

**Teachers College Reading and Writing Project  
Writing Curricular Calendar, Kindergarten, 2015-2016  
Overview of the Year for Kindergarten Writers**



## Overview of the Year for Kindergarten Writers

September/October	Unit One – Launching the Writing Workshop
October/November	Unit Two – Looking Closely: Observing, Labeling, and Listing Like Scientists
November/December	Unit Three – Writing for Readers
January/February	Unit Four – How-to Books: Writing to Teach Others
February/March	Unit Five – Persuasive Writing of All Kinds: Using Words to Make a Change
March/April	Unit Six – All-About Books
May/June	Unit Seven – Crafting Stories Using All We Know About Narrative Writing

Your kindergartners will come to you this year full of stories and information. Some will come from homes in which parents invite their sons and daughters to add to the shopping list or to write stories for dolls and teddy bears, and some will come from Pre-K classrooms in which children are invited to write, tell, and act out stories. But in many cases, it will be you who will introduce kids to the world of written language. This is an enormously important responsibility because you will be the person who helps each and every child in your classroom know that he or she belongs in the world of written language. You will be the one to convey that little marks on the page tell stories, carry jokes, give orders, and change the world. And, you will be the one to help each child in your care come to believe that those little marks on the page will be a source of joy and laughter, friendship, and power.

The units of study that we describe here are based on three decades spent teaching writing to kindergartners and learning from them about ways we can provide powerful help. These units draw on the knowledge not only of TCRWP staff members and researchers, but also of

**Teachers College Reading and Writing Project**  
**Writing Curricular Calendar, Kindergarten, 2015-2016**  
**Overview of the Year for Kindergarten Writers**

the thousands of teachers with whom we learn every day. Of course, these units are also carefully aligned with the Common Core State Standards.

This one document overviews a year-long curriculum for kindergarten writers. This curriculum is further detailed in the series *Units of Study in Opinion, Information, and Narrative Writing, Grade K* (Heinemann 2013), which contains the minilessons, small-group work, conferring, and teacher- and child-facing rubrics that undergird much of this year-long curriculum in teaching writing to kindergartners. This document is also grounded in the teaching of the DVD, *Big Lessons from Small Writers*, which contains twenty-two videos that illustrate this curriculum ([www.unitsofstudy.com](http://www.unitsofstudy.com)), as well as the TCRWP's video compilation of Common Core-aligned teaching, available to all at [www.readingandwritingproject.org](http://www.readingandwritingproject.org). Certainly, we expect you to alter these units based on all you know about your children and based on your own interests and passions. We would never imagine that any teacher would use any resource blindly; instead, please add and subtract according to what works for you and your students.

As you revise these units, keep in mind the skills that your children bring with them into kindergarten. The data shows that at least two-thirds of children enter kindergarten already knowing their letters and sounds. Those children are ready to write whole sentences underneath their pictures, starting the first week of kindergarten. You will find that this curriculum calendar has been written with a diverse kindergarten in mind. We've planned these units knowing that many of your children enter kindergarten only knowing some of their letters and sounds; others know several letters and sounds but do not know how to put these together to write words and sentences, and still others are notably more proficient than this. Within this write-up, and especially the *Units of Study* books, you'll find support and teaching for each of these diverse learners.

Those of you who worked with the TCRWP's curricular calendar from 2014-2015 will notice we have kept some things the same, and made some subtle changes. First, as was the case last year, we've maintained fewer units in all, allowing for more time for you to conduct an initial assessment, formative assessments, and a summative assessment within each unit. We also developed continua that can help you track students' progress in the three genres that the Common Core State Standards spotlight.

Throughout the plans, there are many opportunities for students to engage in close study of the grade-level complex texts that function as mentor texts for a given unit of study. You will see we have paid enormous attention to ensuring that students are given opportunities to engage in work that places high levels of cognitive demand on them. Students are continually asked to transfer what they learn while working in one text or one genre to another text, another genre. They engage in inquiries, evaluating mentor texts, their own writing, and writing written by peers. They also set goals for themselves and receive assistance in working with resolve towards those goals.

**Teachers College Reading and Writing Project  
Writing Curricular Calendar, Kindergarten, 2015-2016  
Overview of the Year for Kindergarten Writers**

The sequence of units has remained the same, except that we have swapped the order of the fifth and sixth units. In the first unit, *Launching the Writing Workshop*, students will first write about topics they already know all about, and then learn to tell and write true stories from their lives. The very popular unit, *Looking Closely: Observing, Labeling, and Listing* comes next. Here, we support the link between writing and science. In November and December, children will again have a chance to write true stories, this time with an expectation that they will work hard to make their writing more readable.

The informational writing work children did in Unit Two continues through January and February. Students will write procedural books that teach readers how to do something, from making a taco to making a friend! This work will teach writers to compose sequenced pieces with increased clarity and focus.

