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Reading as Prewriting: The Effect of the use of Literature on Writing

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READING AS PREWRITING:
THE EFFECT OF THE USE OF LITERATURE ON WRITING

THESIS

Submitted to the Graduate Committee of the
Department of Education and Human Development
State University of New York
College at Brockport
in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Masters of Science in Education

by

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Chapter I

Statement of the Problem

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine the effect of the use of literature on the quality of students' writing.

Need for the Study

Reading and writing are not separate in the development of literacy in children. According to Skolnick (1989), students grow as writers when they enjoy fine literature. Fox and Allen (1983) also found that exposure to good literature appears to make a difference in children's writing abilities. Reading and writing, when integrated in the classroom, also enhance comprehension of the topic of study (Blanchard, 1988; Konopak, Martin, & Martin, 1990).

Children benefit from being exposed to a variety of types of literature to broaden their story knowledge (Skolnick, 1989). Skolnick also discovered that literature can be used to stimulate children's thought processes. After being exposed to good literature, the children can then select and connect ideas from the literature for their own use in their own writing.

Skolnick found that when teachers focus on the craft of the writer in a piece of literature, students follow the examples of the author and begin to implement the author's craft in their own writing.

Butler (1987) also found that books can be used as models of good writing. After examining different phrases and words used by authors in books read in class, she observed that the children began to write their own variations of the stories. The children's increased awareness of how other writers write helped them to enhance their own writing.

Extensive reading, or listening to literature, is important as a means to acquire ideas for writing stories (Juel, 1988). Elley (1989) found that stories read aloud to children are a significant source of vocabulary acquisition. Children can incorporate the vocabulary and ideas experienced in reading into their own writing.

Literature can be used to generate ideas for writing, as well as to model the use of different genre, descriptive language, and story elements (Butler, 1987). Students need to be provided with many opportunities to use reading and writing within the context of their learning experiences. There is no

clear reason for keeping these skills separate in educational practice (Brown & Briggs, 1987). According to Butler and Turbil (1987):

Once we understand the writing process and the reading process, and the similarities between them, we are able to see how reading serves writing and how writing serves reading. We can read without ever having written, but we cannot write without having read. (p. 20)

This study investigates the effectiveness of the use of literature in enhancing students' creative writing.

Null Hypothesis

There will be no statistically significant mean score difference between the literature group scores and the nonliterature group scores on the holistically scored writing samples.

Definition of Terms

In this study, the following terms will be defined as follows:

1. **HOLISTIC SCORING** - Holistic scoring is a form of direct writing assessment. It is based on the theory that the whole is more than the sum of its parts and that the most valid assessment of writing is to consider how all components of writing (content,

organization, word choice, sentence structure, mechanics) work together to achieve an overall effect.

2. SCORING RUBRIC - A chart of categorized criteria for rating writing samples with scores of 0 - 4.

Limitation of the Study

If the literature method has been used in the classroom prior to the study, the students may score better due to their familiarity with the procedure.

Summary

This investigation determined whether the use of literature in the classroom had an effect on the quality of students' writing.

Chapter II

Review of the Literature

Introduction

Children who are good readers also tend to be good writers (Juel, 1988). There is a relationship between the two language processes and the two skills enhance each other's growth (Cox, Shanahan, & Sulzby, 1990). Reading can be taught through writing using a variety of approaches.

When students have the opportunity to read and revise their own and each other's writing, they can improve their reading abilities (Butler & Turbill, 1987). Revising requires a special kind of reading. The readers and writers must remember what has been written and what comes next. They tell others about what they have written, explain their meaning, and read their writing orally for others to hear (Dyson & Genishi, 1982). In doing this, they are improving their comprehension of the written material. Predictions are being made and confirmed (Durkin, 1978). The children are focused on the connectedness or cohesiveness of the written piece.

Although different, the processes of reading and writing have similar features that are essential for

learning (Blanchard, 1988). One common feature of reading and writing is that they are both acts of composing. Another common feature is that both readers and writers work with text. Readers compose meaning from text, and writers compose meaning into text (Butler & Turbill, 1987). Research on the reading-writing connection has demonstrated these and other similarities between the reading and writing processes (Blanchard, 1988). Loban (cited in Bromley, 1988) found in his research that all language processes: listening, speaking, reading, and writing, are mutually supportive of one another, a finding that was supported by Evanechko, Ollila, & Armstrong (1974).

