



Product Research

# ¡Escribir como Estrellas!

Supporting documentation for the development of  
**¡Escribir como Estrellas!**



## ¡Escribir como Estrellas!

Engagement in writing requires students to rely on their experiences in listening, speaking, and reading. Teachers of English Language Learners (ELLs) must be able to differentiate between content knowledge and writing proficiency of their students. While some ELLs may have high levels of content knowledge, they may experience difficulty with composing their thoughts. Utilization of vocabulary, knowledge of idioms, spelling of words, placement of punctuation, and use of adjectives are all areas that can hinder appropriately written communication of ELLs. Students whose primary language is something other than English need opportunities for oral communication with teachers and peers who can serve as models. The oral exchange provides ELLs with support and feedback in expressing themselves effectively. Integrated learning experiences with listening, speaking, reading, and writing must be provided English Language Learners if they are to achieve mastery of the Writing Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS).

*¡Escribir como Estrellas!* is a writing resource developed by Texas educators and focuses on providing instructional and assessment opportunities for the Spanish Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills related to composing, revising, and editing. Units 1–6 focus on the revising TEKS and Units 7–17 focus on the editing TEKS. Each unit begins with two brief activities that address the focus standard and allow students the opportunity to show their understanding of the skills and concepts related to the focus standard through a variety of formats, including filling in blanks, sentences, and charts/tables; completing graphic organizers; and composing original paragraphs about specific topics and prompts. Units 18–22 focus on the composing TEKS. Each unit begins with a prompt related to a

specific composing genre. Students are provided space for jotting notes, sketching, and planning. A graphic organizer invites students to further organize their thinking before composing. Students are then provided a lined page for drafting and revising their composition. Rounding out the unit is a rubric that asks students to evaluate their writing in these areas: focus, structure coherence, ideas and details, and capitalization, punctuation, and spelling.

The content in the *¡Escribir como Estrellas!* units is intentionally flexible and can be utilized in a number of learning arrangements, including with parents and students working together. Teachers who use this resource will recognize the flexibility of its contents. For example, activities can be used for whole class instruction or for independent practice/homework. Because each unit contains two practice sets (one text with five items each), one can be used for whole class instruction and the other for independent assessment, or one could be used as a pre-assessment and the other as a post-assessment, along with other arrangements. Research shows that experienced teachers can use the same content to harness the energy and needs of the students to fit a given situation. This writing resource allows teachers to pivot to alternate instructional strategies that help struggling students connect to new concepts. Authors Katharine Davies Samway and Dorothy Taylor (2007) attest to several evidence-based strategies that attribute to the success of English language learners. These strategies can be used and are recognized in this writing resource, such as building background knowledge, modeling steps, talking with partners/small groups, using charts and organizers, and infusing active learning opportunities. The more flexible teachers can be in an instructional approach, the better teachers



are in adapting instruction to result in increased student participation and engagement, ensuring students are not left behind. With challenging times at their highest, the intent of *¡Escribir como Estrellas!* is to offer incredible opportunities to help teachers build capacity to serve students who need more support and flexibility to succeed.

For the activities in *¡Escribir como Estrellas!*, the correct answers are provided or when answers may vary, the teacher is instructed to evaluate the response, often with sample answers provided to help with the evaluation. For the assessment items, the correct answers, Depth of Knowledge (DOK) and the Revised Bloom's Taxonomy (RBT) levels, and English Language Proficiency Standards (ELPS) are identified. Chart Your Success allows students to record whether their responses to the assessment items are correct or not in units 1–17. In units 18–22, students record their composition scores based on the categories presented in each genre's rubric. The glossaries, in the Student Edition (SE) and Teacher Edition (referred to as Answer Key and Resources), provide student-friendly definitions for each of the significant skills and concepts listed in the standards. In addition to these features in the SE, teachers will find additional writing prompts across a variety of genres in the TE. The writing prompts can be used in combination with the planning, drafting, revising, and evaluating pages provided in Units 18–22 to provide additional practice with the genres. There are also rubrics written for teachers' usage in evaluating student writing; these mirror those in the Student Edition in structure and content.

