PREDICTABLE CHARTS

An Effective Strategy to Engage and Impact Learners

Erin McClure

Discover how predictable charts can support students with reading, writing, speaking, and listening in kindergarten, first-grade, or special education classrooms. Through this article, learn the steps to implementing this weeklong supportive, interactive, and engaging instructional practice.

Shared Writing

Providing a variety of literacy experiences supports readers and writers in their understanding of how language works, how we decode and make sense of texts, and how to communicate effectively (Teale & Sulzby, 1986). As part of a balanced literacy approach, shared writing is a collaborative process in which the teacher and students work together to plan and create a text (McCarrier, Pinnell, & Fountas, 2000). Typically based on a content area study or children's literature, the teacher facilitates the development of ideas and encourages specific language while scribing for students (McCarrier et al., 2000). Through shared writing, teachers can provide instruction on print concepts, phonemic awareness, phonics, and high-frequency words within the context of a community-generated text (Hammerberg, 2001; Tompkins, 2010). Shared writing can strengthen the work students are doing during independent writing and reading (McCarrier et al., 2000).

Predictable Charts

Introduced by Patricia Cunningham (1979), predictable charts are a shared writing experience for early elementary classrooms. Predictable charts encourage active participation while increasing students' understanding of sound-symbol relationships, sentence structures, authorship, and collaboration.

With predictable charts, teachers model ways to generate ideas, encourage student talk, highlight high-frequency words, teach new spelling patterns, and build reading fluency (Hall & Williams, 2001). By carefully observing students during independent writing and analyzing student work, teachers can plan teaching points to demonstrate new conventional writing skills or strengthen current writing abilities during the creation of predictable charts. As a structured language, reading, and writing activity, predictable charts support students' independent reading and writing.

With teacher and peer scaffolds, all children can participate in the learning experience and collective composition of the text even if they have limited literacy experiences or limited English proficiency (Hudelson, 1988; Long, 1983). Periodically implementing predictable charts—along with writing workshop, interactive writing, and other shared writing—capitalizes on the understanding that listening, speaking, reading, and writing abilities are reciprocal processes (Anderson & Briggs, 2011). A predictable chart sequence is shown in Table 1.

In Action

On Monday, students in Ms. Smith's kindergarten class gather close to the blank chart posted at the front of the room. Ms. Smith selects a familiar topic.

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Table 1   Predictable Chart Sequence

Day 1	• Introduce chart theme/topic.
	• Introduce sentence starter and model sentence.
	• Record dictated sentences related to the theme/topic for half the class.
	• Highlight punctuation, high-frequency words, spelling patterns, sentence structure, etc.
	• Lead class in fluency practice with the chart.
Day 2	• Lead class in rereading the chart.
	• Record dictated sentences related to theme/topic for remainder of the class.
	• Highlight punctuation, high-frequency words, spelling patterns, sentence structure, etc.
	• Orchestrate fluency practice with the chart.
Day 3	• Highlight spelling features, sentence structures, and punctuation.
	• Prewrite a sentence from the chart on a sentence strip and cut apart so each word is separate.
	• Select a student to arrange the sentence in the correct order. Encourage class to check the sentence using the chart.
	• Repeat 2–3 times with different sentences.
	• Encourage fluency practice with the chart.
Day 4	• Select a sentence from the chart and write each word of the sentence on a separate piece of construction paper.
	• Select a student to hold each paper with the words out of sequence.
	• Ask students not holding a word to help arrange the sentence in the correct order.
	• Encourage the class to check sentence using the chart.
	• Repeat 2–3 times with different sentences from the chart.
	• Lead class in fluency practice with the chart.
Day 5	• Type each student's sentence in a large font with large spaces between words.
	• Cut each word apart and place the words at the top of students' workspace.
	• Encourage students to arrange their sentence in the correct order and paste the words onto provided paper.
	• Ask students to illustrate their sentence.
	• Collect pages and compile to make a class book.
	• Share the book.
	• Add the book to the class library.

This week, the community is experiencing a polar vortex and thus the coldest days the city has ever experienced. Ms. Smith decided the sentence stem for the chart will be "In the cold, …" She shares the topic and facilitates a brief discussion about what students wear, do, see, and feel in the cold. Ms. Smith actively engages students in the language experience before writing to activate and capitalize on their prior knowledge.

