

Frequently Asked Questions about **EmPOWER™**

Is EmPOWER just for writing?

Not at all. EmPOWER is comprised of several component strategies that can be used to guide and support a number of critical academic skills, including: analyzing and breaking down complex tasks, following written directions, planning and organizing ideas for oral expression, visualizing information, taking organized notes, studying and retaining information, paraphrasing, and summarizing.

Teachers can use elements of EmPOWER across the school day to accomplish several listening, speaking, reading, writing, and higher-level thinking objectives necessary for students to be college- and career-ready.

Can teachers use other materials and teaching approaches with EmPOWER?

Absolutely! Teachers are not limited to using EmPOWER over other methods; they can easily integrate other teaching methods and approaches, weaving EmPOWER into their lessons where they see fit to guide students with the range of skills required for academic writing.

Is EmPOWER just for low performers?

No. EmPOWER is proven to work with a wide range of learners and learning styles – from students in need of specialized instruction, to typically developing students, to gifted and advanced students in urban, rural, and private schools.

Used across a school community, EmPOWER gives teachers and students a common language for academic writing, which means that ALL students receive consistent instruction and support no matter where they are learning – in classrooms, in small groups, or in more specialized learning environments.

Research shows that struggling, typical, and advanced writers all make gains when using EmPOWER.

Is EmPOWER a scripted, pre-packaged program?

Not really. By design, EmPOWER structures the dialogue between teachers and students by revealing the internal dialogue writers use to “talk themselves through” the complex task of composing.

With EmPOWER, teachers pose 10 questions to students, with each question designed to prompt students to make conscious choices about how they will go about crafting their text and what strategies they might use. These 10 questions are typically posed in a “fixed” order (because writing is a process), but ensuing class discussions are far from rote or scripted.

Rather, they promote the development of metacognition and critical thinking needed to guide mindful writing, and they allow students to recognize precisely where they are “stuck” so they can seek just-right supports from teachers and peers when they need it.

Does EmPOWER take instructional decisions away from teachers?

Not at all. Teachers design their own curriculum goals and objectives, drawing on state, district, and/or school-level guidelines. EmPOWER gives teachers tools and methods that help them meet their own unique instructional objectives.

The goal is not to teach EmPOWER; it’s to use EmPOWER to teach. Teachers are in full control of what content gets taught in their classrooms and the complexity of their writing assignments.

How is EmPOWER different from everything else out there?

EmPOWER is unique in so many ways!

- EmPOWER is a teaching method that incorporates routines and concrete strategies. It’s neither a curriculum nor a pre-packaged program. Teachers have a lot of flexibility in how they introduce and use EmPOWER within their own curriculum.
- EmPOWER is designed to guide the process of writing rather than specific writing tasks. Students can use EmPOWER to tackle any writing assignment, whether it’s a letter, a persuasive piece, a book report, a biography, or an essay requiring literary analysis. While EmPOWER was initially developed to support only expository genres of writing, we have since adapted the routine so teachers and students can use it for narrative writing as well. Many of its component strategies apply to all genres of writing – even poetry!
- EmPOWER can be used in all grades and all content areas. All students need to learn and internalize a process for reading and understanding their assignments, generating and organizing ideas, capturing those ideas in text, and reflecting on and refining their language choices.
- Professional development in EmPOWER is research-based and on-going. Like all good teaching, our training follows a gradual release of responsibility model: I DO IT → WE DO IT → Y’ALL DO IT → YOU DO IT.
- A strong research base lies behind every component of EmPOWER and the method as a whole.

I’ve heard it’s a lot of work for teachers to implement EmPOWER.

It can be. Change in any instructional practice takes conscious effort, but research clearly shows that teachers are willing to work hard at using new methods when three conditions are present: 1) those methods make their jobs easier, 2) those methods improve student performance, and 3) teachers are sufficiently supported by their administrators in making those changes.

It's always easier to adopt new methods and teaching routines with the support of close colleagues, which is why school-wide implementation is the most effective model of training. Teachers often report that having a common language and set of teaching strategies among school staff is one of the most immediate outcomes of learning EmPOWER.

We offer teachers intensive professional development and job-embedded guidance to support implementation over time, and our trainers are always available via e-mail or phone to provide individual support.

I've heard EmPOWER is expensive. Is it?

Yes, and no. Implementing any new instructional approach for something as multifaceted and challenging as academic writing takes a big commitment on the part of everyone -- a school, a district and its teachers. Some of that commitment is financial (training fees and materials), some is logistical (freeing up teacher schedules so they can receive training outside of the classroom), and some is personal (teacher time and a willingness to reflect on and evolve instructional practices).

Having worked with schools for many years, we know what's needed in terms of training and support to get results. We also know that training can be structured in a variety of ways, and we collaboratively design training and implementation plans that align with each school or district's unique scheduling needs. In doing so, we look for ways to minimize costs and maximize benefits.

The biggest expense is incurred in the first year, when the goal is to introduce EmPOWER and guide its implementation. Costs typically decrease in subsequent years as schools shift into models of support designed to sustain capacity. Funds from Title I, professional development budgets, materials budgets, and school improvement grants can all be used to fund EmPOWER.

We are looking to partner with schools and document cost savings from reductions in special education services and grade repetition following adoption of EmPOWER.

EmPOWER has been around for twenty years. Is it outdated?

No. EmPOWER has continued to evolve during its many years of development. We have meticulously sought feedback from individual students, teachers, specialists, teacher teams, and schools regarding its design, and we have made on-going adjustments along the way.

We continue to develop new insights about where and how EmPOWER fits within a balanced literacy curriculum that instructs students in a range of writing genres.

Every aspect of EmPOWER is research-based and is aligned with Common Core State Standards and individual state standards.