Information Writing

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Structure and Cohesion		
The writer has not established a clear organizational structure. This writer is struggling with organization. It is likely that his book is a jumble of information about a larger topic, with no clear subheadings or internal organization. The writer may have a table of contents but the chapters actually contain a whole bunch of stuff unrelated to the chapter titles, or the writer may have skipped this part of the process altogether.	One of the most important things information writers do is organize their writing. Making chapters or headings is one way to make it easier for your readers to learn about your topic. It's like creating little signs that say, "Hey, reader, I'm about to start talking about a new part of my topic!" It helps to name what the upcoming part of your writing will be about and then to write about just that thing. When information writers notice they are about to start writing about something new, they often create a new heading that tells the reader what the next part will be about.	One thing ____ About that thing About that thing About that thing Another thing ____ About that next thing About that next thing ~~Something else~~ ~~Something else~~ Another thing ____ NOT: One thing Another thing The first thing A whole other thing
There is no logical order to the sequence of information. The writer has a clearly structured piece of writing and is ready to consider the logical order of the different sections of information. That is, she is ready to think about what sections of her text will come first, which will fall in the middle, and which will come last. In doing so, she will consider audience, as well as the strength of each part of her writing.	You are ready for a big new step. After writers learn to organize an information piece and have created perfectly structured sections and parts, they are often left asking, "What's next?" *What's next* is organizing again but doing it with more purpose. What I mean is this: writers ask, "Which part of my text should come first? Which should come second? What about third?" They think about what order makes the most sense for their particular topic. They might decide to organize from least to most important information, from weakest to strongest information, in chronological order, or in other ways.	Information writers sort their information **logically**. They might put the sections in order from least to most important, weakest to strongest, chronologically, or in other ways.

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Information in various sections overlaps. This writer attempted to organize his piece, but has various sections that overlap. The writer may have repeated similar information in several parts of his piece or may have attempted to give the same information worded differently. Often he has sections and subsections that are too closely related and therefore struggles to find different information for different parts.	It is great that you have a system for organizing things. It is sort of like this page is a drawer and you just put things about (XYZ) in it. And this chapter is a drawer and you just put stuff about (ABC) in it. There are a few mess-ups—places where you have some whole other things scattered in, or some things that are in two places. That always happens. You've got to expect it. So what writers do is just what you have done. They write organized pieces. But then, when they are done writing, they . . . Do you know? They reread to check. Just like you can reread to check your spelling, you can reread to check that the right things are in the right drawers, the right sections.	Writers reread to check that things are in the right drawers.
The writer is ready to experiment with alternative organizational structures. This writer may have a relatively strong organizational structure to her information piece, but you sense there are better options or more challenging avenues she might take. Then, too, she may have tried to organize her piece one way, but the topic does not lend itself well to the structure she has chosen. In either instance, she is ready to broaden her repertoire in regard to organizational structure and study mentor texts to imagine alternate ways her text might go.	One of the greatest things about information writing is that there are so many different ways a text can go. If we were to lay out a few different books on the same topic, we would find dozens of different ways the authors chose to organize them. Some authors, like Gail Gibbons, write chronologically, others write about different sections of a topic, and some authors use pros and cons or questions and answers to organize their information. The options are endless! When writers are looking to challenge themselves and try out some new ways of organizing their writing, they study mentor texts. One way to study an information text is to read, asking, "How does this author structure and organize his information?" Then, you can try out the same structure with your own writing.	Information writers study mentor texts and ask, "How does this author structure and organize his information? Then, they try the same with their own writing.
The writer has chosen a topic that is too broad. This writer has chosen a topic that is broad, such as dogs or the Civil War, and has likely created a table of contents that suggests the product will be more of an all-about book. In an attempt to make his writing more sophisticated, and the process of crafting an information piece more demanding, you will want to teach him to narrow his topic a bit.	I was looking at your topic choice earlier and thought to myself, "He is ready for a challenge!" You chose a topic that is very broad, very big. There is nothing wrong with that. In fact, it means you'll have a lot to say! But when information writers want to push themselves, when they want to craft a text that is more sophisticated, they narrow their topic. Today, I'm going to teach you how to narrow your topic by asking, "What is *one part* of this subject I can write a lot about?"	Writers challenge themselves by narrowing their topics. They ask, "What is *one part* of this subject I can write a lot about?"

