

## SRSD for RAFT Writing\*

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RAFT (Role—who is the writer?, Audience—to whom are you writing?, Format—what format are you using?, Topic—what are you writing about?) strategies are implemented in a classroom prior to-, during-, or after-learning as a short, informal written response to a specific topic prompt (Fisher & Frey, 2008). By providing students a free-style type of activity, RAFTs are typically used to activate students' prior knowledge, to link personal knowledge with content, to assess understanding, and/or to provide students a method for writing from a different viewpoint or perspective.

As described by Foxworth and Mason in Chapter 4, *Writing-to-Learn Instruction that Works*, the first strategy step in RAFT is the Role, directing the student to write either in third person or in first person. If writing in first person, the student can write as a person, or as a living or non-living thing, while adopting a persona. Similarly, Audience can be a person, or can be a living or non-living thing. RAFT Format can be letters, newspaper articles, blogs, or text messages. RAFT Topic prompts can be open-ended or specific.

The lessons in this E-Book chapter illustrate SRSD instruction for RAFT writing. It is important to remember, when planning and delivering instruction, that the teacher can return to any of the six stages of SRSD instruction (develop prior knowledge, discuss it, model it, memorize it, support it, independent practice) at any time, and that self-regulation (goal setting, self-monitoring, self-instruction, self-reinforcement) is supported throughout instruction. Prior to instruction, an informal assessment of students' ability to construct a RAFT should be conducted. Two prompts, providing student choice in writing, should be selected or developed (see sample prompts). This assessment serves two purposes: (1) documenting students' specific instructional needs for planning group and individualized instruction and (2) providing a pre-instruction RAFT to be used during instruction. The teacher should plan to write or select anchor RAFTs to be used during assessment and instruction (see sample anchor RAFTs). The following content and materials are included:

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1. Lessons One through Four
2. Mnemonic charts, planning sheet, and self-statement sheet
3. Sample RAFT prompts for literature, social studies, and science
4. Anchor literature, social studies, and science RAFTS
5. Tips for Developing a Persona handout

### **Lesson One**

The purpose of the first lesson is to (a) develop the students' background knowledge, (b) discuss RAFT components, and (c) evaluate pre-instruction RAFT writing performance. The teacher will tell the students that they will be working together to learn a new writing strategy. Each element in RAFT will then be introduced and discussed. The students will orally state what makes a good RAFT and will be able to identify RAFT components in an anchor RAFT. Students will self-monitor their performance by evaluating their own previously written RAFT for inclusion of the components and for component quality. If needed, the teacher may include group or individualized instruction to support students' development in writing good quality RAFT components. For example, some students may have difficulty in using conventions for writing in different formats (e.g., letters, newspaper article), or in writing in first person and developing a first-person persona (see handout, "Tips for Developing a Persona"). The following materials will be needed for Lesson One: chart paper; overhead or computer/LCD projector; mnemonic charts; planning sheets; RAFT anchor; students' previously written RAFT; paper and pencils.

#### *Steps for the Teacher*

1. Review the RAFT mnemonic. Using chart paper or an overhead or LCD projector, uncover and discuss each letter and component:  
Role – Who is the writer?  
Audience – To whom are you writing?  
Format – What format are you using?  
Topic – What are you writing about?
2. Describe and discuss with the students what makes a good RAFT. Note that good RAFTS make sense, have all components clearly planned, and follow writing conventions. For example, if the form is a letter, the RAFT should include conventions such as date, opening salutation, and complimentary closing.

