EFFECTS OF HIGH-INTEREST WRITING PROMPTS FOR STUDENTS WITH

LEARNING DISABILITIES

by

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ABSTRACT

Effects of High-Interest Writing Prompts on

Performance of Students with

Learning Disabilities

by

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Often described as passive learners, students with learning disabilities (LD)

sometimes approach writing as a negative and burdensome task. Their reaction may

imply that writing requires processes that they find difficult. The purpose of this study

was to examine the extent to which high-interest narrative writing prompts for 12- to 13-

year-old students in special education increase accuracy and total words written (TWW)

in a 3-min timed writing sample compared to low-interest writing prompts. High-interest

writing prompts are story starter topics chosen by each participant as preferred ones for

writing tasks. Participants will be three individuals from a sixth- and seventh-grade

special education language arts class who have been classified with LD. Initially,

participants will select high- and low-interest writing topics using a prompt selection

procedure. Given 40 potential writing topics, individual participants will select their 10

highest and lowest topics of interest. Participants completed 20, 3-min timed writing samples based on high- and low-interest narrative writing prompts. High- and low-interest topics were counterbalanced. Percent accuracy, TWW, and correct writing sequences (CWS) were recorded by the researcher. Using a multi-element design, the results confirmed that high-interest writing prompts produced more volume in comparison to low-interest writing prompts. However, results did not show higher accuracy in the high-interest condition. Results are discussed in terms of constructing writing lessons for sixth- and seventh-grade students with LD.

(74 pages)

PUBLIC ABSTRACT

Effects of High-Interest Writing Prompts for Students with Learning Disabilities

By

Kelsey Chlarson

The following study was done to examine the extent to which high-interest narrative writing prompts for 12- to 13-year old students in special education increase accuracy and total words written (TWW) in a 3-min timed writing sample compared to low-interest writing prompts.

Students who will participate will be individuals from a sixth- and seventh-grade special education language arts class who have been classified with LD. In this study, participants select high-interest writing prompts as story starter topics as preferred prompts for writing tasks. Initially, participants will select high- and low-interest writing topics using a prompt selection procedure. Given 40 potential writing topics, individual participants will select their 10 highest and lowest topics of interest. Participants will complete between 20-30, 3-min timed writing samples based on high- and low-interest narrative writing prompts. High- and low-interest topics were counterbalanced.

Percent accuracy, TWW, and correct writing sequences (CWS) will be recorders by the researcher. Each student's scores will be compiled with the results of the other participants. This information will be used to determine areas of needed instruction for sixth- and seventh-grade students with LD in the curriculum area of writing. Where it is applicable and beneficial to the student, individual results will be used with confidentially to help achieve each student's writing goal(s).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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INTRODUCTION

Learning and practicing writing skills are complex processes. In describing writing, Graham, Schwartz, & MacArthur (1993) described three processes: declarative, procedural, and conditional knowledge of writing. Declarative knowledge addresses *what* good writing is and *what* good writers do. Procedural knowledge describes *how* to plan, revise, and edit written text. Conditional knowledge establishes knowing *when* and *where* to apply procedures for planning and writing (Graham et al., 1993). Students with LD may experience difficulty with one or more of these processes. These students can benefit from instructional methods of teaching writing, because these methods allow for opportunities for strategies used resulting in final written products that are logical and organized (Baker, Gersten, & Graham, 2003). There is a clear rationale for the need to improve students' writing performance by establishing the importance of writing, identifying some of the difficulties that poor writers encounter, and determining what skills are crucial for enhancing writing performance, and exploring to find effective ways to teach writing skills.

Today, educators are finding various ways to implement and include literacy in the curriculum for students with LD (Baker et al., 2003). There is not only a need to understand the writing challenges students with LD face, but also to find ways to help them become more successful. This is especially true in the area of writing. In order to help students with LD become more successful writers, it is important to understand what topics are associated with better writing and produce a higher volume of total words written in order to provide instruction that will enable them to improve their writing.

Importance of Writing

In many societies, writing is an essential tool for communication, learning, and self-expression (Graham, 2006). Through writing, individuals are able to maintain personal links with friends, family, and colleagues from a distance (Graham, 2006). Writing also makes it possible to collect and convey information with accuracy and detail. Individuals can further record their ideas, reflect on their thoughts, or extend their knowledge on a topic through the use of writing. The National Commission on Writing for America's Families, Schools, and Colleges (2004) described writing as a threshold skill for employment and promotion and indicated that people who cannot write well are less likely to be hired, retained, and/or promoted.

Writing is also important in academic settings. Writing skills are often needed for demonstrating learning (e.g., responding to exam items) and progress in school depends on developing an adequate degree of writing proficiency and fluency. Writing is the primary medium by which teachers evaluate students' performance (Graham & Harris, 1988). It also provides a flexible tool for assessing students' knowledge and academic competence in class and on high-stakes educational assessments (Graham & Harris, 1988). For some children, writing presents an alternative medium for expressing thoughts and ideas that they might be unable or unwilling to express in a different way. Persistent writing problems, therefore, make it difficult for students to reach their educational, occupational, and personal potential (Graham, 2006).

Concerns about the writing achievement of students in U.S. schools have been present for many years and continue to persist. According to the Utah Criterion-Referenced Tests (CRT) (2008-2009), many students experience difficulties mastering

writing. Utah has defined proficiency levels for all Core CRTs. Four levels are defined:
Level 1: Minimal, Level 2: Partial, Level 3: Sufficient, Level 4: Substantial. The
descriptors for each level and correspondence with federal proficiency levels are outlined
in Table 1.

Table 1

Utah Student Achievement Level Matched to Federal Levels

Level	Descriptor	Federal levels
Level 4: Substantial	A student scoring at this level is proficient on measured standards and objectives of the Core Curriculum in this subject. The student's performance indicates substantial understanding and application of key curriculum concepts.	Advanced
Level 3: Sufficient	A student scoring at this level is proficient on the measured standards and objectives of the Core Curriculum in this subject. The student's performance indicates sufficient understanding and application of key curriculum concepts.	Proficient
Level 2: Partial	A student scoring at this level is not yet proficient on measured standards and objectives of the Core Curriculum in this subject. The student's performance indicates partial understanding and application of key curriculum concepts.	Basic
Level 1: Minimal	A student scoring at this level is not yet proficient on measured standards and objectives of the Core Curriculum in this subject. The student's performance indicates minimal understanding and application of key curriculum concepts.	

In 2008-2009, the Utah State Office of Education (USOE) reported that 79% of sixth-grade students were proficient. Based on the Utah Student Achievement levels 52% demonstrated substantial proficiency, 28% demonstrated sufficient proficiency, 12% demonstrated partial proficiency, and 8% demonstrated minimal proficiency. Eighty-one percent of seventh-grade students were proficient. Based on the Utah Student Achievement levels, 52% demonstrated sufficient proficiency, 29% demonstrated sufficient proficiency, 9% demonstrated partial proficiency, and 10% demonstrated minimal proficiency.   Breaking the CRT tests into further demographic categories, 47.7% of students with disabilities were proficient on the Language Arts assessment. Additionally, in 2008, the Utah State Office of Education reported that of the 40,349 students who took the sixth-grade Direct Writing Assessment (DWA), 66.02% were proficient. In terms of students with disabilities, 28.36% of students with disabilities were proficient. Results show that only a small percentage of students learn to write well enough to meet classroom demands. One way of addressing this issue is to provide exemplary writing instruction to all children right from the start, beginning in the primary grades. This is advantageous because it serves to maximize the writing development of children in general, minimize the number of students who develop writing problems as a result of poor instruction, and lessen the severity of difficulties experienced by children with writing disabilities (Graham & Harris, 2002).

Literature Review

I searched multiple sources for articles relating to teaching writing to students with LD, including EBSCO Host database (ERIC and Academic Search Premier), college textbooks on instructional methods, articles by authors recommended by committee

members and past professors, and reference sections from relevant articles. Based on these searches, I found hundreds of articles. Focusing my search on students with LD, I limited my literature review to articles (Baker et al., 2003; Englert et al., 1995; Gersten & Baker, 2001; Graham et al., 1993; Graham, Harris, & Larsen 2001; Wong, 1997).

One example of exemplary writing instruction in the early grades is the Early Literacy Project (ELP) designed by Englert et al. (1995). Englert et al. developed and tested a literacy program that included features considered to be essential to effective writing instruction. These features included (a) brainstorming strategies for preparing to write, (b) organizing strategies to relate and categorize the ideas, (c) using parallel strategies as students reading and gathering information for their writing, and (d) monitoring strategies as they clarify their thoughts and the relationships among their items of information. The study included nine participating teachers with similar teaching experience and background. All had taught for several years in resource classrooms settings serving students with mild disabilities. The students included 88 students with mild disabilities in Grades 1 through 4 from resource rooms of the participating teachers. The students differed in prior knowledge and exposure to the ELP program. The ELP instruction took place for 2 to 3 hrs each day in the resource rooms. During this time, students were involved in continuous and interactive reading and writing opportunities. The instruction was intensive, daily, and sustained over time. The program had a positive effect on the writing of students with in Grades 1 through 4, resulting in more organized text. In fact, results suggested not many programs have shown such powerful and multiple effects in these combined areas of literacy. Most interventions used with a special education population been limited to one domain: sight

word recognition, oral reading fluency, or reading comprehension. ELP was immensely successful in advancing students in the major domains of literacy often targeted in special education on students' individualized education programs (IEP).

Another method for addressing writing difficulties is to provide early supplementary writing instruction aimed at preventing or at least partially alleviating later writing difficulties (Graham et al 2001). This approach emphasizes both prevention and intervention. Early intervention programs characteristically yield more powerful benefits than efforts aimed at remediating problems in later grades (Graham et al., 2001). Intervention programs seek to accelerate the progress of struggling writers by providing them with additional instruction, either in a small group or through one-on-one tutoring. The basic goal is to help students catch up with their peers early on before their difficulties become more resolute. Graham et al. confirmed the writing problems of students with learning disabilities (LD) are not transitory difficulties that are easily fixed. Graham et al. outlined six principles thought to prevent or lessen the writing difficulties experienced by students with LD.

1. Provide effective writing instruction;

2. Tailor writing instruction to meet the individual needs of children with LD;

3. Intervene early, providing a coherent and sustained effort to improve the writing skills of children with LD;

4. Expect that each child will learn to write;

5. Identify and address academic and nonacademic roadblocks to writing and school success; and

6. Employ technological tools that improve writing performance.

The authors noted that these principles should be viewed as necessary, but not sufficient, components of an overall response.