According to the Texas Education Agency (TEA, 2020), HB 3906 eliminates the stand-alone writing assessments for grades 4 and 7 beginning with the 2021–2022 school year. Grades 4 and 7 writing assessments will not undergo any changes for the 2020–2021 school year. However, revising and editing items will be field tested in the reading

assessments at grades 3–8 during this time period yet these items will have no accountability at this time.

Mentoring Minds supports bilingual students as they build competency in writing, mechanics, and composition. This stand-alone product has no English counterpart. *¡Escribir como Estrellas!* is written for students whose primary language is Spanish.

The TEKS-based, multi-genre Student Edition is written in Spanish and is comprised of numerous units on revision, editing, and composing, while addressing all five genres mentioned in the TEKS, (one unit per genre). The composing units include steps that support teachers in the guidance of students through the writing process and include teacher rubrics. Composing units include two additional writing prompts for each genre along with more opportunities for students to apply their revising/editing knowledge within the Composing units. Young (2017), a respected authority who previously worked in the TEA Assessment Division in Texas, noted that revision is focused on effectiveness, i.e., strengthening/improving various aspects of a piece of writing: the introduction and conclusion, organization/progression, development, word choice, and sentences. Young also concluded that editing is focused on correctness (conventions): capitalization, punctuation, spelling, grammar, usage, and sentence boundaries (fragments and run-ons). *¡Escribir como Estrellas!* is designed to complement the requirements of the state writing assessments. A glossary is also included in the Student Edition of this product. The glossary serves as a vocabulary resource for students in order to develop an understanding of TEKS-based words and vocabulary appropriate to the activities within each writing unit. Young (2017) stressed the importance of developing students' academic language in support of content area achievement.



In earlier years, Willis (2013) noted that students who acquire proficiency in the academic language for the content being taught will be better equipped to express knowledge and ideas through discussions, writing, and assessments.

Student data from the Spring 2019 STAAR™ Academic Readiness Spanish Summary Report of Grade 4 Writing (TEA, 2019) demonstrate a range of scores. Fourth graders in Texas were evaluated on three reporting categories: Composition, Revision, and Editing. The Grade 4 Writing Summary Report revealed a range of data. The total students tested statewide were 26,221. The released data from the composition reveal an All-Student rating of 3.5 out of 8 possible points yielding a 44% score. The following reasons indicate most likely why students scored in the lower range: weakly matched structure, weak or nonexistent central idea, repetition, or wordiness; inclusion of many different ideas, vague use of language, and weak language conventions. Students who scored in the higher score range produced compositions with the following characteristics: strong match between form and purpose, explicit central idea, narrow and deep development, effective introduction and conclusion, specific use of language, and strong language conventions. As evidenced by these results, there appears to be a need for quality resources that support the implementation of writing instruction and show a strong potential for improving writing outcomes for students with or without writing difficulties. *¡Escribir como Estrellas!* provides an essential framework that offers all students a model composition, critical thinking prompts that encourage narrow and deep thinking, and planning and drafting opportunities to structure student thoughts prior to composition of the written piece.

For the Revision and Editing sections, the Academic Readiness Spanish Summary Report of Grade 4 Writing (2019) from the Texas Education Agency (TEA) revealed results on the Fourth Grade

STAAR™ Writing Assessment. There was a total of 8 revision multiple-choice/selected-response items. In the All-Students category, the students answered 61% of the revision questions correctly or 4.9 average number of items. A total of 16 editing items were given. In the All-Students category, the students answered 66% of the editing questions correctly or 10.6 average number of items. *¡Escribir como Estrellas!* offers instructional support for revision and editing in the form of formative assessment opportunities for targeted TEKS: Corrección and Revisión.

The aforementioned results indicate there is a need for resources to assist with the implementation of writing instruction that results in better writing outcomes for students with or without writing difficulties. Instructional materials that align to the TEKS, save teachers preparation time, and provide focused activities to advance skills in writing mechanics and writing composition are descriptors that define *¡Escribir como Estrellas!*. Many English Language Learners (ELLs) are in difficult situations. While they may acquire conversational English that appears fluent, many ELL students take a longer period to develop Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP). This means ELLs more than likely experience difficulty in academic areas of reading, writing, spelling, and other areas. Thus, ELLs need instructional and assessment materials in their primary language as English tests would not equitably measure their abilities. When ELLs are supported in learning a second language, they will have increased opportunities of performing better in school and growing up to be successful citizens (Roseberry-McKibbin & Brice, 2005). These reasons justify the development of *¡Escribir como Estrellas!*.