3. Show the students an anchor/example RAFT. Next, point to the boxes on a planning sheet and ask students to think about the RAFT components while the RAFT is read out loud. Then, collaboratively with the students, complete the boxes by writing notes on a planning sheet (chart paper, overhead or LCD projected). Components do not have to be found in order; in other words, the planning sheet can be filled out as components are identified. Be sure to note and discuss well-written components in the anchor RAFT—for example, components that make the RAFT more interesting to read.
4. IF NEEDED, use another anchor RAFT to assist students in learning RAFT components and/or teach a lesson for developing skills such as formatting or developing a persona.
5. Once the students have a good understanding of RAFT components, and of what contributes to good quality, give the students their previously written RAFT, collected prior to instruction. Students then read and evaluate their RAFT to check which components they have. Students complete a planning sheet, noting components, and briefly note which components could be better developed. As a class, discuss ways to improve elements. Students count the number of components that were used correctly in their RAFT and write the number on the bottom of the planning sheet. Ask students to leave quality blank for now, noting that quality can always be improved!
6. Explain the goal for RAFT lessons: to write better RAFTs with good quality components.
7. To wrap up, tell the students that next time they will write RAFT from memory and will tell what it means.

## Lesson Two

The teacher models, while thinking out loud, how to write a RAFT and models the use of goal setting, self-monitoring, self-instruction, and self-reinforcement throughout the writing process. Prior to starting the lesson, the students orally say the RAFT mnemonic and state what each letter stands for. The students will attend to the teacher's modeling lesson, write self-statements to self-instruct when writing a RAFT, and revise their personally written RAFT by using the ideas on the planning sheet completed in Lesson One. The following materials will be needed: chart paper, overhead or computer/LCD projector; mnemonic charts; students' previously written RAFT and planning sheet; self-statement sheet; RAFT writing prompt (see sample in Step 2 below); paper and pencils.

NOTE: the *scripted text* below is intended as a guide only. Modeling is best delivered and received when in a teacher's own words and style!

### *Steps for the Teacher*

1. Test to see if the students remember RAFT. Do this out loud to save time. It is essential that each student memorize the strategy mnemonic and steps. If students are having trouble, spend a few minutes practicing. Tell the students you will test them each day to make sure they have the strategy memorized.
2. Lay out a copy of the mnemonic chart, graphic organizer, and graphing chart. Then explain: *Today I will show you how to write a RAFT and then we will practice by revising our RAFTs.* Read aloud the prompt you selected and practiced for modeling. For this modeling lesson, the following prompt will be used: "Write a RAFT about mummification in Egypt. Include important details about the process of mummification and after-life."
3. Say, *There are a couple of things I should do prior to writing the RAFT. First, I need to reread material for ideas if needed. Next, I need to think creatively. Then, I need to plan out my RAFT. I will use the planning sheet to help me with this.* Briefly review—point at—the parts of a good RAFT on the planning sheet. Review what the goal should be—to write better RAFTs with well-written strategy components. Model the entire process for planning. EXPLAIN that you will be talking out loud all the steps of completing the planning sheet. Model how to use academic and relevant vocabulary. Ask the students to help you with ideas and the writing, but be sure you are in charge of the process.
4. Say, *What is it I have to do? I have to write a good RAFT. My RAFT needs to make sense and have all the components. I can write down ideas for each component.* Be sure to model moving out of order on the planning sheet. *I think I will write the Role from the viewpoint of a mummified cat. Great, I like this idea!* Write, "mummified cat," on the planning sheet. *I think I will write the Format as a newspaper column. The title could be something like, "Pharaoh Honors Beloved Cat."* Write, "newspaper article" and the title, on the planning sheet. *Let me add more detail about the cat: "The cat was mummified, when it died, prior to its owner dying."* Write the additional details on the planning sheet. *That makes sense and will make the RAFT not so sad.*  
*Now I better figure out the remaining parts.* Talk out and briefly write notes for the remaining components. *My topic will be animal mummification*

*and my audience will be Egyptians. After generating notes for all RAFT parts say, Now, I can look back at my notes and see if I can add more notes for my RAFT components. I can also look for ideas for good word choice. For example, let me make sure I include in my article the words “embalming” and “wrapping” in my article to explain the mummification process; I will write this on the planning sheet with my Topic of animal mummification. Let me see if I can add more detail to audience; “Egyptians” is not very specific. I think the audience should be ancient Egyptians of Thebes.*

