getting started on the right foot is what the discovery stage is all about. Generating talk about an assignment before writing buys time for students to gather ideas and organize them for writing. Discussion before writing is as crucial to success as discussion before reading. In preparing seniors to write letters to the editor concerning the legal age for drinking in Ohio, the teacher of a course called “Problems in Democracy” asked students for their opinions: “At what age do you think people in Ohio should be permitted to drink alcoholic beverages?” The discussion among the senior students, as you might anticipate, was animated. The teacher followed the discussion with an assignment of a newspaper article on the legal age issue. Further discussion generated more ideas and helped students formulate a stand on the issue. In addition to talk, several strategies that will help students make discoveries for writing by gathering and organizing ideas include **brainstorming**, **clustering**, and **concept matrix charting**.

**Brainstorming**

Brainstorming permits students to explore and examine ideas as a quick way to get started for writing. It helps them set purposes for writing because it gives students problems to solve. Examine how the following two variations on brainstorming can be easily adapted to writing situations:
1. Present a concept or problem to students based on some aspect of what they have been studying. Set a time limit for brainstorming ideas or solutions. The teacher calls, “Stop,” but allows *one more minute* for thinking to continue. Creative ideas are often produced under time pressure.

In a high school special education class for students with learning problems, several weeks had been spent on a unit dealing with the Civil War era. As part of their study of the Reconstruction period, students explored issues such as the rebuilding of the South and the dilemma presented by the freed slaves. One of the culminating learning experiences for the chapter on freed slaves concerned a writing activity designed to help students synthesize some of the important ideas that they had studied. As part of her introduction to the writing assignment, the teacher began the discovery phase of the lesson with a lead-in: “Using any information that you can recall from your text or class discussion, think about what might have been some of the problems or concerns of a freed slave immediately following the Civil War. Let’s do some brainstorming.” As the students offered ideas related to prejudice and lack of money, homes, and food, the teacher listed them on the board. Getting ideas out in the open in this manner was the first step in the discovery strategy. (In the next subsection, on clustering, we discuss how the teacher used brainstorming as a stepping stone for students to organize ideas and make decisions about the writing assignment.)

2. Engage students in “brainwriting” (Rodrigues 1983). Here’s how it works. Divide the class into cooperative groups of four or five students. Each group member is directed to jot down ideas about the writing assignment’s topic on a sheet of paper. Each student then places his or her paper in the center of the group, chooses another’s list of ideas, and adds to it. The group compiles the best ideas into a single list and shares them with the class. Two advantages of brainwriting are that every student contributes and there is time given to consider ideas.

Brainstorming techniques allow students to become familiar with a topic and, therefore, to approach writing with purpose and confidence. Often teachers combine brainstorming with another discovery strategy: clustering.

**Clustering**

To introduce the concept of clustering, write a keyword on the chalkboard and then surround it with other associated words offered by the students. In this way, students learn not only how to gather ideas for writing but also how to connect the ideas within categories of information. Teacher-led clustering provides students with an awareness of how to use clustering as a writing strategy. Once they are aware of how to cluster their ideas around a topic, students should be encouraged to create their own clusters for writing. Box 3.4 provides steps in the clustering strategy for students to follow.

In our discussion of brainstorming, we described how a special education teacher used the list of ideas generated by her students to explore the concerns
of freed slaves during the post–Civil War period. This was a first step in the rehearsal phase of the writing activity. The second step was to cluster the words into meaningful associations based on student suggestions. The teacher modeled the activity by choosing as the keyword the concept of freed slaves. She then drew a line to the upper right corner of the chalkboard and connected the keyword to the word problems. She connected some of the words generated by students during brainstorming to the cluster. The teacher then asked what some of the results of the freed slaves’ problems would be. One student volunteered the word suffering. The teacher wrote suffering in the upper left corner of the cluster and
asked the students to brainstorm some examples. These examples were then connected to the cluster.

The remainder of the clustering session centered on discussion related to the aid freed slaves received and the opportunities that resulted from the Reconstruction years. Figure 3.4 depicts the completed cluster that the teacher and students produced on the chalkboard.

With the cluster as a frame of reference, the students were assigned to write what it would have been like to be a freed slave in the 1860s and 1870s. They were asked to consider what the form of the writing should be. Because the textbook presented a variety of primary sources (including diary entries, newspaper clippings, and death notices), the students could, if they wanted, write in one of those forms. Or they could approach the writing activity as a historian would and write an account that might be read by other students as a secondary source of information.
Students should begin to develop their own clusters for writing as soon as they understand how to use the strategy effectively. They should feel comfortable enough to start with a basic concept or topic—written in the center of a sheet of paper—and then to let go by making as many connections as possible on the paper. Connections should develop rapidly, “radiating outward from the center in any direction they want to go” (Rico 1983, p. 35). Because there is no right or wrong way to develop a cluster, students should be encouraged to play with ideas based on what they are studying and learning in class.

