



BASIC STEPS

A Step-by-Step Essay Writing Program for Elementary and Middle School Students

This publication is adapted from STEPS 1–2–3 and BASIC STEPS by DAVID YOUNT and PAUL DEKOCK. These visionary educators team-taught American Studies in the Grossmont Union School District in California for many years. The success of their innovative and engaging integration of the American History, American literature, speech, and composition curricula led to the creation of Interaction Publishers in 1968. Thus began a quiet revolution in how to enhance student learning through cooperative learning, simulations, integrated curriculum, thematic units, and authentic assessment—the educational experience that defines Interact.

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The nationwide movement for high standards has not only determined what students should learn, but also has mandated that students demonstrate what they know. BASIC STEPS is a standards-based unit addressing numerous English Language Arts Standards as established by the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) and the International Reading Association (IRA). The content and skills taught are targets of most state frameworks for literature, writing, and research. Study the complete list of standards and explanations of those standards at <http://www.ncte.org/standards/standards.shtml>.

The peer teaching and cooperative problem solving required in BASIC STEPS also address Applied Learning standards. There are many opportunities to assess student understanding by using the checklists and rubrics provided.

National Standards for the English Language Arts

4. Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes.
5. Students employ a wide range of strategies as they write and use different writing process elements appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes.
6. Students apply knowledge of language structure, language conventions (e.g., spelling and punctuation), media techniques, figurative language, and genre to create, critique, and discuss print and non-print texts.
7. Students conduct research on issues and interests by generating ideas and questions, and by posing problems. They gather, evaluate, and synthesize data from a variety of sources (e.g., print and non-print texts, artifacts, people) to communicate their discoveries in ways that suit their purposes and audience.
8. Students use a variety of technological and information resources (e.g., libraries, databases, computer networks, video) to gather and synthesize information and to create and communicate knowledge.
11. Students participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members of a variety of literacy communities.
12. Students use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information).

STANDARDS

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California Applied Learning Standards

Standard 2: Students will understand how to solve problems through planning and organization. Students will plan and organize an activity.

Standard 3: Students will understand how to solve problems through teaching and learning. Students will develop and implement a teaching-learning program.

Standard 6: Students will understand how to apply communication skills and techniques. Students will demonstrate ability to communicate orally and in writing.

Standard 8: Students will understand the importance of teamwork. Students will work on teams to achieve project objectives.

California English Language Arts Standards

The California Department of Education standards led to the development of the BASIC STEPS Explanatory (narrative, expository, descriptive) and Persuasive Essay programs. The frequent classroom use of the Compare/Contrast essay in English and Social Studies classrooms along with the addition of essay questions on the SAT are the driving forces behind the Contrast Essay program. Access standards for all grade levels at: <http://www.cde.ca.gov/standards>.

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PURPOSE

The BASIC STEPS writing program was created by Dave Yount and Paul DeKock in 1979. Mr. Yount and Mr. DeKock team-taught high school humanities and saw their students consistently struggle to organize their thoughts. Knowing that good writing—and good thinking—takes more than just an idea and some basic mastery of spelling and writing conventions, the original authors of STEPS devised a commonsense instructional program to teach students to organize their thoughts clearly in relationship to their purpose for writing.

While trends in education change regularly, the fundamentals of good writing remain constant. BASIC STEPS introduces young writers, Grades 5–8, to the basic structure of the five-paragraph essay. Through this unit, your students will experience the following:

Knowledge

- Components of an organized essay
- Three basic organizational principles of the STEPS writing program
- Elements of the writing process
- Writing conventions (spelling, grammar, usage)

Skills

- Organizing information
- Using appropriate writing conventions
- Evaluating their own and their peers' work
- Editing for content and mechanics
- Revising and rewriting, incorporating feedback from teacher and peers
- Presenting speeches to an audience
- Thinking critically

Attitudes

- Confidence as their ability to express themselves clearly and intelligently grows
- Positive attitude towards writing

PURPOSE

OVERVIEW

OVERVIEW

One of the most difficult tasks teachers face is teaching students how to write an organized, purposeful essay. The commonly espoused “writing process” has its limitations. Without direct instruction in a particular style, all the writing, editing, and revising in the world will not make a good essay!

BASIC STEPS is a revision of a proven writing program that has been in use for over twenty years. This notebook reflects input from classroom teachers and includes some of the mnemonic tools of FUNDAMENTAL STEPS (an adaptation of the STEPS writing program for elementary students).

