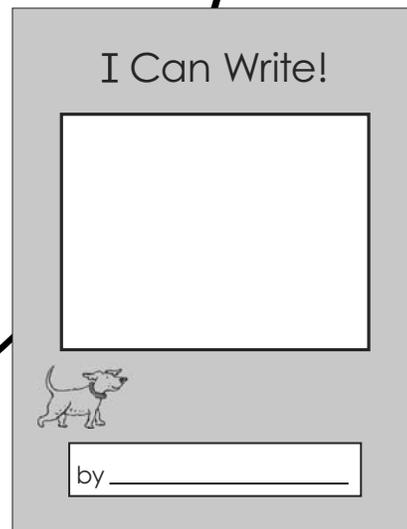


I CAN WRITE!

Teacher's Guide

Katie Moeller

Geri Williams



INTRODUCTION

After many years of teaching writing, we developed *I Can Write!* as a resource to help students use the writing process. This book provides a unique combination of features that help students develop and improve their writing, which include:

- a **spelling list** on the inside front cover that helps beginning writers develop a writing vocabulary; this is a word wall right at their fingertips
 - a **word bank** for new words, which allows students to check and improve their spelling quickly and easily
 - a **dedication page** for students to dedicate their writing to a significant person in their lives
 - the **writing pages**, which include space for planning. These plans may include sketches--beginning, middle, and end--and other forms of support for organization of the writing. There are six lines for writing on each page and lighter **revision lines** that provide space for students and teachers to improve and correct writing
 - a **personalized editing guide** to focus students on key aspects of writing conventions leading to correct punctuation and grammar, highlighting their accomplishments and supporting continued improvement
- an **About the Author** section on the back cover provides space for a self-portrait and a beginning autobiography.

For you, the teacher, we wanted to make writing instruction easier, more manageable, and successful. *I Can Write!* is a helpful and flexible tool to be used in the manner that best suits your teaching style and instructional goals. Three additional sections help you monitor the progress of your students as writers.

- **Recording Spelling Development** on page 61 allows you to document spelling growth across time. This page is helpful for illustrating the stages of development and for parent conferences.
- **Recording Alphabet Knowledge** on pages 62 and 63 display capital and lowercase letters to provide for monthly assessment of alphabet knowledge.
- **Observation Notes**, on the last two pages, provides a space for recording evidence of new learning and for identifying teaching points.

Through the use of these features in the book, we believe your students will find the process of developing and improving their writing faster and easier. Of course, *I Can Write!* supports the types of writing students need to develop in order to meet state standards. Depending on

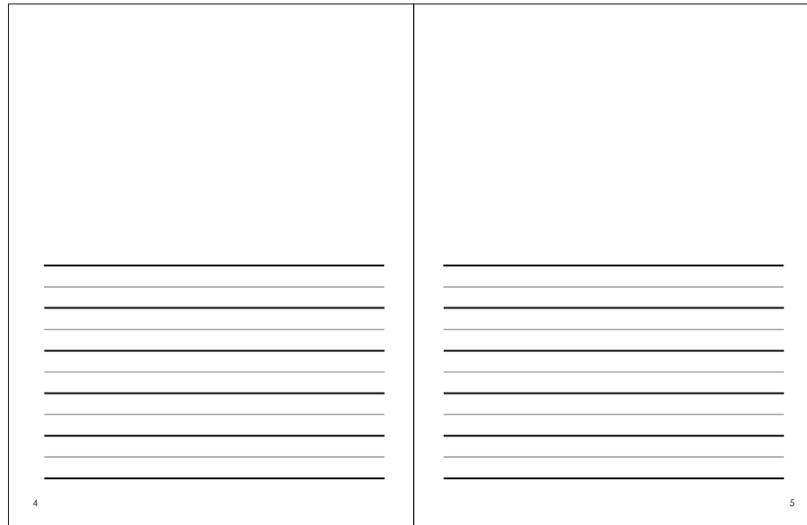


Figure 1: Planning and writing pages

your curriculum and students' needs, the book can be used for:

- developing personal experiences into stories
- learning how to organize for writing
- applying letter sounds to spelling words (phonemic awareness and phonological awareness)
- responses to prompts.