Reading and Literature

Reading and writing ability are closely related. Some researchers believe that children's writing can accurately reveal information about their reading knowledge and processes (Cox, Shanahan, & Sulzby, 1990; Juel, 1988). For both reading and writing, the child must have prior knowledge of the subject matter and knowledge of language and its structures. According to James Britton (cited in Atwell, 1989): "As a child extends his reading, so he

internalizes more and more the patterns of the written language."

Cohesion, the linking together of elements of text, is important to readers for constructing meaning from a text, and to writers in creating a text that others can easily understand (Cox, Shanahan, & Sulzby, 1990). In a cohesive text, the writer's thoughts are related to each other through a series of connecting ties between words in the text. To get meaning from the text the reader uses these cohesive ties to reconnect the writer's thoughts.

Relationships have been found between cohesion and the quality of writing. High quality writing appears to have a strong cohesiveness and low quality writing is weak in cohesiveness (Spiegel & Fitzgerald, 1990). Readers may internalize the conventions of cohesiveness in their reading and then use them automatically when they write.

Cox, Shanahan, and Sulzby (1990) studied cohesion in children's writing of narrative and expository text to look for differences in cohesion in writing between good and poor readers, between the two genres, and between grade levels. They found that the better readers were also the better writers and used

cohesiveness in both narrative and expository writing. The researchers cited this finding as support that cohesiveness is part of general literacy knowledge and is connected in reading and writing (Cox, Shanahan, & Sulzby, 1990).

If reading provides models for children's writing, then the kinds of reading children are exposed to is also important. Eckhoff's research (1983) shows that the writing of children reflects the style and complexity of their reading texts. Text that has been simplified for reading purposes results in inappropriate use of cohesion which is a poor model for the readers (Cox, Shanahan, & Sulzby, 1990).

Reading Programs

Children who were involved in a basal reading program styled their writing according to that model which resulted in short, limited sentence structure. The writing of first grade children was found by DeFord (1981) to be affected by the reading program the children experienced. Basals, because they are used for the purpose of reading instruction, have many controls on the vocabulary, and are a poor representative of written cohesion (Cox, Shanahan, &

Sulzby, 1990).

Brown and Briggs (1987) found that students who learned through a simple sentence basal used fewer complex sentences in their writing. Their research results suggest that students who were given reading instruction through certain basal reading series demonstrated writing that was mechanical and unrealistic. They attributed this to the students' patterning their writing structure after the language encountered in the basal reading books.

In another study by Eckhoff (1983), writing samples were obtained from two groups of students. Group A students received reading instruction using a basal reading text that closely matched the style and complexity of literature in its natural form, while Group B used a basal with a simplified style. The researcher concluded that the children's writing was affected by the text used for reading instruction. Group A students used more elaborate sentence structures, while Group B students used more simple sentences. She concluded that exposure to written language helped the children learn about print and the structures of language, which then had an effect on their writing.

In DeFord's study (1981) the children who were involved in a whole language program, using whole pieces of literature for reading, produced content and meaning based writing. Brown and Briggs (1987) had similar results. They found that children who used a story format basal wrote more vivid stories, which reflected the influence of that particular basal on their writing (Brown & Briggs, 1987).

The reading programs used will also affect the good and poor readers differently. Differing instructional practices used for the two groups control their exposure to cohesive written material. Good readers often read from longer texts, and they are given the opportunity to read silently for longer periods of time (Cox, Shanahan & Sulzby, 1990). Poor readers, on the other hand, spend more time reading short, simple texts and working on individual skills. Good readers are able to focus on meaning in real reading situations, then carry this focus over into their writing. However, poor readers are not given enough opportunities to develop knowledge of cohesion (Cox, Shanahan, & Sulzby, 1990).

Spivey and King (1989) found that when selecting, organizing, and connecting information from reading to

writing, good readers organized their written composition differently than poorer readers. They had more compact, integrated forms for their writing and included more content. Their writing was better connected, more clear, and easier to read and understand. Good readers also invested more time in reading.

