Effective Writing Instruction

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Students’ Writing Is Not What It Should Be

It was a dark and stormy night.
Some Examples Solidify This Point

“I am the best they is in English.”

“Pavlov studied the salvation of dogs.”

“Galileo was one half-Italian, one-half French, and one-half English.”

“Poetry is when every line starts with a capital letter and doesn’t reach the right side of the page.”
WHY IS THIS THE CASE?
WHILE SOME SCHOOLS DO AN EXCELLENT JOB TEACHING WRITING

IN MOST SCHOOLS:

- STUDENTS DO LITTLE WRITING.
- LITTLE TIME IS SPENT TEACHING WRITING.
- WRITING IS NOT A MAJOR ASPECT OF THE CURRICULUM.
- TEACHERS INDICATE THEIR PRESERVICE PREPARATION IS INADEQUATE AND THEY ARE NOR PARTICULARLY POSITIVE ABOUT THEIR INSERVICE PREPARATION.
A Quote By William Ward, the Novelist, Provides Direction:

The good teacher explains.

The superior teacher demonstrates.

The great teacher inspires.

WE WANT TEACHERS AND SCHOOLS WHO INSPIRE OUR CHILDREN TO BE THE BEST WRITERS THEY CAN BE.
Promoting Students’ Writing

- Write
- Teach
- Support
- Connect
- Create
Write

Increase how much students write

– 12 percentile jump
Action Steps

- Students spend a minimum of an hour per day on writing
  - At least 30 minutes dedicated to teaching strategies, techniques, and skills
  - The remaining 30 minutes should be used for writing practice
- Integrate writing practice into other content area instruction to address time constraints
Action Steps

1. Help students understand the different purposes of writing

2. Expand students concept of audience
Action Steps

- Extended opportunities for writing
- Writing for real audiences
- Engaging in cycles of planning, translating, and reviewing
- Personal responsibility and ownership
- Creation of a supportive writing environment

– 16 percentile jump
Teach – Writing Strategies

- Involves explicitly and systematically teaching students strategies for planning, revising, and/or editing text.
- Instruction is designed to teach students to use these strategies independently.
- Writing strategies range from processes such as brainstorming (which can be applied across genres) to strategies designed for specific types of writing, such as stories or persuasive essays.

- 35 percentile jump
Action Steps

1. Teach students strategies for the various components of the writing process
2. Gradually release writing responsibility from the teacher to the student
3. Guide students to select and use appropriate writing strategies
4. Encourage students to be flexible in their use of the components of the writing process
# Examples of Strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Specific Technique</th>
<th>How Students Can Use the Technique</th>
<th>Grade Range</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Describe</td>
<td>sensory details</td>
<td>Use their five senses, as applicable:</td>
<td>K–3</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>o What did you <em>see</em>? How did it <em>look</em>?</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>o What sounds did you <em>hear</em>?</td>
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<td>o What did you <em>touch</em>? How did it <em>feel</em>?</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>o What could you <em>smell</em>?</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>o What did you <em>taste</em>?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Persuade/analyze</td>
<td>TREE</td>
<td>As they write:</td>
<td>2–3</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>o <strong>Tell</strong> what they believe (State a topic sentence.)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>o Provide three or more <strong>Reasons</strong> (Why do I believe this?)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>o <strong>End</strong> it (Wrap it up right.)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>o <strong>Examine</strong> (Do I have all my parts?)</td>
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Suspend Judgment
- Consider each side before taking a position. Brainstorm ideas for and against the topic.
  - Did I list ideas for each side? If not, do this now.
  - Can I think of anything else? Try to write more!
  - Another point I haven’t considered yet is...

Take a Side
- Read your ideas. Decide which side you believe in or which side can be used to make the strongest argument. Place a + on the side that shows your position.

Organize Ideas
- Choose ideas that are strong and decide how to organize them for writing.
  - Put a star next to the ideas you want to use. Choose at least ___.
  - Choose at least ___ arguments to refute.
  - Number your ideas in the order you will use them.

Plan More as You Write
- Continue to plan as you write. Use all four essay parts in DARE.
  - Develop your Topic Sentence
  - Add Supporting Ideas
  - Reject Arguments on the Other Side
  - End with a Conclusion
Self-Regulation

1. Goal-Setting
2. Self-Monitoring
   - Self-Assessment
   - Self-Recording
3. Self-Reinforcement
4. Self-Instructions/Self-Statements

Take a deep breath. Good ideas will come.
Self-Statements

1. Problem Definition
   - “What is my purpose for writing?”

2. Focusing Attention & Planning
   - “Take a deep breath, good ideas will come.”
   - “I need to make a plan.”

3. Strategy
   - “I can use TWA to help me find good reasons and explanations.”

4. Self-Evaluating & Error Correcting
   - “Have I followed all the steps? Let me check. Oops, I missed one; That’s okay, I can revise.”

