The PLAN Writing Strategy

The PLAN writing strategy is designed to help novice writers use self-instruction to plan and produce expository text. The strategy provides a series of steps students follow that are consistent with the writing process of planning, producing, and then editing and revising one's work.

The PLAN writing strategy is designed for use in conjunction with the graphic organizers included in this software. When first introducing the PLAN writing strategy to students, most teachers use the three main idea frame.

An explanation of the steps of the strategy is provided below. For step-by-step examples of who the strategy is used, clink on PLAN example.

The PLAN strategy focuses on four key steps associated with planning and producing writing:

Preview the audience, goals, and words to use

List main ideas & details on a think-sheet

Assign numbers to indicate order

Note ideas in sentences by following your plan.

Preview

One of the first things effective writers do is to consider the audience who will read the document to be developed and why they will be reading it. Since the only authentic reason for developing a written document is to communicate, authors also consider the specific communication goals they hope at accomplish. Example writing goals include...

To entertain...
To inform...
To persuade or convince...
To evoke some kind of action...
To attain permission...
To express an idea, emotion, or attitude...
To create art...

Likewise, another effective strategy is to preview words to use when producing the writing. Here, students brainstorm a list of as many key words related to the topic as they can identify.

List main ideas & details on a think-sheet

Novice writers often attempt to think of what to say, organize the ideas, and actually express the ideas in writing, as well as edit their work -- all at the same time. While expert writers can often do these four processes simultaneously, novice writers usually cannot. As a result, novice writers often produce dysfluent writing (using a minimum of words) that is poorly organized and full of mechanical writing errors. By separating these cognitive processes into distinct phases of writing, even novice writers tend to produce a much higher quality document. In short, most writing goals can be attained more effectively and efficiently if the author, before actually 'putting pen to paper' (or turning on the word-processor), invests some time first identifying some of the key ideas they plan to express, and then organizing these ideas into a logical order .

Think-sheets can serve as excellent tools to facilitate this planning process. An effective 'beginners' think sheet is the "three main-idea" Frame illustrated below. To use this frame, the author first identifies the topic of the document, and then in the space associated with the words, 'is about...' on the frame, writes a brief explanation of the topic.

Next, the author lists the various major topics, or main ideas, they plan to write about without concern for the order in which each will eventually be expressed in the written document. These are noted in the boxes labeled 'Main idea.' Although the example below illustrates three main ideas, sometimes there may be only two, and sometimes there may be considerably more than three. In this case, multiple-main idea frames can be used to plan the writing. To complete this step of the writing strategy, the author identifies various specific points, essential details, or facts they plan to discuss when discussing the each of the main ideas.
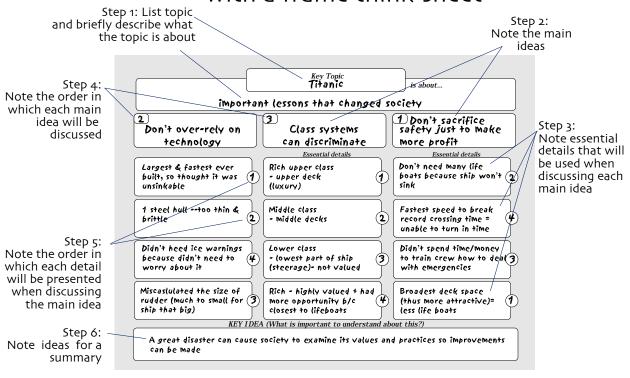
🔒 Locks to avoid...

Information listed on the think-sheet should be considered 'preliminary' main ideas and details. The author is certainly not limited to discussing only those noted on the think sheet.. More can be added at any time later when actually producing the written document.

Last, the author notes at the bottom of the think-sheet in the space labeled 'Key Idea' a summary statement about the overall topic of the paper.

Using the PLAN writing strategy with a frame think-sheet

Step 1: List topic and briefly describe what the topic is about

Step 2: Note the main ideas

Step 4: Note the order in which each main idea will be discussed

Step 3: Note essential details that will be used when discussing each main idea

Step 5: Note the order in which each detail will be presented when discussing the main idea

Step 6: Note ideas for a summary

Key Topic
Titanic *is about...*

important lessons that changed society

② **Don't over-rely on technology**

③ **Class systems can discriminate**

① **Don't sacrifice safety just to make more profit**

Essential details

Largest & fastest ever built, so thought it was unsinkable ①	Rich upper class – upper deck (luxury) ①	Don't need many life boats because ship won't sink ②
1 steel hull – too thin & brittle ②	Middle class – middle decks ②	Fastest speed to break record crossing time = unable to turn in time ④
Didn't heed ice warnings because didn't need to worry about it ④	Lower class – lowest part of ship (steerage)– not valued ③	Didn't spend time/money to train crew how to deal with emergencies ③
Miscaslulated the size of rudder (much to small for ship that big) ③	Rich – highly valued + had more opportunity b/c closest to lifeboats ④	Broadest deck space (thus more attractive)= less life boats ①

KEY IDEA (What is important to understand about this?)