Learning Writing Through Reading

Writing activities have been found to enhance comprehension and learning (Blanchard, 1988; Spivey & King, 1989), and activities that are a combination of reading and writing can link related ideas from different sources and connect them in writing (Spivey & King, 1989). If students write about content being studied in either a structured or a creative way, learning will be enhanced (Spivey & King, 1989).

An instructional strategy that focused on writing as a more integrated approach to promoting comprehension of content in the classroom was studied by Konopak, Martin, and Martin (1990). They found that writing that integrated new and old information was more effective than studying isolated pieces of information, notetaking, or responding to short

comprehension questions. When students were given the opportunity to write their understanding of the topic, the depth of processing was extended. The more the content was worked with by the student, the more likely they were to remember it (Konopak, Martin, & Martin, 1990).

The Guided Writing Procedure is an instructional strategy developed by Smith and Bean (1980) to include writing for content learning. The process was designed to enhance students' comprehension of content material by integrating activities involving all four of the language arts (Konopak, Martin, & Martin, 1990). They found that groups of students instructed using brainstorming, prewriting, and other writing activities throughout the content instruction, generated more, higher quality ideas than the group that received all of the same instruction except for the writing parts. By writing, they were able to generate their own understanding of the information and express it in their own words (Konopak, Martin, & Martin, 1990).

Prediction activities are commonly used to enhance reading comprehension. Predictions involve the reader in more active reading, and they activate prior knowledge. The reader often applies that knowledge to

the content of what is being read. There are many instructional reading activities that use prediction in reading. Although there are few instructional activities developed that use writing and prediction for reading comprehension, one that has been studied is the Plausible Stories activity (Blanchard, 1988). In this activity written predictions are developed by the students who write stories that predict the nature of what the reading material. These stories are then discussed and more predictions are made.

Reading-Writing Connection

Some research studies have indicated that writing and reading should be taught together (Atwell, 1989; Blanchard, 1988; Butler & Turbill, 1987; Skolnick, 1989). Children who tend to do well in reading also tend to do well in writing (Juel, 1988). The two skills appear to enhance each other's growth, because both reading and writing have certain language skills in common. The presence of these skills should result in better performance in both reading and writing (Evanechko, Ollola, & Armstrong, 1974).

Reading can be taught through writing using a variety of approaches. One of these approaches is the

Language Experience Approach (LEA). In the LEA, which capitalizes on children's background knowledge, interest, experience, and language ability (Reutzel & Hollingsworth, 1987), the language of the students is used for instruction. Children dictate a story which the teacher uses for instruction (Brown & Briggs, 1987). The LEA follows a sequence of interrelated steps: thinking, talking, illustrating, telling in story form, and writing for others to read. Together reading and writing provide a basis for learning. The processes are not isolated.

Reutzel and Hollingsworth (1987) showed that story structure awareness can be developed in young children using the language experience approach. They found children in grades kindergarten through second demonstrated significant growth in the use of story grammar categories and ideas generated in their language experience stories. Story grammar was composed of theme, setting, characters, problem, attempt, and resolution (Marshall, 1983). Gordon (1990) found that the more exposure the children had to literature in story form, the better they were able to dictate stories containing the elements of story grammar.

It appears that the language experience approach to reading and language development fosters creative thinking and writing. In this type of program, reading and writing are completely integrated for instruction. They are both part of a total communication system (Daniels, Kasnic, & McCluskey, 1988).

When compared to another instructional program, The Structure of Intellect, which teaches reading by a breakdown of six selected tasks, The Language Experience Approach group scored higher in the area of memory. There was no other significant difference between the two groups (Daniels, Kasnic, & McCluskey, 1988). The researchers concluded that this may have been because through the language experience approach, the children were learning through the reading of group generated stories, which were based on their own experiences and schemata. They had a personal interest invested in the reading, therefore they retained the information from instruction better (Daniels, Kasnic & McCluskey, 1988).

One limitation to the language experience approach is that reading activities based on stories dictated by students will be limited to information the students already know and vocabulary already in their everyday

language (Blanchard, 1988; Shanahan & Lomax, 1986).

Writing and Literature

Literature provides many demonstrations of written language. According to Butler and Turbill (1987), written ideas are the result of organizing pieces of meaningful language that has been stored in memory from different language situations. They found that children needed to be exposed to a wide range of literature to build up a language base to use in their writing.