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The piece lacks an introduction and/or a conclusion. This writer has written an information piece that is missing an introduction and/or conclusion. Alternatively, it may be that the writer attempted to introduce and then conclude her piece but did so in overly folksy or ineffective ways. (For instance, she might have begun, "My name is Michelle, and I'm going to teach you everything you want to know about sharks. They are really cool." Later, she'll likely end along the same lines: "That's everything about sharks! I hope you learned a lot!") She is ready to adopt a more sophisticated tone and learn more nuanced (and subtle) ways of pulling readers in and providing closure.	In stories, writers use introductions to pull their readers in. Their conclusions, or endings, usually give the reader some closure. Really, information writing isn't much different. Writers use introductions to *pull* readers in, often by giving them a little information on the topic (orienting them). Then, they give their reader a sense of closure by wrapping things up with a conclusion (sometimes restating some key points about the topic) and leaving the reader with something to think about.	Introductions pull readers in: • Give a bit of information about the topic. Orient your reader. Conclusions give readers closure and wrap things up: • Restate a bit about the topic. • Leave your reader with something to think about.
Elaboration		
Each section is short and needs elaboration. This writer has attempted to group her information, but each section is short. For example, she may have listed one or two facts related to a specific subsection but is stuck for what to add next.	Information writers need to be able to say a lot about each part of their topic, or to elaborate. There are a few things you can do to make each part of your book chock-full of information. One thing that helps is to write in partner sentences. This means that instead of writing one sentence about each thing, you can push yourself to write two sentences (or more) about each thing. So if I said, "George sits at a desk when he is at school" and I wanted to write with partner sentences, what else might I say about George sitting at his desk? You are right. It can help to fill in stuff about why, kinds of, where, how many, and so on. A whole other thing you can do to get yourself to say more is to use prompts like, "It's also important to know this because …"; "Also …"; and "What this means is …"	Writers Elaborate 1. They check to make sure they have at least four or five pieces of information for each subtopic. If not, they consider cutting that section and starting a new one. 2. Writers elaborate by creating partner sentences. 3. They use prompts like "It's also important to know …"; "Also …"; and "What this means is …" to say more about a particular piece of information.

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The writer elaborates by adding fact upon fact. This writer has elaborated but has done so by adding fact upon fact upon fact. As a result, his writing reads like a list rather than a cohesive section of text. This writer would benefit from learning to add a bit of his own voice back into his writing, relying not just on factual information, but on his own ability to synthesize and make sense of these facts for the reader.	You have tackled the first step in information writing—gathering the information needed to support various subtopics. Here's the thing, though. Writers don't *just* list facts for readers. It is also their job to take these facts and make something of them, to help explain why they are important to the reader. Writers often use prompts like "In other words … ," "What this really means is … ," "This shows … ," and "All of this is important because …" to help readers understand the information they've put forth.	Information writers don't just list fact after fact. They *spice up* their writing by adding a bit of their own voice: • "In other words …" • "What this really means is …" • "This shows …" • "All of this is important because …"
The writer goes off on tangents when elaborating. This writer has tried to elaborate on information but tends to get into personal and tangential details ("Dogs really are great pets. I have a dog, too. I had a cat, too, but she peed on the counter so my Dad got rid of her.") Or by repeating the same information again and again. Or by being chit-chatty ("And I love LOVE that and think it is really funny, so so funny.")	You are working hard to say a lot about your topic, aren't you? I have to give you a tip, though. Sometimes, in your hard work to say a lot, you are doing things that don't really work that well. Let me give you an example of things that don't work when writers are writing information books, and will you see if you do those things some of the time? Pretend I was writing about dogs, so I wrote that there are many kinds of dogs, and the kinds of dogs are divided into groups, like spaniels, retrievers, toy dogs, and so forth. If I then said, "And I have a dog and a cat, too, and the cat's name is Barney …" would that go in my report? You are right. It wouldn't go because it isn't really teaching information and ideas about the topic—and it might not even be about the topic. If I wrote "And I Love Love LOVE dogs," would that go? And if I said, "Some dogs are spaniels, some are retrievers," would that go? You see, there are things people do when they are trying to elaborate, to say more, that just don't work that well. So what writers do is they cross them out and try other ways to elaborate. You will want to reread your writing and to have the courage to say no sometimes. or Today, I want to teach you that information writers revise by checking to make sure all their information is important and new. They cut out parts where they started to talk about their own life too much and got off topic, parts where they included information that doesn't go with what they were writing about, or parts where they repeat the same thing more than once.	Information writers cut parts where: • They started talking about their life too much and got off topic. • They included information that doesn't fit with what the rest of the paragraph is about. • They repeated something they'd already written.