Difficulties That Writers with LD Encounter

The writing products of students with LD do not fare well when compared to the writing produced by their grade-level peers who do not have LD (Baker et al., 2003). Students with LD in fourth, fifth, seventh, and eighth grade produce papers that are shorter, less cohesive, and more confusing than those generated by their regular classmates. They often leave out such critical parts as how the story ends or the basic premise underlying an option essay (Graham et al., 1993). Graham et al. found 10% or more of the words that they include in their compositions are misspelled, and a capitalization and punctuation error usually occurs in one third or more of their sentences.

To better understand what and how students with LD write, Graham et al. (1993) gathered data on writing and the composing processes, attitudes toward writing, and perceptions of writing capabilities of students with LD. The study included 39 students with LD. Twenty-nine of the students (21 males and 8 females) were in the seventh or eighth grade, 10 of the students (7 males and 3 females) were in fourth and fifth grade. All of the students received resource room services and attended a single school system in a rural area in the northeast United States. Additionally, the study included 18 students (14 males and 4 females) in the seventh or eighth grade, and 11 students (7 males and 4 females) in fourth and fifth grade who were students achieving at grade level.

The interview procedure was administered individually to each child in a quiet room at his or her school. Examiners conducted the interviews after receiving considerable instruction and practice in conducting them. During the interview, eight

open-ended questions were asked. The first three questions assessed students' declarative knowledge of the attributes of good writing and what good and poor writers do: (a) Suppose you were asked to be the teacher for one of your classes today and that one of the students asked you, What is good writing? What would you tell that student about writing, (b) When good writers write, what kinds of things do they do? and (c) Why do you think some kids have trouble writing? The next three questions assessed students' knowledge about planning and writing: (a) Teachers often ask students to write a short paper outside of class on a famous person such as Abraham Lincoln; when you are given an assignment like this, what kinds of things do you do to help you plan and write the paper? (b) What if you were having trouble with this assignment; what kinds of things would you do? and (c) If you had to prepare your paper for somebody in ___ grade (three grades below the respondent's grade level), what kinds of special things would you do as you wrote your paper? The final two open-ended questions, assessed students' procedural knowledge about revising and editing: (a) Teachers often ask students to change their papers to make them better; if you were asked to change your paper to make it better or improve it, what kinds of changes would you make? and (b) Students were given a short text on Abraham Lincoln, accompanied by the explanation that it have been written by another student. After the paper was read aloud to each student, the respondent was asked to make suggestion on how to improve it. All the open-end questions were read aloud to the students. If the student responded "I don't know," the examiner reread the question and asked the student to think about it more. The examiners asked follow-up questions to elicit more specific information. The scoring procedures were divided by ideas and categories.

The attitude scale consisted of six items: (a) "I like to write," (b) "I would rather read than write," (c) "I do writing on my own outside of school," (d) "I avoid writing whenever I can," (e) "I would rather write than do math problems," (f) "Writing is a waste of time." Each statement was read aloud and students were asked to indicate agreement on a Likert-type scale. Points on the scale ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). The self-efficacy measure included 10 efficacy statements, and the student was asked to indicate agreement with each item on a 5-point scale (identical to the one used on the attitude measure). Each statement was read aloud and students were asked to be honest and mark privately their responses. Interviews were first scored by the administering examiner and scored a second time by a graduate student unfamiliar with the study. Mean proportions are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2 presents the mean proportion by group for each category included in the statistical analyses for each of the open-ended questions. Given these findings, Graham et al. (1993) concluded that normally achieving students have a conceptually more mature knowledge base about writing and the writing process than students with LD. Students with LD were generally positive about their ability to compose written products, although they viewed it less favorably than their regular achieving grade level peers. It is possible that the type of writing instruction that students with LD receive in school is, in part, responsible for their knowledge base. It was noted by several authors that special education teachers place too much emphasis on the development of mechanical skills (Graham et al., 1993).

Compared to the texts of their more accomplished peers, papers written by struggling writers are shorter, more poorly organized, and weaker in overall

Table 2

Mean Proportions for Responses

Question	Learning disabilities		Normal achievement	
	Young Ss	Older Ss	Young Ss	Older Ss
1. What is good writing?				
A. Production responses	.52	.44	.48	.23
B. Substantive responses	.29	.43	.49	.76
2. What do good writers do?				
A. Production responses	.43	.31	.23	.08
B. Substantive responses	.46	.58	.74	.92
3. Why do kids have trouble writing?				
A. Production responses	.47	.33	.33	.02
B. Substantive responses	.15	.04	.29	.34
C. Motivation responses	.20	.41	.29	.45
D. Ability responses	.16	.20	.08	.17
4. How do you plan and write your paper?				
A. Substantive responses	.82	.92	.97	.99
5. What do you do if you have trouble planning and writing your paper?				
A. Substantive responses	.11	.23	.48	.32
B. Seeking assistance	.87	.64	.44	.61
6. What do you do to prepare a paper for a younger child?				
A. Production responses	.49	.29	.27	.20
B. Substantive responses	.29	.60	.70	.78
7. How do you change your paper to make it better?				
A. Mechanical responses	.49	.65	.48	.31
B. Substantive responses	.51	.35	.52	.69
8. What changes would you make in this student's paper?				
A. Mechanical responses	.34	.40	.50	.28
B. Substantive responses	.66	.60	.50	.72

quality (Graham & Harris, 1988). In addition, these students' compositions typically

contain more irrelevant information and more mechanical and grammatical errors that

render their texts less readable (Graham & Harris, 1988). The skills with which

struggling writers lack experience tend to compromise their ability to execute and

regulate the processes underlying proficient composition, especially planning and

revising.

Motivational factors play an important role in the writing outcomes of students

with and without LD. If a student perceives her skills as minimal, the writing product is

likely to be poor. The teacher, in turn, provides corrective feedback. A cycle emerges

and the student loses confidence, seeks to avoid or "get through" the writing task, and

learns little from the writing experience. Students need writing lessons on topics that will

pique their interest and provide motivation. Identifying instructional adaptations that are

readily integrated into practice will assist in helping teachers, special educators, and other

education professionals maximize the writing potential of grade school children and

youth.

Gersten and Baker (2001) conducted a meta-analysis of 13 intervention studies

with students with LD to determine what impact writing interventions have on these

students and to identify instructional components associated with the best writing

outcomes for them. A common goal in these studies was to teach students with LD how

to organize writing tasks, generate ideas about the writing topics, and produce final

written products that were coherent and organized. Gersten and Baker reported overall

weighted effect sizes ranging from .41 to 1.17 with an aggregate effect size of .81, which

represents a large effect favoring the selected interventions across different measures of

writing including standardized writing tests, quality ratings of student papers, and scores on trait and genre structure rubrics. In their sample of studies, larger effect sizes were associated with true experiments in comparison with quasi-experimental studies, whereas smaller effect sizes favoring the treatment group were found when a control group received some form of writing instruction rather than simply engaged in writing practice. Contrary to findings reported in most meta-analytic studies, MacArthur, Graham, Schwartz, and Schafer (1995), effect sizes were greater when outcomes were assessed with standardized tests than when evaluated with experimental measures. This finding suggests that observed gains in writing performance following an intervention were not restricted to measures that closely matched the intervention limitations. Writing strategy interventions were found to yield large gains in writing performance, however they produced weaker effects on students' writing knowledge, self-efficacy beliefs, and attitudes about writing, effect sizes ranged from .40 to .64 (Gersten & Baker, 2001). In addition, Gersten and Baker reported that generalization and maintenance of treatment effects were inconsistent across studies. The majority of students appeared to have difficulty transferring what they learned to novel situations and the impact of writing interventions noticeably diminished over time.

In the meta-analysis of single-subject designs, Gersten and Baker (2001) examined writing intervention for students with learning disabilities who participated in studies. They also found evidence of positive effects on students' sense of efficacy, that is, their sense of being able to write. Although the number of reviewed studies is not extremely large ($N = 13$) the quality of the research is solid enough to allow inferences to be made about the improvement of classroom practice. Most important, the meta-

analysis highlights a range of research-based instructional approaches that educators should use when teaching written expression to students with learning disabilities.

Gersten and Baker (2001) reported the interventions in each study included several similar components.   Components that appeared to be associated with strong positive writing outcomes included: (a) explicit teaching of the critical steps in the writing process, (b) explicit teaching of the conventions of a writing genre, (c) guided feedback through peer collaboration and teacher conferencing, (d) use of procedural facilitators (e.g., graphic organizers, "planning think sheet"), and (e) the use of self regulation statements and questions.

An ultimate goal in writing instruction is for students with LD to have strategies and processes that can be implemented in both general and special education settings that facilitate improved writing outcomes. Gersten and Baker (2001) identify potential key elements of writing instruction interventions and areas that need additional research. There are numerous writing strategy interventions (Englert et al., 1991; Graham & Harris, 1997) that have been successful in helping struggling writers. However maintaining and generalizing the strategies they acquire requires further investigation.

Students must also master other aspects of writing mechanics, such as capitalization, punctuations, and sentence construction. When faced with the task of composing an essay, students who have not obtained fluent transcription skills often become laboriously consumed with handwriting, grammar, and/or spelling as they struggle to get their writing "onto paper." Gersten and Baker (2001) recommended that future research examine the effectiveness of a combination of writing strategy instruction and the components of a strong writing program with particular emphasis on instruction

that provides students with learning disabilities writing strategies that can be maintained and produce subsequent successful learning outcomes.

Baker et al (2003) suggest that most classroom teachers implement few, if any, adaptations. They suggest researchers should examine why teachers fail to adapt to meet the needs of struggling writers, how they can effectively incorporate meaningful adaptations, and which adaptations are likely to be parsimonious with process-writing instruction and still reap the greatest benefits for students. Past writing instruction research has revealed some important findings about what works for students, especially those who perform least well in writing. In light of that knowledge, one issue that needs to be addressed is the how instruction being given in our classrooms is effecting writing for academic success. In terms of higher-level writing tasks, struggling writers often lack strategies for generating and discarding ideas based on the constraints of writing. Struggling writers have difficulty sustaining their thinking about a topic when retrieving ideas from memory, which makes it difficult for them to generate appropriate ideas for the topic (Graham & Harris, 2002).

Hubbard (2011) offered students in a seventh- and eighth-grade language arts class the option of writing an article for *Voices from the Middle* as an alternative assignment. The peers were assigned to write a two page literary letter to another peer informing their audience of a book they had read and enjoyed. The substitute assignment was to write an article articulating what works for them in the classroom as readers and writers (Hubbard, 2011). Three students, Noah, Tobin, and Jill, took on the challenge of naming their perspective regarding what teachers can do to promote a love of reading and writing. There was some commonality in the structures and experiences the three

students chose to write about, however their individual preferences as readers and writers are evident.