5. SAY, *Now I can write my RAFT and think of more good ideas, using good word choice, as I write.* Talk yourself through writing the RAFT; the students can help. Start by saying, *How shall I start? I need a title and first sentence.* Pause and think, then write. Be sure to add 1–2 more ideas and vocabulary words not on the plan as you write. Refer back to text material for ideas and vocabulary. Don't hurry, but don't slow it down unnaturally. Also ask yourself, *Does my RAFT make sense? Will my audience like this?* Model writing a good ending sentence. When you have finished the RAFT, model by (a) counting the number of components, (b) evaluating quality, and (c) recording your performance on the planning sheet. Self-reinforce by saying, *I wrote RAFT with well-written components; I met the goal of four for each number written and quality. Great, I'm done!*
6. To develop self-instruction, ask the students to tell you the following: (1) things you said to yourself to get started, (2) things you said to yourself while you worked, (3) things you said to yourself when you finished. Ask the students to write some things they could say, in their own words, on the self-statement sheet. Note that you do not always have to think these things out loud; once learned, you think in your head or whisper to yourself.
  - *What do we say to get started? We can say, what is it I have to do? I have to write a RAFT; the planning sheet will help me organize my ideas.*
  - *What do we say while we work? We can say, I can't remember the word. I will look back at the text.*
  - *What things do we say when we are finished? We can say, Great job, I think my RAFT will be fun to share with others.*
7. Give students their previously written RAFT and planning sheet. Allow time for additional notes to be written on the planning sheet. Support students in rewriting their RAFT so that all components are included and well written with good detail and vocabulary use.
8. Ask the students to re-count (verify) the components and write the number completed on their planning sheet. Ask the students to count and write the number of well-written components.

9. Remind the students that the RAFT mnemonic test will be given again next class.

### **Lesson Three—To be Repeated as Needed**

The students will collaboratively write a RAFT. Collaborative writing can be completed in student groups, within pairs of students, or as a class activity. The following materials will be needed: mnemonic charts; planning sheet; self-statement sheet; RAFT writing prompt; paper and pencils.

#### *Steps for the Teacher*

1. Test to see if the students remember the strategy mnemonic and parts: do it out loud to save time.
2. Give each student group a blank planning sheet, their self-statement sheet, and a set of practice prompts.
3. Tell the students that during the next couple of lessons they will be writing RAFTs, and that each time, because they have practiced, will be a little faster with more added to the RAFT. Tell them that the goal is to see how many GOOD components they can write fluently. Tell the students that writing is like all activities; with practice, they can write a well-written response fluently.
4. Support each of the following processes: students can share and use the same ideas, but each student should write a RAFT using their own notes. *SAY, Remember the letters in RAFT and what you need to do.* Refer students to their self-statements sheet. *Be sure to use the planning sheet to write and organize notes. What should the goal be? To write a good RAFT with all four components well thought out.* Remind the students to think about and write more ideas and vocabulary while planning and writing. After students have completed their RAFT, ask them to evaluate components and write the number completed on their planning sheet.
5. Remind students of the RAFT mnemonic test to be given again next time. Repeat this lesson if necessary.

### **Lesson Four—To be Repeated as Needed**

In this lesson, the students continue to practice writing RAFTs until they demonstrate independence in writing a RAFT that includes good quality compo-

nents. The focus of this lesson is to wean the students off the planning sheet. Students will write notes on a blank piece of paper. Students can continue to work in groups or with partners, or independently, in guided practice lessons. The following materials will be needed: mnemonic charts; planning sheet; self-statement sheet; RAFT writing prompt; paper and pencils.

