Guidelines for a Quiver of Arrows
Welcome to a Quiver of Arrows!

This guide will help you maximize your use of the Arrow, so keep this copy with your issues and remember to refer to it throughout the year.

Editorial note: When giving examples, we have either avoided gendered pronouns or we alternate their use by section.

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Reference materials

To aid you in exploring topics such as punctuation and grammar, Brave Writer recommends that you purchase a copy of *Nitty Gritty Grammar* and/or *More Nitty Gritty Grammar* by Edith H. Fine and Judith P. Josephson (Publisher: Ten Speed Press). You don’t need both. *More Nitty Gritty Grammar* alphabetizes the grammar/punctuation principles, making it an easy-to-use reference. These two books have very helpful explanations that are easily understood by children, but punctuation can be learned without them. If you feel confident in your own explanations or already have grammar reference books you like, simply ignore these recommendations. Both of these books are widely available online and in major bookstores.

Copywork and dictation practices

Passages included in each issue can be explored through four copywork and dictation practices. These practices are described in detail in these guidelines. Begin with copywork and progress to reverse dictation. Below is a step-by-step walk-through of several variations. Cycle through them for variety and challenge.
Brave Writer Principles to Guide Your Sessions

» Joy is the best teacher
» Look for the good
» Be curious, not critical
» Take pain seriously
» Make eye contact, sit close, smile
» Help helps
» Take breaks

Putting the Arrow into practice

» There is no required sequence for any group of Arrows. Each issue, focused on a specific novel, is a self-contained unit. You may use them in any order.

» Each Arrow lasts a month with weekly practices, if you follow it as designed. You are free to move more quickly or slowly, as suits your family.

» Read the targeted book aloud to your children, at a comfortable pace over the course of the month, finishing before the last week of the month. The weekly passages are in chronological order, so be sure to read past the week’s passage before using it for copywork and dictation. The week four passage is usually from the end of the book.
» You may print the Arrow or read it on a tablet. Both work. The passage sheets can be printed individually.

» Each week, read the passage with your child. Then take a look at the notes that go with the passage. These are addressed to you, the parent. Read them, understand them, paraphrase them to your child. In some cases, you may even read the notes directly to your child. Sometimes there is more information than your child is ready to absorb. That’s okay! The goal is to educate you as well, so that you will slowly develop a keen eye for what makes great writing!

› Why this passage: Explains why the particular passage makes a nice choice for copywork and dictation.

› What to note: Addresses the particular properties in the passage that help you see its literary power, notable punctuation, or specific grammatical value.

› How to teach this passage: Gives you tips on how to convey the information about the passage to your children.

» Each week’s passage can be explored in one of four ways. These are detailed in this set of guidelines. Be sure to read about how to implement them before attempting each one.

› Copywork

› French-style dictation (included each week)

› Dictation

› Reverse dictation

» The usual sequence for the weekly passage is to copy it first (copywork) early in the week, and then to revisit it using French-style dictation, dictation, or reverse dictation later in
the week. Do not put every passage through all four practices in a week. You'll beat them to death! That said, occasionally it is nice to use three or four practices with one passage in a week. It can build momentum and confidence for some kids! Just don’t overdo it.

» Copywork is the easiest way to engage a passage. It is important for kids to become comfortable with copywork before introducing the dictation practices.

» French-style dictation is a nice step toward full dictation.

» Reverse dictation can be a wonderful change of pace when a child’s hand is tired from a lot of writing in a week, or when the practices of copywork and traditional dictation become tedious.

» Explore the literary element of the month. Read it with your children and look for more examples of that element in the month’s read-aloud and other books you read.

» Once you have explored the literary element, plan a day to try the writing activity that goes with the literary element. These activities are not meant to be full month-long writing projects. They are small, single-day explorations (usually) that do not require revision, designed to give your kids a chance to experience the power of the literary element. The hope is that your children will like using it and one day, use it in their original writing!
Copywork and dictation

1. Copywork

Copywork is the act of reproducing in your own handwriting the passage selected for the week. Your student will look carefully back and forth between the presented passage and her paper, copying the passage word for word, punctuation mark for punctuation mark. The Arrow includes an easy-to-print single sheet with each week’s passage centered on the page. It is also helpful for children to select their own copywork passages that are meaningful to them. Use the Arrow passage one day and a passage chosen by your child on another day.

**Step 1—Print the passage.**

**Step 2—Put the printed page of the passage where the student can easily see it.**

Put the page in an easel document holder so that the passage is at eye level when your student copies it. Alternatively, lay the page on the table so it is easy for the student to read with minimal movement.

