

Chapter One

Tackling the TAKS

Chapter One introduces the framework of The TAKS Tutor and teaching strategies. These strategies will be interspersed throughout the lessons and activities in this book. As mentioned in the *Overview*, the main purpose of The TAKS Tutor is to provide teachers with a resource that can be used to teach good writing habits and skills. Strategies included in this resource have been shown to increase composition and editing skills.

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Chapter Two

TAKS Writing Objectives 1 and 2: Written Composition

Objectives 1 and 2 require students to respond to a prompt in written form. This portion of the writing assessment checks students’ ability to produce an effective composition in relation to a rubric that includes **focus and coherence, organization, development of ideas, voice, and conventions**. Conventions within the composition will be based on grade-level appropriate expectations.

Compositions will be scored on a 4-point holistic scale. Students must be given numerous opportunities to write for different purposes, in specific contexts, and for a variety of audiences to better prepare for the TAKS test. However, it is important that students learn to write effectively by writing about what interests them. After students have had many opportunities to organize their thoughts, develop ideas, write with voice, and learn to use conventions appropriately within the context of their own interests and experiences, then allow them practice responding to a prompt. Only about 20% of all writing time should be focused on responding to a prompt with a specific topic. (Ralph Fletcher and JoAnn Portalupi, *Writing Workshop The Essential Guide*)

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Chapter Three

TAKS Writing Objective 3: Organization

Objective 3 tests the student’s ability to recognize and correct errors in organization and development within peer-editing passages. Since the skill of organizing ideas in a composition is more difficult for students to master, Objective 3 has the least number of items tested on the TAKS. Students are asked to identify sentences that do not belong, could best be added, or should be added after a particular sentence in a composition.

Students must be shown how to effectively revise compositions of their own and those of others to become successful on this portion of the TAKS. They also need to be aware and capable of adding details to compositions to give the reader a better understanding of the events in the paragraph. Reading authentic children’s literature and studying the author’s organization can better help students to understand smooth progression of ideas.

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Chapter Four

TAKS Writing Objective 4: Sentence Structure

Objective 4 requires students to identify faulty phrasing, misuse of conjunctions, fragments, and run-on sentences. In addition, students must be able to choose the best

sentence structure when correcting errors. Question stems, such as the following will be used on the TAKS to instruct students to complete the objective portion:

- Which of the following is **NOT** a complete sentence?
(identify fragments and run-on sentences and ascertain the best way to correct them)
- What is the **BEST** way to rewrite the ideas in sentence ___?
(improve the wording of awkward and/or clumsy sentences)
- What is the **BEST** way to combine sentences ___ and ___?
(choose the most effective way to merge ideas)

In this chapter, students will focus on sentences and sentence parts masquerading as sentences. They will discover how to identify these types of problems and practice correcting incomplete and incorrect sentences.

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Chapter Five

TAKS Writing Objective 5: Usage

Objective 5 requires students to identify and correct errors in standard grammar and usage. The following question stem will be used on the TAKS to instruct students to complete the objective portion:

- What change, if any, should be made in sentence ___?
(students are to identify which answer choice gives the accurate correction of the sentence)
- The meaning of sentence ___ can be improved by changing ___ to ___?
(students are to change the pronoun used to the noun it refers to)

In this chapter, students will focus on editing and revising sentences in standard grammar usage in the context of peer-editing. It is important that students are given daily opportunities to practice this skill. Students should be able to identify and write compositions that convey meaning without distraction to the reader. Incorrect use of tense, lack of agreement between subjects and verbs, and unclear pronoun referents can hinder the reader in their understanding of the author's meaning.

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Chapter Six

TAKS Writing Objective 6: Proofreading

Objective 6 requires students to identify and correct errors in capitalization, punctuation, and spelling. The following question stems will be used on the TAKS to instruct students on the objective portion:

- What change, if any, should be made in sentence ___?
(Students are to identify which answer choice gives the most accurate correction of the sentence. In addition, students must also realize if no change is needed in the sentence)
- What change should be made in sentence ___?
(Students are to identify which answer choice gives the most accurate correction of the sentence within four answer choices)

In order for students to learn conventions (punctuation, capitalization, and spelling) they must read authentic texts every day, write every day for a sustained amount of time, and receive direct instruction in written conventions. We have to bring in the best literature to teach children what they need to know. We have to refer to it again and again, and we have to show students that learning to use punctuation is a life-long study that continues to grow.

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