



For Immediate Release

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Don Johnston Releases First Author® Writing Curriculum
A comprehensive writing curriculum for students with complex support needs

VOLO, Ill., March 5, 2015 – Don Johnston Incorporated released First Author® Writing Curriculum, a comprehensive writing curriculum for students with significant disabilities including autism. The program helps special educators teach early writing skills required for the new alternate assessments.



Traditionally, writing instruction in self-contained and autism classrooms focused on handwriting and worksheets. New state standards require students to write ideas and opinions. Students with the most significant disabilities are now required to take the writing portion of the DLM, NCSC, STAAR Alternate, and other state assessments. First Author Writing Curriculum was designed to give special educators and paraprofessionals the resources they need to meet new state writing standards and prepare their students for the alternate assessments. It also guides teachers to measure writing outcomes.

Several schools participated in the development of First Author Writing Curriculum including Keith Bovenschen School, a school for students with moderate to severe cognitive impairments. Traditional literacy goals in many of these schools include tracing letters, handwriting one's name, address, and sometimes phone number. The school has been implementing First Author Writing Curriculum over the last three years. Bovenschen principal, Denise Jackson, explains a transformation she saw from traditional writing goals to expressive writing. "Not even in our wildest dreams did we ever think of having (our students) write expressive kinds of things about their interests or topics, so First Author expanded a whole area we had not even considered."

"Writing instruction is changing the lives of these students by opening up a whole stream of written communication that many special education programs never considered possible," said Central Michigan University professor and First Author designer, Dr. Janet Sturm. "Yet, students with complex needs are often never taught to write. I've seen many of these students enter a classroom without any authentic writing experiences, and after several weeks of the First Author program, they grow to view themselves as authors. It's really powerful."

The curriculum features explicit instruction, supported writing time, and communication. Scripted lessons guide educators through the process of teaching writing strategies. Students practice writing independently through a Universal Design for Learning model with accommodation supports. They then share their writing with the class through a sharing period called "Author's Chair."



Don Johnston Incorporated released several videos on their website showcasing students in the program. Students are clearly transformed by the experience. One student wrote about going to prom and another wrote about video games. A student with complex physical needs wrote about taking his whole class to an amusement park to see the roller coasters—something no one expected.

“First Author Writing Curriculum is the first comprehensive writing curriculum designed for special education and autism classrooms,” said Mary Krenz, First Author project coordinator for Don Johnston Incorporated. “Many districts aren’t equipped for the new standards, so this curriculum comes at a perfect time. It’ll give teachers the resources they need to be successful teaching writing and then measuring progress.”

The curriculum features a new writing measurement system that illuminates subtle changes in student writing. “New research shows that students with a range of disabilities can make progress in writing when measures are sensitive enough to detect the smallest progressions, and those measures inform instruction,” said Dr. Sturm. First Author guides educators through the process of evaluating writing from scribbling to paragraph writing. Qualitative measures include a 14-point Developmental Writing Scale, Text Type Diversity (writing for different purposes and audiences), and Topic Diversity (variance of writing topics over time). Productivity measures track the quantitative writing components such as the total number of intelligible and unique words. By capturing this data, educators can see a student’s writing strengths and needs, identify the instruction needed to attain the next level, and set standards-based IEP goals.

First Author Writing Curriculum is available for order immediately for \$499 per classroom set.

The curriculum includes:

- Curriculum Guide
 - First 30 days implementation guide
 - Accommodation guide
 - UDL guide
- Instruction Guide
 - 80 Mini-lessons
 - 63 Tip Sheets
 - Classroom posters
- Assessment Guide (plus standards-based IEP goals)
 - Developmental Writing Scale
 - Topic Diversity Measures
 - Text Type Diversity Measures
- Teacher Resource CD

Resource Links:

To learn more about First Author® Writing Curriculum, please visit:

<http://donjohnston.com/firstauthorcurriculum>

To watch Devin share his story about going to Six Flags with his class, please visit:

<https://vimeo.com/99064470>

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About Don Johnston Incorporated

Don Johnston (<http://donjohnston.com>) develops accessible reading and writing technologies to support K-12 and postsecondary students with cognitive, physical, and learning disabilities. Since 1980, the special



education company has partnered with literacy experts, AT specialists, SLPs, OTs, special education teachers, university researchers and DSS coordinators to improve access to learning and to increase reading and writing independence. Tens of thousands of students with dyslexia, autism, dysgraphia, down-syndrome and diverse learning challenges use our software and hardware devices to accommodate their learning needs in schools, the workforce and at home.

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