



THE NEXT STEP

An Advanced Step-by-Step Program for Honing Writing and Speaking Skills

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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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10200 Jefferson Boulevard
Culver City, CA 90232-0802
(800) 421-4246 • www.teachinteract.com
ISBN# 978-1-57336-406-5

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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. THE NEXT STEP 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

Standard 4: Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes.

Standard 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.

Standard 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 text.

Standard 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.

Standard 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.

Standard 11: Students participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members of a variety of literacy communities.

Standard 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

THE NEXT STEP

STANDARDS

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 STEPS Explanatory (narrative, expository, descriptive) and Persuasive Essay programs align with the California Department of Education standards. The frequent classroom use of the compare/ contrast essay in English and Social Studies classrooms along with the addition of an essay questions on college admissions tests (e.g., 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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The 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 common sense 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. THE NEXT STEP enables more advanced students to expand their understanding of the STEPS program to succeed with more demanding curriculum. 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

Beyond BASIC STEPS

What do you, as a teacher, do to further develop the writing skills of your students who have mastered the BASIC STEPS program? You move on to THE NEXT STEP! Your more advanced students apply what they have learned to satisfy ever more demanding curriculum requirements and enhance their abilities to organize and write.

More Complex Introductions

BASIC STEPS primarily teaches logical thinking. Students focus on the *process*, not the *content*. When students move on to the next levels of essay writing, their introductions become more sophisticated. A useful image for visualizing an opening paragraph is to present a sketch of a funnel on the board. Describe a funnel as a tool used to take a large quantity of liquid and channel it into a container. Likewise, an opening paragraph can be like a funnel in that it takes a broader idea, quote, or question or a general description and focuses it into the Preview Thesis (PT) in order to “fill” the essay with the appropriate, relevant information. One can also talk about a funnel directing the flow of the liquid. Following this analogy, the introductory paragraph “directs the flow” of the ideas in the writing. When students reach a more advanced level of writing, in Honors or AP classes, this “funnel” often expands to two or more paragraphs.

More Elaborate Body Paragraphs

As the introductory paragraph becomes more informative, so also do the Bing, Bang, and Bongo sections of the essay. At this level Supporting Details (SDs) become even more important and are more closely scrutinized by the teacher. Because of this, the Bing, Bang, and Bongo sections will expand to more than one paragraph. At these higher essay levels, the individual paragraphs in a section will have Supporting General Statements (SGSs) that develop the Bing, Bang or Bongo GS point within a limited focus.

Bing, Bang, Bongo, and ?

As students advance in their abilities, you may guide them to more than three General Statement ideas. (Be creative and add a *Boom* or *Blowie* for the additional ideas.) Another way to expand this format is to require the students to do multiple paragraphs for each section— perhaps two paragraphs for Bing and Bang, and three for Bongo.

More Elaborate Summaries

As with the other elements of the STEPS essay, at THE NEXT STEP level the Summary section grows in importance. In addition to a restatement of the PT idea that guided the essay, the students will need to include statements (or questions) that draw the reader into the essay by requiring a reaction to the subject just discussed. After some practice writing at this level, the student can ask questions of the reader that lead to the restatement of the PT as the final sentence of the essay. The more advanced essay samples use this technique to good effect.

Literature Essays

In the literature essay, the writer will include the title of the work (correctly formatted) and author in addition to the preview thesis. Students add strength to this paragraph by including an interesting statement (Interest Catcher) about the subject of the essay or by introducing a quote. The more advanced literature essay gives the teacher a chance to teach the appropriate use of quotes from the work of literature and from outside sources such as critics. In the included literature essay samples discussing the play *Our Town*, the students can see the increased level of sophistication in the writing. (Study the contrasted literature essays on *Our Town*, pages 2:7 and following.)

Contrast Essays

The most significant difficulty that students experience in writing higher level contrast essays is adhering to the requirement of contrasting subject A and subject B in terms of three different points (Bing, Bang, and Bongo). Using the STEPS discipline, the Bing paragraph contrasts subjects A and B, then the Bang paragraph contrasts subject A and B, etc. The alternative format (discussion of subject A in terms of three points and then discussion of subject B in terms of the three points) is valid but goes against every other experience in the STEPS program. (In this structure the body of the essay has two distinct divisions. Encourage students to leave exploration of the alternative style to another class.)

Research Essays

Your NEXT STEP students can successfully produce advanced, complex research essays by applying and expanding on the BASIC STEPS techniques they have learned. They use the same research techniques and recording protocols, and expand the length and format of their essays.

MEMORANDUM
OVERVIEW

OVERVIEW

OVERVIEW

Teaching to all Learning Styles

As with the BASIC STEPS writing program, THE NEXT STEP includes worksheets and directions for the prewriting stage, including developing Focus Questions for creating the Preview Thesis. The sample essays and the display copies can be used separately when introducing the more advanced level essay and then together to show the level of growth expected by your Honors or AP student.

Encourage Student Growth

Expect students to continue improving as editors, essay exam writers, and speakers. We suggest you continue to require that students keep track of their progress in eliminating writing errors, in developing a distinctive style of their own, in becoming comfortable with essay exams, and in developing their confidence as a public speaker.

THE NEXT STEP literature essays would be typical of a college prep (advanced) junior year English class by the end of the year. This editor saw that level of growth from the BASIC STEPS level only in her best students during the sophomore year. The more advanced level essays would be typical of a college prep senior level or Advanced Placement English Literature class.

Differentiated Instruction

Like all Interact units, THE NEXT STEP 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 the needs of 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.