



---

---

# Toying With Writing

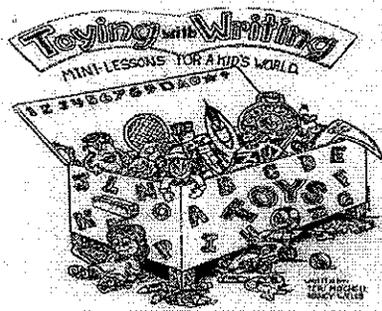
Presenter: Nancy Herta

North Central Association  
Michigan Department of Education

April 7, 2008  
Lansing, Michigan

Toying With Writing:  
Mini-Lessons for a Kid's World

Nancy Herta  
6850 Winegar Rd.  
Perry, MI 48872  
(517) 675-2026  
[nancy@toyingwithwriting.com](mailto:nancy@toyingwithwriting.com)



# "Toying With Writing"

## What's it all about?

### *What is the impetus for "Toying with Writing?"*

One of my concerns, and frustrations, as an educator was how to get kids to revise their writing after they had written their initial rough draft. I often heard comments such as, "I like my paper the way it is" or "I revised it already." When I looked at my students' writing, there was no visible sign that they had revised their papers at all. I soon came to realize that my students needed to have specific revision strategies taught to them, and that they had to want to go back and revise their writing. Therefore, I decided that if I could "hook" my students by using "fun revision" strategies, their desire to revise would be enhanced. The "Toying with Writing" program accomplishes this task! Writing and the revision process come alive in a way that is fun for kids!

### *How do children benefit from "Toying with Writing?"*

Elementary and middle school children can easily benefit from the "Toying with Writing" program. The pedagogy of how children learn dictates to educators that they be resourceful and capture the interest of their students. "Toying with Writing" allows children a new way to look at writing instruction and provides concrete manipulatives for children to play with and explore. This form of instruction has long been the educational approach to most curriculum areas, such as: math, social studies, and science. Now, by using toys as concrete manipulatives, children can experience a more in-depth understanding of how the utilization of effective writing strategies impact their reader/audience. In addition, those students who learn best through hands-on instruction, and through experiential learning, will also find a haven in the "Toying with Writing" program. Children with special needs, or children who are at high-risk, may also benefit from a new and innovative approach to writing that embraces and supports a more concrete and experiential learning style.

### *Why is "Toying with Writing" more than just fun?*

"Toying with Writing" is more than just fun! It has a strong research base that supports the premises upon which it is founded. Reading teachers have known for years that accessing a student's prior knowledge is an important aspect of sound reading instruction. If this is the case, why not take the knowledge that children have about the operation of toys and apply this knowledge to a specific writing concept or skill? For example, if a child knows that a "slinky" will become "all tangled up" when stretched to its maximum length, an easy connection to writing is that a run-on sentence operates in the same manner. If a run-on sentence is stretched out to its maximum length, the reader/audience will also become "all tangled up." This analogy allows a child to make a visual and kinesthetic connection to a specific, abstract writing skill. In effect, the teacher has tapped into the multiple intelligences of children and provided a memory hook for the recall of the writing skill.



---

---

# "Toying With Writing" Meeting the Research

The "Toying With Writing" program aligns with current educational research and pedagogy. The following research and educational structures may be applied to the use of this approach:

## MULTIPLE INTELLIGENCE THEORY

N. White, T. Blythe, & H. Gardner, "Multiple Intelligences Theory", 1992

*"Experienced and successful teachers often cater to a range of students by teaching each part of the curriculum in many different ways."*

*"If students are to develop the full range of their potential, they need to be exposed early and often to a wide variety of activities and materials."*

### Implication of Multiple Intelligence Theory for "Toying With Writing"

By teaching writing skills in a "different way," teachers are able to tap into the intellectual strengths of students within their classroom. Toying With Writing is that "different way". Toying With Writing allows students to utilize their "body knowledge", "visual imagination", and "symbolic language" to understand writing concepts.

## BRAIN-BASED LEARNING

Caine, R.N. and Caine, G., (1994) "Making Connections-Teaching and the Human Brain

*"Metaphors are intrinsic to the construction of new knowledge and at the heart of the acquisition of felt meaning."*

*"When we expand learning from what the child knows already, then we can readily include new facts, ideas and skills. Ignoring the child's natural memory is to ignore what that child can bring to the learning."*

### Implication of Brain-Based Learning for "Toying With Writing"

By teaching writing with toy-metaphors, students are able to access their prior knowledge and add to the schema they already have in place. Toying With Writing allows students to apply known, brain-based strategies to the learning of new writing concepts. In effect, toys become "memory-hooks" for the brain.

