

Chapter 1

WRITING FITNESS

January marks the beginning of a new calendar year and, for many, serves as the month of new commitments. This is the month when millions of individuals commit to a new year with better habits and behaviors. According to Forbes (Murphy, 2020) and *U.S. News and World Report* (Luciani, 2015), over half of Americans make New Year's resolutions. While resolutions involve several topics and ideas, some of the most popular New Year's resolutions involve some aspect of health and fitness. In fact, YouGov reports that at least half of all New Year's resolutions involve some type of health and fitness aspect including losing weight, changing eating habits, and exercising (Ballard, 2020).



For many, even those resolutions that are not fitness related are short lived, because over 80% of all New Year's resolutions get abandoned by mid-February (Luciani, 2015). This happens because often resolutions are unclear or are unrealistic due to the high expectations of the goal itself. In other cases, excitement and commitment to a new habit, especially a new fitness routine, are short lived. If a new fitness habit requires rearrangement of daily life and doesn't have clear, attainable goals, we abandon it because of time constraints, lack of enjoyment, or sheer difficulty.

Imagine setting "training for and running in a marathon" as a New Year's resolution. That takes training and discipline, but it looks different for someone who is already a runner versus someone who is a novice runner. An established runner is already training, but maybe for shorter distances like a 5K or 10K run. Training for a marathon, though more intense than their current training, is manageable because they are already conditioned for running. They already have the right shoes, they have been running on a regular basis, and they have completed some type of running task (5K, 10K, etc.). While this new training may be more intense, for someone who already has experience as a runner, even for shorter distances, this goal is more likely to be met.

Imagine that same task, training for and running a marathon, for someone who is not a runner. This person doesn't know anything about the art of running. They aren't sure how to train for the race or even what shoes they should wear. They may not know how often they should run, for how long, or how long their marathon training should last. They do not own a treadmill, they aren't sure what types of food runners eat, and they know little about any pre- or postrace rituals that should be in place. How easy will it be for that person to complete the goal of running over twenty-six miles? Do you think they will be successful? Probably not. Certainly, it would be more difficult than it would be for the person who has running experience. Because of this lack of experience and the nature of the goal itself, it is likely that the new runner's goal won't be met, simply because it is just too difficult.

For many students, writing feels like running a marathon without prior running experience. Many students fail to perform well for some of the same reasons that individuals struggle with lifestyle and fitness changes. They haven't been trained properly, and their goals are not clearly articulated. In some instructional cases, students are expected to run a marathon and they haven't had experience or success with a 5K or even a jog around the classroom. As a result, writing may seem like a difficult task to master and complete, let alone excel in performance. Why? Think about the writing tasks that many students take part in. Many of the write-on-demand tasks require students to write extended pieces with little time for warmup and brainstorming. Others require students to write about topics they have little experience with. Some are extended responses that require endurance and stamina, while others demand students quickly compile written evidence in a sprint task. Yet other written engagements warrant discipline-specific language and structure and a solid understanding of the foundational aspects of multigenre compositions. When students find that they are unsuccessful at the writing that is thrown at them, many of them do what runners do when they realize that training for a marathon every day without a plan or with the wrong shoes is too hard: They quit.

This is why the teaching of writing is a lot like a workout regimen. It takes discipline, practice, and a specific schedule with goals that are directly linked to results and products. Before a training program commences, the end goal should be clear as well as the steps needed to achieve that goal. Plus, time must be allocated to complete the training—you have to schedule the time for regular training.

When you think about a workout regimen, what tenets and components stand out to you? Do you find yourself comparing multiple aspects of fitness or lifestyle changes and find that there are some similarities? Regardless of the type of training or purpose, most workout regimes have some common components. These might include:

- A schedule
- Targeted results
- Goals
- Expected time commitment
- Varying level of difficulty
- A trainer or expert guide
- A fitness log or tracker
- A plan of activity
- Communities of support from peers
- Supplements and nutritional information that can increase performance

All these items assist individuals as they begin this new task. Because of the multifaceted nature of these characteristics, success is more likely simply because there are multiple components working in tandem to help an individual achieve this goal. In addition, many fitness programs include a preview of the plan, so users know exactly what to expect from the program.

