

*Writing With Ease* and *Writing With Skill*:  
Susan's Updated Recommendations  
(Spring, 2014)

Six years ago, Peace Hill Press began publishing *Writing With Ease*, which fleshes out the general elementary writing recommendations in *The Well-Trained Mind* out into a full curriculum. *Writing With Skill*, which does the same for the pre-rhetoric recommendations, followed.

We've been fortunate that literally thousands of parents have made use of these programs--and have given us plenty of feedback about their experience. Here are three things I've learned...

### **Three Levels of *Writing With Ease* is Probably Plenty**

The purpose of the readings, narrations, and dictations in *Writing With Ease* is to develop critical skills in writing--putting ideas into words, getting words down on paper, and holding words in your head long enough to write them out. (If you're not familiar with the need for these skills, be sure to read my short essay "Why Writing Programs Fail." [<http://downloads.peacehillpress.com/pdfs/samples/wwe/wwesample.pdf>])

For most students, those skills are in place by the end of *Writing With Ease, Level Three*. In fact, many students who are perfectly ready to go on to original writing (the next step in the process) are frustrated by the more complex sentences in Level Four--particularly the dictation exercises.

If you decide to do Level Four, you're certainly not wasting your time; those exercises will continue to develop the student's reading ability, comprehension, ability to summarize briefly, vocabulary, syntax, etc. And students who can do the Level Four work will probably have less difficulty with the texts used in *Writing With Skill*.

But there are also good reasons to *skip* Level Four...such as:

Your student is ready to go into *Writing With Skill*

Your student isn't quite ready for *Writing With Skill*, but he's bored with narration and dictation and needs to do another program for a while.

Your student still needs to do dictation and narration, but it makes more sense to tie those exercises to her current history, science, and literature studies.

You just can't cope with another year of *Writing With Ease* and will run screaming to the nearest creative writing program for relief if you have to keep on.

As long as a student can complete the Level Three Master Evaluation [<http://downloads.peacehillpress.com/pdfs/samples/wwe/wweevaluations.pdf>], you've reaped the main benefits of the program.

### **You'll Probably Need to Repeat the Dictations More than Three Times**

Throughout *Writing With Ease*, I suggest that you repeat dictation sentences three times.

If a student can hold the dictations in his head after three repetitions, that's great. Ideal, in fact.

But as we all know, "ideal" isn't "real."

Many students need additional repetitions. And as you get into the more complex dictations, *most* students will need you to say the dictation sentences additional times.

That's absolutely fine. Don't frustrate your young writer. Repeat the sentences again. And, if necessary, again. And again. BUT, follow these two rules...

1) Always ask the student to repeat the sentence back to you before she goes back to writing.

2) Always repeat the dictation assignment from the beginning. Don't allow the student to write one word at a time as you "feed" the sentence to her.

### **Fifth Grade is Probably on the Young Side for *Writing With Skill***

*Writing With Skill* is one very specific, parts-to-whole, step-by-step outworking of the principles laid out in my writing workshops (such as this one: <http://peacehillpress.com/audiobooks-lectures/a-plan-for-teaching-writing-focus-on-the-middle-grades-mp3-download/>) It is a *pre-rhetoric* course, designed to give students the skills necessary to 1) compose well-organized, properly researched and documented short pieces of expository writing across the curriculum, and 2) prepare them to go into a high school or freshman college rhetoric course.

So, although it is the next logical step after *Writing With Ease* in the student's writing development, it doesn't necessarily have to be completed *immediately* after the *Writing With Ease* series. In fact, most students seem to benefit from a year or more of writing across the curriculum or using another writing program. This additional maturity reduces frustration levels, makes the texts used in *Writing With Skill* more accessible, and still gets the student ready for rhetoric in plenty of time.

Here are a few possible scenarios that you might follow...all of them completely compatible with the writing goals I discuss in my workshops. (Please note that I'm not necessarily making full endorsements and recommendations of the listed curricula—simply trying to give you a sense of how a number of different progressions can get a student to high school rhetoric in time.)

<b>GRADE</b>	<b>First Progression</b>	<b>Second Progression</b>	<b>Third Progression</b>	<b>Fourth Progression</b>
First	Writing With Ease 1	Writing With Ease 1		
Second	Writing With Ease 2	Writing With Ease 2	Writing With Ease 1	Writing With Ease 1
Third	Writing With Ease 3	Writing With Ease 3	Writing With Ease 2	Writing With Ease 2

GRADE	First Progression	Second Progression	Third Progression	Fourth Progression
Fourth	Writing With Ease 4	Essentials in Writing, Level 5 OR Killgallon, Sentence Composing for Middle School	Writing With Ease 3	Writing With Ease 3
Fifth	<i>Continue narrations and summaries across the curriculum</i>	Essentials in Writing, Level 6 OR Killgallon, Paragraph Composing for Middle School	Writing With Skill 1, half speed	<i>Follow TWTM recommendations for outlining, summarizing, etc.</i>
Sixth	Writing With Skill 1	Essentials in Writing, Level 7 OR Killgallon, Sentence Composing for High School	Writing With Skill 1, half speed	<i>Follow TWTM recommendations for outlining, summarizing, etc.</i>
Seventh	Writing With Skill 2	Writing With Skill 1	Writing With Skill 2, half speed	<i>Follow TWTM recommendations for outlining, summarizing, etc.</i>
Eighth	Writing With Skill 3	Writing With Skill 2	Writing With Skill 2, half speed	Writing With Skill 1
Ninth	<i>Continue to write short researched compositions across the curriculum</i>	Writing With Skill 3	Writing With Skill 3	Writing With Skill 2
Tenth	Gerald Graff and Cathy Birkenstein, <i>They Say, I Say: The Moves that Matter in Academic Writing</i> and <i>Schaum's Quick Guide to Writing Great Research Papers</i> , plus regular persuasive papers across the curriculum	Institute for Excellence in Writing, basic course	Classical Academic Press, Writing & Rhetoric, Books 7, 8, 9	Writing With Skill 3
Eleventh	Frank D'Angelo, <i>Composition in the Classical Tradition</i> , plus regular persuasive papers across the curriculum	IEW, Advanced Communication Series	Classical Academic Press, Writing & Rhetoric, Books 10, 11, 12	Institute for Excellence in Writing, basic course

GRADE	First Progression	Second Progression	Third Progression	Fourth Progression
Twelfth	Thomas Kane, <i>The New Oxford Guide to Writing</i> plus regular persuasive papers across the curriculum	IEW, Classical Rhetoric through Structure and Styles	Thomas Kane, <i>The New Oxford Guide to Writing</i> plus regular persuasive papers across the curriculum	IEW, Advanced Communication Series