

Daily Language Instruction (DLI)

Eight Guiding Principles

Learning and applying the conventions of writing—punctuation, capitalization, grammar, and usage—is part of every comprehensive writing instruction curriculum. While the value of teaching writing conventions is widely accepted, research reveals that more grammar instruction does not translate into better writers. On the horns of this dilemma, DLI was developed.

Principle One: Less is more.

Choosing DLI as a resource makes it possible to effectively teach writing conventions while keeping the writing process and authentic writing at center stage. DLI provides quick, daily, systematic instruction that does not take over the writing block. The short amount of time needed for DLI can also offer a perfect way to capitalize on the under-utilized time block at the beginning of the day or class period while attendance or other tasks are completed.

Principle Two: Direct, explicit skill instruction is vital.

The DLI curriculum maximizes the effectiveness of instruction by creating a focus on one new skill each week. Supported by the DLI materials, the classroom teacher uses direct, explicit instruction to introduce the new focus skill each week.

Principle Three: A spiraling curriculum effectively scaffolds student mastery.

Following direct instruction on the focus skill for the week, DLI provides short, daily opportunities for review and practice throughout the coming week and beyond. Each week students are introduced to a new skill and continue to review previously taught skills. The review component in DLI provides students with continual exposure built on the foundation of direct instruction.

Principle Five: Assessment informs instruction and is critical to the learning cycle.

Frequent short assessments prove beneficial to teachers and to students. DLI includes two types of assessments to guide and inform instruction. Pre-post assessments at six-week intervals easily allow teachers to identify areas where more support is needed and to celebrate growth with students. Weekly assessments provide an opportunity for students to develop test-taking strategies and to gain feedback on their progress and for teachers to monitor their students' progress.

Principle Six: If you want to improve instruction, don't overlook teaching the teacher.

Teacher training in the form of staff development is vital to improving instruction. Additionally, supporting teachers with high-quality teaching resources that provide background information on the skills and suggested teaching strategies is important. Beginning teachers, as well as veterans, will benefit from the support and content background provided in DLI as the number and degree of difficulty of skills increases.

Principle Seven: Using a quality resource with fidelity allows teachers to address a large body of content without gaps or duplication.

As school districts have aligned their instruction to the rigor of the Common Core State Standards, the body of content to be addressed in the area of writing conventions has increased significantly. Selecting instructional materials from too wide a variety of sources proves time-intensive, introduces competing terminology, and lacks the benefit of a spiraling review. Teachers can rest assured that DLI knits all of the elements of the learning cycle together into one cohesive resource and supports them in addressing all of the required skills.

Principle Eight: Each exposure to a skill is valuable; multiple exposures complement one another.

A variety of avenues exist for introducing writing convention skills. Each subsequent interaction with the skill adds to the student learning and creates more opportunities for application of these skills. Students may meet a new skill in a writing conference during writing workshop, in the context of a DLI mini-lesson, or during a teacher-led mini-lesson analyzing the use of the skill in a mentor text.

Teachers weave skills into all curriculum content. As students learn these convention skills, teachers and students recognize and discuss these skills when they are employed in their reading materials as well. Each of these individual interactions is important in advancing student learning. Teachers support the process by helping students connect the dots and transfer the skills to their individual, independent student writing.

Developing Daily Language Instruction: Empirical Evidence, Research, and a Pressing Need

The Eight Guiding Principles that formed the foundation for the design of the *Daily Language Instruction* curriculum resulted from observation and experimentation over two professional careers spanning decades and teacher-student relationships with nearly 2000 young writers.

This empirical evidence positioned Barbara Anderson and Laura Swanson to act on a **pressing need**: the need for quality, stand-alone materials addressing writing conventions—materials including direct instruction, review/practice, and assessment—materials that were teacher-friendly and time-effective.

Motivated by need, a collaborative effort began to refine and revise the draft materials and publish *Daily Language Instruction*. The role of research, especially the comprehensive findings of two large studies featuring meta-analysis informed and contributed to the development and revision of DLI: *Writing Next*, commissioned by the Carnegie Corporation and released in 2006, and *Teaching Elementary School Students to Be Effective Writers* released in 2012 by NCEE, Institute of Education Sciences and the U.S. Department of Education.

Research tells us:

Writing Next, employing meta-analysis, identifies 11 elements of writing instruction that research suggests will help 4th to 12th grade students. The first element, determined to provide the greatest impact, is the practice of teaching writing strategies. "Strategy instruction involves explicitly and systematically teaching steps necessary for planning, revising, and/or editing text (Graham, 2006)."

Daily Language Instruction offers:

Explicit and systematic instruction on strategies for editing text is a key element of DLI through the foundational weekly mini-lesson and the systematic review.

Research tells us:

Mastery of writing conventions enables writers to focus on more complex and abstract writing tasks as they develop and mature. *Writing Next* states it in this way, "Writing proficiency develops over time. Effective writing instruction acknowledges that the smooth deployment of the higher-level writing strategies needed to plan, generate, and revise text depends on easy use of lower-level skills such as handwriting, keyboarding, spelling, grammar and punctuation, and access to appropriate vocabulary." This idea is further supported in Recommendation 3 in *Teaching Elementary School Students to Be Effective Writers*.

Daily Language Instruction offers:

Smooth deployment of the higher-level writing strategies needed to plan, generate, and revise text is supported by the short, daily work on capitalization, punctuation, grammar, and usage: the focus of DLI. Additionally, an optional spelling component correlates with the weekly DLI focus skills.

Research tells us:

Writing Next cautions against a *focus* on grammar to improve student writing. It recommends instead the use of the writing process and strategy instruction, mentioned above, as the most effective practices.

Daily Language Instruction offers:

Mastery of writing conventions is accomplished in a time-effective manner with the use of DLI and does not upstage high priority practices.

Research tells us:

Instruction on the strategy of sentence combining is recommended by both studies, *Writing Next* and *Teaching Elementary Students to Be Effective Writers*. Using this strategy, students create more complex and sophisticated sentence structures.

Daily Language Instruction offers:

Sentence combining in DLI is first introduced in Grade 3 and builds throughout the grades. In the Grade 6 edition, five different strategies are employed in the practice of sentence combining.

Research tells us:

The importance of assessment is mentioned in *Writing Next*: "This report identifies elements of instruction that hold promise for improving writing ability. However, as mentioned earlier, together the instructional elements do not represent a curriculum. Before implementing any of the elements, educators should consider the needs of their students as revealed by assessment data. Such data include observations of students while they are writing, analysis of their writing samples (see, e.g., Needels & Napp, 1994), and test scores."

Daily Language Instruction offers:

Assessment is a key element embedded in the design of DLI; the pre-post and weekly assessments give teachers information in real time.

DLI is a focused, stand-alone resource for elementary students that specifically targets writing conventions: capitalization, punctuation, grammar, and usage. Its development is a result of both empirical evidence and research. Systematic, sustained use of DLI supports the development of proficiency in the use of writing conventions and provides students one of the necessary tools in their "tool boxes" supporting their progression to higher levels of writing.