Graham & Harris (2002) found that the quality of writing instruction received by students has an impact on writing achievement. Frequent and varied engagement opportunities are needed to compose meaningful text as well as devote time to direct



instruction in writing skills and strategies (Westby & Costlow, 1991). Furthermore, the state accountability system and aforementioned state assessment scores serve as stimuli for the development of writing resources for teachers. With the emphasis on improved performance in the area of writing and with many other demands placed upon our schools, the search for products that reflect research recommendations and meet the accountability demands is prevalent.

Students build and acquire competency in two broad areas: writing mechanics and writing process. As students advance in grades, teachers must continue to place emphasis and use reinforcement on the mechanics in addition to process aspects of writing. Gallimore and Tharp (1999) recommend that students be provided with structures, questions, and organizational frameworks that offer support as new concepts are introduced. Studies show that writing processes mature over time rather than students memorizing examples of good writing and creating such compositions immediately. Cazden (1988) noted that writing examples provide the impetus from which students learn. Thus, acquisition of writing skills by students takes time to develop and strategies are continuously repeated. There are many opportunities for students to demonstrate mastery or comprehension of skills. The two featured texts within every unit can be used to instruct and model.

*¡Escribir como Estrellas!* guides students from teacher-directed work to independent work. Findings from studies indicate that student interest emerges and results in the interactions of the student with the writing content. Multiple and varied opportunities are present within the Student Edition of *¡Escribir como Estrellas!* that engages students to develop the content. Teachers can also construct learning environments that heighten student interest. The way a student feels about subject content can affect the effort put into the

task at hand and the learning outcome advocated Renninger and Hidi (2002). Studies show that students can feel positively about their writing through support from others. A number of studies indicate teachers can assist students in developing an interest to write (Renninger, 1992, 2000; Renninger, Sansone, and Smith, 2004). Group work can result in a favorable effect on the interests of students to learn (Hidi, Weiss, Berndorff, and Nolan, 1998). Research suggests that students increase motivation to write if the topics are of interest to them (Hidi and McLaren, 1990; Cole and Feng, 2015). *¡Escribir como Estrellas!* applies these research findings while using content that is realistic and an array of topics that spark the varied interests of the students. Thus, *¡Escribir como Estrellas!* reflects research findings to spark student interest, promote active student engagement, and improve writing performance.

Tomlinson (1999) and Hall, Strangman, and Meyer (2003) attest to the positive effects of differentiation. Differentiation is a process through which teachers enhance instruction by matching the characteristics of students to instruction and assessment although the students are accessing the same curriculum. *¡Escribir como Estrellas!* reflects differentiation in several ways. Differentiation in grouping practices is evidenced through the opportunities provided for differing group formats, resulting in independent practice. Differentiation in product also occurs when students demonstrate the learning. Differentiation in terms of a student's learning profile and in relation to product are present in *¡Escribir como Estrellas!* as students are provided opportunities to engage in conversations with the teacher, brainstorm ideas independently and with peers, use graphic organizers, and write responses for compositions. Differentiation also occurs according to the interests of students. The passages are varied, including stories, poems, diaries, and informational texts which appeal to varied levels of student interests.



Research advocates teachers employ a variety of ways to assess the needs of their students. Stiggins and Conklin (1992) note that classroom assessments must be high-quality for instruction to be effective. In 1998, a review of empirical studies by two British researchers noted the benefits of well-planned classroom assessments. Black and Wiliam (1998b) stated that when classroom assessments are used to adjust ongoing instruction, not only did the content appear to be learned better, but students seem to improve their performance on external achievement tests. Black and Wiliam (1998a) stated that all activities employed by teachers and students from which they could gather feedback to modify teaching and learning is formative assessment. Popham (2008) defines formative assessment as a process that students and teachers use during instruction (assessment *for* learning). The assessment feedback guides teachers to adjust during instruction and directs students how to improve their performance to reach the intended goals. Lewis (2002) shares how assessment for learning can improve performance. Teachers can study evidence from an assessment and then purposefully plan additional learning experiences based on what students have and have not learned. These findings support that more sound decisions are made based on assessments *for* learning as opposed to assessments *of* learning. Thus, *¡Escribir como Estrellas!* offers several opportunities from which purposely planned assessment evidence can be garnered and used to adjust ongoing instruction.

