

Excerpted from:

Gunning, Thomas. (2012). Building literacy in secondary content area classrooms. Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

In Chapter 8: Writing to Learn, the author states about the Collins Writing Program:

Putting It All Together: The Collins Program

The foundation of the Collins (2004, 2010) program is the concept of *focus correction areas* and the creation of writing assignments that are clear and that focus on the essentials. As Chadwell (2002) notes, an "everything counts" approach to assessing writing can be overwhelming for students. He recommends focusing on one to three areas. These focus correction areas, or FCAs, can range from using commas correctly to utilizing examples to develop a topic. Collins (2004) recommends including at least one FCA devoted to improving content. Others might deal with organization, style, or mechanics. FCAs are stressed in prewriting discussions and instruction, in conferences, in revision, and in assessment. Papers are written, revised, and assessed with the FCAs in mind. Focus correction areas can be provided for individuals, groups, or the whole class. FCAs are included in writing assignments and are noted at the tops of students' papers. Focus correction areas are not applied to informal writing such as quickwrites and journals. However, when students write a paper that is to be formally published, FCAs might be applied in the early drafts, but the final copy is subject to complete editing. Although students write on a regular basis, only four or five of their papers are published each year.

Providing clear assignments is also an essential element in the Collins program. Assignments are centered on the four components of RAFT plus the focus correction areas, a description of the steps that will be taken to complete the assignment, and a summary of the assignment. The summary states the rationale for the assignment and a description of the end product. The summary is designed to clarify the project for both teacher and students. Note the summary presented in the following section.

Project Summary

As a student in a career and technology program, you must master many tasks to prepare for the workplace. Each task requires that you be aware of the circumstances associated with the task, have all the materials and equipment that you need, and perform the necessary actions. Choose a procedure or task that is important in your technical area. You must use precise language, include all steps in the procedure, and get the steps in the correct order.

For this assignment, the key focus correction areas are having all steps in order and avoiding a particular pitfall, along with one to be determined by the teacher. The procedures include

- Reviewing the task and clarifying any steps that you are unsure of
- Identifying needed terms and procedures
- Using a Focus Sheet entitled "Describing a Procedure or Task" to list steps, materials, and circumstances involved in completing the task
- Completing the first draft
- Reading the draft to yourself and making needed changes
- Working with a peer editor get feedback and check FCAs
- Writing a second draft (Chadwell, 2009)

All key writing tasks in the program were accompanied by similar detailed assignments. From research cited by Collins Education Associates (2009) and interviews from teachers who implemented the program, students' writing showed significant improvement.