The value of clustering in writing shouldn’t be sold short. Gabriele Rico (1983), a leading proponent of this discovery strategy, maintained that it not only “unblocks and releases” information stored in the student writer’s mind but that it also generates inspiration for writing. Moreover, clustering becomes a self-organizing process. According to Rico (1983), “As you spill out seemingly random words and phrases around a center, you will be surprised to see patterns forming until a moment comes—characterized by an ‘Aha!’ feeling—when you suddenly sense a focus for writing” (p. 35). Students can discuss their clusters in small groups and share their plans for writing. Or, as Rico recommended, they can begin to write immediately after clustering.

**Jot-Charting**

Similar to clustering, jot-charting provides a way for students to organize information. However, it doesn’t rely on freely associating ideas to a key concept word. Instead, jot-charting helps students to collect and connect ideas by outlining them on a matrix. The strategy is especially appropriate for writing that relies on explanation and description of ideas, people, events, characters, or processes.

Across the top of the matrix, list some of the main ideas that are to be analyzed or described in the writing assignment. Along the side of the matrix, list some of the areas by which these ideas are to be considered. Students complete the chart by jotting notes and ideas from course material, class lectures, and so on in the spaces created by the matrix.

A language arts teacher used jot-charting as a planning tool for a writing activity that compared famous heroes from the stories that the class had read. The activity directed students to write about how the heroes (David, Hercules, Beowulf) approached and handled challenges. The jot-chart in Figure 3.5 helped students to reread selectively and to take notes in preparation for the writing assignment.

Students in the language arts class discussed their jot-charts before engaging in writing. Jot-charting can be an effective outlining strategy for writing and also has value as a study strategy in that it provides a framework on which students can organize and relate information.

**Drafting**

The drafting stage involves getting ideas down on paper in a fluent and coherent fashion. The writer drafts a text with an audience (readers) in mind.
If students are primed for writing through discovery strategies, first drafts should develop without undue struggle. The use of in-class time for drafting is as important as allotting in-class time for reading. In both cases, teachers can regulate and monitor the process much more effectively. For example, while students are writing, a teacher’s time shouldn’t be occupied grading papers or attending to other unrelated chores. Teachers can do much to influence the quality of writing and learning as students are writing:

When students are writing during class time, the teacher can take an active role. For example, monitor facial expressions—they often tell when a student is starting to get in a jam and needs help. Float around the class during a writing assignment, glancing at first paragraphs and rough beginnings, offering advice if it seems needed—in other words, help students get it right *while* they are writing and encourage them to solve problems the first time around. (Tchudi & Yates 1983, pp. 12–17)

The drafting stage, then, should be a time to confer individually with students who are having trouble using what they know to tackle the writing task. Serve as a sounding board or play devil’s advocate: “How does what we studied in class for the past few days relate to your topic?” or “I don’t quite understand what you’re getting at. Let’s talk about what you’re trying to say.” Students should also have the opportunity to confer with one another: “There are great benefits from such forms of peer collaboration as encouraging writers to bounce ideas off one another, reading draft paragraphs aloud to seek advice, pumping their friends for new advice” (Tchudi & Yates 1983, p. 17). Teacher feedback and peer collaboration underscore the importance of response in the writing process.

**Revising**

Revising a text is hard work. Struggling writers often think that *rewriting* is a dirty word. They mistake it for recopying—emphasizing neatness as they painstakingly transcribe from pencil to ink. They need to recognize that revising strategies help
them to “take another look”—to rethink a paper. This is why good writing often reflects good rewriting. From a content area learning perspective, rewriting is the catalyst for clarifying and extending concepts under study. Revising text hinges on the feedback students receive between first and second drafts.

Teacher feedback is always important, but it’s often too demanding and time consuming to be the sole vehicle for response. It may also lack the immediacy that student writers need to “try out” their ideas on an audience—especially if teachers are accustomed to taking home a stack of papers and writing comments on each one. The “paper load” soon becomes unmanageable and self-defeating. An alternative is to have students respond to the writing of other students. By working together in “response groups,” students can give reactions, ask questions, and make suggestions to their peers. These responses to writing-in-progress lead to revision and refinement during rewriting.

**Student Response Groups**

The purpose of peer response groups is to provide a testing ground for students to see how their writing influences a group of readers. Writers need response to sense the kinds of changes they need to make.

There’s an important difference between response and evaluation. Response involves an initial reaction to a first draft. The reaction is usually in the form of questions to the writer about the content and organization of the writing. Both teacher and student share responsibility for responding. Evaluation, however, involves a final assessment of a piece of writing that has progressed through drafts. The teacher has primary responsibility for evaluating a finished product.