**Step 3—Choose a comfortable pencil with an eraser.**

**Step 4—Limit the length of the copywork practice.**

Ask your child to focus and attend to the passage. When attention flags, it’s time to stop. Try short intervals. Suggest that your child copy as much of the passage, as accurately as possible, in the predetermined time limit each day (anywhere from a minute up to five or six minutes). Then stop. Your child can resume where she left off the next time you work. Gradually lengthen this period as your child reports feeling comfortable.
Most passages in the *Arrow* are between one and four sentences—short enough to complete in one sitting. In the "How to teach the passage" sections of the guide you will occasionally find recommendations for breaking the passage into daily copywork. Those are only recommendations (and are not provided each week). Pay attention to what works well for your family. Encourage the habit of attention and care. A single sentence (or word) per day is a valid way to complete copywork, if needed. The goal isn’t quantity but focus and faithful reproduction.

Charlotte Mason, an education philosopher from Britain who is well-known in homeschool circles, recommends that if your child’s hand tires after a minute or so of writing, you modify the task: ask your child to write a single word or letter with care, and then be done. Five minutes is not a magic amount of time. If one minute works better than five or three, start there.

2. French-style dictation

When Julie Bogart lived in France as a college exchange student, she discovered that the French use a gradual method of dictation training for their students (of all ages—kindergarten through university). She adopted it for Brave Writer’s program and labels this strategy “French-style dictation” as a nod to their system.
The following method eases the transition from copywork to dictation. Each issue of the Arrow in a Quiver of Arrows provides you with weekly French-style dictation passages. Feel free to use ours or to create your own based on these models.

Step 1—Read the passage aloud.

The Quiver of Arrows monthly issues each include a separate page with a passage designed for French-style dictation for your child’s use. Print it. The passage on the page shows blank lines for words omitted, as well as blanks for certain punctuation marks. These words and punctuation marks are represented by blank lines. As you read the passage aloud, your child will read along on the page provided.

Step 2—Fill in the blanks.

When your child hears a word that is not on the page and sees a blank space, he will handwrite the word into the blank space to complete the sentence.

This practice trains your child to read, listen, and write all at once, but without overwhelming him with too many words and punctuation conventions to keep in mind at the same time. By using this method for dictation, you promote your child’s success in later full dictation efforts.

In the Quiver of Arrows, some of the French-style dictation passages also feature omitted punctuation. Your children will be exposed to dialogue quotation marks, for instance, and then they will have the chance to supply them in a French-style dictation passage. Blank lines for those marks are provided as clues to help your student pay attention to the need for punctuation.

One of the great benefits of French-style dictation is the ability to isolate homonyms in the context of real meaning. Additionally, this
method enables your students to practice capitalization of proper nouns and the starts of sentences.

Each issue of the Arrow included in the Quiver of Arrows includes four French-style dictation pages with corresponding keys. Use these or feel free to create your own to feature different words or punctuation.

3. Dictation

Dictation practiced regularly will teach punctuation and spelling more effectively than any other tool. The trick is to do it regularly—once or twice per month. If it becomes tedious, mix it up with copywork (with selections chosen by your child) and with reverse dictations (see method #4, below).

Step 1—Review the passage before dictation.

Read the passage aloud. Together, parent and student review challenging spelling words. Note the punctuation marks by naming them and pointing to them. This preparation can be done right before dictation.

Step 2—Set up the page.

On a clean sheet of lined paper, the student writes: name in the upper right corner; date underneath name; title of book, underlined; page number. Skip a line and indent.
Step 3—Read the passage.

» Parent reads the passage all the way through, slowly, emphasizing punctuation through intonation.

» Begin again, reading the first clause or several-word chunk (no more than three or four words).

» Ask your child to write the word chunk. Reread the chunk of text, if it’s helpful.

» Continue to the next chunk. When you finish a sentence, read it from the start one time through.

» Student reads along, checking to be sure he is satisfied with spelling and punctuation choices.

Step 4—Continue sentence by sentence.

Parent rereads sections, using clear intonations (slightly elevated for commas with a pause, definitively lower and final for periods, and so on).

Step 5—Conduct a final read-through.

Parent rereads entire passage with the student following along. Student makes any final adjustments.

Step 6—Correct the dictation.

Student

» compares work to original

» corrects any errors or omissions

» underlines any misspelled words and rewrites them at the bottom of the page correctly.
Step 7—Apply a rubric.

At the end, tally the number of punctuation mistakes and spelling errors. The goal is to make fewer than five errors per dictation. If there are more, shorten the passage for the next time.

Step 8—Celebrate and recreate.