Having the students' writing preserved in a single volume, along with the personal supports they developed to help themselves, provides you with a wealth of information that can guide your instruction and also demonstrate what students have accomplished.

Writing instruction benefits reading instruction and improves students' literacy. Using *I Can Write!* in the classroom has the following benefits:

- effective development and practice of writing skills
- increased use of the conventions of written language
- growth of authorship, pride, and confidence
- progress over time that is clearly demonstrated and available for review.

In thinking about the students, we wanted *I Can Write!* to support them in expressing their thoughts and ideas as well as assist them in gaining confidence and competence in the craft of writing. Learning to write about their lives and their world is a powerful but challenging experience for students, and helping students find their writing voices and see the impact of their writing upon others is one of the most rewarding aspects of teaching writing. We invite you to assist them in capturing their thoughts, dreams, observations, wonders, ponderings, wisdom, and poems on these pages.

Now, let's take a closer look at the book's key features and how you can introduce them to your students.

INTRODUCING I CAN WRITE! TO YOUR STUDENTS

You may introduce *I Can Write!* to students in a small group seated around a table. To begin, you will want to demonstrate the use of *I Can Write!* Some teachers have photocopied a two-page unit (Figure 1) and enlarged it to chart size for demonstration purposes. The teacher then talks aloud and also writes to help students understand how writers think and how to use

I Can Write! effectively. Here's an example:

Teacher: This is a book for your writing. We all have stories inside our heads. I have a story about this morning when I was almost late for school.

Tynisha: What happened, Mrs. Williams?

Teacher: A friend was going to pick me up this morning at my house, and she got stuck in the traffic. You made me think, Tynisha, and I'm going to make a quick sketch of me waiting and looking out the window for my friend to come. Do you see this place at the top with no lines? That's where I'm going to start drawing the idea for my story.

The teacher continues to talk to students about thoughts and ideas for writing and how to use sketching as a basis for planning and organizing for writing. If the students are ready for more advanced planning of their writing, the teacher thinks aloud and talks with the students as she creates a two- or three-part sketch.

When introducing other parts of *I Can Write!*, you can model the use of those pages in the same manner. With that in mind, let's take a quick walk through the book and look at important features.

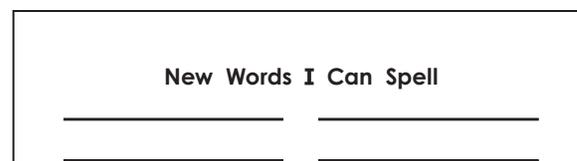
KEY PARTS OF I CAN WRITE!



The cover is designed to help students express their individuality as well as to develop a sense of ownership. In addition to writing their names, students will create their own illustrations inside the frame, or they can paste a photo there.

Words I Can Spell			
A	F	L	S
a	fast	let	sat
am	for	like	saw
and	from	look	say
are			see

Words I Can Spell provides a quick and easy way for students to increase their proficiency with high-frequency words--while they are actually engaged in the writing process. Start by encouraging students to use this page as a tool for developing a writing vocabulary and for independent proofreading and correcting words they have misspelled in their book. Over time, you can start holding them accountable for the correct spelling of the words. For some, this page will also serve as a miniature word wall that helps them build their writing vocabulary until reading and writing these words is automatic.