## UNDERSTANDING LEARNING

Ruby K. Payne, Ph.D. "Understanding Learning - the How, the Why, the What," 2002

*"Mental models- Are how the mind holds abstract information - Often explain 'the why' of things working the way they do - Tell the structure, purpose, or pattern - Are held in the mind as stories, analogies, or two-dimensional drawings - Collapse the amount of time it takes to teach something."*

By teaching writing with mental models, students are able to retain abstract information in a meaningful way.

### Implication of Understanding Learning for "Toying With Writing"

Toying With Writing allows students to apply the "3 M" (Mental Model Metaphor) approach to abstract and unknown writing concepts. Toys allow students to be exposed to new learning by understanding "the How", "the Why" and "the What," through a known medium. They can then use this patterning information for the writing process.

# Michigan Writing GLCE's - Grades K-6

## Toying With Writing Applications

	Kindergarten	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6
	xx=00	xx=01	xx=02	xx=03	xx=04	xx=05	xx=06
<b>Writing Genre</b>							
W.GN.xx.01	X	X	X				X
W.GN.xx.02							
W.GN.xx.03		X	X	X	X	X	
W.GN.xx.04		X	X	X	X	X	N/A
<b>Writing Process</b>							
W.PR.xx.01		X	X	X	X	X	X
W.PR.xx.02		X	X	X	X	X	X
W.PR.xx.03		X	X	X	X	X	X
W.PR.xx.04		X		X	X	X	X
W.PR.xx.05		N/A	X	X	X	X	X
W.PR.xx.06		N/A	X	X	N/A	N/A	N/A
W.PR.xx.07		N/A	X	X	N/A	N/A	N/A
<b>Personal Style</b>							
W.PS.xx.01		X	X	X	X	X	X
<b>Grammar and Usage</b>							
W.GR.xx.01		X	X	X	X	X	X
<b>Handwriting</b>							
W.HW.xx.02	X						
<b>Writing Attitude</b>							
W.AT.xx.01	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

N/A = No Standard Listed

X = Standard Met



# Toying With Writing: Mini-Lessons for a Kid's World

## Six-Trait Connections

### LESSON

### CONNECTION

Nouns

Ideas (specificity)  
Conventions

Verbs

Sentence Fluency (complete sentences)  
Word Choice (stronger verbs)  
Conventions

Subject & Predicate Relationship

Sentence Fluency  
Word Choice (action verbs)  
Conventions

Beginning Capitalization

Conventions

Declarative Sentences

Sentence Fluency  
Voice

Exclamatory Sentences

Sentence Fluency  
Voice

Quotations

Conventions  
Sentence Fluency

Possessive Concept

Conventions  
Sentence Fluency

Combining Sentences

Sentence Fluency

Run-On Sentences

Sentence Fluency  
Conventions

Adding Description

Ideas (adding specific details)  
Word Choice (descriptions)

Synonyms

Word Choice (exact language)

Topic Focus

Ideas  
Organization

Main Idea/Supporting Details

Ideas  
Organization

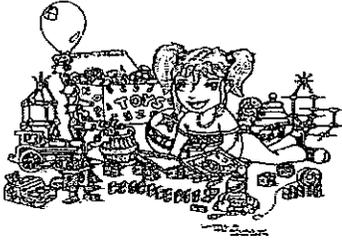
Parts of a Paper

Organization

Introduction/Conclusion Linkage

Organization

*Have FUN "Toying with Writing"! Visit our website at [www.toyingwithwriting.com](http://www.toyingwithwriting.com)*



# Toying With Writing Too/Two More Mini-Lessons for a Kid's World

## Six-Trait Connections

### LESSON

### CONNECTION

Writing on the Line

Presentation/Conventions (overall look)  
Organization

Word Spacing

Conventions/Presentation (overall look)  
Organization  
Sentence Fluency

Sentence Structure

Conventions  
Sentence Fluency

Run-On Sentences

Sentence Fluency  
Conventions

Commas

Sentence Fluency  
Conventions

Possessives

Sentence Fluency  
Conventions

Conjunctions

Sentence Fluency  
Conventions

Paragraphing

Ideas  
Organization  
Conventions (indenting)