Noah's article describes the importance of teachers of "getting to know people our age," giving students "room to breathe" in their studies, and "giving time where time is due" for independent reading (Hubbard, 2011). Most notably, Noah reflects: "Although it might seem like a really small thing, allowing students the opportunity to take their learning at least partially into their own hands and have a say in what or how they are going to learn not only reveals what is the most relevant or interesting learning to them, but also brings a sense of pride in the education they are receiving."

Tobin notes that variety is essential to maintaining a sense of energy and challenge around writing tasks (Hubbard, 2011). Astutely, Tobin looks beyond the language arts classroom and acknowledges that reading and writing are not discipline-specific skills, but are central to the learning that takes place across the curriculum.

Jill, focused her article on the viewpoint that in elementary school, students are taught the basics; commas, periods, complete sentences, nouns, verbs. In middle school, students learn how to write, edit, and go deeper into information. In middle school students are expected to sharpen their reading and writing abilities prior to the high school level. Jill communicated that each student and teacher does things differently. Some classes look more at the creative side of writing, some the more logical side. Some make things fun by having interesting sentences to work with, and some just give you the simplest possible (Hubbard, 2011). The three middle school students, who wrote their responses took the opportunity to thoughtfully brainstorm, consider and write about literacy needs of students at the middle school level.

Genre-Specific Strategies for Enhancing Writing

Prior research, specifically Graham and Harris (1993), called for interventions involving more genre-specific writing strategies. Wong (1997) designed and developed genre-specific strategies based on several factors. These factors included the students' need to grasp the relevance and importance of planning and revising and the cognitive processes involved. Wong (1997) selected three genres for instruction: reportive essay, persuasive opinion, and compare-and-contrast. The characteristics of students who participated are displayed in Table 3.

During the instruction of the genre-specific strategies, computers with word processing software played an essential role. Students were taught to write using word processing, based on the rationale that their motivation to learn and sustain

Table 3
Student Characteristics in Intervention Studies

	Study I (1994)		Study II (1996)		Study III (1997)	
	Trained	Untrained	Trained	Untrained	Trained	Untrained
Male	15	8	13	11	13	
Female	3	5	5	9	8	
Total	18	13	18	20		
Students with LD	15	13	14	15	14	
Low achievers			4	5	7	
ESL	2					
Language delay	1					

the writing task would drop if they had to write and revise with pen and paper (Wong, 1997).

During the planning phase, Wong (1997) explained the writing process to the students, emphasizing the recursive nature of the various stages of planning, writing, and revising. The author then demonstrated the procedure of planning by thinking aloud her thoughts in formulating the writing plan (Wong, 1997). Depending on the specific genre, Wong would demonstrate think-aloud planning for the students. Throughout the writing process, students received assistance from members of the intervention team in articulating their communicative intent and ideas, structuring sentences, choosing appropriate words, and spelling. The dependent measures in the three studies were the instructional foci, the foci of each genre are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4

Instructional Foci per Genre

Genres	Reportive Essays	Opinion Essays	Compare-and-Contrast Essays
Instructional Foci			
General (applies to all genres)	• Clarity	• Clarity	• Clarity
Genre-specific	• Thematic salience	• Cogency of arguments presented • Organization of arguments presented	• Appropriateness of ideas that target either a comparison or a contrast • Organization of ideas

The results from the three-year writing interventions study clearly indicated that students improved significantly in the quality of their compositions. Their gains from pretest to posttest on target dependent measures in each intervention were statistically significant with large effect sizes. Wong (1997) gave three reasons that contributed to the success of the interventions.

1.   Genre-specific strategies. The significant results emphasize that each strategy characterizes one appropriate way of instructing adolescents with LD and low achievers to write one particular genre.

2. Focused and intensive nature of the writing instruction requiring the intervention team to always stayed on target likely contributing to the success of the writing interventions.

3. Use of interactive dialogues in conferences between students and intervention researchers that contributed much to the writing enhancement.

PURPOSE STATEMENT AND RESEARCH QUESTION

Research on writing problems of students with LD have been well documented and described. The purpose of this study was to examine high-interest writing of middle school students with LD. The following research question was addressed: to what extent will high-interest narrative writing prompts for 12 to 13-year old students in a special education writing class increase the total words written and percent accuracy in a 3-min timed writing sample as compared to low-interest narrative writing prompts.

METHODS

Participants

Three individuals from a sixth and seventh grade special education language arts class received parent permission to participate in the research.   All participants are classified with LD specifically in reading and writing. Each of the three students received 90 min of special education reading and language arts instruction each day. Andrea (Grade 7, Caucasian), in addition to special education services, previously received supplemental instruction in language arts through an English as a Second Language (ESL) class; Russian was her native language. Andrea also received speech-language therapy as a related service. James (Grade 7, Caucasian) was diagnosed with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) in addition to LD, and takes medication (Focalin XR 15 mg daily) to manage activity level and attention associated with ADHD. He also received speech-language therapy as a related service. Nick (Grade 7, Caucasian) received special education services in reading, language arts, and math. The full-scale IQ scores for the three students are James 97, Nick 96, and Andrea 62. In addition, each student had obtained a Written Expression composite score of 86 or less on the Woodcock Johnson Test of Achievement – III (WJ-III) (a standardized test with a mean = 100, SD=15) administered as part of the special education qualification process.

Informed Consent

An informed consent form for parents to give their permission for their children to participate in the study was developed using Utah State University's (USU) Institutional Review Board (IRB) guidelines for such forms (see Appendix A). All three participants

were given a letter of explanation and Informed Consent Form. The letter indicated that

(a) the study would examine writing prompts to increase the number of correct writing

sequences in a 3-min timed writing sample, (b) the students were not required to

participate, and, (c) if they did participate, parents could withdraw the students from the

study at any time without penalty.

Setting

The study was conducted in a public school of approximately 700 students,

located in a large district in northern Utah. The study took place in a resource language

arts classroom. Weekly writing curriculum-based measurements (CBM) are used by the

resource teacher and the procedures for administering the CBM are well established.

Distractions were minimized by placing a "Testing – Do Not Disturb" sign on the door to

the classroom. The participants were closely monitored to ensure they produce the best

writing sample possible.

Materials

Before testing the participants, the teacher gathered a set of high-interest narrative

writing prompts and a set of low-interest narrative writing prompts that give students

something to write about, lined paper for participant responses, pencils, and a stopwatch.

Dependent Variables

Total Words Written (TWW)

TWW (see examples in Table 6) was defined as the sum of the total number of

words. A word is any letter or group of letters separated by a space, even if the word is

misspelled or is a nonsense word. TWW was determined by summing all words written in a 3-min session.

Accuracy

In 3-min timed writing, participants produced a writing sample following spelling, grammar, and punctuation rules. Accuracy was determined by dividing the number of correct writing sequences (CWS) by the TWW. A CWS (see examples in Table 5) was defined as two adjacent writing units (words and punctuation) that are correct within the context of what was written. The examiner placed a caret "^" between words that are (a) mechanically (spelled correctly, appropriate capitalization), (b) semantically, and (c) syntactically correct. Sum the number of carets "^"; this is recorded as CWS. Rules for scoring CWS in writing samples and an example of a scored writing sample can be found in Appendix B and C, respectively.

Reliability of Dependent Measures

Obtaining accurate participant writing results should not depend on who assesses the students. Scoring TWW and CWS can be subjective and not always perfectly reliable. Therefore, to determine reliability of scoring across examiners, obtaining inter-scorer agreement was completed on 18 different writing samples or on 30% of the total writing samples. Two examiners independently scored a sample the writings. Prior to the study, the researcher trained the second examiner by presenting three writing passages, explaining the definitions of CWS and TWW, and describing the scoring procedures.

Table 5

CWS and TWW

TWW: The sum of the total number of words.	CWS: Two adjacent writing units (words and punctuation) that are correct within the context of what is written.
• A word is any letter or group of letters separated by a space, even if the word is misspelled or is a nonsense word.	• A caret "^" is used to mark each unit of the correct writing sequence. There is an implied space at the beginning of the first sentence. Examples:
Examples: • It is spring break. **TWW = 4** • It is spring breck. **TWW = 4** • I tride a cupcack. **TWW = 4** • I tride cupcack. **TWW = 3**	• ^The^sky^was^blue.^ **CWS = 5** • ^All^of^the^kids^started^to^laugh.^ **CWS = 8** • ^All^of^the^kids^started^to_laghf. _ **CWS = 6** • ^The^sky^was^blue.^ ^It^was^pretty.^ **CWS = 9** • ^The^sky^was^blue.^ it was^pretty **CWS = 6**

To score a passage the examiners underlined in pencil or pen the words that were

produced in the sample. This score was recorded as TWW.

Formula for calculating inter-scorer agreement:

Agreements/(Agreements + Disagreements) x 100

Example:

For two examiners who scored John as 50 TWW and 48 TWW, their Inter-Scorer

agreement would be 96% as follows:

- They agreed that John wrote 48 TWW

- They disagreed on 2 TWW

- Agreements (48)/Agreements + Disagreements (48 + 2) = 48/50 = .96

- .96 x 100 = 96%

Inter-scorer agreement was computed for TWW, CWS, and accuracy on 50% of each

participants writing samples. Results for inter-scorer agreement are presented in Table 6.

Table 6

Inter-Scorer Agreement

Student	Inter-scorer agreement TWW	Inter-scorer agreement CWS	Inter-scorer agreement accuracy
Nick	100%	94%	94%
James	99%	91%	91%
Andrea	99%	91%	91%

Prompt Selection Procedure

Before testing the participants, the teacher selected the 40 different narrative

writing prompts. These writing prompts were selected at random from a list of narrative

writing prompts from the language arts department head at the school in which the study

took place. This list was a culmination of narrative writing prompts that the language arts

department head and many other teachers in the district have complied over multiple

years. The participants were presented a deck of 40 cards with one writing prompt on

each card. See writing prompts in Appendix E. The teacher read aloud each of the 40

writing prompts. On the table in front of the participant three categories were displayed,

"prompts you would like to write about," "prompts you would NOT like to write about,"

and "neutral." Participants were instructed to place the cards in the corresponding

categories. Initially, the participants were allowed to place each card in their selected

category. At the conclusion of this process, the participants were probed until 10 cards were placed in the "prompts you would like to write about" category and 10 cards were placed in the "prompts you would NOT like to write about" category. The 10 cards in the "prompts you would like to write about" category were noted and categorized as high-interest. The 10 cards in the "prompts you would NOT like to write about" category were noted and categorized as low-interest. Following this procedure, the teacher asked the participants to rank the high-interest and low-interest prompts in descending order as "Top 10" and "Bottom 10." The prompts were ranked from one to 10 with the highest being ranked "1" and the lowest ranked "10."

