

SWIM

PROJECT BRIEF

#2

Shared Writing Instructional Model: Planning, Delivering and Evaluating Writing Instruction for Students with Intellectual Disabilities

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All Students are Writers

All students can engage in meaningful learning about writing. Students may be working on pre-emergent or emergent writing skills focused on using symbols and language to communicate and how letters are combined into words that have meaning. Other students may be focusing on transitional or conventional writing. This involves building skills about organizing ideas and information as well as understanding how to convey meaning through words, sentences, and paragraphs. See SWIM Brief #3 for descriptions of the different writing levels.

What is writing and why does writing instruction matter?

Writing is the product of a complex set of processes in which students translate and organize their ideas into a text that is understandable to others.¹ Written texts allow authors to communicate with readers across time and distance. For students with intellectual disabilities (ID), writing to communicate ideas can support their academic learning, communication, and self-advocacy skills. Writing instruction for students with ID has historically focused on standard English conventions like letter formation and punctuation rather than on the cognition that underlies developing a meaningful text such as identifying a topic for a purpose, organizing ideas, or revising.² Teachers may believe students need to be able to hold a standard pencil to learn to write because of the focus on mechanics and assumptions about writing tool use.³ This approach to writing instruction can introduce accessibility challenges, limit engagement, and hinder opportunities to learn to use writing to communicate.⁴ Because reading and writing instruction rely on highly interconnected concepts, a mechanics-first approach to teaching writing can also limit student progress in English Language Arts (ELA), including reading. The Shared Writing Instructional Model (SWIM) combines research-based elements from Self-Regulation Strategy Development⁵, formative assessment strategies⁶, Universal Design for Learning⁷ and shared reading.⁸ SWIM writing instruction is focused on rich instruction that supports students with ID in learning to write to communicate ideas, information, and share their opinions.

