



## Text Types and Purposes Transcript

The Dynamic Learning Maps® Alternate Assessment System is a new assessment designed to more validly measure what students with significant cognitive disabilities know and can do. This presentation will provide an overview of the Writing strand of English Language Arts for students with significant cognitive disabilities who will complete the alternate assessment.

This module will specifically focus on the cluster of DLM® Essential Elements in writing called *text types and purposes*. This training is part of a series of training videos that support teachers of students with significant cognitive disabilities in their efforts to teach and assess more effectively. Sponsored by a grant from the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, this training is part of the professional development efforts of the Dynamic Learning Maps Alternate Assessment Consortium.

Writing is one of the 4 strands of Dynamic Learning Maps Essential Elements for English Language Arts or ELA. *Writing* refers to the process of constructing texts in traditional orthography, either print or braille, that communicate experiences, thoughts, feelings, and understandings for diverse audiences and purposes. This represents a substantive and substantial shift from the ways in which we have traditionally approached writing for students with significant cognitive disabilities.

Programs that did address traditional orthography focused on handwriting practice and curricula, tracing and fine motor exercises, and copying tasks. Mastery of these activities was viewed as prerequisite to writing for communication purposes.

Programs that focused on communication tended to bypass traditional orthography by trying to teach children to compose texts using task-specific picture symbols or word banks. Neither of these traditions resulted in successful use of print or braille

to communicate experiences, thoughts, feelings, and understandings for diverse audiences and purposes.

The DLM Essential Elements require that we teach children NOT JUST traditional orthography and NOT JUST communication, BUT RATHER how to use traditional orthography to communicate to different people for different reasons. So that students can produce writing for a range of purposes and audiences in order to communicate for a range of purposes with a range of audiences.

To address such a goal requires meeting students at their present level of performance and understanding and helping them progress from there. Let's examine some emergent writing of students with significant cognitive disabilities to consider how instruction might help them advance toward the goal of writing to communicate for a variety of audiences and purposes.

Here is a page of emergent writing composed by Sari, a three-year-old with autism. Sari wrote this during a tornado drill when she and her classmates were unexpectedly interrupted and taken to an office with no windows. As soon the door was closed, Sari began screaming. The teacher handed her a post-it pad and pencil. Sari stopped screaming immediately, and quietly engaged in her vertical and horizontal emergent writing on post-it after post-it until the drill concluded several minutes later. This emergent writing was not produced in traditional orthography, but it provided Sari with a means of communicating her thoughts and feelings without screaming in a small, crowded room.

Sari's emergent writing demonstrates several important understandings and skills. First, she knows that print is produced in a linear way, although she does not yet understand the finer details of individual letters. Second, she understands that writing can be used to communicate and perhaps manage feelings.

Sari demonstrates in her emergent writing that she is attuned to print and communication and would benefit from alphabet instruction and further meaningful, print-based communication opportunities.

Steve is an elementary student with significant physical, intellectual, and communication disabilities. After laboriously typing this writing sample one letter at a time, he read it aloud with his dysarthric speech to his teacher: "To Tyronza. I fell on my head."

Steve's emergent writing shows no understanding of conventional spelling, but he recognizes the use of capital letters, grouping words in sentences, and using spaces between words. He demonstrates that he would benefit from continued meaningful writing opportunities along with early phonics instruction helping him to connect letters with the sounds they represent in words.

This writing sample is from Adam, a boy with significant cognitive disabilities, who would only copy when asked to write his own ideas. This teacher decided to engage Adam in written dialogue about a topic of interest. By using writing as a means of communication, his teacher was able to help Adam begin to transition away from his learned copying toward generating his own ideas from the models provided. Adam understands letters, sounds, and words, but needs greater focus on using writing to communicate for different purposes to different audiences.

The range and content of the DLM Essential Elements for Writing are expressed in four clusters. The first, *text types and purposes*, addresses instruction for students in how to write for various reasons; The second, *production and distribution of writing*, recognizes the importance of students writing for publication to increasingly diverse audiences; The third, *research to build and present knowledge*, is focused on teaching inquiry into topics of interest and importance as well as the use of resources in writing informational texts; and, *range of writing*, addresses writing for

an increasing breadth of teacher-directed or student-initiated tasks, purposes, and audiences.

The cluster, *text types and purposes*, addresses specific writing knowledge and skills related to three types of writing: Arguments, Information/explanation, and Narratives, or stories. Educators often assume that students must be writing at high levels before they can take on these three formal types of writing. Let's look at some writing examples that suggest otherwise. One way to help students plan and generate texts in one or more of these genres is to look for natural opportunities in the students' day to build writing and learning opportunities upon student engagement.

The following is an example of this principle in an email exchange between a literacy camp leader and two adolescent campers who participate in the alternate assessment in their state. The two girls, Anna and Carrie, were troubled to find ants in the cabin where they were learning to read and write. They were encouraged by their teacher to write an email to see if something might be done about this problem. This is an example of an informative and persuasive writing task.