After Session 8 (Session 9 for Andrea) in the Long-Latency Phase, the researcher observed that participants were making comments suggesting that topics previously identified as high-interest were no longer considered high-interest, and some low-interest topics were evaluated by participants as high-interest. It appeared that the latency of the original prompt selection had made the procedure no longer reliable. These sessions were labeled "Long-Latency Prompt Selection." Beginning in Session 9 (Session 10 for Andrea), a new phase was introduced, i.e., "Short-Latency Prompt Selection." In this phase, high-interest prompts were selected by the student at the beginning of the session. The teacher presented the remaining "Top 10" and remaining "Bottom 10" prompts. The participant was instructed to place the cards in two corresponding categories, "prompts you would like to write about," "prompts you would NOT like to write about." This change in procedures was made in attempt to investigate effects of more immediate selection of writing prompt by participants as opposed to the long-latency prompt selection procedure.

Independent Variables

High-interest writing prompt: Long-Latency

Participants were presented with a high-interest writing prompt selected by the researcher. A high-interest writing prompt was randomly selected by the teacher from the 10 prompts selected by the participant as high-interest. Although the prompt was randomly selected, it was removed from future selection opportunity. Removal insured that participants did not write about the same topic in multiple writing sessions.

High-interest writing prompt: Short-Latency

Participants were presented with the remaining "Top 10" and remaining "Bottom 10" prompts. The participant was instructed to place the cards in the corresponding categories, "prompts you would like to write about," "prompts you would NOT like to write about." Once placed in the piles, a high-interest writing prompt was randomly selected by the teacher. Once selected, it was removed from future selection opportunity. Removal insured that participants did not write about the same topic in multiple writing sessions.

Low-interest writing prompt: Long-Latency

Participants were presented with a low-interest writing prompt selected by the researcher. The writing prompt was one of the 10 topics that individual participants selected as low-interest. Selection procedures were the same as high-interest prompt selection.

Low-interest writing prompt: Short-Latency

Participants were presented with the remaining "Top 10" and remaining "Bottom 10" prompts. The participant was instructed to place the cards in the corresponding categories, "prompts you would like to write about," "prompts you would NOT like to write about." Once placed in the piles, a low interest writing prompt was randomly selected by the teacher. Although the prompt was randomly selected, it was removed from future selection opportunity. Removal insured that participants did not write about the same topic in multiple writing sessions.

<div align="center">

Procedures

</div>

Sessions were scheduled so that participants were exposed to equal numbers of high- and low-interest writing prompts. The order of the sessions was randomly selected. Sessions were counterbalanced so that the same number of high- and low-interest sessions were held. The first week's sessions were High (Wednesday), Low (Thursday), Low (Friday), the next week's schedule followed with High (Monday) and Low (Tuesday), Low (Wednesday), High (Thursday), High (Friday). For the aforementioned sessions, the original long-latency selection procedure was used. A short-latency selection changed the prompt selection procedure such that participants selected high and low prompts immediately prior to writing. The sessions continued with Low (Monday) and High (Tuesday). The sessions concluded with two sessions each day High (Wednesday), Low (Wednesday), High (Thursday), Low (Thursday), Low (Friday), Low (Friday), High (Monday), High (Monday), High (Tuesday), and Low (Tuesday).

Participants were not told what topic was selected prior to the session. Procedures for conducting sessions are described below:

1. Daily starter topic was selected by the researcher for individual participants.

2. Participants were provided with a pencil and a sheet of lined paper.

3. Directions and writing prompt were given to the participant by the researcher:

   You are going to write a story. First, I will read a sentence, and then you will write a story about what happens next. You will have 1 min to think about what you will write, and 3 min to write your story. Remember to do your best work. If you don't know how to spell a word, you should guess. Are there any questions? (Pause). Put your pencils down and listen. For the next minute, think about ... (insert writing prompt).

4. After reading the story starter, the researcher began the timer and allowed 1 min for students to "think." (Students were monitored so that they did not begin writing.)

   After 30 s, the researcher said: "You should be thinking about (insert writing prompt)."

5. At the end of 1 min, the researcher said: "Now begin writing." Timer was started for 3 min.

6. The researcher monitored participants' participation. If individual participants paused for 10 s or said they were done before the 3 min, the researcher moved close to them and said: "Keep writing the best story you can." This prompt was repeated to participants if they paused again.

7. At the end of 3 min, the researcher said: "Stop. Put your pencils down."

8. The researcher then collected writing samples.

Analysis of Writing Samples

Writing samples were analyzed and graphed for TWW, CWS and percent correct. The graph displays CWS divided by TWW to show percent correct on high-interest writing and low-interest writing sessions. Writing samples were analyzed for individual participants.

Experimental Design

A multi-element design (Cooper, Heron, & Heward, 2007) was used to compare the effectiveness of the high-interest and low-interest writing prompts. Over the course of the study, participants engaged in 3-min timed writing in 10 high-interest and 10 low-interest writing sessions. If high-interest writing prompts produce higher percent accuracy than low-interest writing prompts, the researcher anticipated that data paths would separate in a non-overlapping fashion. The multi-element design was selected because it allowed for rapid alternation of elements (in this case, high- and low-interest writing prompts) and differentiation of effects across two conditions. No baseline phase preceded the alternating sessions. A multiple baseline design was not selected because a baseline condition of low-interest writing prompts was not realistic, i.e., it would have required successive sessions writing on low-interest topics. A withdrawal design was not selected because percent accuracy on writing was not predicted by the researcher to decrease in a second baseline phase.

Narrative Writing Assessment Rubric

The Narrative Writing Assessment Rubric (Appendix D) was used as a qualitative measure to evaluate participants' writing samples narrative structure. The assessment narrative rubric was given to the researcher from the language arts department head at the school in which the study took place. The rubric was broken down into seven different writing qualities: (a) response to the prompt, (b) story development, (c) organization, (d) word choice, (e) details, (f) sentence structures, and (g) mechanics (punctuation, capitalization, and spelling). The highest quality rating possible was a rating of four and the lowest possible rating was one. In order to receive a score of four in response to the prompt, a participant must provide a good response to the prompt. The prompt would be introduced at the beginning of composition and the samples have a clear sequence of events. Descending from a rating of four these qualities are diminished to an attempt to respond to the prompt; unclear sequence of events resulting in a score of one on the rubric. A score of four under the category of story development would include a clear story development with no irrelevant descriptions or explanations. A score of one would produce a story with unclear or completely lacking story development. The organization of the writing sample would earn a score of four but having a clear beginning, middle, and end. When the organization was not discernible, a score of one would be given. To receive a score of four in word choice, the words must be fresh and vigorous. Samples that were nonspecific and immature earned a score of one. Details were scores as a four for a variety of interesting details, spanning to lack of details for a score of one. When a sample had almost completely correct and appropriate sentence structure it would receive a score of four. Samples producing incorrect and inappropriate sentence structure

throughout composition obtained a score of one. Finally, a sample very few or no

mechanical (punctuation, capitalization, and spelling) errors received a score for four.

This declined to a score of one when many serious mechanical errors were presented.

RESULTS

Within this study, data on participant writing performance included scores on TWW, CWS, and accuracy. Additionally, the Narrative Writing Assessment Rubric (Appendix D) was used as a qualitative measure to evaluate participants' writing samples narrative structure. The results of each of these assessments are provided within this section.

Figure 1 shows TWW for three participants. Figure 2 presents CWS. Figure 3 shows accuracy data. Inspection of the three figures across the first eight sessions (i.e., four high-interest and four low-interest prompt sessions; nine sessions and five low-interest sessions for Andrea) reveals very little separation of data paths on any measures. For example, Nick, James, and Andrea occasionally had higher TWW in low-interest sessions compared to high-interest sessions. Across participants, high-interest TWW exceeded low-interest TWW (i.e., nonoverlapping data) in only 8 out of 12 total high-interest sessions across participants. Examining the same initial eight to nine sessions, high-interest CWS exceeded low-interest CWS (i.e., nonoverlapping data) in 10 out of 12 total high-interest sessions across participants. Finally, looking at the initial eight to nine sessions, high-interest accuracy exceeded low-interest accuracy (i.e., nonoverlapping data) in 10 out of 12 total high-interest sessions across participants.

As shown in Figure 1, Nick's high-interest prompt performance on TWW in the Long-Latency Phase ranged from 49 to 52 with a mean of 51. His low-interest TWW ranged from 36 to 54 with a mean of 46. James' high-interest prompt performance on TWW in the Long-Latency Phase ranged from 22 to 61 with a mean of 47. His low-interest TWW ranged from 26 to 37 with a mean of 33. Andrea's high-interest prompt

performance on TWW in the Long-Latency Phase ranged from 46 to 61 with a mean of 54. Her low-interest TWW also ranged from 46 to 61 with a mean of 53.

As shown in Figure 2, Nick's high-interest performance on CWS in the Long-Latency Phase ranged from 33 to 45 with a mean of 40. Low-interest CWS ranged from 27 to 44 with a mean of 36. James' high-interest performance on CWS in the Long-Latency Phase ranged from 21 to 28 with a mean of 23. Low-interest CWS ranged from 27 to 44 with a higher mean of 36. Andrea's high-interest performance on CWS in the Long-Latency Phase ranged from 30 to 48 with a mean of 41. Low-interest CWS ranged from 23 to 44 with a mean of 31.

Figure 3 presents accuracy data. In the Long-Latency Phase, Nick's high-interest accuracy ranged from 66% to 87% with a mean of 80%. Low-interest accuracy ranged from 74% to 81% with a mean of 78%. James' high-interest accuracy ranged from 66% to 87% with a mean of 80%. Low-interest accuracy ranged from 74% to 81% with a mean of 78%. Andrea's high-interest accuracy ranged from 65% to 82% with a mean of 76%. Her low-interest accuracy ranged from 50% to 72% with mean of 58%.

Short-Latency Data on TWW: Comparison of High- and Low-Interest Prompts

Nick's performance on TWW ranged 49 to 80 on high-interest writing prompts with a mean of 61. Nick's TWW increased on all high-interest writing prompts following Session 14 from 50 to 80 TWW. Nick's performance on low-interest writing prompts ranged from 12 to 39 TWW with a mean of 21. Throughout the short-latency phase, the least separation between high and low writing prompts was 10 words and the greatest separation was 65 words. Nick's high-interest writing prompts produced a greater number of TWW as compared to low-interest writing prompts.

