



Introduction

This volume of *GED as Project* uses actual items and essay prompts from the Practice Test PA as the basis for the Learning Projects and applies an integrated approach to the teaching of writing similar to that established in *GED as Project: Pathways to Passing the GED*, Introduction and Math. In order to write a passing essay for the GED Language Arts Test, learners need to understand and use each stage of the writing process.

The Learning Projects presented in this volume move learners to an understanding of the stages of the writing process by making them slow down, plan, and organize their writing. As learners move through the sequence of Learning Projects, they are immersed in the development of a piece of writing from the earliest pre-writing strategies to the final moments of revision. One of the greatest strengths of this *GED as Project, Writing* approach to the writing process is that the Learning Projects break the writing process down into two tasks: Writing and Revising.

As has been the case with previous volumes of *GED as Project*, learners move through Learning Projects in a manner that incorporates previous learning into current learning. Learners begin the writing process simply, and every new Learning Project they work through incorporates that which has been learned previously. This method of building on previous knowledge provides learners with feelings of accomplishment and growth that encourage them to continue their learning.

Introduction to Writing Learning Projects and Inquiry Activities

In the first two Writing Learning Projects, focus is placed on the steps needed to begin the writing process and on the writing process itself. In Learning Project 1, the writing process is laid out for learners in easy-to-follow activities: choosing a topic, generating relevant details, and organizing the details. After these pre-writing steps have been completed, learners begin to write the first draft of the essay. Learning Project 1 helps learners develop a solid foundation in the understanding of their topic and the development of their essay before beginning to write. These pre-writing strategies are crucial, as they allow learners to have their thoughts developed and organized before they write the first word. Learners can then turn their focus entirely to the writing.

Learning Project 2 presents learners with the Essay Scoring Rubric used by the official GED essay scorers. Knowing and understanding how their essays will be scored will help learners understand the importance of key elements of a passing essay. In Inquiry Activity 2-1, learners are presented with the Essay Scoring Guide and are made familiar with the criteria for a passing essay on the GED test. The next activity, Inquiry Activity 2-2, gives learners the opportunity to use the Essay Scoring Guide to evaluate and score an essay that has been provided to them. Inquiry Activity 2-3 continues to immerse the learners in the scoring rubric by encouraging them to evaluate their own writing and the writing of their peers using the Essay Scoring Guide. This final activity allows learners to see how their writing matches up to the criteria for a passing essay and lets them see where they need to improve. This step allows learners to work within the context of their own writing. Working in this context brings the learning closer to them both emotionally and intellectually. Getting feedback on their writing is the best way for writers to understand where to make improvements in their writing.

After learners have become immersed in the writing and evaluation processes, they need to learn how to go about improving and revising their writing. To achieve this end, the last three Learning Projects of this volume shift focus from writing to revising. With the shift to revision also comes the integration of the GED Language Arts, Writing Multiple-Choice test. These revision Learning Projects introduce the multiple-choice items from Practice Test PA as a means of exploring the various aspects of revision.

Learning Project 3 begins by focusing on clear expression, one of the most important aspects of a passing essay on the GED test. More than anything else, GED essay scorers are looking for essays in which the topic and supporting details are expressed clearly and thoroughly. Inquiry Activity 3-1 has learners identify areas in a passage from the Practice Test PA that are not clearly expressed or could be improved. Learners rewrite the passage for clarity. After rewriting, the learners are presented with multiple-choice questions from the PA that specifically address problems in the passage. Learners check what they have done with the passage against what the multiple-choice answer choices suggest. If their revisions match the correct answer, they have grasped the task. If they have revised incorrectly, a group or class discussion can be useful to help identify what is needed to revise correctly.

Learning Projects 4 and 5 continue the revising process. Learning Project 4 focuses on revising for mechanics and



usage, and Learning Project 5 addresses style. Learning Project 6 focuses entirely on multiple-choice questions and is most appropriate for learners who are ready to take the GED test.