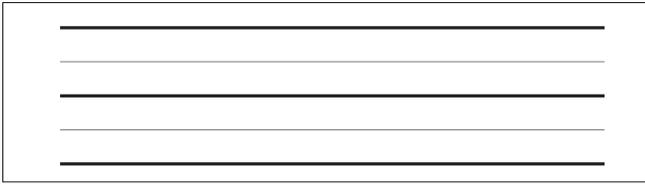


New Words I Can Spell is a word bank for students to collect and refer to new spelling words that are not included in the high-frequency word list on the opposite page. This page is designed to be used when students are ready for adding new words to their writing vocabulary; for some that will be during the first few weeks of school and for others much later in the year. Words misspelled on the pages of *I Can Write!* should be spelled correctly here, along with new words from vocabulary and spelling lessons as well as other sources.

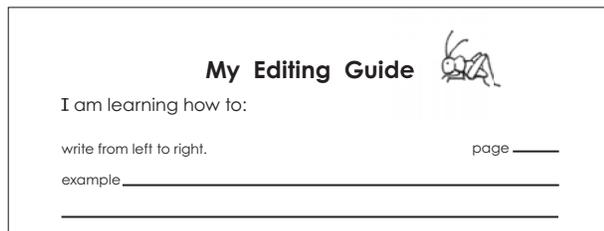


The **dedication page** enables students to dedicate their writing to a significant person in their lives, just like grown-up authors do. The students can also create their own art or put a photo in the frame below to add more meaning and personalize the page further.

I Can Write!



The **writing pages** provide lines for student writing as well as for revisions. At the top, the blank space is for the writer's sketching and drawings; part of planning for writing. Lines for student writing are bold and the lines for revision are lighter. Some writers ignore these light lines; students will use lines as their development and fine motor coordination allow. We suggest not getting too concerned about "writing on the line," the lines are there to support the writer when they are ready to use them.



My Editing Guide, which starts on page 58, provides another handy reference for students when it is appropriate for their stage of development. These pages help teachers monitor student progress and inform instruction. These pages begin with some of the basic concepts about print, such as writing from left to right and top to bottom. The editing moves beyond concepts about print starting on page 59 as students learn to "use a capital letter at the beginning of a first name."

Recording Spelling Development	
Date or Page No.	Stage/Examples from Student's Writing
	Scribbling/Random Letter Stringing

Page 61 is for **Recording Spelling Development** of writers. The following is a very brief description of the stages of development. For a more in-depth explanation of the stages of spelling and the teaching of spelling we recommend *Teaching Kids to Spell* by J. Richard Gentry and Jean Wallace Gillet (1993) and *Spelling: Connecting the Pieces* by Ruth McQuirter Scott and Sharon Siamon (2004). These stages are not discrete or

linear; they illustrate how spelling develops across time. Students may exhibit characteristics of multiple stages simultaneously.

Scribbling/Random Letter Stringing Stage

Young writers may fill the page with scribble or letters to send a message. Sometimes numbers and lines are used. The writer may or may not demonstrate left-to-right directionality using scribble and letter stringing. Capital and lowercase letters may be intermingled; often a preference is shown for writing in uppercase letters. The letter/sound correspondence is not evident.

Partially Phonetic Stage

The writer is beginning to connect letters with sounds to represent words. One, two, or three letters may represent words; many words are abbreviated spellings. For example:

R = are

wt = went

U = you

The writer may or may not use spaces between words.

Phonetic Stage

Writers spell all the sounds they hear. The writer assigns letters strictly on the basis of sound.

Transitional Stage

The writer is learning to use both what words *sound* like and *look* like. The speller is beginning to know that spelling has visual requirements as well as phonetic requirements.

Correct Stage

As young writers develop a writing vocabulary, correctly spelled words will appear in their writing.

The next two pages provide a place for **Recording Alphabet Knowledge** of young students, of both capital and lowercase letters. The letters are in random order to ensure that the child is identifying the letter, not memorizing the alphabetic sequence. This information is kept in the writing book to be easily accessible for the

teacher and for the child. An assessment can be taken each month, and the letters that students recognize circled with a different color for each month. For example, during an initial assessment in August, the teacher circles the letters the child recognizes with a red pencil. As the child recognizes more letters in September, those letters are circled in blue pencil. You may want to put the number of the letters recognized thus far at the end of the month. This will show growth over time. Having all of this information housed in one place is useful during teacher/parent conferences.