James' performance on TWW ranged from 30 to 48 on high-interest writing prompts with a mean of 40. James' writing production on low-interest writing prompts ranged from eight to 35 TWW. His mean TWW on low-interest writing prompts was 21. It should be noted that the morning of Session 7, James did not take his medication for an attention deficit condition. His mother was notified but was unable to bring it to school immediately. James' data paths between high and low-interest writing prompts maintained separation throughout the short-latency selection where James' high-interest writing production was greater than that of low-interest writing prompts.

Andrea's performance on TWW ranged from 42 to 61 on high-interest writing prompts with a mean of 55. Andrea's writing production on low-interest writing prompts ranged from 17 to 42 TWW with a mean of 27. Andrea's data path maintained separation between high and low-interest writing prompts.

Short- Latency Data on CWS: Comparison of High- and Low-Interest Prompts

Nick's performance on CWS ranged from 33 to 52 on high-interest writing prompts with a mean of 43. Nick's performance on CWS ranged from nine to 22 on low-interest writing prompts with a mean of 15. Nick's CWS in high-interest writing prompts were greater than those of low-interest writing prompts.

James' performance on CWS ranged from eight to 24 on high-interest writing prompts with a mean of 19. James' performance on low-interest writing prompts ranged from five to 19 CWS with a mean of 9. James' data paths between high and low-interest writing prompts intersected one time, between Session 14 and Session 15. Overall, CWS in high-interest writing prompts were greater than those of low-interest writing prompts.
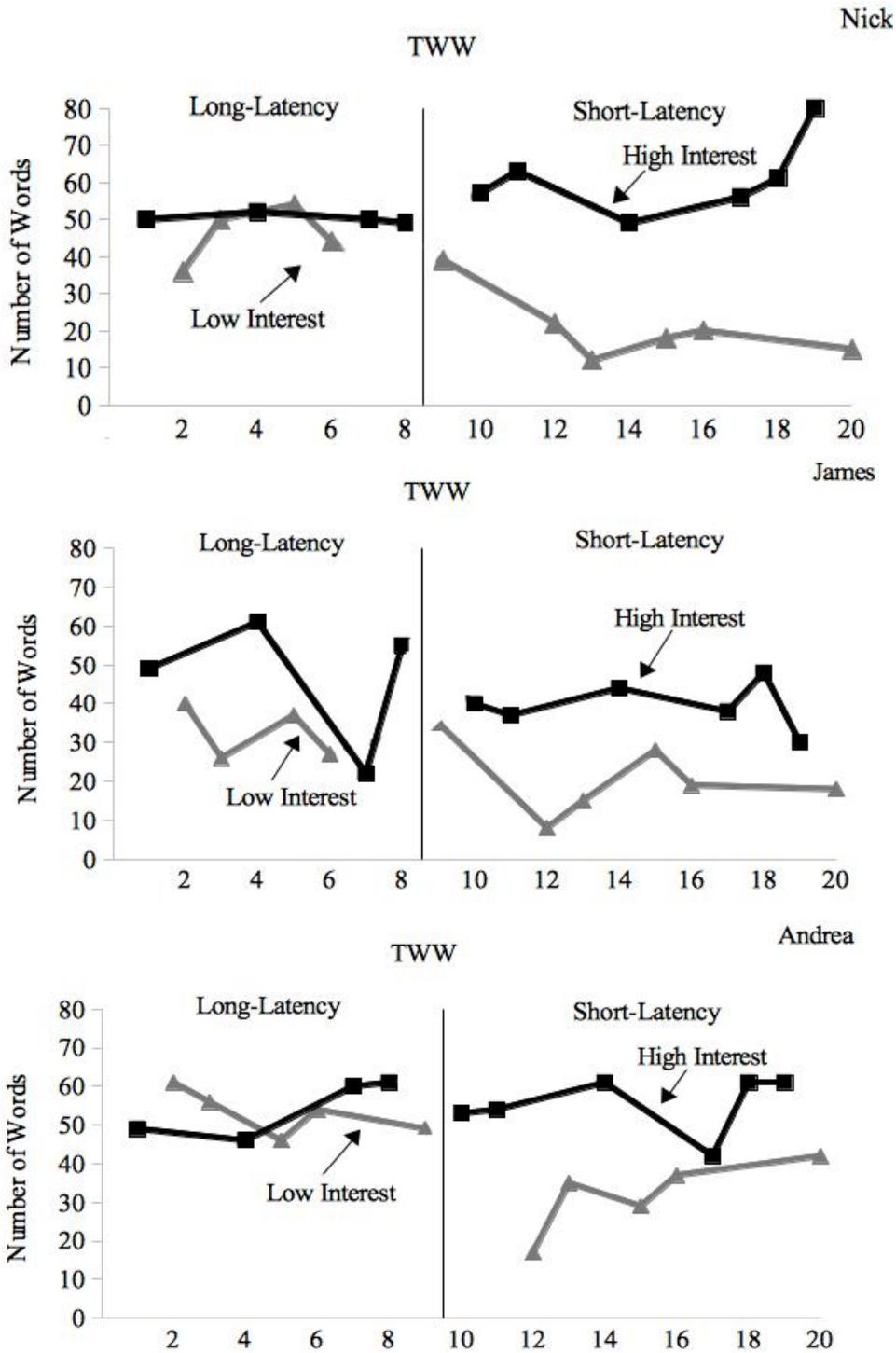
Figure 1. TWW by Nick, James, and Andrea in high- and low-interest sessions across

Long-Latency and Short-Latency prompt selection.

Andrea's performance on CWS ranged from 33 to 52 on high-interest writing prompts with a mean of 44. Andrea's performance on low-interest writing prompts ranged from 12 to 32 CWS. Andrea's average CWS on low-interest writing prompts was 25. Following the change to the short-latency prompt selection, the data paths maintained separation throughout the remainder of the study. Overall, Andrea's high-interest writing prompts produced greater CWS than that of low-interest writing prompts.

Short-Latency Data on Accuracy: Comparison of High- and Low-Interest Prompts

Nick's performance on percent accuracy ranged from 54% to 91% on high-interest writing prompts with a mean of 72%. Interestingly, within the short-latency phase, Nick's overall percent accuracy continually decreased. Nick's performance on percent correct on low-interest writing prompts ranged from 56% to 95% with a mean of 71%. The largest decrease in Nick's percent accuracy was demonstrated from Session 12 to Session 13 with a decrease of 20%. Overall, high-interest writing prompts produced only 1% greater percent correct than low-interest writing prompts.

James' performance on percent accuracy ranged from 27% to 65% on high-interest writing prompts with a mean of 46%. The largest percent accuracy increases were demonstrated from Session 10 to Session 11 with a percentage increase of 25%. James' performance on low-interest writing prompts ranged from 19% to 68% accuracy. James average percent accuracy on low-interest writing prompts was 45%. The largest decrease in James' accuracy was demonstrated from Session 15 to Session 16 with a decrease of 26%. James' data paths between high and low-interest writing prompts intersected three times; all three times were during the short-latency prompt selection procedure.
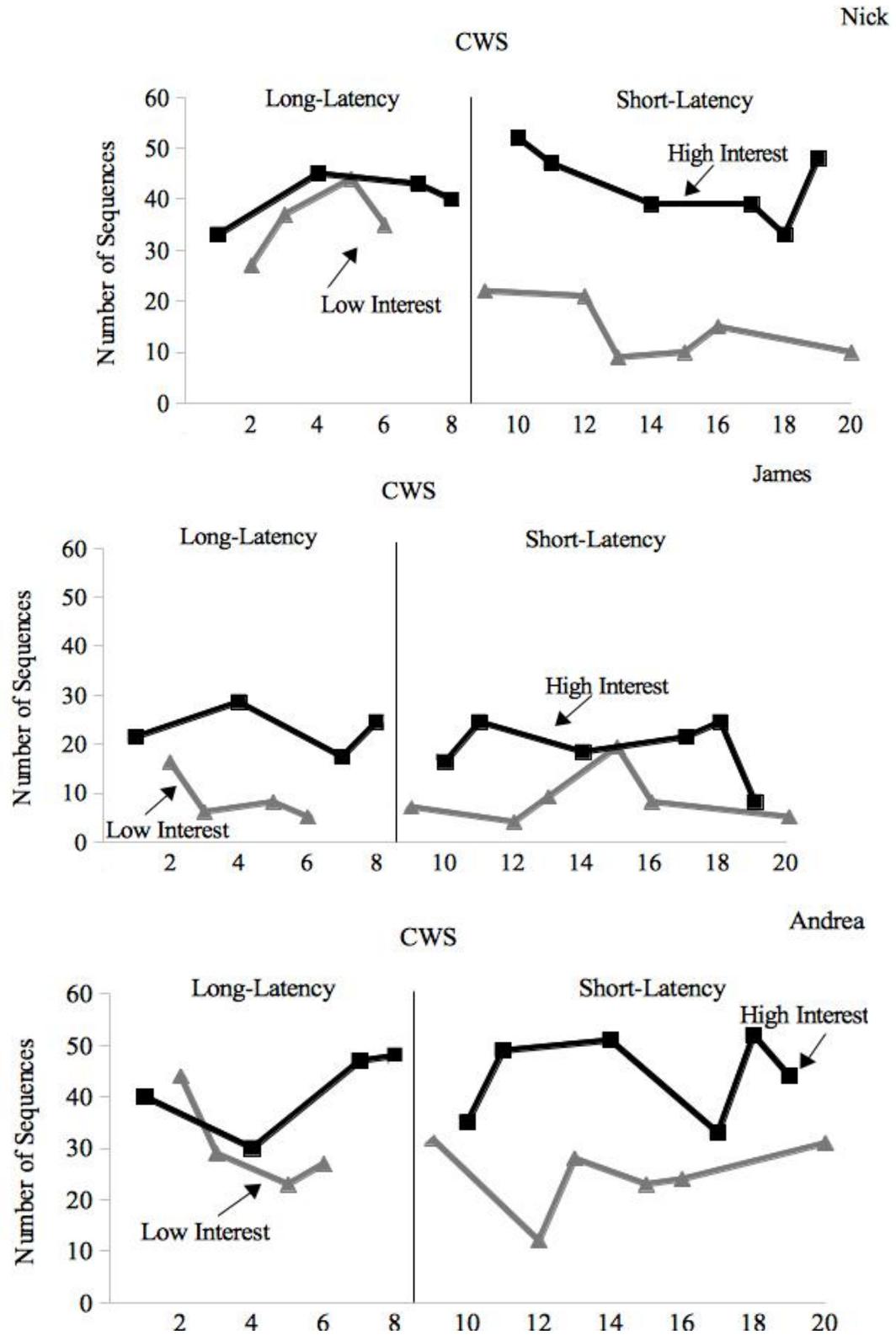
Figure 2. CWS by Nick, James, and Andrea in high- and low-interest sessions across Long-Latency and Short-Latency prompt selection.

