

The Old Schoolhouse

The Magazine for Homeschool Families

wrote this about *The Stack the Deck Writing Program . . .*

“*Stack the Deck* is a complete, seamless, structured curriculum for all learners in all grades. It is both teacher friendly and child friendly.”

“Try *Stack the Deck*. It’s a great deal for the home school family.”

Here’s the complete review:

The *Stack the Deck Writing Program* began as a dream of a couple of high school English teachers, Bob Cahill and Herb Hrebic, who were frustrated with the writing skills of their students. Their desire was to “stack the deck” for student success. What was born from these early discussions is a fabulous system for teaching writing to students in Grades 1-12.

Stack the Deck is a complete, seamless, structured curriculum for all learners in all grades. It is both teacher friendly and child friendly. Let’s take a look at this great product.

The titles of the available levels are creative: *Explore the Deck* is for grades 1-2, *Discover the Deck* for grades 2-3, *Check the Deck* for levels 3-4, *Flip the Deck* for levels 4-5, *Tap the Deck* for levels 5-6, *Open the Deck* for levels 6-7, *Split the Deck* for levels 7-8, *Cut the Deck* for levels 8-9, *Stack the Deck* for levels 9-12, *Fan the Deck* for levels 10-12, and *Master the Deck*, a remedial program, for grades 9-12.

Each level consists of a teacher guide and student workbook. Other products available from this company are an excellent booklet for high schoolers called *How to Take an Essay Exam* and a clever set of posters to remind children of some of the fundamentals of the program.

There are so many writing programs out there. What makes this unique? The many user-friendly features make it stand out in the array of writing approaches. As a professional writer myself, I have a passion for teaching writing, as well as a critical eye for writing programs. *Stack the Deck* impressed me.

Let me first tell you about the teacher labor-saving devices. Every assignment, beginning with *Check the Deck*, begins with a scoring rubric. It is critical when teaching writing that a student knows what is expected. Obviously, this does not apply to a free wheeling creative writing or poetry class, but for other writing assignments, the scoring rubric tells the student what is required, then gives a means of measuring whether those requirements have been met. The rubrics are in the teacher guide and will take much guesswork out of writing assignments.

Next are brainstorming sheets called **Think Sheets**. These are guides to help the student *think* through the piece before writing. They give specific ideas and help to enable the student to create a **meatier piece of writing**.

After students complete a first draft, they get a **SOS Sheet**. This is a revision technique that allows the teacher to communicate to the student specific areas of weakness and offer concrete suggestions. For example, the teacher might note that the composition began with a weak opening and offer suggestions to strengthen that area.

Finally, there are **Checklist Sheets** to allow the student to assess whether they met their objectives in the writing assignment. Students can “critique” each other’s work, or use this to fine-tune their own projects.

In my observations, many home schooling parents start to panic about writing skills around 3rd or 4th grade, so let’s take a look at the program for this age group to give you an inside look at what you get. This level is called *Check the Deck* and has 8 units. In unit one, students practice their describing skills and learn about colorful words, simple sentence combining and punctuating. Unit two discusses imaginative problem solving and teaches personification. Students are introduced to what the authors call “glue words,” such as *before*, *after*, and *when*, which help the student to write transitions. In unit three, students study reporting and turn oral language into writing. Students continue to hone this skill in unit four where they learn persuasive writing. Here the major writing assignment is to write a persuasive letter to parents to argue in favor of getting a new pet. Unit five features narration and the student writes a personal narrative about his/her worst accident. In unit six, students try explaining something, such as how to wash a dog or a cat. In unit seven the student turns to writing about literature. They read *Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day* and practice the skills of predicting and retelling. Finally, in unit eight the student chooses an interesting topic and learns to write a research report. In this one level alone, **students practice and master** description, imaginative writing, persuasion, narration, explanation, literary analysis, and research skills.

What about the upper levels? In *Fan the Deck*, which is intended for advanced high school students in grades 10-12, students learn to write a definition paper (popular in college Freshman English Classes), an analysis paper, a process paper, a comparison/contrast paper, a college application letter, an argumentative paper, a problem/solution paper, and more. **Each project gives the student concrete directions and examples.**

Try *Stack the Deck*. It’s a great deal for the home school family.

--Product Review by: Christine Field, Senior Correspondent, *The Old Schoolhouse Magazine*.

<http://www.thehomeschoolmagazine.com/reviews/reviews/php?rid=1216>

The Stack the Deck Writing Program

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10 Great Reasons to Buy *Stack the Deck* Composition Books

1. Make learning “enjoyable” and build self-esteem with oral language activities. Your children will write their own sniglets, create new verbs, play with idioms . . . Want to know what a **sniglet** is? Give us a call. Ever hear of a **ZRBTT**????
2. Use a child friendly vocabulary to teach sentence writing skills. These **common sense words** will help you teach your children to revise—*guaranteed*.
3. **Help** your children include more details by using journalistic questions to **expand**.
4. Provide **practical** activities (mini-lessons) **before** each prompt to help them include similes, personification, colorful words, etc. in their writing.
5. Include simple strategies to help writers identify and correct **common mistakes**, e.g., fragments and run-ons. You’ll love our **I BELIEVE THAT** tip!
6. Teach the major modes of writing: narration, description, exposition, persuasion, and occasionally some literary analysis papers.
7. Follow a **step-by-step process** for each writing assignment.
8. Include **grading sheets** for each major writing prompt to make your job **easier**.
9. Help writers remain “focused” by providing specially designed think sheets as a **prewriting activity**.
10. Provide **practical revision strategies** to help writers identify repetitious sentence beginnings, “I,” “I,” “And then,” “And Then,” “The,” “The,” etc. or shift in tenses from present to past back to present, plus . . .
Your children will learn to revise using our famous **SOS sheet**.
11. Support the **National Council of Teachers of English** Research Findings in writing.
12. **Reasonably priced** composition books for all levels.

(Okay, there are more than 10 reasons. We fibbed.)

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