5. Coping & Self-Control
   - “Okay, I need to go slow and take my time. I can do this.”

6. Self-Reinforcement
   - “Hurray! I’m done!; I’m getting better at this!”
Teach – Transcription Skills

Explicitly teaching handwriting and spelling

– 21 percentile jump
Teach – Sentence Construction Skills

- Involves teaching students to construct more complex and sophisticated sentences through exercises such as sentence combining where two or more basic sentences are combined into a single sentence.

- 19 percentile jump
EXAMPLE

SENTENCE COMBINING

Involves teaching students to construct more complex and sophisticated sentences by combining two or more basic sentences are combined into single sentence.
Jill wanted to go swimming.
Alphonso wanted to play baseball.

(but)

Jill wanted to go swimming, but Alphonso wanted to play baseball.
HOW TO TEACH

1. Show how to do it, and establish why it is important (TEACH)

2. Provide students with assistance until they can apply the skill correctly and independently (GUIDED PRACTICE)

3. Ask students to apply the skill when they write (APPLY)

Doing this once is not enough
TEACH – Vocabulary for Writing

- Tier 2 words
- Genre Vocabulary
- Content Words
- 28 Percentile Point Jump
Explicitly teaching students the basic structure of different types of text

- 21 percentile jump

Have Students Emulate

Model Text  - 10 percentile jump
Support – Clear Writing Goals

Involves assigning students specific goals for the written product they are to complete.

– 28 percentile jump
Support - Peers Working Together to Compose

- Involves students working together to plan, draft, and/or revise their compositions.

- 31 percentile jump
Support - Pre-Writing Activities

- Involves students engaging in activities (such as using a graphic organizer) designed to help them generate or organize ideas for their composition.

21 percentile jump
Support – Assessment

Assessment included adult feedback to students, peer feedback, self-assessment, and progress monitoring.

Feedback
– 29 percentile jump

Self-Assessment
– 18 percentile jump
CAVEATS

1. Too much feedback can be debilitating to students.
2. Feedback should celebrate students’ accomplishments and direct attention in a constructive manner to the aspects of text most in need of revision.
3. Feedback may not always lead to instruction, but students will need instruction if they are to address some issues identified through feedback.
4. Feedback for each paper should not be treated as singular and unique event.
Support – Word Processing

Involves having students use word processing and related software to write.

– 18 percentile jump
Use writing to support understanding of what is read: 18 percentile jump

Connect writing and reading instruction: 18 percentile jump

Use writing to support Learning: 13 percentile jump
Informational text that emphasized understanding and communication about subject matter content (e.g., summarizing information, presenting information in reports, connecting new and old information, comparing and contrasting ideas, describing processes, explaining why or how a process operates, or creating analogies)
Other Writing Activities

**Building an argument** (e.g., bringing evidence together to support a claim or hypotheses or stating an opinion about subject matter material)

**Producing a narrative** (e.g., creating a story or poem to illustrate or expand subject matter content or creating a word problem to illustrate an example of a specific mathematics principle)

**Creating a graphical representation of content** (e.g., using notetaking, graphic organizers, or mind maps as a tool for remembering, understanding, or analyzing content, but with little or no construction of new connected text)
CREATE a Pleasant Writing Environment

Create a writing environment where students are free to take risks, their work and effort are appreciated, and writing is valued.
Some Action Steps

1. Teachers should participate as members of the community by writing and sharing their writing
2. Give students writing choices
3. Praise Students Efforts and Accomplishments
4. Write for real purposes
5. Publish students’ writing, and extend the community beyond the classroom
6. Set realistic but challenging goals for students
More Action Steps

- Created a positive classroom, where students were encouraged to try hard, believe that the writing skills and strategies they were learning helped them to write well, and attribute success to effort and the tactics they were learning.

- Developed classroom routines, such as sharing writing in progress and completed papers with peers, which promoted positive interactions among students.

- Adapted writing assignments and instruction so that they were appropriate to students’ interest and needs, especially students who find learning to write challenging.

- Connect writing in and out of school.
“Stuff For a Good Teacher.”
From a 7 year old

- Loves her kids.
- Helps you out.
- Always has a smile.
- Is fair with her kids.
- Is full of surprises.
- Likes to laugh.
- Tries her best.
- Listens to her heart.
My English teacher has made such a difference in my life. He teaches like no other teacher I’ve known. He really makes us think - not only about school, but about life. He cares so much about us learning. I’ve never seen a teacher that cared so much. I’ve learned more in one year from him than I have in any other class I’ve had.

-- Tiffanie, a 17 year old
Questions or Push Back?
Selected References


