

The Writing Pyramid

Try to Avoid 'Temporary' Language!

WHAT AND WHY: For beginning writers with complex communication needs, writing often consists of:

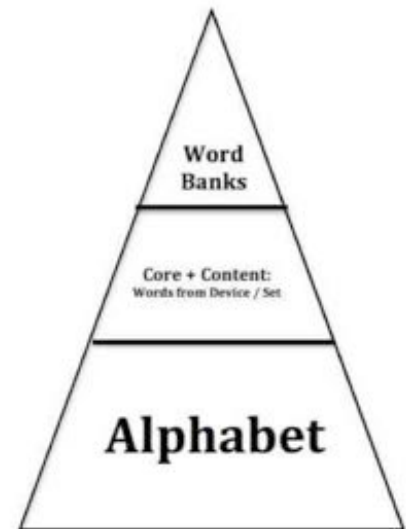
- Copying or tracing;
- Errorless writing;
- Use of limited symbol sets

Use of the Writing Pyramid can help teachers, parents, and therapists remember that students need access to multiple modes for writing!

WHO IS THIS FOR: This is especially important for emergent writers who:

- Struggle to write with a typical pencil
- Use Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC), whether high tech or light tech

Writing Pyramid



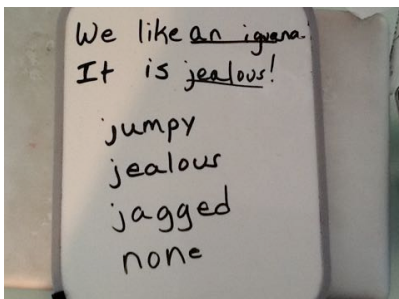
Dr. Caroline Ramsey Musselwhite
2013 www.aacintervention.com

WHAT ARE THE COMPONENTS?

Read the Bookette: The bookette, *Write to Talk / Talk to Write* (Musselwhite & Hanser, 2003, www.aacintervention.com) for more information about the vocabulary sets that emergent writers with complex communication needs might access.

Word Banks (Closed Vocabulary Sets):

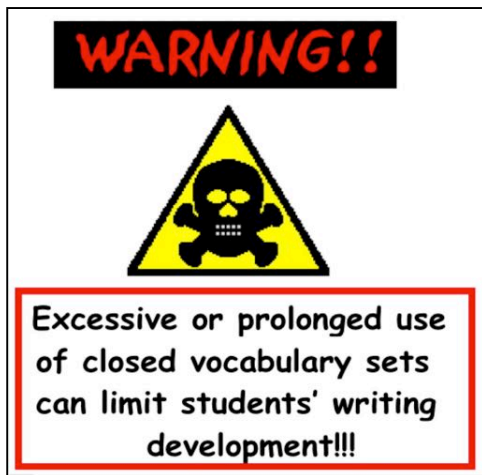
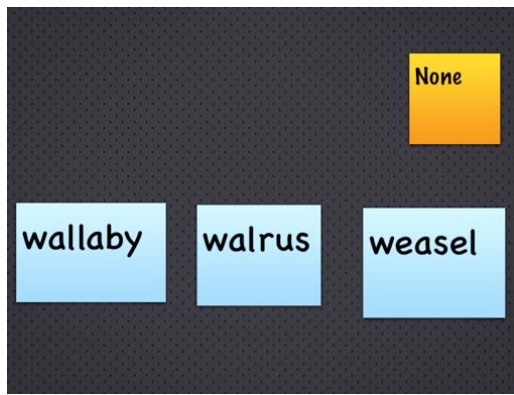
Word banks can be used in addition to the alphabet, to support writing. However, often they are used in isolation, such as the symbols shown in the activity pictured. The student was offered a limited set of describing words and nouns to create this 'writing' project.



Word banks can also be presented in the format of written words, presented through in light tech format, using PostIts or dry erase board.

Word banks can also be presented via high tech means. Samples are apps such as *Sticky* or *Glow Coloring*.

In these samples, the student first picked a letter then was presented with three possible options. Thus, the student was picking an animal, and chose W, then was offered 3 animals. Another student was selecting a describing word, and picked C, then selected from 3 choices.



The bottom line about word banks? Use them sparingly!!! While they can help students develop a product that 'looks great on the wall', they can limit writing development, as students are not generating or sharing their OWN ideas!

Core + Content: Words from the Communication System

Core words are those high frequency words that might be used to write about any topic (pronouns, articles, helping verbs, etc).

Content words refer to words from categories such as: foods, clothing, action words, describing words, etc.

For example, one student used the five words below to summarize a newspaper article for a class assignment. All of the words were stored on her high tech communication device.

Police camera paper ticket mail

It's easy to figure out that she was summarizing an article about a new stop light camera in her community! She was able to translate the ideas into writing using words that she 'owned' – that is, words already in her system!

Another student was asked to summarize how Scrooge changed from the beginning to the end of the book *A Christmas Carol*. Her two-word response shows that she absolutely 'gets it!'

cares about

This 'core + content' approach reflects what individuals can do if they have a robust communication system, which high tech or light tech.

A third student has just finished reading a book about a hero. He uses his PODD (Pragmatically Organized Dynamic Display) system to describe the character, using words such as:

REALLY NICE SMART STRONG

Some strong advantages of use the student's existing robust communication system are:

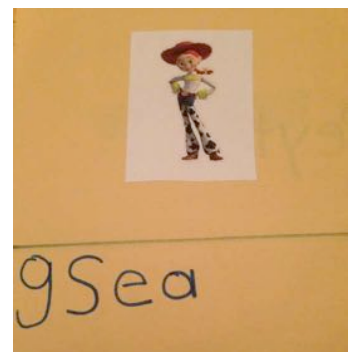
- 1) Students are using the same system for writing and talking
- 2) They can develop more motor automaticity.

The Alphabet

Use of the alphabet, even for beginners is extremely important for a number of factors such as;

- 1) Using the alphabet is the ONE way that students can express absolutely anything that they want;
- 2) As Erin Sheldon observed, once a student uses the alphabet no one can doubt him or her again;
- 3) The interrelationship between reading and writing is well-known; when beginning writers use the alphabet to try to write a word, they must sound out the word in their head.

The sample on the right shows a student writing about one of her favorite characters. The 5 year old used an alternative pencil, the Alphabet Flipbook to choose these letters. (In case you don't know her, that is Jessie!).



For more information, see the July, 2014 AAC Intervention tip, Alternative Pencils:

<http://www.aacintervention.com/home/180009852/180009852/Tips/2014/07Jul2014/HanserRespondingToScribble2014.pdf>



The example on the left shows a student, age 10, who used eye gaze on her Eco device to write about a photo. She had been to a concert to see Clint Black, (CB) and was asking us WHERE he was now (WH).

Combining Vocabulary Sets

Students often combine vocabulary sets. This sample shows how an 11 year old student used the language on her communication device AND the alphabet to summarize a book that she'd read. Up and down refer to the pig riding up and down on a bicycle. The letters can represent many things, such as G for GO and eeee for WHEE. I have shown how these would be represented on the Writing Pyramid.



Summary:

The Writing Pyramid demonstrates that across time, we hope that students will rely more on the alphabet and core + content vocabulary. Just as we try to limit desserts in our personal diets, we should limit word banks in students writing diets!