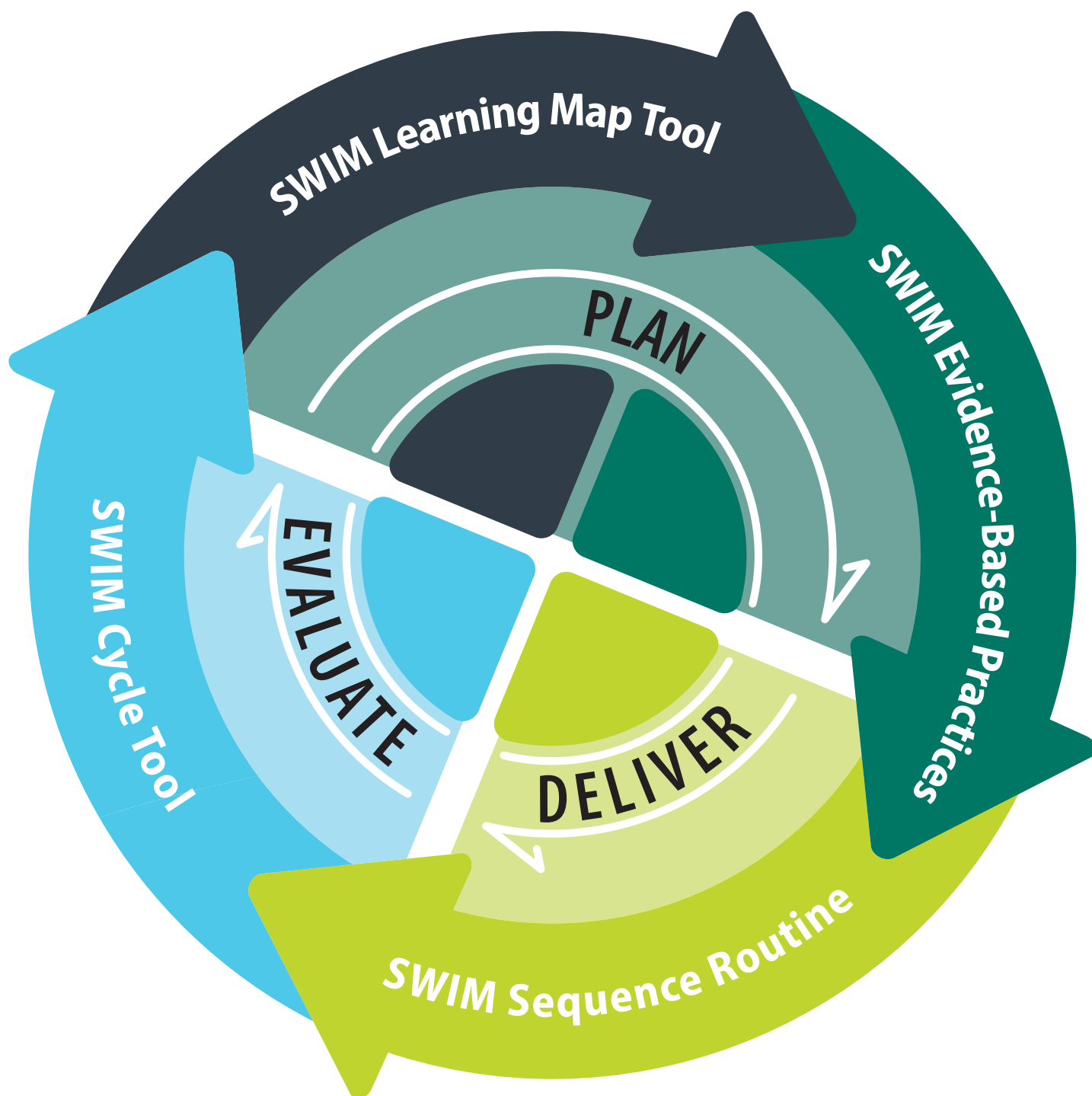


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What is the Shared Writing Instructional Model?

The SWIM Cycle is a way to plan, deliver, and evaluate instruction that uses writing as a way students with ID can communicate. Each phase of the cycle includes tools and resources to support teachers in delivering writing instruction as part of a comprehensive approach to literacy. SWIM professional development resources and coaching can support teachers in implementing the SWIM Cycle.



Plan

The SWIM approach to writing includes using research-based learning maps to identify individual instructional goals for students who are working on any writing level. Learning maps are intentionally designed to be reflective of all learners and show the various ways that students can learn knowledge, skills, and understandings over time. The learning map tool includes questions about students' current ELA instruction and communication skills to identify an appropriate set of instructional goals and student learning outcomes from within the learning maps. By answering the questions in the SWIM learning map tool, teachers can select a plan that is customized to the learning goals for each student to help guide the delivery of instruction. Each plan includes evidence-based practices for writing instruction to support teachers in building students' communication skills using written text.

Deliver

In delivering SWIM writing instruction, teachers engage students in a five-step writing routine that can be tailored based on the plan for instruction and the needs of the individual learner. The SWIM sequence is a research-informed, flexible, five-step routine that can be used for students working on different levels of writing.

SWIM instruction focuses on both the **writing process and the writing product** with the ultimate goal of the student conveying meaning in text. The instructional goals and learning outcomes in steps 1 and 2 concern the knowledge, skills, and understandings related to researching to build and present knowledge. In steps 3, 4, and 5, the goals and outcomes can focus on either informative and explanatory writing or opinion writing. Table 1 shows how students working on emergent, transitional, and conventional writing can all use the SWIM sequence with different instructional goals.

Evaluate

The SWIM Cycle Tool is designed for teachers to use at the end of a SWIM Cycle to aid in reflecting on and evaluating their writing instruction. Completion of the SWIM Cycle Tool generates a recommendation for where to begin instruction for the next SWIM Cycle. The tool is composed of six sections:

1. Evaluation of student mastery of learning goals in both writing process and product
2. Reflection on student engagement
3. Evaluation of student access to writing in both communication and writing tools
4. Reflection on possible student barriers to writing
5. Reflection on instructional fidelity
6. Recommendation for the next SWIM Cycle.