The GED as Project Approach to Writing

Writing and teaching writing are particularly difficult tasks. With other subject areas -- reading, math, science, and social studies -- the content is available from the beginning: the stories, the formulas, the facts. Teaching these subjects, while not easy, is a more straightforward matter of helping learners discover and interpret the content in front of them. Writing, however, is completely different. In asking our learners to write, we are asking them to start with nothing and end with something, and ultimately to end with something good enough to pass the GED essay test. But this can be a long and bumpy road. Essentially, we are asking our learners to write and to make their voices heard. Teaching writing is the art of encouraging our learners to look inside themselves, to think critically, and to make connections between themselves and the outside world.

The *GED as Project* approach helps learners make these connections. Volume 2: Math and Volume 3: Reading emphasize the strength of community and ask that students bring their real-life experiences into the classroom. Through group sharing and the reflection, extension, and evaluation steps of the *GED as Project* model, GED learners make connections and gain deeper understandings of learning by being more actively involved in learning.

In this volume of *GED as Project*, we focused on the same type of community-building activities as previous versions. As your learners work through the inquiry activities, we ask them to work together in developing ideas and strategies for starting writing, in doing the writing itself, and in revising. The *GED as Project* approach emphasizes the community of learning. This Writing volume is no different

Introduction to writing as a content area is best done by starting with GED Writing and You. The four Inquiry Activities in GED Writing and You offer the learners the opportunity to explore their feelings about writing, their awareness of what will be tested in the GED, and develop their action plan to improve their writing and pass the test. Also in GED Writing and You, we present a variety of idea-generating strategies: list making, free writing, brainstorming, and mind mapping. This Inquiry Activity was included here

upon the advice of the field test teachers who felt the learners should be exposed to the skills of generating ideas before being introduced to the process of writing.

Woven throughout the Writing Learning Projects is a strong emphasis on the three components of essay writing -- focus, organization, and development -- that essay graders are looking for. These three components of the essay are critical to your learners when they write the essay on the test. If your learners have a foundation in developing a main idea and supporting details, organizing the main idea and supporting details, and focusing on the goals of their essay throughout, they will have a distinct advantage when they sit down to write their GED essay.

Two Major Requirements for Becoming a Competent Writer

Composition theory has proven that there are two requirements in helping learners become competent and successful writers. These two requirements should underscore any approach to teaching writing. They are:

1) The writer/learner must experience and become immersed in the act of writing.

This requires nothing more than simply doing writing: five or ten minute freewriting exercises, writing personal journals, or required essay writing every week. Give your learners the opportunity to write and give them time to do it.

As they arrive for class, have them sit down and freewrite on a prompt for five or ten minutes. Have them bring a reading journal to class, and ask them to write their reactions to materials they read in class. You may meet with some hesitation to write at first. Most people are cautious about expressing themselves or sharing their words and thoughts. This is a response to the way they have been taught to write in the past. Giving your learners the time to write and encouraging them to use the time effectively offers them a true service. The more experienced your learners are, the better they will write.

Peter Elbow, esteemed writing theorist and author of numerous writing texts, including *Writing Without Teachers* and *Writing With Power*, likens the process of writing to the process of cooking. To borrow his analogy: think about the first time you ever prepared a recipe. You were awkward and overly cautious. You wanted everything



to turn out right, and there was a certain amount of anxiety that came along with all that was required of you to make that happen. You followed the rules very closely: a dash of this, a tablespoon of that. The recipe may or may not have turned out well, but the process was more than likely cumbersome, foreign, and strange.

Since that first awkward experience with a recipe, however, you have probably become more familiar with cooking. The process of getting the blend of ingredients just right has become much easier for you. You've lost the anxiety and the awkwardness you had that first time. Maybe you've done enough cooking since then that the process has become instinctive for you. You've been able to leave the recipes behind. You know how to cook.