When training students as writers, consider how the above characteristics transfer into instructional practices. Ask yourself some of these questions:

- Is writing a fixed component on the instructional schedule?
- Do the students have writing goals for their progress?
- As the instructor, are there class goals in place for writing?
- Do you know how much time you have for writing in the day?
- Do they see writing modeled by their teachers?
- Who is assisting with the training of the students? (Not just the teacher, but peers as experts and authors through the integration of author's craft.)
- What kind of writing community are students part of?
- How often is literature used as a supplement in writing class?

Taking an inventory of the items above can assist teachers as they begin to plan purposeful writing instruction and training. When planning for writing instruction, it helps to have a solid grasp not only of the *how* we plan to teach but also the *why*. Breaking an instructional goal down into specific chunks, as in the following table, can help teachers plan purposeful lessons that can lead to more effective instruction. (You can find a printable copy of this on the online companion website, resources.corwin.com/WritingWorkouts.)

Writing Instructional Goal	Why Is This Goal Relevant?	How Can This Goal be Achieved?
What do I want students to do?	Why do students need to know this?	What will I as the instructional leader do to facilitate the goal? What will the students do to achieve the goal?

Even though many students have the potential to become skilled writers, a significant portion of our writers are out of writing shape. Why?

- They haven't been trained properly.
- They don't have a steady diet of authentic writing.
- They suffer from writing injuries or conditions (fragmentitis, bad cases of the run-ons, FOWM—Fear of Writing More).
- They lack writing endurance and stamina.
- They have limited opportunities to practice their writing skills.
- Their literature diets lack variety.

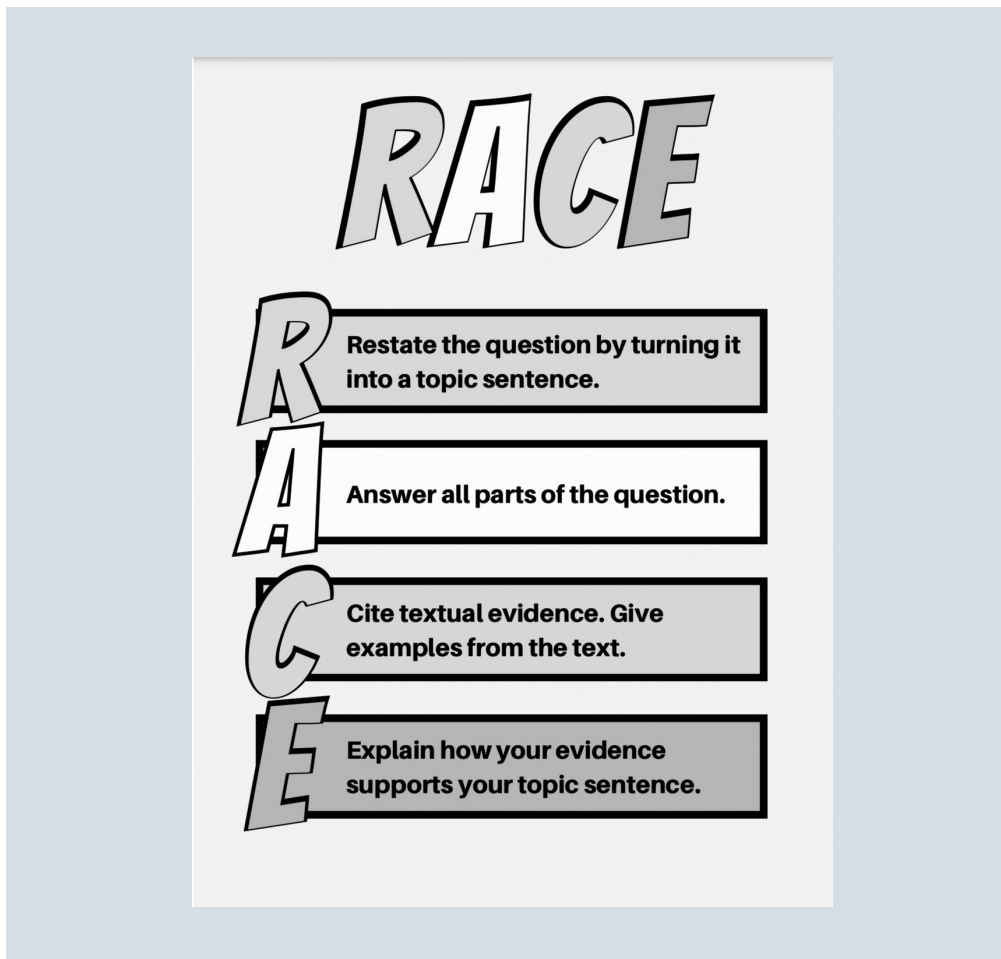
Yet all these deficiencies can be remedied by implementing writing into the daily lives of students and their instructional experiences. By offering students multiple opportunities to practice and train, teachers can help their writing fitness to improve over time, which can lead to stronger writers who can lift heavier topics, write for longer amounts of time, and improve their overall writing health. Not only that, but writers who are in good writing shape can also write on demand, complete sprint writing tasks, and stretch their writing muscles by playing around with words and phrases. Good writing shape involves a solid baseline of multiple writing proficiencies, not just one area.