The SWIM Cycle Tool uses teacher responses within the sections to provide a range of options for building student mastery, engagement, access, and instructional fidelity. A few examples include, the student staying at the same level and incorporating elaborative writing practices (e.g., revising a draft, writing more about the topic), the teacher increasing student access and repeating the level with fidelity, or moving the student to a new, more advanced set of instructional goals from the SWIM learning maps. A summary question at the end of the tool prompts teachers to further reflect on student barriers and instructional fidelity and what instructional changes are needed for the next SWIM Cycle. Both the recommendation for where to begin instruction in the next SWIM Cycle, and teacher reflection and evaluation of their current writing instruction, guide the next plan phase of the SWIM Cycle.

**Table 1. SWIM Sequence Example:
Grade Band 2-4; Cluster Level 2**

SWIM Learning Map Neighborhood	Research to Build and Present Knowledge	Informative and Explanatory Writing		
SWIM Sequence Step	<div data-bbox="331 541 557 850"> <p>1</p> <p>Choose a Topic and Purpose of Writing</p> </div> <div data-bbox="570 541 795 850"> <p>2</p> <p>Learn about the Topic</p> </div>	<div data-bbox="823 541 1049 850"> <p>3</p> <p>Plan for Writing</p> </div>	<div data-bbox="1075 541 1300 850"> <p>4</p> <p>Write with a Purpose</p> </div>	<div data-bbox="1326 541 1552 850"> <p>5</p> <p>Review and Evaluate for Purpose</p> </div>
Emergent Writing Level	Describe a personal experience using relevant details.	Draw or select an image that represents the meaning of a word before drawing or selecting pictures and illustrations to communicate with others, produce marks or written products and then provide their meaning to others, and recognize what a topic is and can express a preference for a topic.		
Transitional Writing Level	Recall information from personal experiences to answer a question about a topic with the guidance and support of others and can understand information sources that provide information about a topic.	Arrange letters in words from left-to-right order before producing word strings by combining random letters, use frames during sentence production.		
Conventional Writing Level	Recall and gather information about a topic from personal experiences and print and digital information sources for a writing task, respectively.	Compose an informative or explanatory text by naming or introducing the topic, by supplying or conveying facts, ideas, and information about it, and by providing some sense of closure (e.g., the end).		

Key considerations for teachers using SWIM

1. Plan for the writing level that is appropriate for the student. The time and emphasis of instruction will vary for the five steps, depending on the writing level. For pre-emergent and emergent writing instruction, presume that students intend to communicate and support them in making meaning during shared writing.
2. Make writing instruction engaging and relevant. Encourage students to select topics and elaborate about ideas and information that is interesting and important to them. Writing is a powerful way for students to express themselves!
3. Provide access to an appropriate writing tool and a robust language system. Students need individualized writing tools for access and enough vocabulary in their system to generate and communicate their ideas and thoughts. (See SWIM Brief #1 “How can my student write if they can’t hold a pencil?”)
4. Use think-alouds to model and instruct all five steps of the SWIM sequence with students over multiple lessons or instructional cycles. Using a consistent but flexible routine helps students develop conceptual understanding.
5. Integrate writing into daily comprehensive literacy instruction and other academic content areas such as social studies and science. For example, teachers and students can use the SWIM sequence to write about research topics in science or opinions in social studies.
6. Use formative assessment approaches. Writing is about process and product. When you are teaching using the SWIM approach, notice what the student is thinking and communicating while writing in addition to evaluating the student’s writing product.

Supporting The Use of SWIM with Professional Development and Coaching

SWIM professional development is intended for teachers of students with ID to meet grade-level expectations in writing as part of ELA instruction. The learning objective and outcome of SWIM professional development is that teachers will understand the SWIM model components by implementing the SWIM instructional cycle of *Plan, Deliver, and Evaluate*. SWIM professional development incorporates a student case study to promote job-embedded learning and apply teacher knowledge of the SWIM Cycle. Learning modules are organized into sections that introduce shared writing and the SWIM Cycle. The sequence of learning is designed to support teachers in applying the knowledge, skills, and understandings of the SWIM Cycle and support them in beginning to use the SWIM sequence in writing instruction immediately.