Overall, James' high-interest writing prompts produced writing with only 1% greater accuracy than that of low-interest writing prompts.

Andrea's performance on percent accuracy ranged from 66% to 91% on high-interest writing prompts with a mean of 80%. The largest increases in Andrea's accuracy were demonstrated immediately following the short-latency phase, from Session 10 to Session 11 with an increase of 25%. Andrea's performance on percent accuracy on low-interest writing prompts ranged from 65% to 80%. Andrea's average accuracy on low-interest writing prompts was 72%. The largest decrease in Andrea's percent accuracy was demonstrated from Session 15 to Session 16 with a decrease of 14%. Throughout the short-latency phase, Andrea's data path crossed one time, between Session 19 and Session 20. Finally, Andrea's high-interest writing prompts produced 8% greater percent correct than low-interest writing prompts. Overall, accuracy appeared to evidence no difference in comparison of short-latency to long-latency phases or from high-interest writing prompts to low-interest writing prompts.

Comparison of Long- and Short-Latency Prompt Selection

High-interest performance of participants in TWW varied throughout the study. Nick's TWW was much higher in the short-latency phase as compared to the long-latency phase with a mean of 61 compared to 51 respectively. Yet, James' TWW were mostly lower in the short-latency phase (Mean = 40) compared to the long-latency phase (Mean = 47), with the exception of session seven. Andrea's performance was about the same on TWW with a mean of 55 on the short-latency phase and a mean of 54 on the long-latency phase. In regards to CWS, all participants' performance was about the same in the short-latency phase compared to the long-latency phase. Mean differences between phases for

each participant in CWS were minimal (Mean difference for Nick = 3; James = 4; Andrea = 3). Additionally, mean differences between phases for each participant in accuracy were minimal (Mean difference for Nick = 9% with Long-Latency higher; James = 6% with Long-Latency higher; Andrea = 4% with Short-Latency higher).

Quality of Writing

Using the narrative writing assessment rubric, quality of writing was used as a subsequent measure of the overall quality of each writing sample. Student performance regarding quality of writing is presented in Table 7. For six of seven writing quality variables, high-interest mean ratings exceeded low-interest mean ratings for the three participants. Differences between mean ratings for high-interest and low-interest ratings ranged from zero (Sentence Structure: 1.75 for high-interest, 1.75 for low-interest) to 0.58 (Story Development: 3.25 for high-interest, 2.67 for low-interest). Across all seven writing qualities, mean high-interest ratings exceeded mean low-interest ratings (2.89 for high interest, 2.61 for low interest). In regards to individual participants, most mean high-interest ratings exceeded mean low-interest ratings. Exceptions were Nick (Organization: high-interest = 3.25, low interest = 4.0; Word Choice: high-interest = 3.0, low interest = 3.25; Mechanics: high-interest = 2.5, low interest = 2.75). In five cases (e.g., Andrea: Mechanics) mean high-interest and mean low-interest ratings were identical.
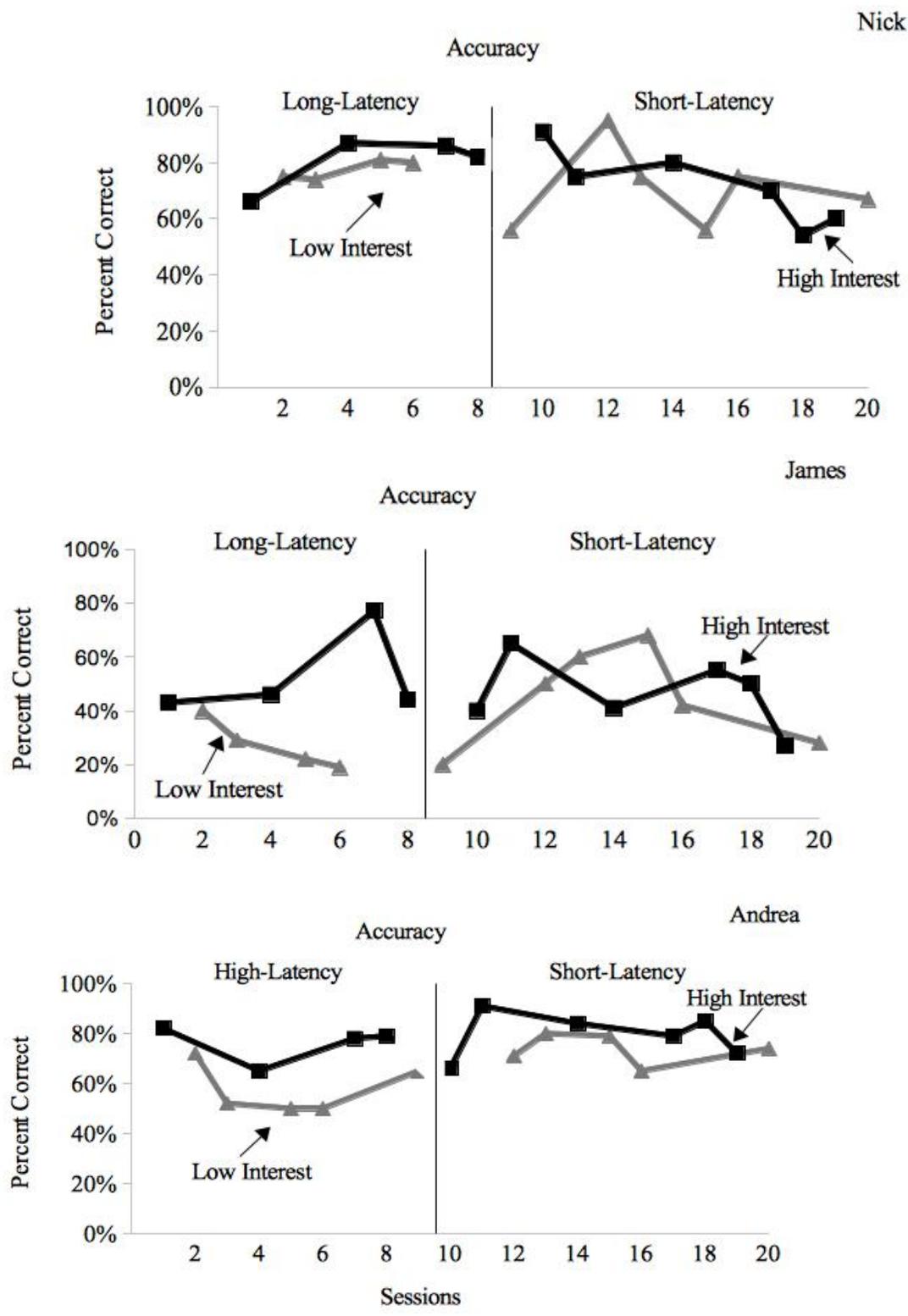
Figure 3. Accuracy by Nick, James, and Andrea in high- and low-interest sessions across

Long-Latency and Short-Latency prompt selection.

Table 7

Narrative Writing Assessment Rubric Data for High- and Low-Interest Writing Samples

Across Participants

Writing qualities		Nick	James	Andrea	Total mean
Response to Prompt	High	3.5	4	3.75	3.75
	Low	3.25	3.75	2.5	3.17
Story Development	High	3.25	3.5	3	3.25
	Low	3	2.25	2.75	2.67
Organization	High	3.25	3.5	3.25	3.34
	Low	4	3	2.5	3.17
Word Choice	High	3	3	2.5	2.83
	Low	3.25	2.25	2.25	2.58
Details	High	3.25	2.75	3	3
	Low	3.25	2.25	2.5	2.67
Sentence Structures	High	2	1.25	2	1.75
	Low	2	1.25	2	1.75
Mechanics	High	2.5	1.5	3	2.33
	Low	2.75	1	3	2.25
Total High		2.96	2.79	2.93	2.89
Total Low		3.07	2.25	2.5	2.61

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to empirically examine high-interest narrative writing prompts compared to low-interest narrative writing prompts in terms of increasing the TWW, CWS, and percent accuracy in a 3-min timed writing sample. A multi-element design was used to examine the effects of each phase of the intervention on student writing performance. A long-latency prompt selection procedure demonstrated unexpected results. Prompts that were initially chosen as high or low-interest changed across time. The long-latency phase across all participants established that the duration of the selection procedure phase did not produce separation between high and low-interest writing prompt performance on TWW, CWS, and accuracy. Therefore, a short-latency prompt selection procedure was used to identify whether selections of high or low-interest directly prior to writing produced differential measures of variables. The short-latency phase was associated with increased performance on TWW, CWS. Thus, the study demonstrated that participants who selected high-interest topics immediately prior to writing had higher TWW and CWS than they did when they selected low-interest topics. In some cases, these data were higher than when participants selected high- or low-interest topics at a much longer latency.

This intervention had not previously been used in research for instructing students with their writing. Previous research demonstrating a number of writing strategy interventions, for example Gersten and Baker (2001), used (a) explicit teaching of the critical steps in the writing process, (b) explicit teaching of the conventions of a writing genre, (c) guided feedback through peer collaboration and teacher conferencing, (d) use of procedural facilitators (e.g., graphic organizers, "planning think sheet"), and (e) the use

of self regulation statements and questions, have been successful in helping struggling writers. Thus, results of the current investigation add to the literature on effects of student selection of high-interest prompts.

Effects of high-interest writing prompts selected in short-latency to the writing exercise produced different effects on variables selected in this study. Each effect will be examined below.

TWW

Based on data in this study, it appeared that the short-latency prompt selection procedure had a larger impact on TWW than did the long-latency prompt selection procedure. Specifically, Nick greatly improved his TWW performance following the short-latency phase. James appeared to increase TWW the most on each high-interest prompt. James' low-interest samples produced, on average, a lower number of TWW. Andrea's performance was variable across high and low-interest prompts. She improved on TWW after the short-latency prompt selection procedure on high-interest writing prompts. Andrea's TWW on low-interest writing prompts decreased overall throughout the study. The TWW for all three participants increased following the short-latency prompt selection procedure for high-interest prompts. However, there were fewer increases in TWW following the short-latency prompt selection procedure for low-interest prompts. Accordingly, it appears that within this study, the hypothesis that the use of high-interest writing prompts produces a greater number of TWW was confirmed.

