



# Professional Development Guide

# Writing

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# Writing

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## Writing Is Essential

The writing program in *SRA Imagine It!* teaches students how to write skillfully. This is essential, because writing is a powerful tool.

Writing lets us communicate with people who are removed by distance and time. E-mail and text messaging make it easier than ever to communicate through writing.

Writing is a useful tool for learning. Writing about a topic allows us to explore, organize, and refine our ideas.

Writing provides an enjoyable means for self-expression. This ranges from creating imaginary places and events to persuading others that a particular viewpoint or course of action is preferred.

Writing allows us to discover more fully who we are and what we think. We use writing to chronicle our experiences and to reflect on what we know and how we feel.

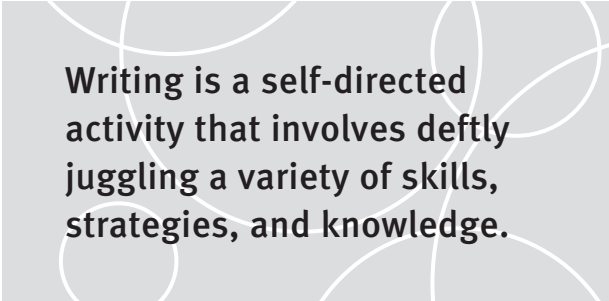
The power of writing resides in the many ways in which it can be used. The *SRA Imagine It!* writing program teaches students how to use writing effectively for these purposes.

## What Do Students Need to Learn to Become Skilled Writers?

Writing is a demanding task. Even a seemingly simple writing task can take considerable skill and effort. It took

Dr. Seuss more than a year to write the *Cat in the Hat*, and he agonized over every word.

Writing is a self-directed activity that involves deftly juggling a variety of skills, strategies, and knowledge. The writer must make plans, consider the reader, draw ideas from memory, develop new ideas, organize thoughts, consider the conventions of the genre, translate ideas into words, craft sentences, evaluate decisions, make needed revisions, transcribe words into correctly spelled print, and monitor the writing process, among other things. Writing anything but the most routine text requires considerable skill.



**Writing is a self-directed activity that involves deftly juggling a variety of skills, strategies, and knowledge.**

Good writing requires even more skill. Writing knowledge; mastery of basic writing skills; strategies for planning, drafting, revising, and editing/proofreading; and motivation must come together to create a paper that is clear and effectively achieves the writer's purpose. Such writing is characterized by the following seven traits:

- Clearly presented and fully developed ideas
- Writing that is easy to follow and logically organized
- Effective and precise word choice

- Varied use of sentence structure to promote fluency, rhythm, and natural speech patterns
- Writing that captures appropriate tone or mood to make the desired impact on the reader
- Correct spelling, usage, and grammar
- A written product that is legible, attractive, and accessible

Skilled writing does not take place in a vacuum. What and how well students write is influenced by a host of social factors, including the amount of time devoted to writing, the creation of a supportive writing environment, and interactions with peers and teachers as audience and collaborators.

How should students learn to write then? One thing is absolutely certain; this cannot be left to chance. Students will not develop this essential skill if we do not devote time and attention to its mastery. Likewise, writing does not develop “naturally” by having students just write for real purposes and real audiences. Although students must write frequently and for many purposes, they also need to be explicitly taught critical writing skills, processes, and knowledge. The key is to create a balanced writing program that involves a judicious combination of writing, explicit instruction, and less formal techniques such as conferencing and capitalizing on teachable moments.

## How does research inform writing practices?

Teaching students how to write also must be informed by research. Can you imagine going to a dentist who does not keep up

with new and proven practices in the field? Or even worse, imagine a dentist who is learning through trial and error as he or she works on your teeth!

The study of how people learn to master different domains provides important insight into promoting writing development. The road to competence in many academic domains, including writing, is paved by changes in knowledge, strategic behaviors, basic skills, and motivation (Graham, 2006). This means that our writing program is designed to enhance:

- Knowledge about the characteristics of different genres, intended audience, and writing topics
- Writing strategies involved in basic composing processes including planning, drafting, monitoring, evaluating, revising, and editing/proofreading
- Command of basic writing skills such as penmanship, spelling, sentence construction, grammar, usage, and mechanics
- Interest and motivation to write, as well as perceptions of competence as a writer

The study of how skilled writers compose also provides useful insights into what students need to learn. This mirrors what we know about how competence develops.