SWIM coaching is designed to transfer the critical components of SWIM professional learning into practice so that teachers can use the SWIM Cycle. The goal of SWIM coaching is to support teachers in planning, delivering, and evaluating high quality, specially designed writing instruction so that ALL students may grow in their writing development. The SWIM coaching model is designed to support collaborative actions or touch points between the teacher and coach throughout and across SWIM Cycles. Coaching allows for flexibility and personalization, including, in-person or virtual coaching and scheduling of professional development and coaching sessions around teacher needs and local context. Examples include 1:1 individual, small group coaching, building or district professional learning communities (PLCs), and a community of practice (CoP). SWIM coaching can be tailored to meet specific contexts. The SWIM coaching menu of options includes the development of a SWIM professional learning and coaching plan in which SWIM coaching, PLCs, and a CoP can be integrated before, during, and after the SWIM professional development.

Endnotes

- ¹ Abbott, R. D., Berninger, V. W., & Fayol, M. (2010). Longitudinal relationships of levels of language in writing and between writing and reading in grades 1 to 7. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 102*(2), 281; Koppenhaver, D., & Williams, A. (2010). A conceptual review of writing research in augmentative and alternative communication. *Augmentative and Alternative Communication, 26*(3), 158-176.
- ² Karvonen, M., Wakeman, S. Y., Browder, D. M., Rogers, M. A. S., & Flowers, C. (2011). *Academic curriculum for students with significant cognitive disabilities: Special education teacher perspectives a decade after IDEA 1997* (ED521407). ERIC. <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED521407.pdf>
- ³ Baker, S., Gersten, R., & Graham, S. (2003). Teaching expressive writing to students with learning disabilities: Research-based applications and examples. *Journal of Learning Disabilities, 36*(2), 109-123.
- ⁴ Gillespie, A., & Graham, S. (2014). A meta-analysis of writing interventions for students with learning disabilities. *Exceptional children, 80*(4), 454-473.
- ⁵ Graham, S., & Harris, K. R. (1993). Self-regulated strategy development: Helping students with learning problems develop as writers. *The Elementary School Journal, 94*(2), 169-181; Harris, K. R., & Graham, S. (2017). Self-regulated strategy development: Theoretical bases, critical instructional elements, and future research. In *Design principles for teaching effective writing* (pp. 119-151). Brill.
- ⁶ Heritage, M., Kim, J., Vendlinski, T., & Herman, J. (2009). From evidence to action: A seamless process in formative assessment?. *Educational Measurement: Issues and Practice, 28*(3), 24-31.
- ⁷ CAST (2018). *Universal Design for Learning Guidelines version 2.2*. <http://udlguidelines.cast.org>
- ⁸ Erickson, K. A., & Koppenhaver, D. A. (2020). *Comprehensive Literacy for All: Teaching Students with Significant Disabilities to Read and Write*. Brookes Publishing Company. PO Box 10624, Baltimore, MD 21285.

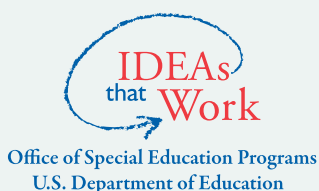
Notes

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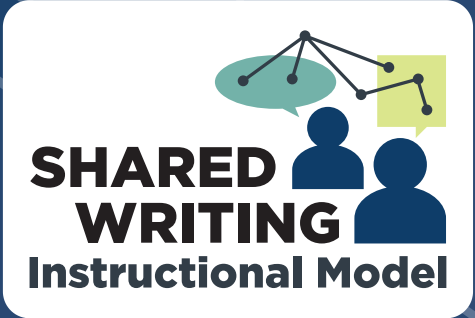


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