

Using a Graphic Organizer to Develop Writing Skills, Increase Language, and Organize Thinking

Slide 1: This presentation was developed by Kelly McNell. Kelly is a special education teacher and administers the New York State Alternate Assessment for the Erie 2 BOCES.

Slide 2: The method included in this presentation is adapted from the book *Four Square Writing Method: A Unique Approach to Teaching Writing to Grades 1-3*, authored by Judith S. Gould and Evan Jay Gould. In the presentation, boxes and squares are used interchangeably.

Slide 3: Benefits and uses of using a graphic organizer for writing: The benefits of using this graphic organizer that I will show you is that the graphic organizer helps organize thoughts, thereby breaking down writing into smaller tasks, which ultimately promotes language expansion at the same time. Multi-levels can use the same template. This can be used with emerging writers, intermediate writers, and experienced writers. It is visual and kinesthetic. So, it works well for busier children who might need a break in between. The graphic organizer can be used with verbal and nonverbal students. And if students cannot physically write, the results from the graphic organizer can be scribed or typed by teacher or aide, they can be typed by the student, or a picture can be chosen or drawn by the student. In this case, the student is still providing the text. The graphic organizer has many uses. It can be used for journaling, using narrative, putting verbs in boxes two through four. It can be used for review or gathering facts about a subject, using expository, putting nouns in boxes two through four. And this graphic organizer will ultimately increase writing independence the more familiar the students become with the organizer.

Slide 4: In explaining the boxes, I number them one, two, three, four and five.

Slide 5: Box number one is where the topic goes. Box number two, three, and four all have supporting details. The fifth box serves multiple purposes. It can be a detail for your emerging writers. It can be a wrap-up or feeling for your primary or intermediate writers. Or, it could have a conclusion for your advanced writers.

Slide 6: This slide does not have audio.

Slide 7: For emerging writers, pictures can be used. For the purposes of this slide, our topic will be farm. The student can select pictures: pig, cow, horse, and the fourth detail chicken.

Slide 8: The next step would be to encourage the child to use the pictures and convert it to spoken or written language. In the case of a non-writer, someone who cannot use a pencil and actually write the letters, you can encourage them to use a sentence about the farm. For example, the student would look at the first picture and come up with the sentence: A farm has pigs. The second picture would be: A farm has cows...and so on.

Slide 9: For students who can write their own words, the topic word again is farm. In box number two, they would write cows. In box number three, they would write pigs. In box number four, they would write horses. In box number five, they would write chickens.

Slide 10: Moving the graphic organizer to written language would result in one of two things. One sentence: A farm has cows, pigs, horses, and chickens. Or, four sentences: A farm has cows. A farm has pigs. A farm has horses. A farm has chickens.

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Slide 12: So, when it comes to your primary and intermediate writers, I found that journal topics lend really well to this writing method. So, what I did was kept just an ongoing list in my file, so I can pick a different journal topic for each day or each week however often you could do it. Sometimes it was tied into my weekly schedule. For example, we went into the community every Friday, so every Wednesday the journal was used to front-load my students regarding the plan for that particular trip. This lent itself to behavioral success in the community because everyone knew what we were doing. You can also relate the journal topics to your thematic units. And these are for the whole-group. The journal topics would go into box number one. And the teachers, teaching assistants, aides lead the students individually to kind of individualize the topic so that it pertains to them. Some examples of journal starters are: Over the weekend; My favorite meal is; On Friday, we are going to; My house; I live in. They are endless.

Slide 13: You can expand written language by making a five-sentence paragraph. This slide shows with cues. And the cues are where, who, what or why for boxes two, three, and four. Our topic sentence is *Over the weekend dot-dot-dot*, and the student filled it in with *I went to the store*. So, box number two: Where did you go to the store? *I went to Wegmans*. Box number 3: Who did you go to the store with? *I went with mom*. Box number four is: What did you do at the store, or why did you go to the store? The student responded and wrote *We brought groceries*. Then box number five is a feeling sentence: *Going to Wegmans with mom is fun*.

Slide 14: And the resulting five-sentence typed or written paragraph is, “Over the weekend I went to the store. I went to Wegmans. I went with Mom. We bought groceries. Going to Wegmans with Mom is fun.”

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Slide 16: Taking things a step further and expanding the squares, we can make an eight-sentence paragraph by adding more details. Notice that next to the bullet, the student is only writing a single word: Hamburg. During the transfer process when the student turns it into the paragraph, the teacher would say something like, “Tell me a big sentence about Hamburg.” And that’s what the student will write. The topic again is “over the weekend.” The student finished the sentence with “I went to the store.” In box number two, again, “I went to Wegmans.” As the teacher or the facilitator, I would say, “Tell me something about going to Wegmans” and put a bullet. Next to the bullet, the student wrote “Hamburg.” In box number three, again, “I went with Mom.” “Tell me something about going with Mom.” Put a bullet. The student writes “Jeep.” Box number three: “We bought groceries.” “Tell me something about buying groceries.” The student might say, “bananas.” They wrote it next to the bullet. And four, someone who is making an eight-sentence paragraph with details, I would want them to expand the feeling sentence a little bit more. So, in this case, “Going to the store was the best part of my weekend.”

Slide 17: And here is the resulting eight-sentence paragraph—typed or handwritten.

Slide 18: A good next step is adding transition words, and the next slides will also show you how you can use writing weekly to front-load students for behavioral success by letting them know the order in which things are going to happen on, perhaps, a field trip or an event.

Slide 19: Taking things a step further, we will now make a multiple-paragraph essay by adding more details, and I’ll show you an example with transition words also. So, the topic sentence is, “On Friday we are going to East Aurora.” The student fills in box number two, “We will ride the bus.” Tell me something about riding the bus, and three bullets: seat belt, driver, bus number. Box number three, “We are eating at McDonald’s.” Tell me something about eating at McDonald’s. Three bullets: hamburger, napkin, dessert. Box number four, “We will shop at Tops.” Tell me three things about shopping at Tops: cart, tuna fish, wallet. And box number five remains the closing sentence, or the feeling sentence.

Slide 20: In the resulting essay, each box becomes its own paragraph.

Slide 21: And here is the resulting essay with the expanded sentences made from each bullet: On Friday we are going to East Aurora. First, we will ride the bus. I will buckle my seatbelt by myself. The driver’s name is Linda. The bus number is 260. Next, we will eat at McDonald’s. I will order a hamburger without pickles. I will use my napkin to wipe my face. If I have enough money, I will get dessert. Last, we will shop at Tops. I will push a cart carefully. We will buy tuna fish for the classroom. I will need my wallet at Tops. East Aurora is the best place ever!

Slide 22: Probably the most famous expository writing is the book report. After reading the story *The Three Little Pigs*, we use the graphic organizer to create a book report about the story. Notice the more experienced writers can just jot down words for the details and the

supporting details. One thing different about being a more experienced writer is that the book report requires a concluding sentence.

Slide 23: Notice that as the writer converts the story from the graphic organizer to the essay, they will develop sentences out of the words they jotted down on the organizer.

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Slide 25: After the student becomes more advanced and more comfortable, the graphic organizer can be given with just the bullets and a sentence starter for the topic.

Slide 26: Feel free to adapt this method to meet your and your students' needs. Use what works for your population. Hopefully, using this or a variation of this graphic organizer will allow you to teach your students to tackle writing in a way that is not as overwhelming as most think. I've included a blank graphic organizer on the next slide.

Slide 27: This slide does not have audio.