A great disaster can cause society to examine its values and practices so improvements can be made

Assign numbers to indicate order

Once the author has completed the process of listing main ideas and details on the think-sheet, the next phase is to indicate order in which each of the various ideas will be expressed when writing.

The first main idea the author initially listed on the think-sheet may not ultimately be the most logical main idea to begin discussing when writing the document. Thus, the author now considers the order in which the list of main ideas will be expressed. To do this, the author indicates numbers in the small bubbles in the upper right-hand corner; these numbers indicate the order in which each main idea will be discussed later when producing the document. Once the order of main ideas has been established, the author then

🔒 Locks to avoid...

The order indicated by the numbers in the bubbles on the think-sheet should be considered only as a preliminary plan for the order in which ideas will be expressed. Naturally, the order can be changed anytime it makes sense to do so.

repeats this process for each set of supporting details for each main idea.

Once the author has indicated the order for expressing all of the ideas on the think-sheet, the process of actually producing the written document can begin.

Note ideas in sentences by following your plan.

The last step of the basic writing strategy is to produce the written document. The author should introduce the topic in the opening paragraph using the (i) the 'is about' information expressed at the top of the think -sheet; the opening paragraph should also introduce each of the main ideas of the document.

Each subsequent paragraph focuses on one of the main ideas noted on the think-sheet. The author follows the order indicated on the think-sheet when addressing each main idea. Thus, the first main idea addressed in the document is the one the author indicated on the think-sheet with a '1' in the upper right-hand corner of the main idea box. As the main idea is discussed, the author follows the order for expressing each detail as indicated on the think-sheet. Once the author has completed the discussion of the first main idea and its supporting points, they begin a new paragraph to discuss the next main idea on their think-sheet.

The following is a sample of a brief essay about the Titanic that was written based on the ideas outlined on the above think-sheet. Notice how the order of the ideas expressed in the essay correspond with the order indicated on the think-sheet

Sample essay

Lessons from the Titanic Disaster

Although the sinking of the Titanic was a disaster because so many people died, the event taught us some important lessons. The first lesson was that it is important that safety not be sacrificed just so somebody can make more money. Unfortunately, that's what happened with the Titanic. For example, the White Star Line wanted people to think it was the most luxurious ship in the world. To make the decks seem more open and spacious, the designers eliminated many lifeboats. They figured that since the ship
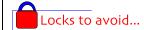
was unsinkable, they really didn't need the lifeboats anyway. Another thing they did to make more profit was not spending the time or money needed to train the crew for what to do in case the ship started to sink. Also, because they wanted everyone to think it was the fastest ship in the world, they went too fast when going through ice berg areas in the ocean. The owner thought it was more important to try and break a speed record so more people would want to buy Titanic tickets in the future. Needless to say, these are just a few examples of how safety was sacrificed just to make more money. Bad idea!

The second important lesson the Titanic provided is that we should never rely too much on technology -- you still have to use common sense and make good decisions to be safe. For example, people thought that because the Titanic was the largest and fastest ship ever built, it couldn't sink. In reality, the ship was poorly designed. It only had one layer to the hull, and it was made of steel that was too thin and brittle. Also, the size of the rudder was miscalculated, so it was unable to turn the ship very much. They ignored the ice warning because they didn't think they needed to worry about ice bergs. In other words, the White Star Line relied on technology to keep them safe instead of using their own heads. They should have slowed down when going through the ice berg area.

The third lesson is a very different one. It's about the class system. The very rich had rooms on the upper decks. Middle class people had rooms in the middle of the ship, and the poor people had to ride way down in the bottom of the ship. When the ship started sinking, the rich were considered more important, thus more 'valuable.' The crew let them get into the lifeboats first. Since the rich paid more for their luxury tickets, the crew though they had more of a right to be saved than people who bought cheaper tickets. The crew even locked doors and gates to keep the middle class and poor people from getting spaces on the lifeboats. The lesson here is, when it come to human life, it should not matter whether you are rich or poor. Everyone

should have an equal opportunity to have their life saved. To summarize, although the disaster was huge, it did teach society some important lessons.

The think-sheets have been found to be effective for use by a wide array of skill levels of writers. For example, they can be been used by extremely novice writers (e.g., first or second grade level students), and they can be used by relatively sophisticated writers in high school or college to produce expository text. They have also been found to be very effective for use by many students with mild cognitive disabilities such as those identified as learning disabled.

Locks to avoid...

Very novice writers should be encouraged to write a minimum of one complete sentence for each box on the think-sheet that has an idea listed in it. Later, as the authors become more fluent and knowledgeable, they should be encouraged to write an entire paragraph about each idea that was listed on the think-sheet.

PLAN writing strategy   **Makes Sense Home**