Now, think back to your first writing experiences. Were they awkward? Were you overly cautious? Did you want everything to turn out right? Was there a certain amount of anxiety related to the process of writing? For most people, the answer is yes. Writing, like any other craft, is a process that takes time and experience to learn. Research has proven that students who are required to write in every class, or who write at least once a week, are significantly better writers than students who are required to write only one or two papers per semester. Give your learners the opportunity to write. They need it.

2) **The writer/learner must be equipped with a metalanguage, particularly a language about his/her own writing.**

Writers need to know how to talk about their writing. This is mandatory to succeed as a writer. Learners need to understand what it means when someone tells them they have a typo, or that a subject and a verb disagree. Giving your learners an awareness of what they are doing by helping them name it is essential to the learning-to-write process.

To go back to the cooking analogy, think about the language that is required to understand a recipe. You need to understand the order of ingredients. You need to understand the difference between a teaspoon and a tablespoon. You need to know the difference between the words whip and mix. These cooking terms are all required terms if you are going to succeed in the cooking process. It can take time to learn these terms, and the best way to learn is through the practice of cooking.

The Writing Process

This volume of *GED as Project: Pathways to Passing the GED* has been written with both of these requirements in mind. Our Learning Projects focus on allowing learners to work with their own writing as a means of achieving an understanding of what it takes for them to become competent writers. The focus on writing in GED 2002 is a focus on writing an essay competently. It is important to draft a well-organized essay that establishes a purpose and follows through on that purpose in a clear and concise manner. Rote memorization of grammar rules and drill worksheets may help learners understand the rules of grammar, but it will not help your learners learn to write. Your learners may write an error-free essay that is unclear, confusing, and uninteresting. It will not be a passing essay.

Teaching grammar should not be done in isolation, as it has been done traditionally. Grammar instruction needs to be addressed within the context of a learner's writing. Identify the deficiencies of your writers by looking at the problems they have in their writing, and address these deficiencies within the context of that writing. Learners are more likely to be interested if they can see how a grammar rule affects their own performance as writers.

Our intention in helping learners prepare for GED 2002 has been to demystify the process of writing. Too often our learners have been led to believe that writing is an innate ability. They think, "You're either a good writer, or you're not." They have also been led to believe that writing is a magical act in which a writer sits down at a computer, writes, and as the words come out, they are concise, eloquent, perfect, and finished, never to be touched again by the writer. With this in mind, our learners sit down to write, find it impossible to create perfection on the first try, get frustrated, and quit.

While writing may come more naturally for some, it is by no means a process that just happens. Writing takes practice. For many it is a lifelong pursuit. Talk to your learners about the process of revision. Let them know that writing is not a natural ability. Show them a sample of your writing as it ascended from the murky depths of the first draft to the eventual shining glory of the final draft. Show them that writing is just as much a process of revision as it is of coming up with the ideas.

The revision step must come after the writing has been done. The editing function is one that looks for errors and problems in the writing, thus inhibiting the creative process. Helping learners free up that creative process will allow them



to more easily generate words and ideas.

In many ways, writing exceeds the other subject areas of education in difficulty because it is, for lack of a better term, contentless. Not until something has been written does writing have a body of content to work with. It is the job of our learners to create this content, and it is our job to help them create. Have your learners work through the Learning Projects in this volume. Include burst lectures when they are lost or confused.

Most importantly, give them plenty of opportunity to write and revise, and encourage them in these processes.

In an effort to focus national attention on the teaching and learning of writing, the College Board - a nonprofit membership organization composed of more than 4,300 schools and colleges - established the National Commission on Writing in America's Schools and Colleges. In their report, issued April 2003, the Commission states:

American education will never realize its potential as an engine of opportunity and economic growth until a writing revolution puts the power of language and communication in their proper place in the classroom. Yet, although many models of effective writing instruction exist, both the teaching and practice of writing are increasingly short-changed throughout the school and college years. Disciplines such as mathematics, history, science, and foreign language properly deserve the attention they receive. This Commission holds no brief for the idea that writing can be improved while substance is ignored. Still, writing is how students connect the dots in their knowledge. And writing, always time-consuming for student and teacher, is today hard-pressed in the American classroom.