Getting Into Writing Shape

So what does getting into writing shape look like? First of all, just like real fitness plans, the writing workouts that have lasting results are not quick fixes and don't work overnight. In other words, this is not a five-paragraph juice cleanse that will make you produce a product that passes an assessment on Friday, only to have you struggle with the same skills the following week.

There is no one quick formula, no RACE to the constructed response finish line or RAFT for that multigenre writing task. While some formulas might work for some types of writings, when students only know that one approach, many attempt to utilize

it for every single type of writing. Consider the RACE strategy, for example. RACE, simply put, stands for Restate, Answer, Cite, and Explain. While this strategy may work for a constructed response that demands textual evidence as a component of the composition, it simply won't work in a persuasive or narrative setting. Similarly, all constructed responses that require textual evidence won't work with this approach either. Several years ago, I was in a fourth-grade math classroom in a district that exclusively utilized the RACE writing strategy. I watched a fourth grader as she struggled with placing the right information into the appropriate letters of the acronym. When she asked her teacher how she should restate the problem, the teacher told her to simply rewrite the math problem for the R letter. The student did as she was instructed, then moved on to answer the problem, only to find herself confused again with the Cite section of the strategy. Her teacher told her skip that part and move on to the Explain portion. As a result, this strategy was not an effective one for this lesson and for this purpose. Why?



- It included components that were not necessary or possible due to the nature of the question.
- Due to its one-size-fits-all nature, specific goals and purposes of the lesson were not taken into account.

- Because this district was *only* utilizing this strategy for *all* their writing tasks, both the student and teacher did not have another strategy in their writer's toolbox that could be implemented.

In this case, this student was *overtrained* in the use of one specific strategy that was only useful for certain types of writing. Think of it like a weightlifting routine. If someone wants to enter the World's Strongest Man competition, would training focus on just the biceps? No. Instead, it would focus on all or most muscle groups since the end goal is to build overall strength. Similarly, in the classroom, getting into good solid writing shape involves training across genres and formats. A solid writing workout regimen acknowledges that the craft of writing cannot be exclusively restricted to a formulaic method of construction. Rather, it is a unique set of skills and competencies that work in tandem with subtle nuances and the craft of language, which create a story, an explanation, an account, an argument. Students who are in good writing shape have teachers and facilitators who recognize that they teach *writers* not writing.