Learning to respond to writing in peer groups requires training. Response groups must be “phased in” gradually—students can’t be expected to handle response tasks in groups without extensive modeling and coaching. Moreover, response groups shouldn’t be initiated too early in the school year. After a month or two of regular writing activity, students will be more confident in their writing ability and will, in all probability, have developed some fluency in their writing. It is at this point that they are ready to be introduced to responding and rewriting situations.

The following steps provide enough structure to shift the burden of feedback from teacher to students:

**Step 1.** Discuss students’ attitudes toward school writing and attempt “to shape new ones if existing attitudes are constricting or counterproductive” (Healy 1982, p. 268). For example, talk about writing as a process that occurs in stages. When students are engaged in an important writing task that will be presented to others (“published”), they shouldn’t expect a finished product in one sitting. A first draft is often rough around the edges. It usually needs focus and clarity. Let students know what you value in their writing. Moreover, emphasize the importance of “trying out” writing on an audience before tackling a final draft. Tryouts are a time to react as readers to writing, not nitpick over errors or correct writing as evaluators.
Step 2. Use the whole class as a response group to demonstrate how to give feedback to a writer. On an overhead transparency, show a paper that was written by an “anonymous” student from a different class. Read the paper aloud and talk about it. The goal is to practice talking about writing without posing a threat to any of the students. Camp (1982) suggested kicking off discussion with the question: “If you were the teacher of this student, and you received this paper, what would you decide to teach the student next, so that the next paper he or she writes will be better than this one?” (p. 21). Let the class brainstorm responses. List their suggestions on the chalkboard, and then ask the students to reach a consensus as to the most important points for improvement. Conclude the discussion by acknowledging that responses to content and organization have a higher priority than to mechanics. Writers-in-progress need feedback on how to set their content and organize it before attending to concerns related to spelling, capitalization, punctuation, and grammar.

Step 3. On an overhead transparency, project another paper from a different class and ask students to respond as the writing by making comments or raising questions. Write these on the transparency next to the appropriate section of the paper. You may find that students have difficulty with this task, so demonstrate several responses that tell what is positive about the paper. What do you as a reader like about it? What is done well? Note the differences between useful and useless feedback. The response “This section is confusing” is of little help to the writer because it isn’t specific enough. A useful response, however, is one in which the writer learns what information a reader needs: “I was confused about the Bay of Pigs invasion. Did Kennedy fail to give backup support to the commandos?” Students will soon catch on to the idea that a response gives information that helps the writer get a clear sense of the needs of the audience.

Step 4. Form cooperative groups of three or four students. Distribute copies of a paper that was written in a different class. Also pass out a response sheet to guide the group discussion. The response sheet should contain several questions that pattern what to look for in the writing. Figure 3.6 illustrates a response sheet.

Step 5. Form response groups to discuss first drafts that the students have written. Healy (1982, p. 274) recommends the following conditions for working in small groups:

- Keep the groups small—two to five at first.
- Have groups sit as far away as possible from other groups for noise control.
- Have students write the names of their response partners at the top of their original drafts.
After response partners have heard a paper read, have them make any comments or ask the writer any questions that occur to them. The writer will note these on the paper.

Encourage writers to ask for help with different sections of their papers. Have writers make all revisions on their original drafts before doing the final one. Have them staple both copies together.

A variation on these conditions is to use response sheets to guide the group discussions. They are particularly useful in the beginning, when the task of responding is still new to students. However, with enough modeling and practice, response sheets will probably not be necessary.

Once feedback is given on the content and organization of a draft, response group members should work together to edit and proofread their texts for spelling, punctuation, capitalization, word choice, and syntax. Accuracy counts.
Cleaning up a text shouldn’t be neglected, but struggling writers in particular must recognize that concern about proofreading and editing comes toward the end of the process.

Struggling readers and writers exhibit a learned helplessness characterized by a lack of control over literacy strategies and an ambivalent attitude toward anything that has to do with classroom activities involving reading and writing. As a result, they tend to avoid reading and writing or being held accountable for content literacy tasks in school. Students who struggle with text challenge the teacher to look for and experiment with instructional practices that actively involve them in the academic life of the classroom.

Teachers reach struggling readers and writers by scaffolding instruction in ways that support content literacy and learning. Throughout this chapter, we explore scaffolded instruction designed to help all students develop the ability to read and write strategically. To achieve this, we concentrated on the role of explicit instruction in the development and use of literacy strategies.

Strategic classrooms are places where students learn how to learn. We explored how to teach for metacognition so that students will be more aware of, confident in, and competent in their use of literacy strategies. Explicit strategy instruction includes assessing students’ knowledge of and use of strategies, explaining the rules and procedures involved in strategy use, modeling and demonstrating how to use a strategy, providing guided practice, and application in the use of strategies. Think-alouds, reciprocal teaching, and question–answer relationships (QARs) are three research-based instructional practices that help students develop text comprehension strategies.