“Writing today is not a frill for the few, but an essential skill for the many.”

– *The National Commission on Writing in America's Schools and Colleges*

The Writing Template

1) Identifying the Problem

Step 1 of the writing template addresses two tasks that are crucial to beginning the writing process. The first task is recognizing the topic of the essay to be written. In the GED test, writers will be presented with a prompt, a very general statement upon which writers can develop a personal essay. The second task is identifying the prospective audience of one's writing. Step 1 helps learners understand that their essay will be read by two readers who will be assessing their writing according to a set of evaluation standards.

In this step, learners are asked to read the writing prompt and the directions carefully and to identify any areas they do not understand. Misreading the topic is a frequent mistake that causes test-takers to not pass the GED Language Arts, Writing test. As in the other *GED as Project* subject areas, we ask learners to slow down, read carefully, and become grounded in the material with which they are presented.

2) Becoming Familiar with the Problem

The second step of the *GED as Project* writing template targets the research stage of the writing process. Before writing can begin, writers research the essay topic to provide themselves as much information and detail as possible. This step requires considering all possible topics, exploring the details of the topics, and thinking about how to present the topics to the intended audience. While GED essay topics do not require research in the traditional sense, they do require some thought. In identifying a topic to write about, learners are asked to think about subjects they are already familiar with. Learners are asked to choose topics that they would feel comfortable teaching to others. These topics tend to hold the most detail and meaning for learners.

3) Planning, Assigning, and Performing Tasks

Planning

Based on the work they have done in Steps 1 & 2, learners will develop a writing plan.

Assigning

This would generally be an individual activity so there would be no assigning of tasks.



Performing Tasks Doing the Work

The first two Learning Projects place focus on preparing to write, the writing process itself, and evaluating essays based on the scoring rubric used on the GED Language Arts, Writing test. Beginning in Learning Project 3 the focus shifts to the process of revising an essay.

• *Writing*

Here learners will begin the actual writing of the essay. Learners begin by developing a list of topics they know well enough to teach others. From there, they narrow down the list to a handful of topics that they know very well and continue by choosing one topic they know and understand better than any other.

Once the final topic, the topic for the essay, has been decided, learners are asked to develop a list of details that describe, characterize, and summarize the topic. Using a number of detail-generating techniques, learners develop a long list of details they can use in their essay.

After the details have been generated, learners revisit the list and remove all of the irrelevant details. Learning to separate relevant details from irrelevant details is one of the most important elements of good writing. Learners need to understand that some details are interesting, but they do not serve a purpose in the essay. Once the irrelevant details have all been removed, learners begin the process of organizing the relevant details into groups based on their similarities.

All of this pre-writing work pays off when the learners start to write their first draft. Having a well-developed topic accompanied by supporting details helps the learners focus on the act of writing. Instead of thinking of details on the fly, learners already have everything they need to write in front of them.

• *Revising*

The last three Learning Projects focus on developing skills in revision. These projects break down the revision process, allowing learners to focus on one aspect of revision at a time – organization, clear expression, mechanics and usage and style. Ultimately, learners integrate their learning to incorporate all of these aspects of revision at once.

The multiple-choice portion of the GED Language Arts test is actually a test of revision skills. As such, the revising Inquiry Activities integrate the multiple-choice items from the Practice Test PA into the process of revis-

ing one's own work. The result is that, in addition to the learners gaining skills in revising their own writing for clear expression, organization, mechanics and usage, and style in their own work, they are also equipped to answer the multiple-choice questions on the test.

In test-taking circumstances, learners take the multiple-choice test first. The GED test designers developed the test in this way because they want to see that test takers have honed the revision skills necessary for revising their own essays in the second portion of the writing test. The skills learned in this step of the writing template allow learners to experience revision not only within the context of their own writing, but also in the multiple-choice format of the test.

