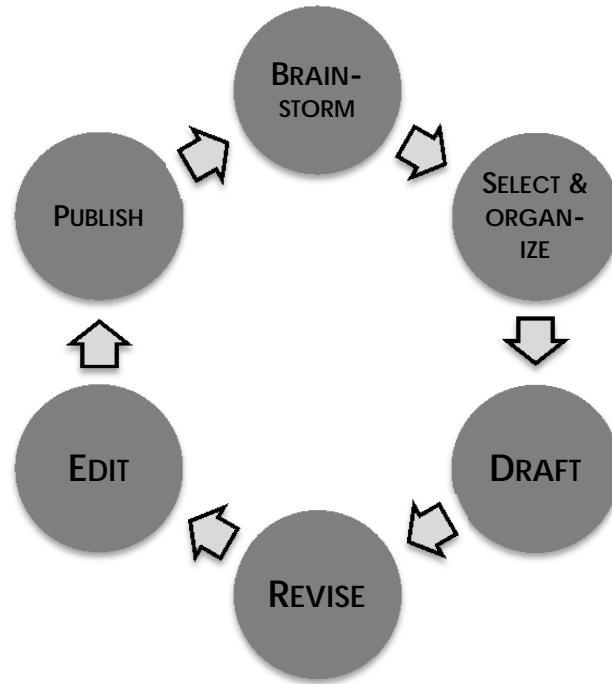


## Writing Instruction in the Age of Tech Tools

by Lauren Bailes

*Aim Academy English teacher, doctoral student Ohio State University.*

The writing process is probably a familiar one to most of us.



We get it: somehow, kids are supposed to come up with great ideas before sorting and organizing them into a cohesive draft. Then, they diligently shoulder through the revisions, the editing (yes, revision and editing *are* different, honey) and then they generate a real-world product vested with meaning and pride.

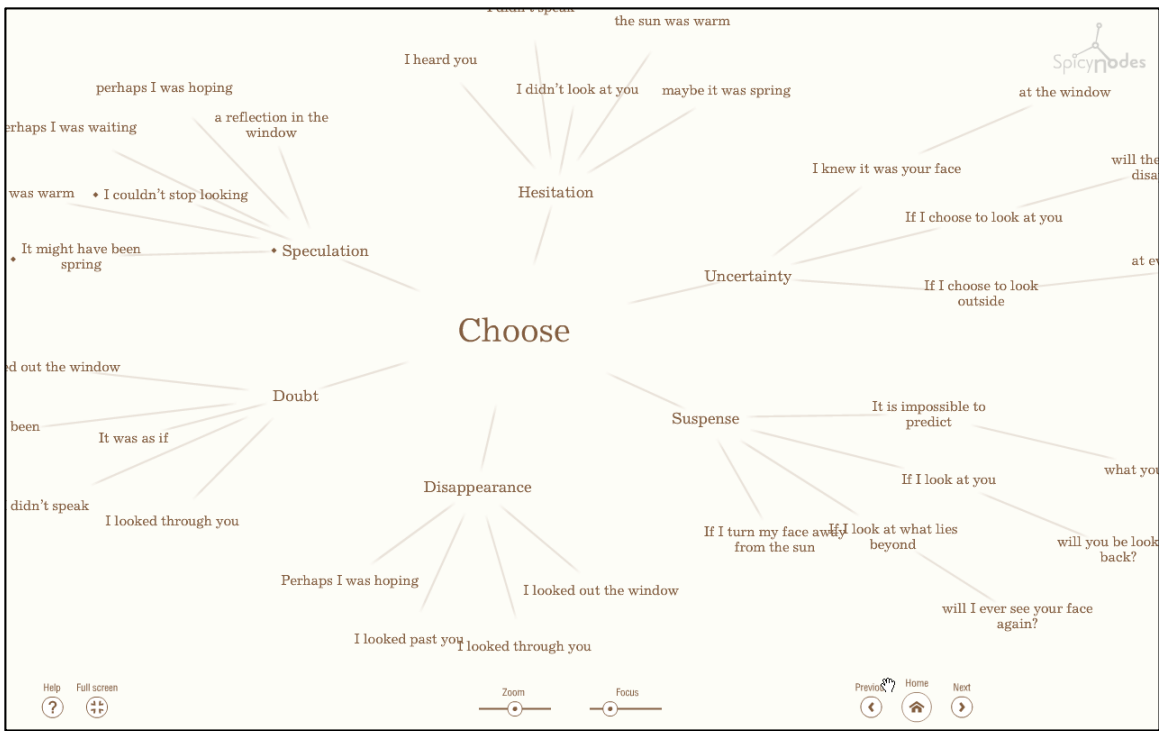
The best practice for writing is just writing. It's a hard sell for some kids. The idea of not really being "done" is scary enough for grownups; no wonder it results in routinized boredom (at best) or disengagement (at worst) with others.

But wait for it: There is hope. The advent of Web2.0 provides homeschooling parents with literally hundreds of tools to vivify the writing process once again. Take a look at some of the tools below, categorized according to each stage of the writing process.