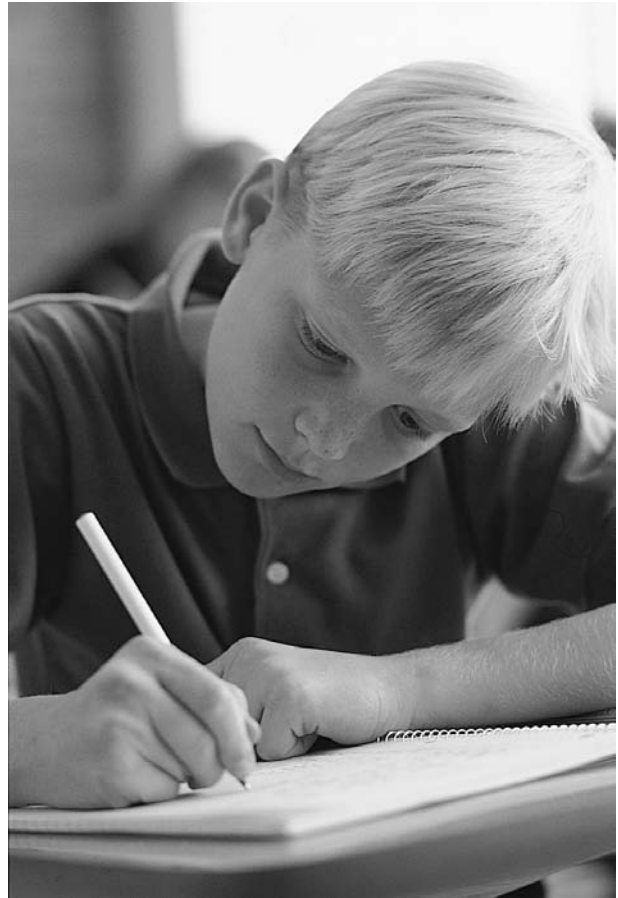
- Skilled writers know how to obtain information about their topic, are familiar with basic features of different genres, and possess basic schemas, or frameworks, for accomplishing common writing tasks.
- Skilled writers flexibly employ a series of processes (planning,

drafting, revising, editing/proofreading, and publishing) to create text.

- Skilled writers execute basic writing skills, such as penmanship and spelling, with little conscious effort.
- Skilled writers possess an “I can do” attitude.

The study of how expert teachers teach writing (Pressley et al., in press) further sharpens our vision of how to construct an effective writing program. These teachers

- make sure their students are engaged. Students spend most of their time doing something that involves thoughtfulness (such as crafting a story or learning how to construct a complex sentence).
- teach basic writing skills, strategies, and knowledge balanced by ample opportunity to apply what is learned.
- involve students in writing for a variety of purposes.
- create a writing classroom environment that is supportive, pleasant, and motivating.
- encourage students to accomplish as much as possible on their own (to act in a self-regulated fashion), but teachers are ready to offer support and instruction as needed.
- use reading to support writing development and vice versa.
- monitor students’ growth in writing and encourage students to monitor their own growth.
- provide extra assistance to students who experience difficulty.
- are passionate about writing.



Finally, recent reports such as *Writing Next* (Graham & Perrin, 2006) and other systematic reviews of writing intervention research (Goldring, Russell, & Cook, 2003; Graham, 2006; Graham & Harris, 2003) provide additional detail on how to teach writing, showing that the quality of students’ writing is improved by

- explicitly teaching strategies for planning, revising, and editing/proofreading.
- modeling effective use of writing strategies.
- having students work together to plan, draft, revise, and edit/proofread their compositions.
- using prewriting activities such as graphic organizers to gather information.

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- involving students in Inquiry activities designed to help them further develop their ideas for writing.
  - making the goals for writing assignments clear and specific.
  - teaching students how to construct more sophisticated sentences.
  - providing students with the opportunity to read, evaluate, and emulate models of good writing.
  - teaching students how to use word processing as a tool for composing.



## How should students learn to write?

The answer to the question posed earlier is that we need to design writing instruction to enhance each important area of development—knowledge, skills, strategies, and motivation—using evidence-based practice to ensure that students master the seven traits of effective writing: ideation, organization, vocabulary, sentence fluency, voice, conventions, and presentation.