The girls typed the following, exactly as seen here. It reads:

Dear Dave,

The bugs are everywhere.

Don't bite me.

Bugs are everywhere.

I hate bugs.

I don't like bugs.

I don't like bugs.

Step on bug.

Don't cut me.

Seal the door.

Anna Carie

The literacy camp leader understood the intent of their messages, but recognized a motivated and natural writing opportunity and replied:

Dear Carie and Anna,

I agree with you. I don't like bugs either. Did you bring any bug spray to camp? You should always use it before you go outside. Maybe it is just that the bugs think you are sweet.

Your friend,

Dave

After reading the reply with the support of a talking word processor, the girls attempted to clarify their request with more information:

Dear Dave,

You are funny!

We are talking about bugs inside.

You are talking about bugs outside.

Please kill bugs for us.

It is hard for us to work.

Anna Carie

The camp leader continued to feign ignorance, replying this time:

Dear Carie and Anna,

You have bugs inside!

You should take medicine.

That will kill the bugs.

Then you will be healthy.  
Your friend,  
Dave

The girls then provided their clearest argument:

Dear Dave,  
You're really, really funny.  
We aren't sick.  
The bugs are in our room.  
There are bugs everywhere.  
Kill them.  
You're so funny.  
Anna and Carie Cat

With nothing left to confuse, the camp leader changed direction:

Dear Anna and Carie Cat,  
Oh, the bugs are in the room.  
That's great!  
I will bring chocolate.  
We can kill them and eat them.  
Chocolate-covered ants are yummy.  
Your friend,  
Dave

He then left chocolate at the girls' table while they were out and later received the following message:

Dear Dave,  
That's disgusting.  
Don't eat that.  
Do not eat ants.  
Don't eat that.  
Dave, you will get sick.  
Don't eat chocolate.  
Thank you for the chocolate.  
Anna Carie Cat

The camp leader then made a suggestion:

Dear Anna and Carie Cat,  
Glad you liked the chocolate.  
Too bad you didn't try it with ants. Yum!  
Use your energy from eating the chocolate to step on the ants.  
Happy stamping.  
Your friend,  
Dave

As the camp leader and teacher read these emails and observed the girls' relative strengths in communicating their message but relative need for spelling assistance, they decided to introduce word prediction software into the activity. As the girls began composing the following message, their teacher stopped them after three sentences and introduced the software.

You can observe the impact on their written product.

Dear Dave,  
He is silly

Chocolate ants are disgusting  
He's very funny

Then the spelling prediction software was introduced.

No way you have to step on the ants  
I love you dave  
Anna Carie cat

Pursuing writing to the end, the camp leader wrote:

Dear Anna and Carie Cat,

I'm glad I don't have to kill your ants.  
I didn't want ant blood on my shoes.  
Try some ants with chocolate.  
You might like them.  
I love writing to you also.

Your friend,  
Dave

Using word prediction for the entire message, the girls wrote their final reply.

Dear Dave  
Thank you for nothing. You are hopeless.  
we have ants camp over  
You are lazier  
You not halp us  
You can make sure ant aren't in our room next year

Your friend

ANNA CARIE CAT

Over time, students, like these two, learn to appreciate that a key purpose of writing is to communicate clearly to an external, sometimes unfamiliar (and perhaps even uncooperative!) audience, and they begin to adapt the form and content of their writing to accomplish particular tasks and purposes.

Teachers may be unsure of how to focus on writing for communicative purposes when students are unable to compose text independently or are still learning letter names, sounds, or words. In the examples above, teachers supported meaningful composition for communicative purposes by encouraging or allowing spelling words at whatever level students were able. Eventually, they recognized that word prediction software would help the students communicate more successfully by spelling more words correctly.

There were three critical components in this interaction that can be extended to other lesson designs: set up a meaningful task or purpose. For example, you might suggest that students write to provide reasons why recess should be longer, list items needed for a project, or tell a story about a visit to an amusement park; provide students with a means of access to traditional orthography such as alternate pencils, models of possible ways of writing, use of word prediction and other assistive technologies; and provide a response from the intended audience as was modeled by the literacy counselor in the bugs example. .

This is why activities like copying or tracing are insufficient. They do not address the goal of writing to communicate for a variety of audiences and purposes.

This module provided an overview of writing as it is reflected in the DLM Essential Elements with a focus on the cluster, *text types and purposes*. Please be sure to complete the other modules on writing, which will focus on the remaining clusters:

*production and distribution of writing, research to build and present knowledge, and range of writing.*

For more information about the Dynamic Learning Maps Alternate Assessment System, please go to [dynamiclearningmaps.org](http://dynamiclearningmaps.org). Thank you.