### *Steps for the Teacher*

1. Test to see if the students remember RAFT.
2. Explain to students that they will not usually have a planning sheet with them when they have to write a RAFT. They can write notes on blank paper. Discuss and model how to write down the RAFT mnemonic reminder at the top of the page, making a space on the paper for each component.
3. Put out a practice prompt set. SAY, *Remember the letters in RAFT and what you need to do.* Refer students to their self-statements sheet. *Be sure to use the your new written planning sheet. What should the goal be? To write a good RAFT with all four components well thought out.* Remind the students to think about and write more ideas and vocabulary while planning and writing. After students have completed their RAFT, ask them to evaluate components and write the number completed on their planning sheet.
4. Repeat this lesson if necessary. If you believe they have it, celebrate student learning!



Role	Who is the writer?
Audience	To whom are you writing?
Format	What format are you using?
Topic	What are you writing about?

FIGURE 4.6 *RAFT mnemonic chart*



Role Who or what is the writer?	
Audience To whom are you writing?	
Format What format are you using?	
Topic What are you writing about?	

FIGURE 4.7 *RAFT planning sheet*



Number of components used in my RAFT \_\_\_\_\_

How many components were well written? \_\_\_\_\_

**RAFT Writing Self-Statement Sheet**

**Before Writing**

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**While Writing**

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**After Writing**

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FIGURE 4.8 *RAFT writing self-statement sheet*

## Sample RAFT Prompts

RAFT prompts can direct students to a specific topic or can be open-ended, as in the examples below.

### *Literature*

#### Prompt Set One

You are a supporting character (e.g., Burstner, Gruback, Huld the Lawyer, Montag) in Kafka's *The Trial*. Write to convince other characters in the novel of the importance of your part in the novel. Include important quotes and/or lines in your RAFT.

Write a RAFT that describes the views of one supporting character (e.g., Burstner, Gruback, Huld the Lawyer, Montag) in Kafka's *The Trial*. Include important quotes and/or lines in your RAFT.

#### Prompt Set Two

In Edgar Allan Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher," you are the character of Roderick Usher or Madeline Usher; in other words, you are one of the characters *other than* the unnamed narrator who tells the story. Write a RAFT that shows how your view of the events of the story is different from the views of the narrator. Include in your RAFT important quotes and moments from the story.

Write a RAFT that shows how the characters of Roderick Usher and Madeline Usher might view the events of Edgar Allan Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher" differently from the unnamed narrator who tells the story. Include in your RAFT important quotes and moments from the story.

### *Social Studies*

#### Prompt Set One

You are one of the leaders in Russia during the Revolutionary period of 1917 (e.g., a democratic leader such as Kerensky, or a Bolshevik leader like Lenin or Trotsky). Write a RAFT setting forth your views of the major figures of that time, including czarist leaders as well as fellow revolutionaries with whom you may disagree.

Write a RAFT about the leaders of the Russian Revolution of 1917, including democratic leaders such as Kerensky as well as Bolshevik leaders like Lenin and Trotsky. Incorporate specifics showing how these leaders disagreed with each other, along with details of their shared opposition to the rule of Czar Nicholas II.

### Prompt Set Two

You are a European journalist in Philadelphia in 1776. Write a RAFT describing and responding to the Continental Congress's adoption of the Declaration of Independence. Include your impressions and feelings, and emphasize what you think readers in your country would want to know regarding this important event in North America.

Write a RAFT about the American Declaration of Independence. Include specific details regarding the causes and consequences of the Continental Congress's adoption of the Declaration.

## Science

### Prompt Set One

You are a lung in a human body. Write a RAFT about why your host human should not smoke.

Write a RAFT to describe how cigarette smoking affects the human body.

### Prompt Set Two

You are Pluto, in the outer reaches of the Solar System. Write a RAFT about your reclassification from planet to dwarf planet, including your feelings about, and responses to, the reasons why you are no longer considered to be one of the major planets of the Solar System.

Write a RAFT describing the process by which Pluto was reclassified from major planet to dwarf planet, and setting forth the reasons for Pluto's reclassification.