Sequencing

Organization

Main Idea /Supporting Details

Ideas  
Organization

Introduction, Body, Conclusion

Organization

Writing Structure

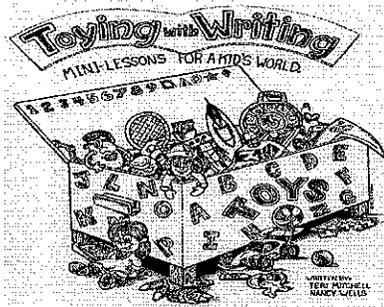
Organization

Varying Leads

Organization (kinds of leads)  
Sentence Fluency  
Voice

Adding Description

Ideas (specificity)  
Fluency  
Voice



---

# Nancy Herta

## "Toying With Writing"

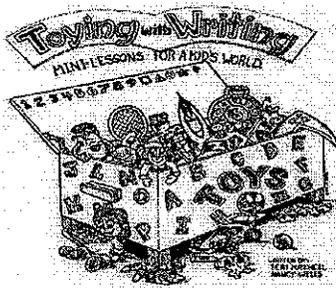
**Nancy Herta** has been a classroom teacher for Kearsley Community Schools for the past eleven years, and she currently teaches fifth grade students within this district. She has a Master's Degree in Curriculum and Teaching from Michigan State University and has also completed post-masters work through Marygrove College in Detroit, Michigan. Nancy's experience and degree in curriculum planning has allowed her to have a working knowledge of effective curriculum design and development which has resulted in the creation of the co-authored *Toying with Writing*® program.

Ms. Herta is the co-writer of two books entitled *Toying with Writing: Mini-Lessons for a Kid's World* and *Toying with Writing Too/Two: More Mini-Lessons for a Kid's World*. In addition, Nancy has published an independent article in the Michigan Reading Journal (Fall 2001/Vol. 34:1) entitled "Toying with Writing: Thinking Like Children". These writings have been utilized by educators across the United States to enhance their writer's workshops and to make meaningful connections for children.

As a published author and curriculum designer, Nancy has been hired to provide numerous schools and districts with professional development opportunities. Along with these appearances, Nancy has shared her co-authored *Toying with Writing*® program at various educational conferences across the country. Nationwide, educators have embraced her ideas and seen the implications of research-based practice embedded within fun mini-lessons that kids enjoy doing. Ms. Herta has developed many different workshops of various lengths for educators to enjoy and makes a point of customizing these presentations to the needs of the educators who attend her sessions. FUN is always an important part of her teaching style and toy/lesson giveaways add to the enjoyment of her professional development opportunities.

Nancy Herta has also been an adjunct writing professor for the University of Michigan-Flint where she taught undergraduate students, and has also taught graduate level classes for Performance Learning Systems. These adjunct positions have allowed her to stay current and well-versed in pedagogical best practice and the latest educational research. She makes a point to connect this research to national writing standards and her *Toying with Writing*® program. Nancy believes that a strong, research-driven program is doubly effective when it allows children to have fun while meeting educational standards and benchmarks.

In addition to her teaching of both children and adults, Nancy has also traveled extensively throughout the United States as an educational consultant in the field of writing. She has presented her "Toying with Writing" program at conferences in numerous states, including: Michigan, Indiana, California, Tennessee, Arkansas, Wisconsin, Texas, and many more.



---

---

# Presentation Resume'

## International Conferences

Greater Edmonton Teachers Conference Association - Alberta, Canada

## National Conferences

Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD)

North Central Association Conference

National Council of Teachers of English

## Regional Conferences

International Reading Association - Eastern

International Reading Association - Great lakes

International Reading Association - Plains

International Reading Association - Southwest

## State Conferences

Michigan  
Tennessee

Kentucky  
Ohio

California  
Texas

Indiana  
Wisconsin

## Organizations

Michigan Summer Literacy Conference

Michigan Association of Public School Academies

Michigan Education Association

Michigan Student Education Association

Michigan Alternative Education Association

Michigan Council of Teachers of English

Michigan State University Bright Ideas Conference

Genesee County Curriculum Council

Bullshead, Arizona ISD Reading Council

Spring Arbor College Teacher's Conference

Kent County Reading Association

Bay-Arenac Reading Association

## School Districts

Alpena, MI  
Escanaba, MI  
Muskegon, MI  
White Lake, MI  
Denver, IN

Hazel Park, MI  
Flushing, MI  
Nashville, TN  
Delta-Schoolcraft, MI  
Peru, IN

Forest Hills, MI  
Dearborn Academy, MI  
North Branch, MI  
Columbus, IN  
Cincinnati, OH