

## FOR-PD'S READING STRATEGY OF THE MONTH

# RAFT

January 2009



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"We said there warn't no home like a raft, after all. Other places do seem so cramped up and smothery, but a raft don't. You feel mighty free and easy and comfortable on a raft." ~ Huckleberry Finn, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

### RATIONALE

Huckleberry Finn and his buddy Jim had a good time on their raft as they travelled down the Mississippi river. The raft was more than just a way to help them navigate through the flood water; it was a retreat from the outside world and, representative of a peaceful time. Huck Finn's raft provided support for him and Jim to explore the river in a similar way that the RAFT literacy strategy lends itself to assisting creative and resourceful thinkers in exploring new points of view while retaining and synthesizing new information (Wormeli, 2005).

Writing to learn in the content areas provides new tools for exploring subject matter and allows for writing to be used as a tool for thinking (Daniels, Zemelman, & Steineke, 2007). The RAFT method, developed by Nancy Vandervanter, an English teacher from the Montana Writing Project (Santa, Havens, Nelson, Danner, Scalf, & Scalf, 1988), offers students a way to gain a better understanding of content topics and subjects as they write. RAFT, an acronym that stands for **Role**, **Audience**, **Format**, and **Topic**, is used as a post-reading strategy, or as part of the drafting process during writing instruction. RAFT is structured to help students organize their thoughts on a topic, elaborate on it, and create a thoughtful piece of writing that expresses their understanding (Strayer & Strayer, 2007).

RAFT writing assignments are written from various points of view (other than the writer's) and for audiences other than the teacher (Santa, et al., 1988). RAFT holds a great appeal to both teachers and students because of its differentiated instructional options. Assignments can be based on student interest and/or their abilities and leads students to incorporating the synthesis level of Bloom's Taxonomy into their writing (Strayer & Strayer, 2007).

### HOW TO USE THE STRATEGY

As you read above, RAFT is an acronym that stands for **Role**, **Audience**, **Format**, and **Topic**. Before beginning your instruction on this strategy, make sure that you are familiar with these elements.

- **Role of the Writer**

- Students choose a role they wish to emulate. Options may include a soldier, a chemist, a bird, a mayor, or a sheep. Writing from a different perspective helps students to develop critical thinking skills as they have to consider what would be important to the specific role they chose.

- **Audience**

- Writing for a specific audience also leads to high order thinking as the student will need to consider what the audience needs to know. An audience could be a person or a group of people and might include anything from zoo patrons to the United States Congress. Reviewing informal and formal types of writing will be key when discussing how to address a specific audience.

- **Format**

- The writing format should correspond with the role of the writer, the audience, and the topic. Teachers will want to step away from regular reports and essays. Let students work on writing formats such as lyrics, raps, letters, speeches, journals, fables, flyers, or even political cartoons.

- **Topic**

– Topics can stem from the research students are doing within a subject, themes that are being studied in school, or subtopics within a unit that needs more clarification or enrichment. The goal is to make sure the topic is not too broad (Strayer & Strayer, 2007).

**Steps to Teaching RAFT** (Strayer & Strayer, 2007; Santa, et al., 1988)

- Consider the objectives you wish to meet by using this type of writing assignment. Decide on the topic(s) you wish to cover and in what sequence you want to incorporate RAFT into your instruction.
- Direct instruction is best for explaining how to use RAFT. Model, explain the purpose, teach how to use it and when, and let your students “see and hear” you use the RAFT strategy. Describe the elements of RAFT and provide examples of each element. You may want to go over the topic first to assist them with understanding the roles, audience, and formats that would best match each other. An example of this would be the topic of protecting the rainforest, the role taken as an environmentalist, and the audience as a senator. The format could be a letter, a political cartoon, or a speech. The goal is to ensure that students understand that the role they choose, the audience, and the format must make sense in context to the topic.
- When working with the format element, remind students that they must consider the purpose or goal for how they present their information. Are they going to persuade, educate, sell, encourage, critique, or clarify? Teachers may want to have students create a statement of purpose that will assist them in narrowing down format options. Statements of purpose usually contain a strong verb that helps students focus on their writing.

**Example Purpose Statement:** My role as a veterinarian and my audience contains people that own cats. I want to clarify to them ways to help keep mites out of their cat’s ears.

- Have students complete a pre-writing chart of the RAFT elements. Students may decide on their own topic or the teacher may provide that element in advance. Remember to not be too broad when deciding upon a topic. (Dependent upon the skill level and experience with RAFT, the teacher may opt to choose the format of the assignment, as well.) Do remember that RAFT is considered a highly-motivational strategy when more choices are provided to students or if students decide on their own for all elements.
- Once students feel they are comfortable with their pre-writing chart, have students continue on with the assignment and begin their draft using the elements they chose. After drafting, teachers may desire for students to find a partner or small group to help each other review the work completed. (Some teacher may also have short meetings with each student on their work.) Finally, students can begin on their final draft and reflection of the process and what they learned.

**Check out the following links for examples and useful handouts.**



The image shows a blank RAFT Pre-writing Chart. At the top left, there is a logo for "Florida Online Reading Professional Development" with a small icon of a laptop. The title "RAFT Pre-writing Chart" is centered above a table. The table has four columns labeled "Role", "Audience", "Format", and "Topic". There are five rows of empty cells for data entry.