## Anchor RAFTS

### Literature Blog

Prompt: Write a RAFT that describes the views of one supporting character (e.g., the ghost of Hamlet's father, Polonius, Gertrude, Rosencrantz) in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Include important quotes and/or lines in your RAFT.

RAFT: Role—Horatio; Audience—Travelers Considering Denmark; Form—Travel Blog; Topic—Hamlet's State of Mind

### *My Trip to Elsinore Gone Bad*

*Things have been really bad here in Denmark ever since Hamlet's father, King Hamlet, suddenly died. Hamlet's mother, Queen Gertrude, married the King's brother, Claudius, and then Hamlet started acting strangely. I went*

*to see Hamlet because two soldiers and I saw King Hamlet's ghost walking around the royal castle at Elsinore! Hamlet and I and the soldiers went back the next night and saw the ghost again, and Hamlet went off with the ghost, and now he won't even tell us what he and the ghost said when they talked! He keeps saying things like "There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy."*

*It gets even stranger from there. Hamlet wanted to put on a play that shows a man murdering his brother the King in order to get the throne and the love of the Queen. King Claudius totally freaked out and ran out of the room! Hamlet was really happy, though in kind of a crazy way, and said, "O good Horatio, I'll take the ghost's word for a thousand pound!" I'm never quite sure when Hamlet is pretending to be crazy, in order to trick the King, and when he's really acting crazy. And I'm his best friend! If I don't know what's going on with him, who does?*

*Now I have to tell you some sad news. Hamlet's mom was lecturing him in her chamber, and the King's adviser Polonius was listening from behind a curtain, and then Hamlet stabbed with his sword through the curtain and killed Polonius! I think he was trying to kill King Claudius, but killed Polonius by mistake. And then Polonius' daughter Ophelia, the girl Hamlet loves, went crazy and drowned herself in a brook. So many sad things happening here! And now Laertes, Polonius' son and Ophelia's brother, is all angry and wanting revenge.*

*That brings us up to what's happening now. The King has scheduled a fencing match between Hamlet and Laertes. I told Hamlet that he shouldn't go, saying, "You will lose this wager, my lord." But Hamlet is insisting that he go, saying, "If it be now, 'tis not to come; if it be not to come, it will be now," as if he doesn't care whether he lives or dies! I'm afraid that King Claudius and Laertes may have some sort of evil plan going. But I have to go now, because Hamlet is just now leaving for the fencing match. I will let you know what happens next time I am on-line.*

*Horatio*

### ***Social Studies Newspaper Article***

Prompt: Write a RAFT about an important event that occurred during the French Revolution.

RAFT: Role—British Journalist in France; Audience—British Newspaper Readers; Form—Newspaper Article; Topic—Execution of Marie Antoinette

EXECUTION OF MARIE ANTOINETTE!  
 TRAGIC DEATH OF  
 FRANCE'S ILL-FATED QUEEN!  
 DID SHE REALLY SAY  
 "LET THEM EAT CAKE"—  
 OR NOT?

*PARIS, 16 October 1793—Here in the capital of Revolutionary France, emotions are running high in the wake of the execution of Marie Antoinette, former Queen of France, who died today on the guillotine in the Place de la Revolution. The Austrian-born, 37-year-old ex-monarch, whose husband, the former King Louis XVI, had been guillotined nine months before, faced her death bravely, causing sympathy even among revolutionaries who had previously called for her execution.*

*The death of the controversial former queen has caused people across France to re-evaluate the life and legacy of a woman who was once renowned for her beauty and style, but whose lavish lifestyle came to symbolize the divide between the nobility and the long-suffering peasantry in pre-revolutionary France. Most famously, in what has come to be known as the "Affair of the Necklace," Marie Antoinette was accused of seeking out for herself a lavish diamond necklace worth millions of French livres, though the queen insisted that she had never wanted the necklace and had actually refused it when the king offered it to her as a gift.*