Skolnick (1989) observed students writing and interviewed them about their work to find out whether the use of literature in the classroom influenced their writing. She found that both what children read and how they read influenced their writing. The students interviewed discussed writing longer pieces, adding more details, using stronger language, telling more, expanding characters, and using beautiful language as things they learned to use in their own writing from how authors write.

In a study by Brown and Briggs (1987) children also modeled their writing on how authors write. They found that children sometimes rewrote stories they had

read to change circumstances or story endings. In Hickman's study (1983), it was found that books read aloud to students would often be borrowed by students, who would later produce a story written about the book.

In a study by Mills (1974) it was reported that fourth grade children who read or listened to and then discussed children's literature prior to writing scored significantly higher in their writing than a control group that did not use children's literature in this way.

A child who had not been read to as much as another child was likely to come to school with less knowledge of stories and fewer ideas for their creation (Juel, 1988). The study also found that the majority of lower achieving readers were also lower achieving writers. Many lacked story ideas, knowledge of story structure, and the ability to deliver interesting story events. The good readers used imaginative story lines, more story grammar elements, and interesting vocabulary to express ideas. Juel attributed these skills to the more frequent reading experiences of the good readers. Devries (1970) also found that increased reading practice improved writing.

Goodman (1989) found that as children participated

in meaningful literacy activities, they developed both reading and writing. They began to understand the ways that meaning and oral language are represented in written language and how both were related to represent meaning. They also began to understand the reasons and purposes for written language, and they began to understand how written language is organized for communication to occur.

The use of literature appears to have a positive effect on children's writing (Brown & Briggs, 1987; Butler & Turbill, 1987; Devries, 1970; Mills, 1974; & Skolnick, 1989). Good literature becomes a model for children to use in their own writing.

Holistic Scoring

Holistic scoring is a form of direct writing assessment which evaluates a writing sample as a whole. In holistic scoring, it is assumed that each writing skill is related and that no one skill is more important or should receive greater emphasis than another (Patchell, 1986). Holistic criteria require raters to assign a single score based on the overall quality of the student's writing (Herman, Aschbacher, & Winters, 1992).

Holistic scoring has been found to be a desirable form of writing assessment compared to primary-trait scoring, which is a score based on purpose only; and analytical scoring, which is a total of individually defined characteristics scored separately. According to Greece Central School District's Assessment Procedures For Language Arts (1992), "The most valid assessment of writing is to consider how all components of writing (e.g. content, organization, word choice, sentence structure, mechanics) work in harmony to achieve an overall effect." Holistic scoring focuses on the overall impression of the written piece.

The evaluation in holistic scoring is achieved through the use of a rubric, or scoring guide, which lists the criteria for each score. A scoring rubric provides well-defined criteria for judging student performance which promotes consistent scoring. Another means of promoting consistent scoring is through the use of more than one rater for each writing sample. Rater agreement within one point is considered reliable (Herman, Aschbacher, & Winters, 1992).

Chapter III

Design of the Study

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine the effect of the use of literature on the quality of students' writing.

Null Hypothesis

There will be no statistically significant mean score difference between the literature group scores and the nonliterature group scores on the holistically scored writing samples.

Materials

The literature used for this study was selected by the examiner. It included Millicent and the Wind, by Robert Munsch; Brother Wind, by Patricia MacKissack; and The Sun, The Wind, and The Rain, by Lisa Peters.

Writing samples were scored holistically by the examiner and a second reader, based on a scoring rubric established by the school district based on third grade expectations (see appendix).

Methodology

Subjects

This study involved a heterogeneous group of twenty-one third grade students from a suburban, public elementary school in western New York.

Procedure

The study consisted of the collection of two separate writing samples from the students.

For the first sample, the examiner assigned a topic and had the students compose a writing sample. No prewriting activities were provided. The students followed the writing process, from prewriting to final copy, using three fifty minute periods. These samples were scored holistically, with a 0 - 4, by the examiner and a second reader using a third grade scoring rubric (see appendix).

For the second sample, the examiner read aloud selected literature to the class prior to assigning a topic. The literature was discussed after each reading, focussing on the story elements of character, setting, problem, solution, and main events.