In March/April, children will channel their opinions into persuasive writing pieces through which they strive to make the world better, starting with their own classroom.

During *All-About Books* in April/May, students will teach one another about all kinds of topics they know well. This unit gives children an opportunity to share their personal expertise, and to plan and categorize the information they know to teach across pages.

Finally, in May/June, the year wraps up with another unit in narrative writing, building on the work from the start of the school year and highlighting reading-writing connections to lift the level of writing. Children will return to composing personal narratives about things that have happened to them in their own lives, using all they know about reading to craft stories that are easy to read. This unit also provides writers an opportunity to study the work of a favorite mentor, exploring craft techniques in their own stories. You'll end this unit, and the school year, with an invitation to write stories about imagined characters, giving kindergartners an exciting opportunity to write fiction!

## Assessments

We have a few suggestions for how to ratchet up the level of your writing instruction. First, remember that your children will come to you able to think of stories to tell and topics to teach. Chances are that it is simple for them to think about something they have done, put that event onto the page however they can (for most this will mean drawing pictures), and to tell the story of the event. It's also likely that kindergartners will have no trouble at all thinking about a topic on which they are experts and then teaching others all about that topic. So you'll want to teach writing in ways that capitalize on your children's yearning to tell their stories, to teach the topics they know, and you'll want to further support your budding writers by conveying to them that writers learn and draw on tons of strategies in order to come up with ideas for writing.

**Teachers College Reading and Writing Project**  
**Writing Curricular Calendar, Kindergarten, 2015-2016**  
**Overview of the Year for Kindergarten Writers**

Children also come to you with knowledge of letters and sounds and of genres of writing. You may question whether this is, in fact, true of your students. During 2012, we began the school year by asking hundreds of kindergartners to do a piece of on-demand opinion writing and on-demand informational writing, as well as the on-demand narrative, and we were flabbergasted by how much children already know, even at the start of kindergarten. The curriculum set out in these units is integrated into an assessment system, available in *Writing Pathways* (an accompaniment to the *Units of Study* series), which includes three learning progressions, one in each type of writing, as well as grade-by-grade checklists, grade-specific rubrics, and three benchmark texts illustrating at-standards-level, on-demand opinion, information, and narrative writing.

An early version of this assessment system has been piloted in thousands of classrooms, and the entire system has been revised based on feedback. Essentially, in this system, K–8 teachers begin the school year by asking students to spend forty-five minutes writing an on-demand narrative, and on other days, to spend similar time writing an on-demand information text and opinion text. In most schools, teachers decide that in each instance, students will merely be told to do their best writing. A teacher might say to her students, for example, “You have forty-five minutes to write your best personal narrative, Small Moment story, true story, or piece of short fiction—your best narrative. Write in a way that shows me all you know about narrative writing.” Some schools prefer the prompt to be much more clearly delineated, with all the expectations spelled out. We provide schools with both ways to word the tasks so you may choose the method you prefer.

Each student’s work is then scored against a learning progression and an accompanying set of sample student texts in each genre that have been benchmarked to represent each level of the learning progression. For example, a teacher can read the introduction in one child’s information text, asking, “Does this match expectations for a kindergarten introduction? A first-grade introduction? A Pre-K one?” (There is also a way for teachers to characterize the piece as 2.5 or 3.5.) Then, he or she can teach the class a unit on information writing, giving students ample opportunities to assess themselves at the beginning, middle, and end of the unit against crystal clear checklists that spell out the goals they should be working toward. After the unit is completed, the on-demand assessment is repeated, and students’ work is again scored. Presumably, teachers will teach more than one unit in each of the three major kinds of writing, and the on-demands can be given periodically again later in the year to continue to track students’ progress.

The most important thing about the learning progressions and performance assessments is that they enable teachers and students to grasp where students are in their writing development so that teachers can figure out ways to give children the help they need to move toward next steps. The assessment system that undergirds this curriculum is meant as an instructional tool. It makes progress in writing as transparent, concrete, and attainable as possible and puts ownership for this progress into the hands of learners. This

**Teachers College Reading and Writing Project**  
**Writing Curricular Calendar, Kindergarten, 2015-2016**  
**Overview of the Year for Kindergarten Writers**

assessment system clarifies the Common Core State Standards, allowing students and teachers to work toward a very clear image of what good writing entails.

We also encourage you to assess students' growing control of spelling and recommend administering Donald Bear's Developmental Spelling Inventory detailed in *Words Their Way* as well as the Letter and Sound Identification Assessment which is part of the TCRWP Assessments ([www.readingandwritingproject.com](http://www.readingandwritingproject.com)). In your students' on-demand pieces you may see some evidence of letter/sound correspondence, concept of word, as well as (in some cases) the ability to write in full sentences. Familiarize yourself with all that your students know about letters and sounds as well as discrete features of phonics. Conducting a letter and sound identification assessment will reveal what letters and sounds to expect in student writing as well as which ones you need to teach. Some teachers discover that small groups (or their whole class) are ready for a spelling inventory. Some teachers wait until their second unit of study to conduct their spelling inventory. Whenever you decide to assess your spellers you will need to count not the words but the features that are correct. This information will not only help you decide what to teach in your phonics/word study time, it will also give you valuable information about how to help your kindergarten students with spelling during writing workshop.