*¡Escribir como Estrellas!* reflects regular informal means of assessing the students and then using the results to drive future instruction. Activities within the Student Edition may be used by students and teachers to gather input to gauge the learning and correct any misunderstandings. Constructed-response questions and selected-response

questions are featured within the Corrección and Revisión sections. These activities can be used for guided and independent practice and to assess learning on the targeted revision and editing standards. Students gain much practice and display comprehension as well as misconceptions in learning as they respond to questions where they are asked to identify where mistakes occur and how to correct them. In *Formative Assessment and Standards-Based Grading*, Marzano (2010) described three types of assessments, *obtrusive*, *unobtrusive*, and *student generated*. *¡Escribir como Estrellas!* includes the first two as there are assessment opportunities that take place while instruction is and is not occurring. There are also several opportunities for assessment when students may not be aware that teachers are gathering information. In all *¡Escribir como Estrellas!* assessment opportunities, the evidence gathered may be used to adjust instruction. Therefore, the assessments are considered as formative in nature, meaning the assessments within the Student Edition may be used as input to gauge students' learning, correct any misconceptions, and determine future instructional plans as well as improve student performance in writing.

Numerous studies have examined the effectiveness of various planning and revising strategies in writing (Graham & Harris, 2005; Harris & Graham, 1996). Strategies that research found to have favorable results include teacher modeling, cooperative application of the strategy, and independent practice of the strategy. *¡Escribir como Estrellas!* supports these findings by utilizing the research recommendations upon which to base the three sections Revisión, Corrección, Composición) in the resource. When instructing students who are learning English, it is essential to improve comprehension. Graphic organizers facilitate ELLs' comprehension through visual illustrations of vocabulary, ideas, and the interrelationship (Kim, Vaughn, Wanzek, & Wei,





2004). Graphic organizers are most beneficial to ELLs when presented in small group activities. During the activities, ELLs have the opportunity to work cooperatively, discussing and sharing their thoughts. During initial unit activities, the teacher can promote collaborative discussions to help students understand how organizers help to frame content prior to writing compositions. Eventually, the discussion scaffolding can be removed when students sufficiently acquire the skill of completing organizers; yet organizers remain as a strategy for students to use independently.

Research shows that graphic organizers are key to assisting students to improve academic performance (Egan, 1999). Ritchie and Karge (1996) share evidence that students who create visual displays of concepts are better able to comprehend the concepts. Fountas and Pinnell (2001) cite that when content is illustrated with diagrams, the information can be maintained by students over a period of time. Organizers portray knowledge in meaningful ways which help bring clarity to ideas as connections are made. Several studies noted that information is more easily learned and understood with visual organizers across different populations of students and in different content areas (Landorf & Lowenstein, 2004; Ellis, 2001; Hobbs, 2001; Dye, 2000; Carlson, 2000; Levine, 1995). Once students acquire the basic, yet solid foundation of a concept, then future content can be addressed at higher cognitive levels leading students to become more strategic learners. *¡Escribir como Estrellas!* incorporates a variety of organizers within the composition of Composición component of the units. Graphic organizers and charts encourage students to organize their thoughts prior to writing a piece as well as provide teachers with observing how students think. This evidence can help teachers determine if other instruction is necessary or provide an impetus and feedback from which to have student-teacher conversations.

