



Step Up to Writing Strategy Spotlight

Avoiding the *Things* Trap

Ever have a student who uses non-specific language? Maybe his or her writing looks like this:

There are a lot of things students should know about Internet safety. Bad things happen to kids who do stuff on the Internet that is not safe. Some things are fun to do on the Internet but stuff can happen even if it's fun.

Step Up to Writing includes a Strategy (4-18 in the Intermediate manual and 4-19 in the Secondary manual) that can be helpful for students whose word choice could be improved upon.

First, the teacher puts topic sentences on the board or overhead and demonstrates how to replace *things* with more descriptive words. The class then works together to fix a variety of sentences, followed by partners fixing several sentences. Finally, students read their or a classmate's writing, underline any non-specific words, and re-write sentences using more descriptive vocabulary. Although the strategy aims specifically at improving topic sentences, it can be applied to any sentences.

Step Up includes a Tool with *things* alternatives, including: abilities, actions, advances, advantages, adventures, agreements, attributes, behaviors, benefit, characteristics, choices, concerns, conflicts, contributions, corrections, details, difficulties, effects, events, experiences, facts, features, feelings, frustrations, ideas, impressions, improvements, incidents, items, matters, movements, occasions, occurrences, parts, performances, periods, places, points, powers, problems, projects, promises, qualities, reasons, remedies, resources, responses, rules, sections, situations, skills, successes, surprises, talents, themes, thoughts, troubles, and type.

Copy the tool and include it in the guides or notebooks of students who struggle with word choice.

Analyzing a Paragraph

This is a QUICK and INFORMATIVE strategy. Once students have written a paragraph, whether it's about the solar system, our constitution, or the character Huck Finn, they can do a quick analysis. Check out Strategy 10-9 in your manual.

Students find the first word of the first sentence and record it on Tool 10-9. Then they record the first word of each additional sentence on the Tool. Next they count the number of words in each sentence, identify the verbs used in each sentence, any WOW! words, and finally specific content words that were used. By completing the Tool 10-9, students and teachers can see patterns that lead to weak paragraphs. This gives students who are unsure of what they should revise a clear starting point for improving their writing.

Reaching Every Child Through...

- Common Concepts
- Common Strategies
- Common Activities

Common Language
+ Common High Expectations

= SUCCESS

~Maureen Auman