Then you will be able to plan your whole-class spelling instruction so that it is aligned with the main needs you see across your class and also differentiated for your struggling and strongest spellers. Over the course of the year, in each unit of study, we have outlined key spelling features to work on with your students to help align your word study work with writer's workshop. Of course, if your students enter well above or below grade level, you may want to adjust which features you teach to better respond to your students' need. The foundational skills section in the Common Core will also help you align your concepts about print, spelling, and phonics work so as to build a coherent word study program in your school. In writing workshop, your students will have ample time to learn and practice these skills as well as those described in the language standards.

In addition to spotlighting spelling, you will also teach students how to recognize and name ending punctuation, how to use a capital letter at the beginning of a sentence as well as for the word *I*, and how to edit for spelling, both as they write and as they publish. As students write across genres, they will have opportunities to demonstrate command over many of the conventions of Standard English grammar, capitalization, punctuation, and spelling. This supports the expectations of the Common Core State Standards in language that kindergarten children use grammatical structures such as nouns, verbs, and prepositions, as well as capitalization and a beginning understanding of punctuation.

Finally, bear in mind that kindergartners should bring all that they are learning in reading to their writing work. Teach them to draw on their repertoire of strategies in reading to use similar strategies in writing. You might say to a child who is reading a Level A or B text, "Look at the picture and expect that the words and pictures will match." The goal is that

**Teachers College Reading and Writing Project  
Writing Curricular Calendar, Kindergarten, 2015-2016  
Overview of the Year for Kindergarten Writers**

children will understand they are creating text in the same way when they write, and that their pictures and words need to match as well. When you teach children to point crisply under words as they read their leveled books, you want them to understand that they can also do this when they read their own writing. When they read a book and ask themselves if something makes sense, you want them to bring that same question to their writing. Many teachers find it helpful to have children keep their book baggie nearby when they write.

## Special Words of Advice

We have a few suggestions for how to lift the level of your writing workshops in the year ahead. First, it is important that children are given opportunities to do work of high cognitive demand. You can introduce a new kind of text—say, a how-to text—by saying to students, “Will you study this text and notice the ways in which it is different from the stories you were just writing? Think about what you will need to do to write a how-to text like this one.” Then you can send students off to show what they can do. Don’t worry if the work many kids produce suggests they were unable to independently analyze the new kind of writing. You can follow the invitation to engage in an inquiry with more explicit and supported instruction. Give them opportunities to evaluate their own writing and to draw from a repertoire of possible techniques—the ones most suited to their needs. Give them chances to self-assess their work, noting ways in which their work does and does not meet the criteria, and then invite them to set goals for themselves.

In your minilessons, be sure to remind writers of all the options they have to draw upon during any one day’s writing workshop. Don’t expect that the work children will do on any one day will be solely what you taught during that day’s teaching point! If you taught children that characters can do different things on each page, and that writers might add to the pictures, to the labels, and even to the words, you should expect children to add details and feelings, and anything else they have already learned, in addition to making characters do different things across the pages of their booklets. In order to keep children drawing on all they have learned, you might prominently display classroom charts that contain teaching points from previous minilessons. Teachers often begin a minilesson by reviewing the strategies on a chart that are especially relevant for writers that day.

One way to be sure your teaching gives students opportunities to do work that is at a high level of cognitive demand is to ask students to show you what they already know, and can do, during conferences. For example, if you decide through your research that you’d like to confer to teach a particular writer to plan the beginning, middle, and end of her booklet using her fingers to hold each part of her story, rather than writing a random string of events, you may want to first say to the writer, “If I were to suggest that you plan your whole story, can you tell me how you would do that?” Then you can respond to what that

**Teachers College Reading and Writing Project  
Writing Curricular Calendar, Kindergarten, 2015-2016  
Overview of the Year for Kindergarten Writers**

student demonstrates she can already do, noting ways in which her work was effective and ways she could take it further.

As you confer, much of the instruction will come in response to the data that is before you. If you sense that instead, you are moving among students, spoon-feeding them a bite-sized version of that day's minilesson, you will want to step back and reexamine your instruction. Make sure that at least half of your conferences arise in response to your study of student work, and that when you do study student work, you look at the extent to which students are drawing on all that you have taught over the course of the year and not just on the instruction of that day.

Finally, when planning your units of study, always draw on the writing work that your students produced in prior units so that your instruction builds across the year. Children will only work with lots of vigor and productivity if you have and convey expectations of them as they grow and learn across this first year.