### Brainstorm

<http://www.spicynodes.org/>

This site allows anyone to track and plan their thoughts – and then relive them live. Use the nodes to connect and expand ideas, save, and play it back so you can see your own ideas develop. I imagine this as a great tool for adding more information throughout a research project or for building rich, descriptive episodes into narrative writing.



## Select & organize

<http://www.exploratree.org.uk>

There are thousands of graphic organizers out there, but some are a little stale. Exploratree is the next generation of graphic organizer. With dozens of templates plus customizable shapes, colors, and the possibility for collaboration, this site is actually capable of capturing thinking as it happens – and as it changes. (Bonus tech tool: use this [teaching guide](#) for additional pointers with many graphic organizers.)

## Draft

<http://www.focusboosterapp.com/>

<http://anti-social.cc/>

The same tools that work IRL (in real life) work in the web when it comes to drafting: a way to limit distractions and a timer. FocusBooster (Macs and PCs) sets a 25-minute timer and then alerts the user to take a five-minute break. AntiSocial (Macs and PCs) reduces or shuts off Internet connectivity for a user-determined amount of

time. Used in tandem, these apps will have your writer whipping up a flurry of new material. (Bonus tech tool: try [Think](#) to provide your writer with a clean, word-processor like writing environment. Macs only for now.)

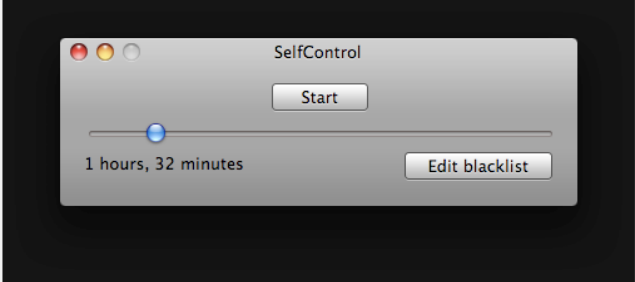
Fork it

## SELFCONTROL

March 2009

Is email a distraction? SelfControl is an OS X application which blocks access to incoming and/or outgoing mail servers and websites for a predetermined period of time.

For example, you could block access to your email, facebook, and twitter for 90 minutes, but still have access to the rest of the web. Once started, **it can not be undone by the application**, by deleting the application, or by restarting the computer – you must wait for the timer to run out.



Created while at **Eyebeam Center for Art and Technology**. Thanks to *Charlie Stigler* for developing the application.


**VISIT THE SELFCONTROL SITE**

[SelfControlapp.com](#)

**SELF CONTROL IS FREE SOFTWARE**

SelfControl is Free Software under the **GPL**. Feel free to make improvements, linux ports, etc. The sourcecode and wiki are on **GitHub**, and there is a **ticket system** too.

### ABOUT



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### NEWS

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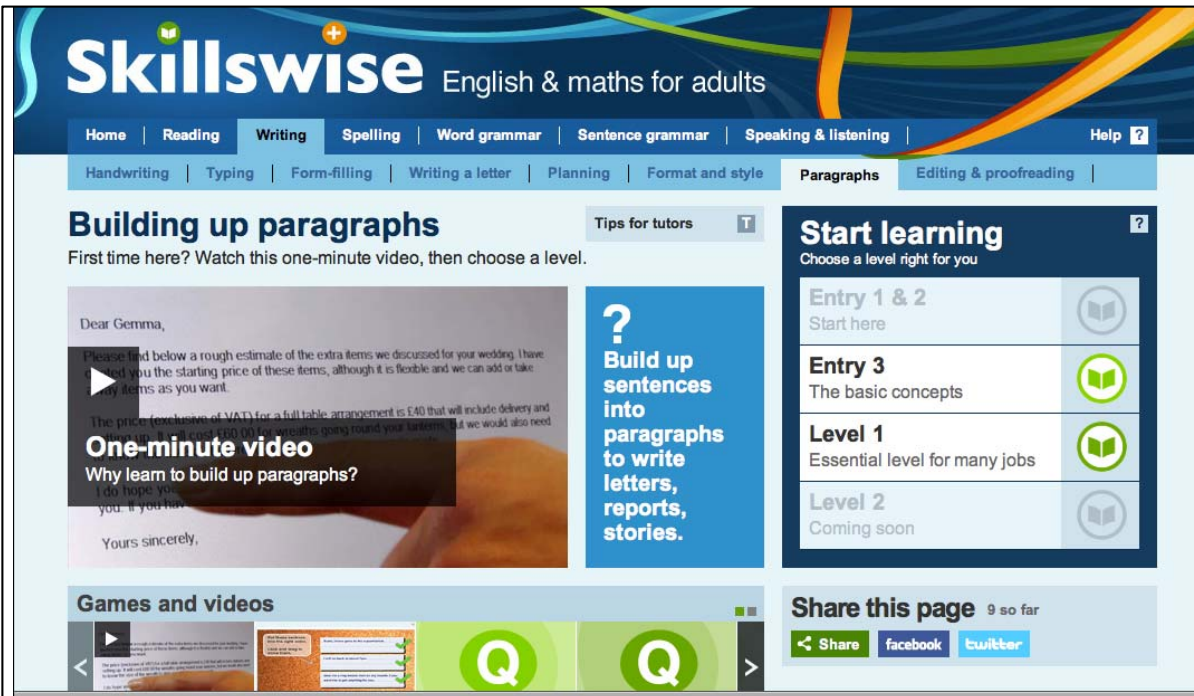
### WORKS

2012  
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## Revise

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/skillswise/topic/building-up-paragraphs>

Now that there's a draft in place, writers have to think about showing off the best information. I love the BBC Skillswise sites for all things writing intensive – building paragraphs, editing and proofreading, even sentence and word grammar. Watch a one-minute video, play a game, take a quiz, print off a worksheet and, all of a sudden, paragraph woes are a thing of the past.