At the heart of formative assessment is observation of the learner. The teacher watches literacy unfold, and the **Observation Notes** pages provide space to record those observations. These pages become invaluable for parent conferences and to guide the teacher in adjusting instruction based upon the needs of the learner as revealed by monitoring and observation. Some sample observations that teachers have recorded on these pages include:

- eyes are on the print as the story was re-read
- added on to writing; writes more than one sentence (fluency)
- writes from left to right, top to bottom now.

Observation notes are another way for teachers to document growth across time and to provide evidence of learning.

The **About the Author** section on the back cover provides space for a self-portrait or photo and a brief autobiography or promotional “blurb.” Students can decide how they want to present themselves as authors, and it will encourage them to examine the jackets of published books to see how other authors describe themselves.

In addition to the book, teachers can use other resources to support their students' writing progress.

USING AN ALPHABET CARD

Teachers often use an alphabet card to help children learn phonemic awareness and phonics and to develop phonological skills during the writing process. We know that young children can learn sound/letter association through writing. Research indicates that writing slows down the reading process so that the finer features of print can be examined. Some teachers use shipping tape to permanently attach a laminated alphabet card to the back cover of *I Can Write!* The card can be folded out for easy reference during writing. Some of the prompts teachers use to support the use of the card include:

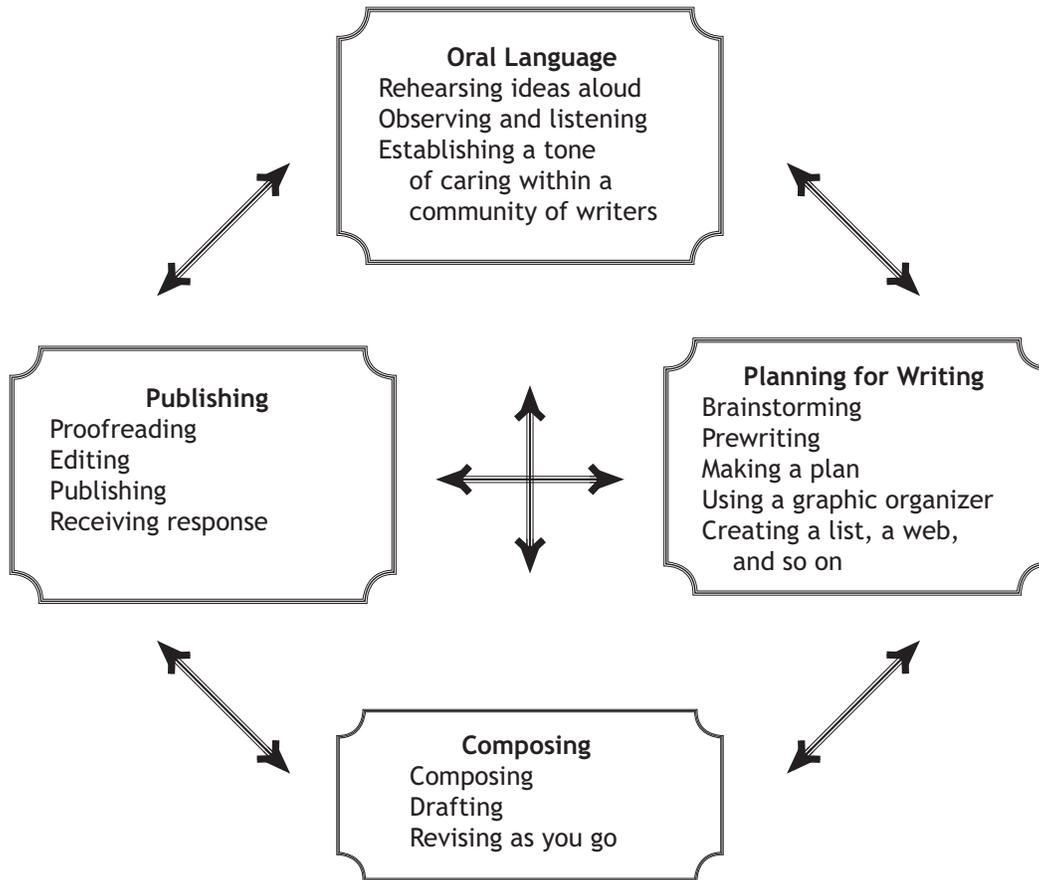
- say the word slowly
- What can you hear?
- What letters would you expect to see?