CWS

The researcher hypothesized that in addition to high-interest writing prompts producing a greater number of TWW, high-interest writing prompts would also produce gains on CWS. Overall, I found that high-interest writing prompts did produce gains in writing quality, this was more indicative in Nick's and Andrea's performance. While the CWS of James' high-interest writing samples remained higher than that of his low-interest writing samples, the separation was not as evident. Results for this variable can be attributed largely to mechanics. Following Rule 1 in the Rules for Scoring CWS in Writing Samples (see Appendix B), pairs of words must be spelled correctly. It should be noted that James' spelling proficiency is typically his lowest academic skill. As a result, the hypothesis that the use of high-interest writing prompts produces a greater number of CWS was confirmed and most clearly supported by Nick and Andrea's performance, as both students increased the number of CWS by the last session to 80 and 61 CWS respectively.

Accuracy

Results for this variable are not as clearly indicated. The relation between high and low-interest prompts relative to accuracy was unclear. Andrea's overall percent correct was typically higher than that of Nick or James. Andrea's proficiency level for putting ideas together coherently and writing a conventionally sound composition is relatively high. It is obvious that where Andrea and Nick made gains in their TWW and CWS and accuracy was calculated as CWS divided by TWW, their overall accuracy

would be higher. The nature of the high and low prompt selection encouraged participants to identify topics that they were personally interested in writing about. During this study, participants were not specifically asked to focus on the conventions of writing that influence writing accuracy, including punctuation, spelling, and capitalization. Overall it appeared that high-interest writing prompts produced a greater number of TWW and CWS and as the participants wrote, they may not have been as focused on the accuracy as they generally might have been. This finding lends credibility that as the TWW increases, writing accuracy may decrease slightly.

In addition to high- and low-interest writing prompts used within this study, an additional measure was used to further assess writing performance. The Narrative Writing Assessment Rubric was administered post-session for each of four high and four low writing samples for each participant. Prior to scoring, an individual blind to the study, a classroom paraprofessional, was introduced to the 4-point scale and the distinguishing features of each point were discussed. Following training on how to use the rubric and its corresponding points the researcher and the paraprofessional practiced scoring five different writing samples, not included in the study. After scoring the practice samples, the rubrics were compared and discussed to reduce any deviations and to increase inter-scorer reliability. Training on scoring the assessment rubric was completed when the percent of agreement was above 80%.

Quality of Writing

Overall, each of the three participants demonstrated a greater percentage of proficiency on each of the seven categories of the writing quality ratings as specified on the narrative writing assessment rubric on high-interest writing prompts as compared to

low-interest writing prompts. This finding is interesting as all participants wrote a greater number of TWW and CWS on the high-interest writing prompts. These longer and more complex writing samples may have allowed for more opportunities to make mechanical errors, specifically with punctuation and spelling, and present more chances for the participant to possibly fluctuate from the topic. These variables could potentially decrease the overall quality of writing. The overall sentence structures and mechanics resulted in the lowest ratings on each of the participants writing performance. However, given the observed outcomes, it appears a higher number of TWW, CWS, and accuracy produced the use of more vivid vocabulary and details, better story development and organization.

Findings from this study can contribute to the literature by showing that teachers who use thought-provoking, high-interest writing prompts to catch participants' attention will obtain improved writing performance.

As the researcher anticipated, there was no such relationship between high-interest writing prompts and accuracy. If high-interest writing prompts alone do not increase the accuracy of participants writing samples, it may be explained by the type or genre of writing prompt the participant selected. Involving participants in selecting their own writing prompts engages them in a process that will help them develop ideas and content for a particular writing task. Future research should examine whether results in this study are replicated in different genres.

In addition, the researcher provided the prompts to the participants. This was necessary because of limited resources. Future research should consider having prompts deliver by an individual who is naïve to the purposes and conditions of the research.

Throughout each testing session, the researcher monitored participants' participation. If individual participants paused for 10 s or said they were done before the 3 min, the researcher moved close to them and said: "Keep writing the best story you can." This prompt was repeated to participants if they paused again. Frequency of researcher prompts was not tallied in a session. There may have been different frequencies of prompts in low-interest versus high-interest sessions. This may have represented a weakness in that prompts became an added variable that may have increased performance in the low-interest conditions. Future research should eliminate or standardize the number of prompts and the script for the verbal communication to students as they write.

Altering the Phases of the Study

The prompt selection procedure had to be changed from a long-latency to the short-latency to examine whether the length of time between prompt selection and writing had an effect on writing performance. One could argue that ultimately, changing the procedure may have introduced a reinforcement procedure for selecting high-interest prompts selected immediately prior to writing. The increase in TWW and CWS may have been a function of being provided the opportunity to select a high-interest prompt at the beginning of the writing session. Alternatively, the requirement of writing on a low-interest topic may have decreased TWW and CWS. The establishing operations of these selection opportunities were not as salient in the Long-Latency phase.

Limitations

There are at least three limitations to this study. One limitation within this study, relating again to the writing prompts, was that the participants were repeatedly assessed using the original 10 high- and 10 low-interest writing prompts. This may have introduced a problem as the participants quickly changed which prompts they noted as high or low-interest depending on the day. For example, if a prompt had relation to family and the participant was having a good or bad time at home, the opinion of high or low would quickly change. It was also noted that prompts chosen as low-interest and having to do with most embarrassing moments, worst memories, and worst days, influenced the performance of each participant and produced a significantly decreased number of TWW. Novel story prompts could provide a more clear indication of the participants true high and low preferences. This limitation was not expected but it is possible that a participant's performance may have a greater degree of increase or decrease with novel story prompts. To avoid this limitation, future research should include allowing the participants to select from a group of novel writing prompts from a larger selection size.

A second limitation of this study was the limited number of participants involved, reducing the ability to generalize results to other students and populations. Specifically, as only three participants were involved in this study, we cannot assume that these students are representative of all students their age. Conceivably the selected group of participants was more or less responsive to the features than would be another group of participants. Additional research is needed with larger numbers of participants. Another obvious concern with this limitation is that Andrea, the only female in the study,

demonstrated a more varied performance as compared to Nick and James. It is unclear whether gender influenced her performance, perhaps the prompts used inadvertently accommodated a particular group or gender of people. This could have potentially led to biased results within this study and point to a clear limitation that needs to be examined in future research.

A third limitation of this study was that all the prompts were delivered by the researcher. A paraprofessional scored each writing sample and the researcher assisted in inter-scorer agreement. The same paraprofessional assisted in scoring the narrative writing assessment rubric. Conducting this study using a blind delivery and blind scoring format would be ideal and is recommended for future research.

The abovementioned limitations may have influenced the results of this study. However, this study accomplished its goal as none of the limitations appeared to pose significant threats to internal validity.

Implications

When students are provided with a writing prompt they find interesting, they are required to identify their content knowledge about the new topic, generate ideas related to this topic, and organize these ideas logically. The findings and procedures of this study can be used to increase motivation of these participants to produce writing. Writing requires knowledge about various topics and demands a lot of creativity and organization of the content. Students who lack writing proficiency encounter many problems when trying to produce a writing sample on a topic they find to be of low-interest. Therefore some students find writing to be very boring and tedious. Teacher-assigned topics may, in some cases, produce ideas and thoughts that are vaguely presented, content is not

appropriately paragraphed, and absence of linkage and flow. This results in students scoring lower percentage accuracy.

In many classrooms, students often express they do not like to write. Subsequent to a writing assignment or task, many students moan, "How long does it have to be?" "I have nothing to write about." "My life is boring." The comments of students convince other students (perhaps the teacher as well) that writing is going to be a dreaded activity. Yet writing is a means for students to demonstrate what they know and a way to help them understand what they know. High-interest writing prompts may serve as a valuable tool in classroom settings to increase writing samples. By utilizing prompts that the students find interesting, savvy teachers in the field will help them cultivate broader writing skills. Based on the results of this study, future research should first teach participants the different writing genres before selecting their own writing prompts. The methods used to select each high-interest writing prompt warrant further investigation to ensure effectiveness. A particular component that requires more investigation is the limited amount of time allotted for the writing sample along with the lack of allocation of time for participants to revise their own writing. Thus, further research involving revision practice using students' own writing is necessary.

Should teachers employ high-interest writing prompts, the results of this study suggest that accuracy still needs to be monitored by the student or teacher. Merely writing about a high-interest topic may not increase accuracy of written products.

Future Research

This study answered the research question while also posing many new questions for future research. First, the methods used to select high and low-interests prompts need to be more effectively designed and include a larger sample size.

Second, this study included only three participants, which raises the question of the ability to generalize the results. Future research should examine the same high and low-interest conditions using additional participants. Particularly, within this study, it was identified there was only one female participant and participants used were not representative from a variety of ethnic groups. Future research should include participants from a variety of ethnic groups and multiple representatives from both genders. Including these participants may assist in impartially identifying influences of ethnicity and gender. This would provide useful information from which to identify appropriate high and low-interest prompts for particular groups.

It also appears appear necessary to conduct the study using blind prompt delivery and blind scoring methods. This may also help determine if the impact of interpersonal relationships plays a role increasing or decreasing the motivation towards each session.

This study examined writing performance in terms of TWW, CWS, and accuracy. Particularly in this study, the participants have demonstrated decreased interest over time, through both verbal comments and unspoken body language, on writing prompts once deemed as high-interest. This led to participants decreased TWW, CWS, and accuracy. Accordingly, further research needs to be conducted to further determine a prompt selection procedure that is both time sensitive and effective for monitoring writing performance.

Conclusion

Overall, the results of this study clearly confirm when students write about a topic they consider to be of high-interest, they produce more writing and write with a higher quality due to their interest in the topic. It was also established that participants perform more poorly when provided with a writing prompt in which they have less interest. Students should have writing experiences that will encourage them to do more writing and to understand that writing is an interaction with a reader. In order to be successful, writers must possess knowledge about writing strategies and processes, and be experienced and competent.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

UtahState University

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INFORMED CONSENT
Effects of Writing Prompts for Students with Learning Disabilities

Introduction/ Purpose Kelsey Chlarson in the Department of Special Education and Rehabilitation at Utah State University is conducting a research study to find out more about the effects of interest level on the percent accuracy in a three minute timed writing sample. Your child has been asked to take part because weekly writing curriculum based measurements are being used to track the ongoing progress of your child's writing goal and the procedures are well established. There will be approximately three participants at this site. There will be approximately three to five total participants in this research.

Procedures If you agree to allow your child to be in this research study, the following activities will occur. By agreeing to consent to this study, your child will complete between 20 and 30 three minute timed writing samples to increase the number of correct writing sequences in a three minute timed writing sample. Each student who participates will be assessed within school hours, most preferably during Mrs. Chlarson or Mrs. Hicken's language arts class. Each student's scores will be compiled with the results of the other participants. This information will be used to determine areas of needed instruction for sixth and seventh grade students at Cedar Ridge Middle School.