*There have also been accusations that Marie Antoinette, when told that the peasants of France could not afford the bread they needed to live, replied, "Let them eat cake." Such a statement would be a very cruel response, as cake costs so much more than bread that a starving peasant could never afford it. The queen denied those accusations as well.*

*With Marie Antoinette's death, France officially leaves behind its former royalist system, and enters a potentially dangerous period in its history. Some revolutionaries, such as the Marquis de Lafayette who assisted the American rebels during their revolution against British rule, have stated that the goals of the revolution should be peace, freedom, and equal rights for all. Others, however, like Maximilien de Robespierre, have stated that a more radical restructuring of society is necessary, and that many more executions may be needed before France's revolution can be considered complete. Statesmen in Britain, and political leaders of other countries, look on with concern, as the future direction of the French Revolution remains uncertain.*

*Science Letter*

Prompt: Use a RAFT to write about a virus. Be sure to include how the virus is spread, virus symptoms, and treatment.

RAFT: Role—Smallpox Virus; Audience—Medical Science Community; Form—Letter; Topic—Keep Me Safe

*January 1, 2015*

*Dear Medical Researchers and Scientists,*

*It has been 35 years since a case of smallpox has naturally occurred on planet Earth. I want to encourage you to continue your vigilance in the U.S.A. and Russian laboratories where my species still exists. As a member of one of the few remaining smallpox virus communities left on the planet, I understand the potential threat to humans if we were released.*

*If smallpox viruses were released, we would infect people! It is what we do as viruses. We are a weak virus and easily destroyed by sunlight and heat; however, after a one-week to two-week incubation period, we do spread quickly through human contact, via direct contact with an object, or by aerosol release into the air. The problem? There is no treatment for smallpox and, according to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, three out of every ten infected people die.*

*I was glad to see that symptoms of our invasion into the human body are still easy to find in textbooks and on virtual websites. We cause high fevers, aches and pains, vomiting, and spots. We are most contagious when the spots have appeared. Spots start first on the tongue and mouth and spread as a rash all over the body within 24 hours. This rash becomes bumps, then pustules that eventually scab over. I hate to admit this, but we are known to leave people scarred for life.*

*Why am I writing now? In 2014, a couple of vials were found in a lab in the U.S.A. I wonder, are there other missing communities? It may be time to revisit our containment and the vaccination, originally developed by Jenner in 1796, that so effectively prevents us from infecting people. Thank you for considering my request to keep me safe!*

*Sincerely,*

*Smallpox virus  
Atlanta Group*

### Handout: Tips for Developing a Persona

In the past, students like yourself may have been expected to write “objectively,” and are frequently told to write only in the third person. In other words, they are told to avoid using first-person words like “I,” “me,” “mine,” and “my.” Teachers give these directions because they feel that when students avoid using first-person words like “I” and “my,” the students are more able to view a situation from perspectives other than their own.

With some forms of writing (such as in some RAFTs), by contrast, you will need to use the first person, and to take on a *persona*—in other words, the role of a person other than yourself, the same way an actor portrays a character even though that character’s personality is different from that of the actor him- or herself. The reason for doing so is that, in taking on a persona, you as a writer can come to understand more clearly what people in another time or place may have been thinking and why.

Writing in the first person while taking on a persona is fun, but is not necessarily easy. It involves your doing whatever research is necessary to help you understand what a person in another time or place may have been thinking. Once you have done that research, you use your imagination to construct your sense of what a person in another time and place might have been thinking and feeling during a historical or current-events situation that is of interest to you. During that process, it is important that you try as hard as possible not to impose your values on someone from another time or another culture, but rather to be fair to what that person would probably have been thinking and feeling, and to understand why those thoughts and feelings would have existed within that person’s mind.

When you successfully write in the first person and adopt a persona, you learn many valuable things regarding the reasons how and why the thoughts and feelings of others may differ from your own.

### References

- Fisher, D., & Frey, N. (2008). *Improving adolescent literacy: Content area strategies at work*. Columbus, OH: Pearson.