Chapter Seven

TAKE CONTROL!:  
A Strategy for Revising Controlling Ideas

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Introduction

I developed the strategy described in this paper while teaching an English 11 Plus Class. This is a small team-taught class, which is composed of many students who are struggling readers and writers and must now pass the ELA 11. Many of these students have difficulties with reading comprehension, drawing conclusions from reading material, and writing.

Step One: Identifying the Strategy

For the Session Two Part A (Task III) exercise, students must read two pieces of literature that have a common thread and then pull together a sentence/controlling idea that "sums" up the main idea of the literature. This poses a problem for many of the students in this class. The Take Control Strategy is designed to address this problem. The other problem students have is finding and using examples of literary elements. This will not be discussed here but is addressed in another strategy in this collection entitled "Reading and Writing for Literary Response." A thinksheet for this second strategy is provided with that strategy.

Students in my class have developed controlling ideas in the past as part of a class exercise. I have corrected papers from these students and have shown them what is needed to produce quality papers. However, many of the students still have demonstrated that they do not fully understand the concept of developing a strong and direct controlling idea.
In my English 11 Plus Class, students had finished reading the novel, *The Runner*. As part of their writing evaluations for the end of the unit, they had to reread the last chapter and then read the poem, “To an Athlete Dying Young.” I decided that at this point the students needed to develop their own controlling idea sentences. The teachers circulated and offered suggestions to individual students.

**Step Two: Modeling the Strategy**

Upon completion of the assignment, I put together a thinksheet of everyone’s controlling ideas. Names of students were kept confidential.

I believed that seeing everyone’s ideas on paper in front of them and on the overhead would be beneficial. My assumption was that students would be more receptive to comments from their peers. The students would have a greater tendency to look closely at these suggestions, rather than teacher “red ink” ones. This gives students a chance to enhance their controlling idea and essays.

The students received a copy of the Controlling Idea Thinksheet. The teacher read the rubric for Session Two Part A, focusing on the quality descriptor for *Meaning*. This showed the class what the State expected from their writing, particularly the importance of a strong controlling idea. At this point, the students turned their attention to the first example on the thinksheet. The teacher discussed the example’s strengths and weaknesses, and suggested revisions to create a stronger controlling idea. The revisions were entered on the thinksheet.

**Step Three: Scaffolding the Strategy**

As a class, discussion began, addressing each controlling idea. I then wrote these suggestions on the overhead transparency sheet. After we had completed the thinksheet, students could then return to their essays and enhance what they had written. At this point they needed to continue on with their essay writing.

**Step Four: Providing Additional Practice**

Throughout the year, we will continue with the peer suggestion practice. The controlling ideas that are listed below will change based on the readings given and “Your Task.” At a designated point, students will be expected to write their own controlling idea without input from their peers and teachers. At this point they are going to be self-regulated learners.
Conclusion
This strategy is a simple way to help students become better writers of controlling ideas/thesis statements. This thinksheet can be adapted to fit all Session Two Part A assignments and even for writing research papers that require strong thesis statements. Students learn to work together and accept other students' ideas and opinions. Constructive criticism is learned and accepted.

Suggestions for other Content Areas
This strategy can be used for all levels of English. This strategy can also be used in social studies classes to help students develop a strong topic sentence for their DBQ answers or in science classes, as they also need to have their students write more in preparation for the science Regents examinations.

Thinksheet
Copy is attached.
THINKSHEET

**Directions:** You have read two pieces of literature. Using the literature and the assignment sheet given to you with “Your Task” you have developed a controlling idea that your entire essay will be based upon.

Listed below are all the controlling ideas that this class has developed. What is seen here is exactly the same as what was written on your papers. Let us read them together and then determine which ones need to be changed. This might include streamlining or enhancing them. Remember your goal is to develop an idea that is powerful and relevant.

- People have different ways of reacting to the death of a loved one.

Revision Needed: ____________________________________________

- In the story The Runner by Cynthia Voigt and To An Athlete Dyeing Young by Alfred Edward Housman. The statement of when “People die it greatly effects the feelings and emotions of their loved ones is proven true by Cynthia Voigt.

Revision Needed: ____________________________________________

- People react differently when it comes to the death of a loved one.

Revision Needed: ____________________________________________

- People portray different emotions when an athlete dies.

Revision Needed: ____________________________________________

- The death of an athlete produces various amounts of emotion from their families, and fans.

Revision Needed: ____________________________________________

- People have different ways of reacting to the death of a loved one.
Revision Needed: ____________________________________________

- There are many emotions and actions of people who react to the death of a loved one.

Revision Needed: ____________________________________________

- When a loved one passes away there are different emotions and actions that people left behind display.

Revision Needed: ____________________________________________

- There are many ways that emotions and actions are expressed by people in reaction to the death of a loved one, such as positive and negative reactions.

Revision Needed: ____________________________________________