As always, wind up your session with a game, a walk, teatime. Connect with joy.

Dictation practiced regularly will teach punctuation and spelling more effectively than any other tool. The trick is to do it regularly—once a week, once every other week. If it becomes tedious, mix it up with copywork (using quotations selected by the writer) and with reverse dictation (see next section).

4. Reverse dictation

In addition to copywork and French-style dictation practice, several of the issues in the Quiver of Arrows include reverse-dictation pages. Reverse dictation gives the student a chance to wield the red pen!

These passages are missing punctuation and indentation, and many of the words are misspelled. It's up to the student to locate the misspelled words, to underline them, and then to spell them correctly at the bottom of the page. Students should do their best to punctuate the entire passage (including capitalization, apostrophes, dialogue quotation marks, commas, end marks, and indentations for new paragraphs).
Reverse dictation is challenging for very young children so you want to limit how many errors they must find. Be sure to only ask them to notice misspellings or missing punctuation marks that they already know really well.

**Step 1—Prepare.**

Type the passage into a new document without punctuation, deliberately misspelling several words (choose ones that are likely to be tricky). Triple space and use a large font. Print.

**Step 2—Discuss the passage.**

Talk about the sorts of punctuation marks that were in the original passage. You might create a note card with a list:

- Periods
- Capital letters to start sentences
- Capital letters for proper nouns
- Commas
- Quotation marks indicating dialogue
- Indentations
- Contractions and possessives

As your child edits the page, she can refer back to the list to be sure she has checked for each category.
Step 3—Execute.

Student uses pencil or colored pen to correct the passage. His job is to:

» underscore all misspellings and rewrite them correctly at the bottom of the page
» insert proper punctuation
» be sure proper nouns and the first words of each sentence are capitalized
» underscore any titles
» indicate the need to begin a new paragraph with a pilcrow—that’s this symbol: ¶

Caveat: When you begin reverse dictation, it may be too overwhelming to eliminate all punctuation. If your student understands end marks only, then leave the commas in. If the child is used to capitalizing first words in a sentence, but unfamiliar with identifying proper nouns, then leave the capitals in for the proper nouns, and only leave off the initial capital letters of sentences. As with all practices, incremental steps of challenge are preferable.

Practical tips for reviewing the reverse dictation exercise

Step 1—Parent reads student’s work.

Before showing the original passage to the student, sit together and read it.
Step 2—Total the missed punctuation marks or misspellings.

If there is a punctuation mark or misspelling overlooked, mention that there are still X number of remaining errors. (So for instance, the parent might say: “There are three errors you missed.”) Student rereads the whole passage, looking for those errors.

Step 3—Support the discovery process.

If a student can’t find one of the overlooked errors, narrow the scope of the investigation to a single line. Put a check in the right or left margin of the line on the same side as the missing punctuation mark or misspelling. The student will only search within that line, examining each word or punctuation choice.

Step 4—Narrow the scope.

If the student needs another clue, parent reveals whether the issue is with spelling or punctuation. Student searches the line again.

Step 5—Identify the error.

If the student still can’t find the mistake, parent runs a squiggly line under the exact location. Student makes correction on the spot. (This is a great moment for a conversation, for modeling the way a comma might work better than the period currently in that space, for instance.)

Step 6—Another option for the final step.

Student compares corrected page to original, locates the differences, and makes corrections.

Step 7—Play the penny game!

For every correct correction, student gets a penny! Give one for identifying a misspelling and another for rewriting it correctly. Give
one for each corrected punctuation mark or addition of a missing punctuation mark. Give one for each corrected capital letter.

This step-by-step editing process does more to help the learner internalize the lessons the passage has to teach than if the parent were simply making the corrections. Take the time to make reverse dictation a real learning opportunity.
Literary elements

The Arrow features a literary element each month. In that section, you will learn about some of the elements of writing craft that enhance the power of the writing. Your student can use these same elements to improve her own prose! Keep the name of the element on a white board throughout the month as a reminder to “pay attention” to all the ways it gets used in everyday life (from billboards to supermarket flyers to cartoons to radio ads).

You are free to pick any day of the month to learn about the literary element. If you decide to read about it early in the month, you give your family more time to notice it in the book and in other writing throughout the month.

Writing activity

Each month the Arrow includes one writing exercise, game, or tip—often related to the literary element. Most of these are meant to take a day or two at most, and aren’t intended to be revised (unless otherwise indicated). Enjoy them. Play with them! Pick a day without other writing projects so that it stays light and easy. It is also possible to do the activity collaboratively (in many cases) so that everyone works together—you and your child(ren)—as a team.