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The writer does not elaborate on information from outside sources. The writer has included information from outside sources, such as quotes, facts, or statistics, but does not elaborate on this information for his reader. As a result, his writing is often very short and hops from interesting fact to interesting fact.	I love all the research you have included in your information piece. It really shows that you are an expert on this topic. One way to show you are an expert, to show all you know about your topic, is by including outside information like quotes, facts, and statistics. Another way to be an expert and teach your readers (the way I'm going to teach you today) is by elaborating on those facts. Today, I want to teach you that writers don't just plop information into their writing. Instead, they explain what it means to their readers by using phrases like "What this means is …" or "In other words …"	Writers don't just plop information into their writing. Instead, they explain what it means to their readers by using phrases like "What this means is …" or "In other words …"
Language		
The writer incorporates quotes, facts, and statistics but does so awkwardly. This writer uses quotes, facts, statistics, and other outside information to elaborate on the sections of his information text. The information is well organized, and the facts and quotes are generally well placed but often sound awkward. It is not clear that the writer understands how to move from his words to the words and examples of an author or experts, and he needs help with ways to do this more fluently.	Quotes, facts, and statistics are incredibly important in information writing because they tell a reader that, yes, I have done my research and know a lot about my topic! Today, I want to teach you how to take quotes, facts, and statistics and make them sound like a part of your writing. You can do this by using transitional phrases like *for instance*, *one example*, or *according to*.	Writers use transitional phrases to introduce quotes, facts, and statistics. Example: Sharks aren't that dangerous. One example of this is basking sharks. People in the Hamptons often see them and they are slow-moving and harmless. According to Science-Facts.com, "more people die of alligator attacks than shark attacks."
Transitions from section to section sound awkward. This writer has organized her information piece into sections and paragraphs, but the transitions from part to part feel awkward. She would benefit from a few tips aimed at helping her ease readers into each new section of her text.	One of the hardest parts about being an information writer is moving from one part of a topic to the next. One second a writer is talking about the Lewis and Clark expedition, and the next second she is talking about the Louisiana Purchase. In her mind she knows how these two things connect (they are both about the Westward Expansion), but this isn't always clear to her readers. Today, I want to teach you how to write a topic sentence that reminds readers what your big topic is and introduces them to what your next section will be about. One way writers do this is by connecting each section back to the larger topic.	Information writers use topic sentences to say what a section will be about and explain how it relates to the big, overall topic. Example: Lewis and Clark were famous explorers who took on a daring adventure. They were an important part of the Westward Expansion. or Another important part of the Westward Expansion was the Louisiana Purchase, because it gave Americans new land to explore and settle.

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The writer does not incorporate domain-specific vocabulary. This writer has written about a topic but has done so without incorporating domain-specific vocabulary. It may be that the child simply glossed over using terms such as *caravan* or *brigade* (because he did not understand them or know how to incorporate them into his own writing) or used simpler language in place of complex vocabulary.	As an information writer, it's important that you come across as an expert on your topic. Readers expect to learn something new, and one way to teach them something new is by using technical, expert vocabulary. Today, I want to teach you that writers don't just toss these words into their writing, though. Instead, they learn what they mean, and then they define them for their readers. They can either say the word and then its definition, or tuck the word's definition into a sentence using commas.	Information writers use expert vocabulary (and define it for their readers, too). They can: • Say the word and then explain what it means. Example: Loyalists were people who remained loyal to the king during the American Revolution. • Tuck the definition into the sentence using two commas. Example: Loyalists, people who remained loyal to the king during the American Revolution, fought throughout the war.
The Process of Generating Ideas		
The writer chooses topics about which she has little expertise and/or that are difficult to research. This child often generates ideas quickly, and they often relate to her passions. She might decide to write about the melting of the polar ice caps and its effect on seals during a unit in which students are writing about areas of personal expertise or access to research material on that topic is limited and difficult to comprehend. This child needs help mining her life for topics that are closer to home and assessing her own ability to write long, strong, and focused about a particular topic.	Writers ask themselves some tough questions when they are choosing a topic for information writing. They ask: 1. Do I care about this topic? (You are already doing this!) 2. Do I know enough to imagine a possible table of contents? 3. Do I know one or two resources I can use to gather more information? If not, they pick a different topic.	When Choosing a Topic, Information Writers Ask: • Do I care about this topic? • Do I know enough to imagine a possible table of contents? • Do I know one or two resources I can use to gather more information?
The writer simply copies facts into his notebook. This writer's "collecting" amounts to copying facts from books into his notebook. He copies lines verbatim, rarely bothering to paraphrase or quote. It may seem as if the child is not being overly discriminatory about what to include. That is, if the book says it, he writes it. In this way, the child's notebook becomes an endless list of facts about a topic or, if the child has created organized categories, parts of a topic.	Research is a pretty hard thing to do as a writer. Researchers have a difficult job: They have to take the information that other people have written, sort through it, and then put it into their own words or quote it. You can't just copy what other authors have written into your notebook, because that would be stealing their words! Today, I want to teach you one way that writers take information from a book and incorporate it into their own writing. It's called paraphrasing. To paraphrase (or put something into your own words), it helps to read a chunk of text, close the book, say back an important part of what you just read, and then put it into your own words.	One way researchers put information into their own words is by paraphrasing. They: 1. Read a chunk of the text. 2. Close the book. 3. Say back an important part of what they just read. 4. Put it into their own words.