Ms. Smith models her sentence orally: "In the cold, I can see my breath." She repeats the phrase and counts the words. "My sentence has eight words. I need to make sure I write all eight words in my sentence," she shares. On the chart, she writes, "In the cold, I can see my breath." As she writes *in* and *the*, she references the word wall and reminds students that these are high-frequency words they have studied and should know in a snap. Ms. Smith chose the predictable frame for students to have more practice with specific high-frequency words. When all the children in the class use the same structure for their dictated sentences, the children who cannot make up sentences on their own can use the chosen pattern and find success (Hall & Williams, 2001).

Ms. Smith begins to write *cold*, but before she writes, she says the beginning sound for *cold* several times: "/c/, /c/, /c/. *Cold* begins with the sound /c/. I know that sound can be spelled with *c* like *camera* and *can*. I also know it can be spelled with a *k* like *kite* or *kitten*. Let's look around the room to see if we have anything that will help us." The children look around and spot the word *cold* on their weather graph. They excitedly point out the word, and Ms. Smith begins writing as the children spell the word aloud. Ms. Smith continues writing her sentence, emphasizing high-frequency words. The class rereads Ms. Smith's sentence to internalize its sentence structure. Ms. Smith records her name in parentheses after the sentence to show ownership.

Now that the model sentence has been reviewed and discussed, Ms. Smith selects the next author by drawing a name out of a bin. The children wait expectantly to see if their name is chosen. "Justin," Ms. Smith asks, "are you ready with your sentence?" He enthusiastically nods his head. "In the cold, I wear mittens," he shares. Ms. Smith asks the class to repeat Justin's sentence and count the number of words in his sentence. "In the cold, I wear mittens," repeats the class as they hold up a finger for each word. Ms. Smith continues to stress the number of words since she had previously noticed students are leaving out words in their writing. She turns to the chart and begins to write Justin's sentence. As she writes, she continues to highlight the high-frequency words and stresses the beginning and ending sounds of *wear*. After Justin's sentence, Ms. Smith writes Justin's name in parentheses as he smiles from ear to ear.

Ms. Smith draws the next student's name. "Erica, are you ready?" Erica shares, "In the cold, I shiver!" Before Ms. Smith writes Erica's sentence, she asks the students about the punctuation for Erica's sentence. "What does the sentence need to start with?" Ms. Smith then records Erica's sentence in a different color so the students can easily see the difference between each of the sentences on the chart (see Figure 1). When Ms. Smith gets to the end of the sentence, she asks Erica what type of punctuation she wants at the end of

Figure 1   Class Predictable Chart
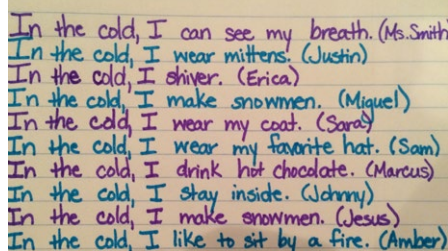
her sentence. "An exclamation point!" shouts Erica. Ms. Smith continues to choose names and ask students to provide their sentence using the beginning phrase "In the cold, …" to form a complete sentence. She records the sentences for half the class. As she progresses through recording the sentences, she highlights high-frequency words, spelling patterns, punctuation, and spacing, stressing things she noticed students struggling with during independent writing. After the sentences have been recorded for half the class, Ms. Smith selects a student to use a pointer and point to the words as the class chorally reads the sentences.

On Day 2, Ms. Smith repeats the Day 1 process with the other half of the class. Ms. Smith continues emphasizing features and structures targeted to needs she observed in students' independent writing. Ms. Smith is always amazed at her students' engagement in this process. Before trying predictable charts, Ms. Smith thought students would never sit through the dictation of so many sentences. However, the first time she tried it, she was pleasantly surprised by how her students actively listened to their peers, thoughtfully contributed, and felt a sense of pride in their involvement.

On Day 3, Ms. Smith reminds students about certain spelling patterns, sentence structures, and punctuation before the class chorally reads the chart. For fluency practice, the class rereads

the chart. Ms. Smith then selects a name from her bin. "Chris," she asks, "can you select a sentence to read?" Chris looks at the chart and finds his best friend's sentence. He loudly reads, "In the cold, I drink hot chocolate. Marcus." "Thank you," says Ms. Smith. She pulls the next name and asks Larissa to read a sentence. Larissa chooses to read her own.