**Skillswise** English & maths for adults

Home | Reading | **Writing** | Spelling | Word grammar | Sentence grammar | Speaking & listening | Help ?

Handwriting | Typing | Form-filling | Writing a letter | Planning | Format and style | **Paragraphs** | Editing & proofreading

## Building up paragraphs

First time here? Watch this one-minute video, then choose a level.

Tips for tutors

Dear Gemma,

Please find below a rough estimate of the extra items we discussed for your wedding. I have included you the starting price of these items, although it is flexible and we can add or take away items as you want.

The price (exclusive of VAT) for a full table arrangement is £40 that will include delivery and set up. If you have 100 guests, that's £4000. If you have 200 guests, that's £8000. If you have 300 guests, that's £12000. If you have 400 guests, that's £16000. If you have 500 guests, that's £20000. If you have 600 guests, that's £24000. If you have 700 guests, that's £28000. If you have 800 guests, that's £32000. If you have 900 guests, that's £36000. If you have 1000 guests, that's £40000. If you have 1100 guests, that's £44000. If you have 1200 guests, that's £48000. If you have 1300 guests, that's £52000. If you have 1400 guests, that's £56000. If you have 1500 guests, that's £60000. If you have 1600 guests, that's £64000. If you have 1700 guests, that's £68000. If you have 1800 guests, that's £72000. If you have 1900 guests, that's £76000. If you have 2000 guests, that's £80000.

**One-minute video**  
Why learn to build up paragraphs?

Build up sentences into paragraphs to write letters, reports, stories.

### Start learning

Choose a level right for you

Entry 1 & 2 Start here	📖
Entry 3 The basic concepts	📖
Level 1 Essential level for many jobs	📖
Level 2 Coming soon	📖

Games and videos

Share this page 9 so far

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## Edit

<http://grammarmancomic.com>

Almost finished and pesky punctuation strikes again. Keep your writer from giving up with Grammarman. Read, watch, and listen to the comics and complete the accompanying exercise. Click for the answers or print as a PDF. Once your writer has defeated Sammy Colon, it's to the Batcave, er...writing desk.

The screenshot shows the Grammarman website interface. At the top left is a 'Grammarman Menu' with a blue arrow icon. The main content is a comic strip titled 'GRAMMARMAN BY BRIAN BOYD' with the website 'WWW.GRAMMARMANCOMIC.COM'. The comic panels show Grammarman receiving a golden dictionary from a mayor, being threatened by a villain named Sammy Colon, and being rescued by a blue alien. The comic includes various misspelled words in speech bubbles and captions, such as 'GUARDSCOMEQUICKLYH EYWHATSHAPPENING' and 'WHATSGRAMM ARMANSAIYN'. On the right sidebar, there are 'AdChoices' and a section for 'BRAIN TRAINING GAMES' with categories like Intelligence, Memory, Attention, Focus, Speed, and Language.

## Publish

<http://www.bookemon.com/>

Kids deserve to see their work in black and white. Or in as many colors as they can imagine. Bookemon allows kids to make books for free. They can drag in their own images or PDFs or adopt material from the web. Take a look at the 'Explore' link and see all the ways that writers have used this tool – from informational nonfiction to space-aged mysteries and cookbooks to how to books. Online books can be shared or converted into hard copies and purchased.

The screenshot shows a book profile on the Bookemon website. At the top, it says 'This is for ONLINE reading ONLY. It is NOT identical to Book in Print.' Below this is a navigation bar with a scale of 63%, a 100% zoom button, and page navigation (3 of 12). The main image is a book cover for 'Killer Shale' by Ty Putchio, featuring a shark swimming in blue water. A speech bubble on the cover says 'Killer Shale'. Below the cover, there is a green text box that reads: 'The name of the killer shale has come from the creatures it is related to the Great White Shark and the Killer Whale.' To the right of the cover is a 'Book Profile' section with the title 'The Mysterious World of the Killer Shale' by Ty Putchio, an 'Add as a Favorite' button, and a 'Like it' button. Below this is a search bar for 'Search book contents:'. At the bottom, there is a 'More similar books' section with several book recommendations, including 'Kids Learning -..' by Antione Jackson, 'The Cheesy..' by Melissa Lillian, '¡No me..' by Reina F McKenzie, 'My Name Is Luke' by Erika Miller, and 'The Tortoise and..' by Mrs. Andrea Robinson.