4) Sharing with Others

Sharing with Others is an activity that every GED content area shares in the *GED as Project* approach. Communicating an understanding of the writing process reinforces the learners' ability to use and make meaning of the process. Discussing writing and the approaches taken in the writing process helps learners think through their processes more thoroughly than keeping it all internalized. Having learners share their writing and their strategies places them in the role of teaching others. It is our continued belief that one learns best when one teaches.

In this step, learners discuss and report to the class how they approached the writing process, how what they have learned may benefit them in their daily lives, and any of the questions covered in Steps 1 through 3. Learners should be encouraged to lead the class in discussion and to share what they know and what they have learned. Doing so allows learners to further build their communication skills while extending what they have learned by teaching it to others.

5) Reflecting, Extending, and Evaluating

Step 5 in the template is devoted to the learner, whose aim is broader than that of simply a test-taker. The learner is encouraged to learn the process of writing through the activities presented in *GED as Project, Volume 4*. An important reason for continuing beyond step 3 in each IA is to allow the learners to apply what has been learned to other types of writing, both test-based writing and real life writing. Learners have to explore



other ramifications of the process of writing in order to handle the essay portion of the GED test. Step 5 gives the learners that chance.

Reflecting: Think about how well you understood what you have done.

Each reflecting step is introduced with the following comment to reinforce this very important thinking skill:

Here are some questions to start you thinking about the experience you just had. Thinking about what you have experienced is part of the learning process. When the focus is only on the answer, you don't get much time to think about what you learned.

Reflecting questions tend to be analytical in Sternberg's *Successful Intelligence* model. There are numerous issues you can ask learners to reflect on, including:

- Thinking skills learned
- Why writing is important
- What has surprised them about the writing process
- Test-taking skills developed

Extending: Extend what you learned to new situations.

Learners now get a chance to build on the knowledge gained by making connections to the world around them. Understanding the generation of ideas, the importance of strong supporting details, and the power of the revising process are all important in gaining a deeper understanding of writing concepts. These concepts are important not just in test writing, but also in everyday practical writing. The skills learned in this writing volume of *GED as Project* help learners think like writers, a kind of thinking that learners will carry with them far beyond the GED test.

All of these extending activities can be done in groups and reported to the rest of the class.

Evaluating: Assess what you learned and how you learned it.

Each evaluating step is introduced with the following comment to reinforce this highest thinking level in Bloom's Cognitive Taxonomy:

In this last step, you get a chance to review the methods used to learn. There are no right or wrong answers in these questions; it is your chance to look more closely at your learning style and the opportunity to state how you

benefited or didn't benefit from the content and/or the methods to help you pass the GED test.

The evaluation process is similar to the reflecting process, but it tends to be more personal to each learner. Here are some questions that could be asked. These questions tend to be analytical in Sternberg's *Successful Intelligence* model.

- What parts of the activity worked best for you? Explain.
- What parts of this Inquiry Activity will you use when writing the essay on the GED test? Why?
- What kinds of essay writing strategies did you learn from this Inquiry Activity?
- What have you learned about revising?

The Inquiry Activity template is dynamic and can be applied to different situations in multiple ways.

The Appendices contain:

- A) The GED Scoring Guide
- B) Sample Essays
- C) 5 Tips for Improving Peer Review
- D) Frequently Asked Questions about the GED
- E) Writing and Teaching Resources

Student versions of all of the Inquiry Activities that follow may be downloaded from the *GED as Project* web site: <http://www.jmu.edu/gedproject>.

The Writing Template

- 1. Identifying The Problem**
- 2. Becoming Familiar With The Problem**
 - *Developing*
 - *Organizing*
- 3. Planning, Assigning, And Performing Tasks**
 - *Writing*
 - *Revising*
- 4. Sharing With Others**
- 5. Reflecting, Extending, Evaluating**