The examiner then assigned a writing topic related to the literature. This topic and the topic of the

first writing sample were both based on a common theme of friendship to prevent the topics from being the cause of a discrepancy in the results. The similar topics eliminated the possibility of student interest in or prior knowledge of the topic becoming a variable. The students again followed the writing process, using three fifty minute periods. Prior to each writing period, the examiner read aloud from a topic related piece of literature. This was followed by discussion. These samples were also scored holistically by the examiner and a second reader.

The two writing samples were obtained within a three week period of time to control for growth over time.

Analysis of Data

Each writing sample was rated independently by two readers, the examiner and a second trained reader, using the criteria on the rubric for rating the writing samples. An appropriate score level (4, 3, 2, 1, 0) was assigned by each reader. The examiner reviewed the two scores for each student to determine if the student's scores were discrepant, which would be a difference of two or more points between the two scores or a zero paired with any score that is not a zero. If

a discrepancy existed, the examiner would procure a third reader and score this piece of writing according to the two closest scores. Total scores were then recorded for each sample. The data from the first set of samples, in the form of raw scores, was compared with the data from the second set of samples, and the difference in the mean score for each sample was calculated to determine if there was a significant difference between mean scores of the two treatments.

Holistic scoring, a form of direct writing assessment, was selected as the measure for rating the writing samples. With this type of assessment, each writing sample is scored by two individuals, and this multiple scoring increases reliability. For inter-rater reliability, at least two raters are needed for each writing piece, and the ratings can be summed or averaged to provide a final score. A third rater can be called in for discrepant scores (Herman, Aschbacher, & Winters, 1992).

Summary

Two writing samples were obtained from twenty-one third grade students using two different treatments, a literature based writing activity and a nonliterature based writing activity. After the treatments were

applied, writing samples were scored holistically and the mean scores of both samples were compared.

Chapter IV

Analysis of Data

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine the effect of the use of literature on the quality of students' writing.

Results

Interrater Reliability

To show interrater reliability, two raters, the examiner and a second reader, scored each writing sample using the grade level rubric and following the holistic scoring procedure. The ratings were summed to provide a final score for each writing sample. In the case of discrepant scores, a third reader was procured and the two closest scores were recorded.

Null Hypothesis

There will be no statistically significant mean score difference between the literature group scores and the nonliterature group scores on the holistically scored writing samples.

The difference between the writing scores of the students in the literature and nonliterature groups was

compared with a t test to see if there was a significant difference between the mean scores of the two groups. The results are shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Mean and t Test Differences Between Writing Scores of Nonliterature and Literature Groups

	MEAN	NUMBER	STANDARD DEVIATION	CALCULATED t	DF
NONLIT.	4.57	21	1.40	-2.40	40
LIT.	5.67	21	1.56		

$$t_{\text{crit}}(40), \alpha < .05 = 2.021$$

A calculated t score of -2.40 was the result of the analysis. Since the critical value of t with 40 degrees of freedom at the 95% confidence level is 2.021, the null hypothesis must be rejected, concluding that there was a statistically significant difference between the mean writing scores of students in the literature and nonliterature groups. The mean score for students in the nonliterature group was 4.57 whereas the mean score for students in the literature group was 5.67.

Further analysis of the children's writing indicated that more students in the literature treatment group included descriptive language in their writing. The criteria for determining the use of descriptive language was the use of five or more adjectives in the writing sample. These children also developed the topic more completely with relevant support material, such as details and explanations, often using vocabulary presented in the literature.

The use of proper mechanics (capital letters, punctuation, and spelling) was similar in both the literature and nonliterature groups' writing samples, therefore it appears that the literature treatment did not effect mechanics. The students' uses of complete sentences was also consistent between the two writing samples, with neither treatment having an effect on this area.

Summary

There was a significant mean score difference between the writing samples of the nonliterature and literature groups with the literature group scoring higher.

Chapter V

Conclusions and Implications

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine the effect of the use of literature on the quality of students' writing.

Conclusions

The researcher observed that the mean writing scores of the students in the literature treatment group were noticeably greater than the writing scores of the students in the nonliterature treatment group. The analysis of these scores led to the conclusion that the literature treatment resulted in significantly higher writing scores for the students.