Moreover, writing should be thought of and taught as a process. When students develop process-related writing strategies, they will be in a better position to generate ideas, set goals, organize, draft, and revise. The writing process occurs in stages; it is not necessarily in a linear sequence of events but more of a recursive, back-and-forth activity. The stages of writing explored in this chapter were defined broadly as discovery, drafting, and revising. Discovery-related writing strategies discussed in this chapter include brainstorming, clustering, jot-charting, and discussion. These help students to explore and generate ideas for the writing, set purposes, and do some preliminary organizing for writing. As students discover what to write about, they draft ideas into words on paper or on the computer screen. Drafting itself is a form of discovery and may lead to new ideas and plans for the writer. Revising strategies help students to rethink what they have drafted, making changes that improve both the content and organization of the writing. Response is essential for students while writing is in progress to develop revising strategies.

In the next chapter, we take a closer look at one type of student that often struggles with content literacy tasks—the English language learner. With every passing year, the United States becomes more linguistically
and culturally diverse. English language learners struggle with academic language and are often tracked in lower ability classes than language majority students. The dropout rate among English language learners is alarmingly high. How can content area teachers plan instruction to account for cultural and linguistic differences in their classrooms? Let’s read to find out.

Minds On

1. Picture a science class of twenty-five students from very diverse backgrounds—different social classes, different ethnicity, and varying achievement levels. Many of the students struggle with text materials. Describe some classroom strategies you might use to respond to struggling readers and writers while maintaining high standards of content learning.

2. What strategies do you feel would be most useful in helping to make writing assignments meaningful for struggling writers?

3. Your group should divide into two teams, one pro and one con. Review each of the following statements, and discuss from your assigned view the pros and cons of each issue.
   a. We write to discover meaning (to understand) as much as we write to communicate meaning to others (to be understood).
   b. Students need to know the purpose and audience for a writing assignment if they are going to write effectively.
   c. The stages of the writing process are so interrelated that a knowledge of them is of little practical value for students.

Hands On

1. Bring several copies of a favorite poem or short text to class. Following the “think-aloud” guidelines in the chapter, model the checklist for self-evaluation by (a) developing hypotheses by making predictions, (b) developing images, (c) sharing analogies, (d) monitoring comprehension, and (e) regulating comprehension.

2. Using a passage from a content area text, develop one example of each of the four QAR categories: (a) “right there,” (b) “think and search,” (c) “on your own,” and (d) “author and you.”

3. In the center of a blank sheet of paper, write the name of the first color that comes to your mind. Circle that color. Let your mind wander, and quickly write down all descriptive words or phrases that come to your mind that are related to that color word. Connect the words logically, creating clusters. Next, see what images these relationships suggest to you. Write a piece (e.g.,
a poem, a story, or an essay) based on your clusters. Exchange papers, and in pairs, comment on the following:

a. What is the best phrase in your partner’s piece?
b. What needs explanation or clarification?
c. What is the central idea of the piece?

With your partner, discuss how this exercise illustrates some of the characteristics of the discovery stage of writing.

4. Work with a partner to better understand the strategies you use during writing. Each partner is to observe the other during the following activity and to record the characteristics of the other’s process. For example, you might describe the writer pausing, sighing, gazing off, writing hurriedly, scratching out, and erasing. At the end of the activity, share your written description with the partner you observed to see if your observations match the writer’s own perceptions of the process.

For this activity, write down seven pairs of rhyming words, and then recopy the pairs, alternating words (e.g., hot, see, not, me). Next, give your list of rhymes to your partner, and have him or her write lines of poetry, using each word on the list as the final word in a line of the poem.

What did you learn from both observing and being observed as a writer in process?

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**e.Resources**

- Go to Chapter 3 of the Companion Website ([www.ablongman.com/vacca8e](http://www.ablongman.com/vacca8e)) and click on Activities to complete the following task:

  The following site contains a wealth of material for struggling students in all content areas: [www.sparknotes.com](http://www.sparknotes.com). The site includes review concepts, story summaries, math problems, and much more. Browse the various content areas and locate helpful information to assist struggling learners. Share your findings in small groups.

- Go to the Companion Website ([www.ablongman.com/vacca8e](http://www.ablongman.com/vacca8e)) for suggested readings, interactive activities, multiple-choice questions, and additional Web links to help you learn more about struggling readers.

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**Themes of the Times**

Extend your knowledge of the concepts discussed in this chapter by reading current and historical articles from the *New York Times*. Go to the Companion Website and click on eThemes of the Times.