The lessons within *¡Escribir como Estrellas!* are designed to help students master the elements of writing (e.g., text and character development), writing skills (e.g., spelling, punctuation), and process strategies (e.g., planning and revising techniques). Lessons also incorporate certain characteristics that form a language common to shared expectations and feedback regarding the quality of writing (e.g., sentence fluency, word choice, voice, organization). Both constitute core components of effective writing instruction noted Fowler (2007). Explicit instruction in writing mechanics and composition skills is necessary for writing success for English Language Learners. Students must be taught specific strategies and skills on a systematic basis to help them improve their writing techniques and their English simultaneously. The authors of *¡Escribir como Estrellas!* sought to use this knowledge and findings in a product to prepare students for the Spanish Version of the STAAR™ Writing Assessment. Later, when students write without the scaffolds provided in *¡Escribir como Estrellas!*, they will have developed the confidence and acquired the skills needed to independently produce high quality compositions. Thus, *¡Escribir como Estrellas!* prepares students to independently and mentally work through the steps to organize, plan, and write compositions.

*¡Escribir como Estrellas!* references levels of thinking by coding activities to Depth of Knowledge (DOK) and Revised Bloom's Taxonomy (RBT) through the use of selected- response items on and constructed-response items. Constructed-response prompts invite students to demonstrate their ability to think about everyday topics and then construct responses. With selected-response assessment items, the answers are visible to students, yet they must be able to recognize the accurate responses.

The literature on critical thinking notes the importance of explicit instruction and indicates



that students should be taught how to construct responses that require critical thought. *¡Escribir como Estrellas!* provides numerous situations where teachers may purposefully model situations or ask questions to focus students' thinking on an underlying concept and prompt deeper thought. Revised Bloom's Taxonomy (Anderson et al., 2001) and DOK (Webb, 2002) provide useful frameworks for examining and differentiating among different levels of learning and thought. Critical thinking is a crucial element in any content area instruction because it promotes comprehension of content and skills. Opportunities within the activities allow students to make application of the information about the topics contained in *¡Escribir como Estrellas!* to personal or everyday life.

In conclusion, *¡Escribir como Estrellas!* promotes targeted instruction within every unit with an editing and a revision focus. Closure to each unit is reached with planning, drafting, and composition pages for student writing. This writing resource emphasizes composition, revision, and editing skills necessary for students to write effective literary texts such as personal narratives and poetry, compose informational texts, compose multi-paragraph argumentative texts, as well as composing correspondence that reflects pieces that solicit information. All these compositions include associated graphic organizers and rubrics and are aligned to the standards required by the Texas Education Agency (2017). The unit components of *¡Escribir como Estrellas!* help maximize classroom writing instruction throughout the year, resulting in preparedness for the forthcoming composition. Researchers note that students who use information learned in different contexts tend to remember that information longer. When students apply skills across disciplines, student confidence appears to increase. As a result, cross-curricular connections reinforce learning and enhance life-long learning skills.

In 2017, the State Board of Education adopted the English and Spanish language arts and reading Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) for K–12 and amended them in 2019 by TEA. Identified resources are provided to assist parents and teachers in the transition to the revised English and Spanish language arts and reading TEKS for K–8, which will be implemented in 2019–2020 school year, and grades 9–12, which will be implemented in 2020–2021 school year. Resources for the Spanish Language Arts/Spanish Language Arts and Reading and English as a Second Language Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) includes current and revised TEKS to be implemented in K–8 beginning with school year 2019–2020.

*¡Escribir como Estrellas!* is designed around the proven practices and experiences of practitioners, and the standards from the state. *¡Escribir como Estrellas!* covers the TEKS eligible for assessment, resulting in students prepared to write independently and demonstrate writing skills during *STAAR Writing Assessment, Spanish Version*. The Spanish RLA TEKS were studied and every standard related to writing (revising, editing, composing) is addressed in the Student Edition, with one unit focused on each specific standard. Released writing tests in English were studied to ensure that the lengths and complexities of texts were mirrored and to ensure that the design and content of assessment items were mirrored. The authors have extensive teaching experience in Spanish language classrooms and in writing instruction. They combined their expertise, myriad of experiences, and evidence-based practices to create the product *¡Escribir como Estrellas!* Mentoring Minds is dedicated to providing educators with quality resources that allow the effective use of classroom time so that teachers and students have the tools they need to develop excellence in writing for ELLs.





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