New Findings During the course of this research study, you will be informed of any significant new findings (either positive or negative), such as changes in the risks or benefits resulting from participation in the research, or new alternatives to participation that might cause you to change your mind about continuing in the study. If new information is obtained that is relevant or useful to you, or if the procedures and/or methods change at any time throughout this study, your consent to continue participating in this study will be obtained again.

Risks It is not anticipated that the assessment will be uncomfortable or unpleasant, but if either you or your child chose not to participate during any stage of the assessment, the request will be honored.

Participation in this study was designed to minimize stress and any potential embarrassment for your student. Ethical research criteria were used in designing the assessment and it has received approval by the Internal Research Board as well as meeting the standards of Utah State University's Special Education Masters Committee.

Benefits There may or may not be any direct benefit to you from these procedures. The investigator, however, may learn more about the effects of writing prompts in writing samples. Where it is applicable and beneficial to the student, individual results will be used with confidentially to help achieve each student's writing goal(s).

Explanation & offer to answer questions Kelsey Chlarson has explained this research study to you and answered your questions. If you have other questions or research-related problems, you may reach Kelsey at 563-6229.

Voluntary nature of participation and right to withdraw without consequence Your student will not be graded on the results of this test, nor will he or she be penalized for not participating in the assessment. Participation is strictly voluntary. The purpose of this assessment is to further the advancement of educational knowledge and improve instruction. Once permission is given you have the right to reconsider or withdraw your student's participation in the assessment without need to give reason for doing so. This may be done at any point in the assessment.

Confidentiality Research records will be kept confidential, consistent with federal and state regulations. Only the investigator and the Masters Committee will have access to the data which will be kept in a locked file cabinet in a locked room. Personal, identifiable information will be kept for the duration of the study, approximately three to five months.

IRB Approval Statement The Institutional Review Board for the protection of human participants at USU has approved this research study. If you have any pertinent questions or concerns about your rights or a research-related injury, you may contact the IRB Administrator at (435) 797-0567 or email irb@usu.edu. If you have a concern or complaint about the research and you would like to contact someone other than the research team, you may contact the IRB Administrator to obtain information or to offer input.

Copy of consent You have been given two copies of this Informed Consent. Please sign both copies and retain one copy for your files.

Investigator Statement "I certify that the research study has been explained to the individual, by me or my research staff, and that the individual understands the nature and purpose, the possible risks and benefits associated with taking part in this research study. Any questions that have been raised have been answered."

Signature of PI

_____
Kelsey Chlarson - Principal Investigator
435-563-6229
kelsey.chlarson@ccsdut.org

<u>Signature of Participant</u> By signing below, I agree for _____ to participate in the writing assessment.

_____   _____
Parent(s)/Guardian Signature   Relationship to Participant

_____
Date

<u>Child/Youth Assent:</u> I understand that my parent(s)/guardian is/are aware of this research study and that permission has been given for me to participate. I understand that it is up to me to participate even if my parents say yes. If I do not want to be in this study, I do not have to and no one will be upset if I don't want to participate or if I change my mind later and want to stop. I can ask any questions that I have about this study now or later. By signing below, I agree to participate.

_____   _____
Name   Date

Appendix B
Rules for Scoring CWS in Writing Samples

Rule 1. Pairs of Words Must Be Spelled Correctly
^All^of^the^students^started^to^write.^ **CWS** = 8
^All^of^the^kids^started^to_rite. _ **CWS** = 6

Rule 2. Words Must Be Capitalized and Punctuated Correctly with the Exception of Commas. Correct punctuation must be present at the end of the sentence. The first word of the next sentence must be capitalized and be spelled correctly for a correct writing sequence to be scored.
^The^soup^was^boiling.^ ^It^was^hot.^ **CWS** = 9
^The^soup^was^boiling.^ it was^hot **CWS** = 6

Rule 3. Words Must Be Syntactically Correct. Sentences that begin with conjunctions are considered syntactically correct.
^I^had^never^seen^the^play^before.^ **CWS** = 8
^I^never_seen^the^play^never.^ **CWS** = 6
^And^then^the^girl^gave^the^teacher^her^paper.^ **CWS** = 10

Rule 4. Words Must Be Semantically Correct
^Braxton^went^to^the^store.^ **CWS** = 6
^ Braxton^went_too_the^store.^ **CWS** = 4
^My^mom^made^the^cookies^especially^for^me.^ **CWS** = 9
^My^mom^made^the^cookies_specially_for^me.^ **CWS** = 7

Rule 5. Contractions. Apostrophes are required if the word cannot stand alone without it.
^I^went^to^John's^house.^ **CWS** = 6
^I^went^to Johns house.^ **CWS** = 4

Rule 6. Words with Reversed Letters. Words containing reversed letters are included in the total CWS count unless the reversed letter causes a word to be spelled incorrectly.
^There^was^a^bad^smell. ^ **CWS** = 6
^There^was^a^dad^smell. ^ **CWS** = 6
^The^dog^ran^in^the^yard.^ **CWS** = 7
^The bog ran^in^the^yard.^ **CWS** = 5

Rule 7. Story Titles and Endings. Words written in the title or endings that are capitalized and spelled correctly are included in the total CWS.
^The^Hot^Day^ **CWS** = 4
the Hot ^Day^ **CWS** = 2
the hot day **CWS** = 0
^The^End.^ **CWS** = 3
^The end.^ **CWS** = 2

Rule 8. Abbreviations. Commonly used abbreviations that are spelled correctly are included in the total CWS count.
^Juan^lives^on ^Hollywood ^Blvd. ^ **CWS** = 6

Rule 9. Hyphens. Hyphenated words are counted in the total CWS count as long as each morpheme separated by hyphens is spelled correctly
^My^brother-in-law^graduated^from^school.^ **CWS** = 6
^My broder-in-law graduated^from^school.^ **CWS** = 4

Rule 10. Numbers. With the exception of dates, numbers that are not spelled out are not included in the total CWS count.
3 men^ran.^ **CWS** = 2
^Three^men^ran.^ **CWS** = 4
^It^is^June^10, ^2011.^ **CWS** = 4

Rule 11. Unusual Characters. Symbols used in writing that are not spelled out are not included in the total CWS count.
^I^won^a^prize @ the^fair.^ **CWS** = 6

Appendix C
Scored Writing Sample

^ he ^was ^ jumping ^ on descs and ^ when ^ we tride to ^ get ^ him ^ he ^ would ^ climb ^ up ^ on ^ top ^ of ^ the cupberds and ^ we ^ could ^ not ^ reach ^ him^. ^ When ^ we ^ went ^ up their on ^ a Ladder he ^ would ^ jump ^ on ^ a ^ light ^.

CWS: 33
TWW: 41
33 ÷ 41 = 80.4
Accuracy: 80%

Appendix D
Narrative Writing Assessment Rubric

Writing Qualities	1	2	3	4
Response to Prompt	Attempt to respond to the prompt; unclear sequence of events	Adequate response to the prompt; sequence may be unclear in many places	Good response to the prompt; sequence may not be entirely clear throughout the composition	Good response to the prompt; introduced at the beginning of composition; clear sequence of events
Story Development	Unclear or completely lacking	Adequate but includes irrelevant or not enough descriptions or explanations	Good but may include an irrelevant description or explanation	Clear with no irrelevant descriptions or explanations
Organization	Not discernible	Not completely clear	Good but may include too much emphasis on one part of the composition	Good; clear beginning, middle, and end
Word Choice	Nonspecific and immature	Adequate	Good but not particularly fresh or vivid	Fresh and vigorous
Details	Lack of details	Few details	Sufficient details	Variety of interesting details
Sentence Structures	Incorrect and inappropriate throughout composition	Many incorrect and inappropriate	Mostly correct and appropriate	Almost completely correct and appropriate
Mechanics (punctuation, capitalization, and spelling)	Many serious errors	Serious errors	Some errors	Very few or no errors

Appendix E
Narrative Writing Prompts

1. Think about your best holiday celebration ever. Tell about this celebration and why it was your favorite.
2. You spent a day with your grandmother. Tell about your day.
3. It was your birthday yesterday. How did you spend the day?
4. Describe a time when you had a fight with your best friend.
5. Write about the most memorable day of your life.
6. Write about the worst day of your life.
7. Write about the time when you went out your way to help someone in need.
8. Remember the best school assembly ever. What happened?
9. A flying saucer has been sighted over your town. You have never believed in flying saucers, but then you see it for yourself and...
10. You won a school contest that allowed you to be teacher-for-a-day. Write about your experience as the teacher.
11. One April Fool's day you played a safe but terrific joke on your best friend. Write about your April Fool's joke.
12. Imagine that as you are taking a shortcut through the woods, a tree topples pinning you underneath. Describe how you free yourself.
13. Tell about a time when you were embarrassed.
14. Imagine it is late at night, you are at home alone when the telephone rings. What happens next?
15. Describe what would be like if you could fly.
16. Think about a time you thought, "It's not fair." What happened to you that was not fair.
17. Write about a trip you have taken.
18. Think about a heroic adventures or daring rescues you have witnessed, participated in, or read about. What happened during one of these rescues?
19. Think of a day in your life when everything seemed to be going wrong. Tell about it.
20. Tell about a time when you felt proud.
21. What is one of the funniest things that has ever happened to you? Retell the event as completely as you can.
22. Recall a time when you felt really disappointed about something. Tell about this experience.
23. Think of a day in your life when everything seemed to be going in your favor. Tell about it.
24. Think about a time when you felt scared. Tell about it.
25. When you get to school, there's a sign on the door stating, "School's Closed." What do you do?
26. Tell about a time you "saved the day."
27. Suppose that one day you woke up and were 25 years old. Write about your day as a 25 year old?

28. You and a friend find an empty building and decide to make it your secret place. Tell about your secret place.
29. One day at school, your teacher comes into the classroom, places a box on the floor, and leaves the room. Suddenly, the box begins to move. Write a story about what happens next.
30. If you could become any animal, what animal would you choose to be?
31. What is the best part of your day?
32. If you could have any job/career you wanted, what would it be?
33. For a children's magazine, describe your first attempt at playing a new sport.
34. The thing that I regret most about my life is….
35. If I could accomplish one more thing, I would…
36. If I could live anywhere in the world, I would choose….
37. My favorite childhood memory is….
38. If you had to flee from your burning house, what would you choose to save?
39. If you have your driver's license where would you drive?
40. Your best friend doesn't invite you to her/his birthday party…