Basic Concepts and Key Word Outlines

1. Most students who dislike writing have difficulty partly because they “don’t know what to write about.”
2. Being able to think of something to write should not be a prerequisite for learning how to write.
3. Writing is a complicated process; spelling, handwriting, and composition are entirely different neurological functions. For a student who has difficulty with writing, this complexity must be broken into small, manageable pieces.
4. Imitation is not only okay, but is actually the best way to begin learning to write.
5. If the students do not have to worry about what to write, they can learn how to write. As they gradually gain confidence and competence, they become more comfortable with the task of determining what to write.
6. Using a source text allows the student to get content for writing while reviewing content from subjects such as history, science, literature, or geography. Writing should be a part of the study of these subjects rather than a subject unto itself.
7. Just as Benjamin Franklin took “short hints of the sentiment of each sentence” to teach himself to write, our students can use key word outlines to help them get started with writing from simple source texts.
8. Source texts can be fiction or non-fiction. Aesop’s fables work well. Material should be at or below the reading level of the student. Selections of 4–7 sentences are ideal. Try one from a short Aesop’s fable:

The Fox and the Goat

By an unlucky chance, a Fox fell into a deep well from which he could not escape. A Goat passed by and asked the Fox what he was doing down there. “Oh, have you not heard?” said the Fox. “There is going to be a great drought, so I came down here in order to be sure to have water by me. Why don’t you come down too?” The Goat thought this a good idea and jumped down into the well. But the Fox immediately sprang onto her back and by putting his foot on her long horns, managed to hop up to the edge of the well. “Good-bye, friend,” said the Fox. “Remember, be careful of the advice of one who is in trouble.”

I. 

1. 

2. 

3. 

4. 

5. 

6. 

7. 

8. 
USE OF THE KEY WORD OUTLINE

Step 1: Verbal Summary
Tell back the information verbally, making complete sentences from the key words. Exact duplication is neither expected nor required.

**Note:** For many students it will be best to do several key word outlines from short, easy to read paragraphs and practice choosing words and telling back content until the process becomes fairly easy.

Step 2: Written Summary - First Draft
Using a key word outline, have the students first verbally tell back the content corporately and then proceed to write down on paper the sentences they said. As the students write, remember these:

- Don't expect great handwriting; do wait until the clean copy to say anything.
- Don't expect perfect spelling; do be the human dictionary. (Never say: “Go look it up.”)
- Don't worry about neatness; do encourage “no erasing.”
- Don't overcorrect or lecture; do praise the students' efforts.
- Don't frown, grimace, or look serious; do smile as much as possible.

Step 3: Clean Copy
After the rough drafts are finished, the teacher or peer editor (student) edits to correct spelling, syntax, and punctuation.

**Note:** These steps should be repeated numerous times until the process has become relatively easy (or at least less painful). Don't hesitate to help, give suggestions, and even dictate sentences if necessary. When you feel the students have confidence and understand the process, proceed to Step 4.

Step 4: Introducing Dress-Ups, Creating a Checklist
Introduce the idea of dressing-up the compositions to make them sound a little more professional. Teach students to add an -ly adverb, and give them a nice list of adverbs to choose from. Do many assignments requiring just one -ly adverb. When that is easy, add a who-which clause, and when that is easy, add a because clause.

1. **-ly adverb** The fox **effortlessly** jumped up on the goat's back and escaped the well.
2. **who-which** The clever fox convinced the goat, **who** jumped into the well.
3. **strong verb** The fox **spun** a tale of impending drought.
4. **because** Because the fox seemed sincere, the goat believed him.

Create a Composition Checklist for your student, being very specific, and provide word lists to ensure success.

### Composition Checklist

**General**
- Title and name on paper
- Composition double-spaced
- Checked for spelling and punctuation

**Dress-Ups**
- -ly adverb
- who-which clause
- strong verb
- because clause
Celebrating the New Year

The celebration of the New Year is the oldest of all holidays. It was first observed in ancient Babylon nearly 4000 years ago. Around 2000 BC, the Babylonian New Year began with the first new moon after the first day of spring, to celebrate rebirth, planting of new crops, and blossoming. Their celebration lasted for eleven days. Each day had its own special celebration. The Romans continued to observe the New Year in late March, but various emperors tampered with their calendar. Their calendar soon became out of synchronization with the sun. We now celebrate the New Year on the first day of January.

I. ______________________________________________________

1. ______________________________________________________

2. ______________________________________________________

3. ______________________________________________________

4. ______________________________________________________

5. ______________________________________________________

6. ______________________________________________________

7. ______________________________________________________

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