BASIC STEPS introduces three basic essay formats: **explanatory**, **persuasive**, and **contrast** (the formats most often assessed by current testing instruments). These basic formats can be adapted for essay styles such as: narrative, report of information, research, essay exam, etc. Often, middle and high schools assign specific essay styles to different grade levels or even different subject matter departments. BASIC STEPS can greatly assist those teachers who do not always teach writing by giving them a concrete writing program that can be used across the curriculum.

In addition, BASIC STEPS includes instruction in preparing research papers. A key dilemma faced by most teachers in the area of research (besides plagiarism) is what is to be done about citing electronic sources and how to do this on word-processed papers. The **research** teaching instructions refer the teacher to appropriate sources for *current* information on citing sources and also gives hints on how to organize the research process.

Differentiated Instruction

Like all Interact units, BASIC STEPS provides differentiated instruction through its various learning opportunities. Students learn and experience the knowledge, skills, and attitudes through all domains of language (reading, writing, speaking, and listening). Adjust the level of difficulty as best fits your students. Assist special needs students in selecting activities that utilize their strengths and allow them to succeed. Work together with the Resource Specialist teacher, Gifted and Talented teacher, or other specialist to coordinate instruction.

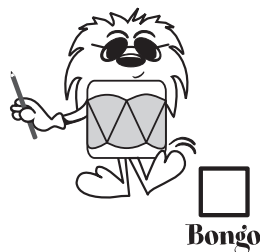
BASIC STEPS PRINCIPLES

Three basic principles of writing guide the entire STEPS writing program. Essentially, these principles state that every well-organized essay has:

1. A **Preview Thesis (PT)** — This introduces the main idea of the essay and acts as the essay organizer. This Preview Thesis also divides the main idea into several parts identified by the mnemonic terms *Bing*, *Bang*, and *Bongo*.
2. **General Statements (GSs)** (*Bing*, *Bang*, and *Bongo* ideas) — Ideas or opinions introduced in the Preview Thesis must be supported by concrete **Specific Details (SDs)**. Students expand on these in three body paragraphs and add concrete details (facts) to support their statements.
3. A **Summary (S)** — The final paragraph restates the Preview Thesis and reviews *Bing*, *Bang*, and *Bongo*. It wraps up the essay clearly and firmly—often the most difficult part for students.

Bing, Bang, and Bongo!

The “parents” of the *Bing*, *Bang*, and *Bongo* mnemonic, Dave Yount and Paul DeKock, (and this editor as well) actually taught and used these terms in high school, dealing with the smiles and snickers of adolescents “too cool” for such silliness. More than twenty years after their inception, *Bing*, *Bang*, and *Bongo* have helped many of these “cool” (but well-prepared!) young adults through college and on to successful careers as lawyers, journalists, teachers, entrepreneurs, and many other professions involving the writing process. This editor noted that the logical approach to organized writing appealed especially to the gifted math/science students and stood them in good stead in college where clear writing in the sciences is sometimes lacking and the ability to write well can be a marketable skill. The testimonials of former students speak volumes. At the younger ages and even into the middle and high school years, clever memory tools are critical, particularly to address multiple intelligences and various learning styles.



Bing, *Bang*, and *Bongo* are the three General Statements that require Specific Details for support. In **FUNDAMENTAL STEPS** (the elementary level program), *Bing*, *Bang*, and *Bongo* are represented by musical instruments. *Bing* is the triangle, *Bang* is the cymbal, and *Bongo* is the drum. They are represented by shapes that closely match their instruments: *Bing* = triangle, *Bang* = circle, and *Bongo* = square.



STEPS teaches students to distinguish between a statement such as, “The car is beautiful,” and a statement such as, “The car is a shimmering, candy-apple red.”

BASIC STEPS PRINCIPLES

The use of the shapes and instruments allows the teacher to emphasize the progression of the essay from minor point (softer sound) to major point (louder sound). In addition, teachers can use a third concrete distinguishing variable for Bing, Bang, and Bongo—color. Bing = green, Bang = blue, Bongo = red. Teachers of any grade level can appreciate the delightful scenario based on the idea of an orchestra that presents writing with child-friendly mnemonics.

Although in BASIC STEPS the organizational principles are a bit more sophisticated than those presented in FUNDAMENTAL STEPS, BASIC STEPS retains the geometric symbols and terms *Bing*, *Bang*, and *Bongo* precisely for the reason that such devices provide the classroom teacher with tools to engage a wide variety of learning styles.