Ms. Smith invites several other students to read a sentence from the chart. Ms. Smith has prewritten several sentences on a sentence strip and cut the strip apart so each word is separate. Cutting apart the sentence helps children who have trouble tracking print with the concept of word (Hall & Williams, 2001, p. 4). Ms. Smith selects a name from the bin and calls Miguel to come and arrange a sentence. She hands Miguel the cut-apart sentence, and he places each word in the pocket chart. Miguel rearranges the words until the sentence is displayed correctly. Ms. Smith calls on two more volunteers to arrange two additional sentences. If a pocket chart is not available, words can be placed on an easel, an interactive whiteboard or dry-erase board ledge, or taped to the wall. The class chorally reads the chart one more time to end the lesson.

On Day 4, Ms. Smith has prewritten several sentences word by word on construction paper. Each piece of paper has one word. Ms. Smith displays the predictable chart and shares that today, students will be "sentence builders." A cheer erupts from the class. They love Sentence Builders; they think of it as a game and always try to get faster and faster.

Ms. Smith shuffles the papers that contain the first sentence and calls up six students. She hands each student a paper with one word on it. She calls up Kim and hands her the paper that has "Kim" written on it. Kim and her six peers stand at the front of the room, proudly showing their words. The other

students look intently at the words and begin to think about how to unscramble the sentence. Ms. Smith asks for a volunteer to move the first person to the correct place. Hands shoot up. "Carolina, who needs to move to make the sentence make sense?" Ms. Smith asks. Carolina tells Joshua to move to the beginning of the row since his paper has the word "In" written on it. Joshua moves to the front. As a class, they read the new sentence. "Is that correct?" Ms. Smith asks the class. "Nooo!" they exclaim. "All right, who can help?" Hands shoot up again. Ms. Smith continues to facilitate movement as students think about syntax and punctuation to re-create the sentence correctly.

The class completes Sentence Builders with three more sentences. To build fluency, they read through the chart one more time.

After school, Ms. Smith types each of the students' sentences in a large font with exaggerated spaces. After they are printed, she cuts each sentence apart and places them at the top of each student's desk.

On Day 5, students enter the classroom, unpack their bags, and set to work on their sentences. Ms. Smith has placed a piece of paper at each child's space. The students grab their cut-apart sentence and begin putting it in order on their sheet of paper. After

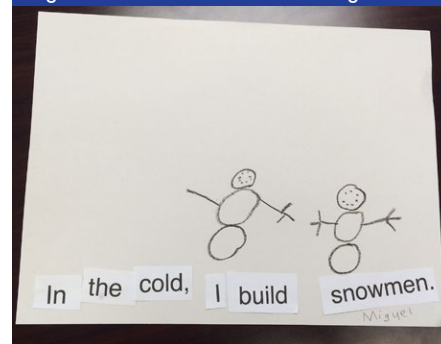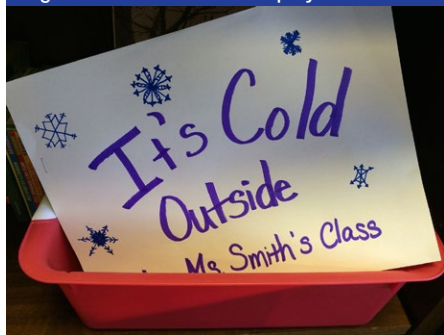Figure 2   Illustrated Student Page

Figure 3   Class Book Displayed

double-checking their sentence with the chart, they begin gluing their sentence at the bottom of their page. Once the sentence is set, they illustrate their sentence (see Figure 2).

As students complete their illustrations, Ms. Smith collects them. When all of the pages are completed, Ms. Smith takes the cover page she created and attaches the pages together (see Figure 3). During shared writing time, Ms. Smith excitedly displays the new class book. She reads the first page, which contains her sentence, in order to model fluent reading. As she turns each page, she invites the author/illustrator of that page to read his or her sentence and briefly share

about the illustration. The students are so proud of their work. After everyone has read their page, Ms. Smith proudly shares, "As with all of our class books, I am going to add this one to our classroom library so you may choose to read it during self-selected reading time." The students are excited to read their work.

Since students have had so many successful opportunities to read the sentences, they can fluently read this text, written at a higher level than many of the students can read.

Benefits of Predictable Charts

Throughout the process of creating predictable charts, students have opportunities to use specific language about a topic, gain confidence in their literacy abilities, appreciate contributions from classmates, experience sound-symbol relationships, try out new ideas, and see the interrelatedness of reading, writing, speaking, and listening (Hall & Williams, 2001). The process also builds fluency through multiple readings. Predictable charts provide an engaging way to expand

literacy skills while addressing the demands of numerous state standards. This occasional shared writing experience can support the day-to-day benefits of writing workshop, reading workshop, and word work. Happy charting!

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