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The Process of Drafting		
The first draft is not organized. This writer has written a first draft that is disorganized. It may be that there is an underlying organizational structure (e.g., the writer grouped similar information together), but she did not use new pages, section titles, or transitions to let the reader in on this structure. Alternatively, the writer may have simply "written a draft," compiling all the information she collected into one ongoing piece of writing.	One of the most important things information writers do is organize. It can be hard for a reader to learn a lot of new information about, say, sharks. But when a writer organizes the information into sections, then it becomes easier for the reader to take it in. The reader knows that one part will be about sharks' bodies, another will be about what they eat, and another will be about their family life. As a writer, it's important to look at your draft and make sure that you've organized it in a way that will make sense to the reader. This usually means taking all the information or facts about one part of a topic (like sharks' bodies) and putting that together. Then, taking all the information about another topic (like what sharks eat) and putting that together. Then using section headings to make it clear what each part is about.	Information Writers Organize Their Writing! • Divide your topic into sections (you may have already done this while planning). • Put the information about one section together with a heading. • Put the information about another section together with a heading. • And so on … (Sometimes it helps to cut up your draft and tape different parts together!)
The Process of Revision		
The writer is "done" before revising. This writer is perfectly pleased with his first draft and declares, "I'm done" soon after completing it. Your revision minilessons do little to help inspire this writer to revise, and you feel you must constantly sit by his side and point out parts to revise in order for him to do the work.	I've noticed that you often have trouble thinking of ways to revise your piece. You write a draft and then it feels done. Sometimes when it is hard to come up with ideas for improving your writing, it helps to have a published writer help. You just look at a published book that you love and notice cool things that the author has done, then you revise to do those same things in your writing.	When writers feel done, they study a few mentor texts asking, "What has this writer done that I could try as well?"
The writer does not have a large repertoire of strategies to draw from. This writer lives off of each day's minilesson. She is task-oriented and generally applies (or attempts to apply) what you teach each day. This student is living on your day-to-day teaching as if it is all she has, rather than drawing on a large repertoire of known writing techniques and strategies.	Whenever I teach something, I love to see kids like you go off and give it a go. It means they are pushing themselves to try new things. But I also hope that isn't *all* kids do. We've talked about how writers carry invisible backpacks full of strategies. When I teach a minilesson, I give you something new to add to your backpack, but it is important to use everything else you have in there, too! Today, I want to teach you one way writers remind themselves of what they already know about revision. They look at artifacts like classroom charts and our information writing checklist and look back at old entries to remind themselves of the strategies they know. Then, they write an action plan.	Take Action! 1. Look at charts, your notebook, and the Information Writing Checklist. 2. Make a list of the ways you could revise. 3. Create an action plan for yourself.

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The Process of Editing		
The writer has edited but has missed several mistakes or would otherwise benefit from learning to partner-edit. This writer often thinks she has written what she intended to say, and therefore she overlooks many mistakes. She would benefit from learning to edit with a partner before publishing her writing.	I know that you have worked hard to use many of the editing strategies you know and have made many changes to your piece. As a result, it is clearer and more readable. Sometimes as a writer, though, you know so clearly what you *wanted* to say that you miss places where you may have said something in a confusing or incorrect way. That's why most writers have editors that look at their writing once it's done. Today, I want to teach you a few things you and your writing partner can do together. You can: • Read your piece aloud and ask your partner to check to make sure what you say matches what he or she sees. • Circle words you think are misspelled and try to figure them out together. • Use the class editing checklist together.	A Few Things You and Your Writing Partner Might Say to Each Other • "Reread your piece, and I'll make sure what you say matches what I see." • "Let's circle the words that we think are misspelled and try them again." • "Let's use our class editing checklist to proofread your piece."