Role	Audience	Format	Topic

**Blank RAFT Pre-writing Chart**

 **General RAFT Pre-writing Chart**

Role	Audience	Format	Topic
Travel Agent	Travelers	Brochure	Sally visit...
Political/Political Figure	Employer	Resume	Highlights of a public figure
Advertiser	General Public	Advertisement	Selling an idea
Political Cartoonist	General Public	Political Cartoon	Political critique
Object (S.S. heart, book, ball)	Teacher	Poem	Expression of feelings to illustrate understanding
Math Concept	Student	Word Problem/Situation	Application of concept
Science Concept	Teacher	Journal Entry	Inform about evolution and concept
Writer	Reader	Fairy Tale	Inform on topic creatively
Game Designer	Classmates	Game Instructions	Clarification of concept
Editor	Newspaper Readers	Editorial	Critique of issue

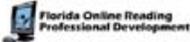
General RAFT Pre-writing Charts

 **RAFT Pre-writing Chart**

Subject Elementary Health—Health Consumer

Role	Audience	Format (purpose)	Topic
Doctor	Patients	Brochure (inform)	Helping other become good health consumers
Advertiser	Consumer	Advertisement (encourage)	Positive aspect of a health product
Chemist	Company	Product Label (inform)	Providing quality information on a health product
Toothpaste	Tooth	Jingle (entertain and inform)	Why it is important to use toothpaste
Consumer	Company	Letter (complain)	Unhappy about a product

RAFT Pre-writing Chart: Elementary Example

 **RAFT Pre-writing Chart**

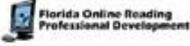
Subject Geography—Latin America History and Government

Role	Audience	Format (purpose)	Topic
Mayan Priest	Other Mayans	Stylis (inform)	Astronomical Observations
Caudillo (dictator)	Ministry	Speech (persuade)	To give allegiance to or with...
Francis Pizarra (conqueror)	Enraged Aztecs	Song (entourage)	Songs about conquering against the Aztecs
Artes Person	Artes Children	Fable or story (illustrate)	Artes class system
Historian	College Students	Article (inform)	Spanish Conquistadors and the destruction of the Incas Empire

RAFT Pre-writing Chart: Secondary Example

**ASSESSMENT**

Students may desire to self-evaluate their work after their initial draft and/or after the final draft. Teachers may consider using this work in a writing portfolio or notebook and rate them on a variety of assessment elements. The following rubric, adapted from Strayer and Strayer’s R.A.F.T. Rubric (2007), may be useful when assessing students on their RAFT assignments.

  
**RAFT Rubric**

Assignment Traits	Novice (0)	Basic (3)	Advanced (5)
<b>Relevance</b> —Is the information significant, current, and supported by text/evidence?	The information provided is not supported by the text/evidence.		The information is correct and is supported by text/evidence.
<b>Organization</b> —Did the writer select the writing to reflect the task chosen? Did the writer avoid the obvious choice?	Writer did not reflect on the task chosen and wrote unrelated or unrelated's ideas.	Writer's ideas reflected the chosen task, but was inconsistent through writing.	Writer's ideas were reflective of the chosen task and were consistent throughout writing.
<b>Focus</b> —Did the writer follow the task chosen? Did the writer provide enough text details?	Writer was not focused on the assignment or wrote very general.	Writer focused was consistently focused on assignment and wrote pertinent but not full.	Writer focused was consistently focused and wrote numerous and details were provided.
<b>Mechanics</b> —Did the writer avoid their usual errors in spelling, punctuation, capitalization, or grammar errors?	More than five mechanical errors were found.	Three or four mechanical errors were found.	No mechanical errors were found.
			<b>TOTAL</b>

Adapted from Graves, B. & Searles, J. (2008). Strategies for differentiating in the content areas. New York, NY: Scholastic.

## RESOURCES

### RAFT

The West Virginia Department of Education provides RAFT examples in the areas of science, math, social studies, and language arts.

<http://wvde.state.wv.us/strategybank/RAFT.html>

### Desert Unit RAFT

Teachers created this site to help their 3rd grade students have the opportunity to work on a RAFT activity. Example of a desert unit is provided.

<http://www.somers.k12.ny.us/intranet/reading/desertassign.html>

### RAFT Examples

The authors of this PDF document provide a variety of RAFT examples for elementary, middle, and high school subjects.

<http://www.leadandlearn.com/resources/custom/writing/WTL%20Processes%20and%20Products%20RAFT.pdf>

### Come Aboard a Raft!

Check out this site for an interactive, internet based RAFT application.

<http://www.geocities.com/writingprocess/raftchoices.htm>

## REFERENCES

Daniels, H., Zemelman, S., & Steineke, N. (2007). *Content-area writing: Every teacher's guide*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Santa, C. M., Havens, L., Nelson, M., Danner, M., Scaff, L., & Scaff, J. (1988). *Content reading including study systems: Reading, writing, and studying across the curriculum*. Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt.

Strayer, B. & Strayer, T. (2007). *Strategies for differentiating in the content areas*. New York, NY: Scholastic.

Wormeli, R. (2005). *Summarization in any subject: 50 techniques to improve student learning*. Alexandria, VA: Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development.

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