



Literacy Connects

A Content Literacy Newsletter from Regional Professional Development Program-Issue XII



Writing for Precision and Concision Across the Curriculum

Research shows that students should write frequently; however, curricular and time constraints interfere with writing in the content areas. Teachers need easy strategies that engage students in writing activities that will augment existing curriculum without adding to their already overburdened workload. One strategy that will allow students to demonstrate content knowledge and research skills without creating mountains of paperwork for teachers is the **Short Statements Strategy**

Short Statements requires that students write one or two paragraphs of three or four well-developed, information-rich sentences each. This strategy develops research skills while teaching students to be precise and concise in their writing. As the pieces are short, they are not only easier to grade, but less likely to be found on the Internet, thus reducing the incidence of plagiarism. Although students are thrilled at the prospect of writing research papers of only several paragraphs, they soon discover this type of writing requires extensive research and more thought and planning than longer papers. For each of the following activities, encourage students to use action words, precise language, and sentence combining.

- **The Brief Bio:** Students write brief biographies of historical or modern figures being studied. They briefly explain who, what, when, where and why. Students can research famous scientists, authors, mathematicians, artists, or athletes.
- **The Place/Event Statements:** Students provide a brief description of a place or event being studied. They put the place/event in historical context, explain its significance, and discuss the major people involved.
- **Compare/Contrast Statements:** Students address the relationship between terms or ideas presented in class. Students write a thesis sentence containing the main point, a comparison sentence that points to similarities between the terms or ideas, and a contrast sentence that highlights the differences. For example, in science students can compare and contrast a virus and bacteria or a protist and a fungus; in math, they can discuss different functions or geometric figures; in social studies, the branches of government or causes of wars.
- **Process Statements:** Students discuss a particular process in one or two paragraphs, such as photosynthesis, the rock cycle, factoring, or graphing. This is particularly useful in classes like science, math, art, or P.E.

Simple Summaries work well when used as a follow-up to journal writing. Topics can be introduced during journal, allowing students to reflect on what they do and do not know. They then research to fill in knowledge gaps and develop a piece of writing that reflects existing knowledge, research and critical thinking skills, and writing ability.

NOTE: For ideas on using journals to teach content, see *Literacy Connects*, Issue XI.

These ideas were taken from "Putting Gel Pen to Paper" by Michael Yell (ASCD, November, 2002)