Children learn to pronounce the word slowly to hear the sounds (phonemic awareness). The publisher of this journal offers a high-quality alphabet card. For further in-depth explanation about the use of alphabet cards during writing, please see *The Kindergarten Book: A Guide to Literacy Instruction* by Marilyn Duncan, pages 95 to 96 and Chapter 8 (2005). This book is an indispensable resource for maximizing writing instruction in kindergarten and beginning first-grade classrooms. It gives in-depth explanations of writing instruction for diverse learners.

USING THE WRITING PROCESS

In *I Can Write!*, students use the writing process with guidance and support. Because of the teachers' active role, the students grow increasingly skillful and competent. When students “journal write” every day, without explicit teaching, they may become bored or disengaged and their writing erodes into long lists of everything they have ever done. How many of us have listened to a student describe in agonizing detail every ride at the amusement park on the family vacation? Donald Graves has described this as “bed to bed” writing; writing that lacks a clear purpose, focus, and

I Can Write!



Writers do not work in a lock-step sequence. Note how the arrows move in a variety of directions to illustrate how writers use the writing process at their own point of need.

Figure 2: The Writing Process

audience, and appears to be written simply because the teacher has assigned writing to be done (Graves 1994, 68). The writing process in Figure 2 illustrates the various steps a writer uses and the ways in which a teacher deliberately supports a writer across time with a piece of writing.

The process of writing is messy. Writers do not work in a lock-step sequence. Note how the arrows move in a variety of directions to illustrate how writers use the writing process at their point of need. Most teachers will begin writing instruction with the opportunity for writers to talk about their experiences and observations and develop or rehearse their ideas aloud before the pen hits the paper. This is the writing conference “before” writing that front-loads a writer to succeed. If we

always wait until the end to conference, it is too late; we are conferencing after students have floundered with their topic, focus, or knowing what they want to say and how to go about organizing it.

Students should be encouraged to brainstorm, plan, or “pre-write” through the use of sketches and drawings. These plans support organization and structure within the writing. The plan becomes the foundation for students as they compose, draft, and revise. As the piece nears completion, the writer works to proofread and edit. Students who learn to craft a piece of writing that demonstrates correctness in grammar, spelling, and punctuation are demonstrating respect for their readers. The true joy of writing comes from the response of an audience.

There are three strategies in revision and *I Can Write!* accommodates all three strategies. Those strategies are:

1. adding on; elaborating
2. deleting; eliminating the unnecessary
3. reorganizing; restructuring the order of the writing.

I Can Write! provides revision lines above the writing lines; these lines are not bold. This space is intended as a kindness to both teachers and students. At the earliest stages of writing development, revision will include primarily adding on or elaborating. Students may think of details to add to their sketch, or they might add another line to what they have written. Rarely at this stage will they delete; it takes so much effort for the youngest writers to get their writing down that they will not want to “take away” or delete anything.

Teachers using the writing process understand the power of publishing and helping students get their writing to an authentic audience. *I Can Write!* is useful for supporting writing in many forms. Teachers will use the writing process based upon their intended objectives and lesson outcomes. In kindergarten and first grade students will learn the writing process at their own rate of development; some children come to school writing paragraphs and are ready for revision conferences. Other students come using scribble and letter strings to send their message; their conferencing is talking about their ideas and perhaps adding a letter or a word or two.