These results are consistent with those reported by Juel (1988) in which she concluded that "It appears likely that extensive reading (or listening to a lot of stories) is important to acquiring ideas with which to write one's own stories." (p. 446). The literature group writing samples were more developed, with supporting details and description.

Vocabulary from the literature was incorporated into the children's writing. Cohen (1968) found that

reading aloud on a daily basis stimulates new vocabulary. Since the literature read to the literature group was related to the writing topic, the children were able to make a connection with the new vocabulary and it became part of their writing vocabulary, enriching their written language.

The findings of this study clearly showed that the writing of the children studied contained features of the literature they were exposed to. The writing of the nonliterature treatment group in general was less elaborate than that of the literature treatment group. The literature group added more adjectives and descriptive language to their writing, and some of the writing samples incorporated ideas or events from the literature.

Implications for Research

These results support the need for further investigation in the area of writing. A variety of related factors could be considered such as:

1. Further studies of teachers' methods of teaching writing with the use of literature.
2. Studies on methods of writing assessment. If students' writing is enhanced by the use of literature,

perhaps it is limiting and unnatural for students to have their writing assessed through the use of a writing prompt given in isolation.

3. Studies exploring the attitudes of students toward writing.

Implications for Classroom Practice

An abundance of research has been conducted in the area of the language arts to support the reading-writing connection. With the support of this research, it is necessary for teachers to bring this connection into their classrooms through the integration of reading and writing instruction. Good literature is a model for children to work from in their own writing. The objective is not to have the children duplicate an author's work but to try some of the author's forms of expression. Exposure to a wide variety of writing styles and different genre provide children with the basis for their own writing.

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RATING SHEET FOR WRITING SAMPLES

STUDENT	SAMPLE 1 SCORE			SAMPLE 2 SCORE		
	RATER 1	RATER 2	TOTAL	RATER 1	RATER 2	TOTAL
A	2	3	5	3	3	6
B	4	3	7	4	4	8
C	2	2	4	2	3	5
D	3	3	6	3	4	7
E	1	2	3	2	2	4
F	1	1	2	2	1	3
G	2	2	4	3	2	5
H	2	3	5	3	3	6
I	3	3	6	3	4	7
J	1	2	3	2	2	4
K	2	2	4	3	3	6
L	2	3	5	3	3	6
M	2	2	4	3	2	5
N	1	2	3	2	2	4
O	2	2	4	2	2	4
P	2	3	5	3	3	6
Q	3	3	6	4	4	8
R	3	4	7	4	4	8
S	2	1	3	2	2	4
T	2	2	4	2	3	5
U	3	3	6	4	4	8

CRITERIA FOR RATING WRITING SAMPLES

GRADE 3

4	3	2	1
Develops the topic in an appropriate way demonstrating a logical plan of organization including attempts at paragraphing even though results may be inappropriate	Develops the topic using an adequate plan of organization	Attempts to develop the topic using some plan of organization	Refers to the topic but has almost no plan of organization
Develops ideas through use of relevant support material (details, explanations, examples, etc.)	Develops ideas through the use of some support material	Demonstrates weakness in the development of ideas with little use of support material	Does not use any support material in developing ideas
Uses complete sentences and some variation in the sentence structure	Uses complete sentences most of the time	Demonstrates sentence sense but has some run-on or fragmented sentences	Lacks sentence sense
Uses descriptive language	Occasionally uses descriptive language	Occasionally uses inappropriate or incorrect language	Frequently uses inappropriate or incorrect language
Makes few or no errors in mechanics (i.e., capital letters, end punctuation, spelling) and writing is legible	Occasionally makes errors in mechanics that do not interfere with communication and writing is legible	Makes errors in mechanics that interfere with communication and writing is legible	Makes errors in mechanics that seriously interfere with communication and writing is illegible
Revises for clarity (adding/deleting information reorganizing content and using descriptive words)	Makes some revisions (adding/deleting information reorganizing content and using descriptive words)	Attempts to revise (adding/deleting information, reorganizing content and using descriptive words) though results may be weak	Does not revise as expected

Writing - 19

Zero Paper

Is totally unrelated to topic

or

Is illegible, i.e., includes so many indecipherable words that no sense can be made of the piece of writing

or

Is incoherent, i.e., words are legible but syntax is so garbled or meaning so unclear that no sense can be made of the piece of writing

or

Is a blank piece of paper