Think about some of the strategies that students might use when drafting, brainstorming, or organizing. Take the outline, for example. The purpose of an outline is for writers to organize their compositions, and build a skeletal framework or overview of what the paper is supposed to be about *before* they actually write it. I bet there are many reading this book who wrote your paper *first*, and then wrote your outline. If you're nodding your head reading this, then the outline was not an effective strategy for you. (Hey, it didn't work for me either!) If that is the only strategy that was provided for students when it comes to developing a plan for a paper, then some students are going to struggle.

However, what if teachers offered students multiple methods for organizing ideas? What if students took part in writing instruction that showed them that there are multiple ways to plan and organize your paper? How about using any of the following?

- Outlines
- Colored Post-it maps
- Story boards
- Jamboard or Dabble online
- Timelines
- Paint strip blocks for multiple sources
- Graphic organizers

And the list goes on. A writer who has more tools in the toolbox is more likely to produce compositions that are more fully developed and effective than a writer who only has one or two tools at his/her disposal.

Now, let's think back to that runner who has training experience but is now preparing for a marathon. Of course, this new training is still going to be difficult. The runner may still struggle, but certainly not to the degree of the one who has never run anywhere before. The same goes for student writers. While new genres and writing tasks demand different

subsets of skills, a student who writes often and for a variety of purposes is better prepared to take up a new writing task than one who writes on rare occasions. That's why a student who has a lot of experience writing in the persuasive genre will find that training in that genre can assist when they begin writing an argument. One who has experience with informational writing can use this experience when completing longer research writing tasks. This related training helps build stronger overall writers. Some of the related writings that students complete are listed in Figure 1.1.

Figure 1.1

Related Writings/Tandem Training		
Persuasive essays	Personal narratives	Informational writing
Argumentative papers	Historical fiction	Research papers
Position papers	Story scripts	Outlines
Movie/book reviews	Story boards	Summaries
	Autobiographies	Lab reports
	Memoirs	Biographies

Components of Effective Writing Training

What should an effective writing fitness program look like? What yields real writing results? What makes a healthy writer? Effective writing training includes several crucial components:

1. Daily opportunities for writing

When writing becomes a part of the daily routine, the expectation is set. When will we write? Today, tomorrow, and the next day. We write daily. Students who write daily become better writers (<https://www.literacyworldwide.org/>; <https://ncte.org/>; <https://www.nwp.org/>).

2. Inclusion of relevant and authentic writing tasks

Writing engagements that are relevant and authentic allow students to write for real purposes and real audiences. Plus, when students can write about what they know first, they are able to leverage background knowledge and create more developed writing pieces. In addition, because many students are already writing outside of the academic setting, but don't necessarily recognize the connection between home and academic writing (Lenhart, 2008), these authentic writing opportunities are imperative. Giving students opportunities to write for authentic purposes and establishing a link between personal and academic writing can help students become more aware of this crossover.

3. Goals-oriented, process-based instruction

Not only should instruction involve specific short-term and long-range performance goals, but writers also need support when developing goals for individual writing pieces. Because part of the writing process involves planning and thinking about the overarching purpose of the piece, setting goals and making plans for their writing

helps writers think through their writing tasks, resulting in better final products. To effectively achieve this, students should have an intimate working knowledge of the writing process itself.

In a nutshell, the writing process involves planning, drafting, revising, and editing, but it is important to note that these processes are recursive and can occur at any given point in the construction of a piece. Recognizing that writing is not a linear process helps students view writing as fluid and dynamic rather than in a formulaic, scripted nature. Don't like how that sentence sounds now? Don't wait till your entire draft is complete; go ahead and revise it now. Make it halfway through your piece only to realize you need to include another section or component? Go back to your original plan and modify it. Showing students examples like these can help them realize that they can make shifts and changes throughout the process, not just at certain check points. Plus, when students understand the actual process of writing, their compositions become longer, more developed, and qualitatively better (Graham et al., 2012).