ONE PLACE FOR WRITING

I Can Write! books are a tool for teachers to manage the writing process; often drafts get lost when papers go flying in and out of writing notebooks. This book holds all the writing in one place.

I Can Write! is the place for students to practice and develop their skills and the craft of writing. Across

time it becomes a resource for the writer; it is the writer's history and a collection of the writer's life stories and experiences. It may contain students':

- observations, both personal and scientific
- personal experiences
- imaginative writing
- informational writing
- prompt writing
- student writing on self-selected topics.

When a student's writing is collected in one place over time, it is easy for both the student and the teacher to see growth across time. Students excitedly look back at their earlier writing and see evidence of their growth and maturity as a writer. Because all student writing is in one easily accessible place, *I Can Write!* is a formative assessment tool for teachers to assess and monitor student writing and to plan their next learning opportunities by utilizing mini-lessons, writing conferences, and modeling or writing demonstrations.

PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

A key consideration is the amount of writing that will take place in your classroom during the school year. *I Can Write!* has 55 pages for writing. To plan for the number of books you might need, consider the following table:

One piece of writing per week	One book per student
Two pieces of writing per week	One to two books per student
Daily writing instruction	Three to four books per student

We suggest that when your students finish a book you conference with them about which piece represents their best effort. Photocopy that page and place it in a portfolio and send the finished *I Can Write!* book home with the student. The student receives a new book. Our advice is that students may not compose and draft every day, but they should be involved in the writing process every day. For example, they may be conferencing about

I Can Write!

writing, brainstorming topics, reading a piece aloud to a friend, or searching for additional details. Ideally, students write every day, but not all of their writing is composing and drafting in *I Can Write!*

ENCOURAGING AUTHORSHIP AND ENJOYMENT

By creating and completing their own books, students develop a sense of authorship and ownership. In addition to serving as a resource for the writer, *I Can Write!* becomes a collection of the writer's stories and experiences and therefore a part of his or her history. As the school year winds to an end, you will find writing has given your students a way of exploring their dreams, hopes, aspirations, and vivid imaginings, which they have now recorded and can share with others. What a great way to reinforce the power and pleasure of writing!

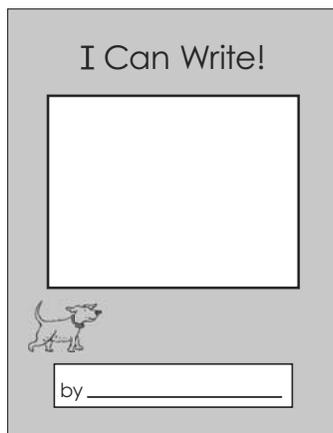
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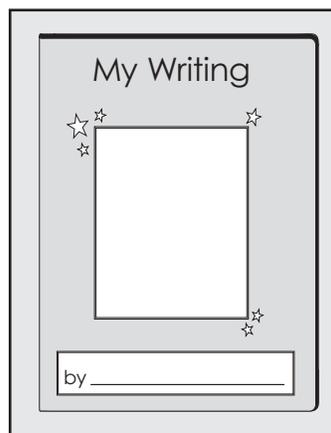
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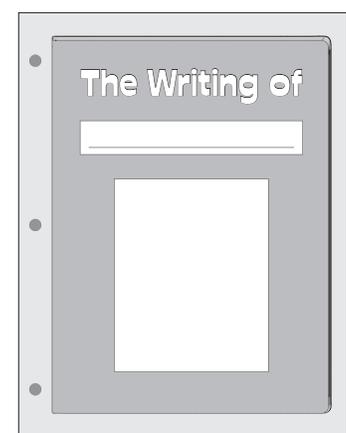
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