4. Training variety

To improve overall writing fitness, students should take part in training engagements that utilize a variety of formats and offer opportunities to practice writing across a wide variety of genres and purposes and for a number of audiences. Providing opportunities for students to take part in a variety of writing activities and tasks increases the likelihood that they will be stronger writers overall. Plus, students should take part in writing engagements that vary in complexity, overall length, and topic. For example, proficiency in a specific genre—take the persuasive one, for example—should involve training that utilizes multiple topics, formats, and audiences to prepare a writer who is in good persuasive shape.

5. Expert input

When training, students need the opportunities to engage and learn from and with a variety of experts. These experts should come from a number of areas and aren't exclu-

sive to the teacher charged with teaching the class. Instead, utilizing peers, mentor texts and authors, as well as other writers from additional areas offers unique perspectives and breadth for young writers. Plus, when young writers see writers represented from a variety of backgrounds, it asserts and reaffirms the notion that anyone can be a writer. In addition, allowing students to see and hear how experts struggle is key when building confidence. Let students see how writers sometimes can't come up with a solid sentence, forget how to spell in front of the class, or have days where they can't come up with any ideas that seem *writable*. This can help students build confidence in their own writing and assist in building classroom community as well.



Stop & Think

While I enjoy a variety of fitness programs, I recently began one that was beyond intense. Although I have a lot of experience working out, this particular one was very hard for me. One of the main reasons I did not quit had to do with the "experts" who were leading this training. They ALL were in better shape than me, and most (truthfully, probably all) of them were younger than me, yet every single one of them struggled, too. As a result, I didn't feel defeated. In fact, I felt encouraged. If these experts were having a hard time, then it's ok for me to struggle, too!

6. Communities of support and feedback

Writers can grow and thrive within a supportive community of feedback. For writers to learn and improve their writing, opportunities for feedback are necessary. Because feedback drives revision, nurturing a supportive community and fostering relationships that capitalize on safe spaces can aid students in their writing endeavors. Building a community with this in mind puts the teacher and students as cooperative partners who learn from each other (NCTE, 2018).

7. Balanced diet of reading and writing

Not only do students need to train appropriately and often, but they also need a balanced reading and writing diet. To grow as healthy writers, students must digest a variety of literature types. Merging contemporary titles with canonical texts; utilizing digital texts, graphic novels, and poetry; and presenting students with choices that represent diverse authors, characters, and perspectives helps develop healthy readers and writers.

Using the components outlined previously when working with writers helps develop strong writers. When students are in good writing shape, they can accomplish a number of goals. Here's what a student in good writing shape can do:

- Write for a variety of purposes and audiences
- Write for extended amounts of time
- Complete short bursts of targeted writing
- Revisit and revise writing pieces
- Give and receive feedback used to guide and shape future revisions
- Plan, execute, and amend long- and short-term writing goals
- Implement different writing strategies and approaches for different writing engagements

Now, all these benefits for getting into writing shape don't mean that writers sometimes don't want to write, can't think of ideas, or get frustrated with the task. Even professional athletes and trainers have days where they don't want to go to the gym. Writers are no different. Just as a swimmer needs a day off after a three-day intense meet, sometimes writers need a day of recovery or rest. Yet don't be fooled by rest days; even on those days, students are still getting trained. Instead of high intensity training, it might simply include a quick one-sentence response to a reading or a paint strip collection of words they like, or it might be through a read-aloud where we ask them to think about a portion of the story and map it out in their heads. Regardless, all these can translate later into something they are doing in their writing.

Quick Tip!

Share with students select author interviews from YouTube or authors' websites that talk about the writing process, specifically the struggle involved. This past year our Writing Project Site has hosted over forty authors for book clubs. These virtual conversations revealed that every single one of these experts has their own writing struggles. Whether it was manuscript rejections, facing writer's block, or simply lacking the motivation to write, all our visiting authors agreed that writing can be a struggle sometimes!

How This Book Can Help

Chapters in this book outline and address specific types of writing training and explore what types of writing engagements fit within those areas. Sample schedules and goal documents follow on the companion website, along with recommended approaches for students at varying writing abilities.

Further are some highlights from each chapter that may help you determine just where you want to start reading first. However, you'll find that the layout of the book in some ways follows the natural progression and framework of a workout. Looking at the brief synopsis of the chapters provides information on what types of engagements are included in each section. Doing this first can help ensure that the time spent is not wasted on strategies or engagements that don't fit your purpose or time availability. You may find that you dip in and out of this book as you locate strategies that best fit the goals of your instruction. If you haven't been including as much writing in your instruction or are a little apprehensive with going full tilt right off, start with the Writing Warmups chapter, the Cold Starts and Cooldowns chapter, or the Rest, Recover, Revise chapter. Regardless, each chapter offers unique and novel approaches for developing and nurturing young writers.

Chapter 2—Writing Warmups

This chapter includes writing engagements that allow students to warm up and stretch their writing muscles. These tasks are quick and easy to implement because they require minimal planning and preparation. In addition, they transcend a variety of genres and delivery methods so they are natural winners in today's diverse classrooms. Plus, writing warmups serve as the precursor for larger, fully involved writing engagements to come. Although they require little planning and preparation, their strategic, purposeful placement can enhance and improve student performance in a longer writing task.

Chapter 3—Targeted Training

To strengthen specific types of writing or skills, targeted training is necessary. In this chapter you'll find specific ideas for the teaching of voice, grammar, comparing and contrasting, point of view, and textual evidence, which are just some of the specific training lessons included. If you are searching for ways to teach specific skills using contemporary and engaging material, this chapter offers excellent approaches with easy implementation ideas.

Chapter 4—High Intensity Training

Some of the academic writing engagements that students are charged with executing are intense. Not only are students required to write lengthy compositions, but many academic writing engagements also require them to analyze and synthesize multiple sources, apply sophisticated placement of textual evidence, and craft a solid position

statement. In this chapter, high intensity writing tasks are offered, including argumentative compositions, multisource research, thesis statements, and more.

Chapter 5—Cold Starts and Cooldowns

Just like warmups, students need opportunities to cooldown from a writing task. Typically used at the end of a class period, at the culmination of a writing task, or following a unit of study, cooldowns offer students the chance to reflect, process, and respond to material they have completed. Some of these include new exit slip ideas, reflection formats, and other informal out-the-door assessments.

Chapter 6—Rest, Recover, Revise

Writers who are in good writing shape know that revising is an integral part of the writing process. In reality, there is no real final draft; we could keep revising and rewriting forever. In this chapter, ideas for revising and revisiting pieces are used including Bless, Press, Address; First Off; Stretch a Sentence; and more.

Chapter 7—Stretch Day

There are days when writers can stretch their muscles with writing tasks and ideas that allow them to play around with words and language. With these opportunities, students get to take part in playing with writing. Students will stretch by creating Blackout Poetry, Movie Soundtracks, Prepositional Phrase Poems, and more.

Chapter 8—A Balanced Diet of Reading and Writing: The Literature and Writing Students Need to Thrive

Part of developing healthy writers includes feeding them the right material along with their writing tasks. Learn why and how to integrate new and engaging literature in writing instruction that captures diverse perspectives and views, along with offering students opportunities for reading and research, publishing and sharing, and serving as literacy advocates.

Online Companion Website

On the companion website, you'll find all the handouts or templates needed to accomplish some of the strategies listed in the book: <http://resources.corwin.com/WritingWorkouts>.



Companion
website to
*Writing
Workouts*