## Fostering Motivation

*“It feels rewarding to be an author. Because after you are done with your work it all pays off. It just makes you feel kind of special when somebody reads your work and smiles.”*

**Jennifer Ostrowsky, Grade 5**

Although students start school enjoying writing and wanting to learn how to write, some quickly come to see writing as a chore or something to be avoided. Our goal is for students to become

life-long writers—people who can use writing effectively at work and in their personal life.

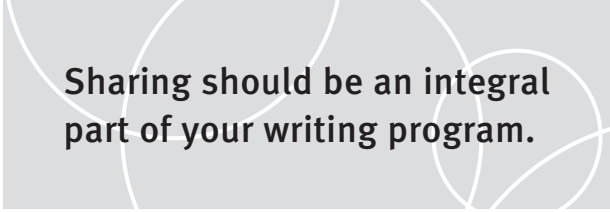
## Questions That Teachers Ask about Fostering Motivation

**How can I foster students’ interest in writing and promote an “I can do” attitude? Have students write for real purposes and real audiences.**

Make sure your writing assignments have a real purpose. Have students identify why they are writing and what they want to accomplish. Likewise, when providing writing instruction, make sure students know what they are learning, why they are learning it, and where they can apply it.

Have students share their writing with others. They are more likely to do their best writing when they have an audience. Sharing should be an integral part of your writing program. Students can share their plans, an initial draft, a portion of their composition, or the completed paper with you, their peers, or other students or adults. Before writing, students should be encouraged to think about their audience and how they plan to maximize their impact on the reader.

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**Sharing should be an integral part of your writing program.**

**Create a classroom environment that is supportive, pleasant, and low risk.**

Establish clear rules for student behavior during the writing period. Keep the rules simple and reasonable in number. Consistently reinforce them. Students are not likely to enjoy writing (or learn well) if the classroom is chaotic.

Create a low-risk environment where students feel comfortable taking risks with their writing. This means being accepting and positive about students' efforts and encouraging them to act in the same manner. For example, make it a rule in your class that when someone shares his or her writing, the first thing that you or your students do is say what you liked most about it.

Do not circle every misspelled word or write "Awkward" next to every grammar error or example of clumsy wording. Intensive concentration on students' mistakes can make them more aware of their limitations and less willing to write. This is not to say that you should ignore these errors, but select only one or two to concentrate on at a time. Otherwise, you are likely to overwhelm a developing writer.

Support students as they begin to apply the knowledge, skills, or strategies you teach them. This can include reteaching, providing hints and reminders, giving useful feedback, and initially helping students apply what was taught.

Have students help each other as they plan, draft, revise, edit/proofread, and publish their work. This is most effective when the process of working together is structured. For instance, students are more likely to give good advice for revising if they are asked to focus on specific aspects of the composition, such as identifying places where the writing is unclear or where more detail is needed.

**Allow students to make their own decisions and accomplish as much on their own as possible.**

Make writing more motivating by allowing students choice. For example, when the class is working on story writing, students should decide the subject or the plot for their story. However, students do not need to choose the topic for every writing assignment, as they also need to learn to respond to assigned topics, such as using writing to extend their thinking about something they read.

Increase students' ownership of a writing topic by allowing them to develop unique interpretations of the topic. For example, author and drama critic Peter Benchley modified what he saw as a boring final exam, concerning the point of view of Great Britain and the United States on international fishing, by writing from the point of view of the fish.

Encourage students to take ownership of their writing. This includes allowing them to arrange a suitable writing environment, construct a personal plan for accomplishing the writing task, work at their own pace (when possible), and decide what feedback from peers and the teacher is most pertinent for revising their paper.

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**Encourage students to take ownership of their writing.**

**Foster a sense of accomplishment.**

Celebrate students' success by displaying their work. This can be done by prominently displaying it in the classroom or in other places in the school. Students also can be asked to publish such work in a class or school newspaper, or to read their composition aloud to younger children in other classes or at a special event.

Look for opportunities to give students positive feedback about their work. Let them know when they have done something well in their writing. Praise works best when it identifies what the student did well. It should be used only when it is warranted though, as overusing praise can blunt its effectiveness.

Encourage students to monitor their progress. This can be done by having them select their best writing to keep in a writing portfolio and identifying why they selected each piece. Students also can be asked to compare a composition written early in the school year with one written later, identifying how and why their writing improved.

Foster an "I can do" attitude among your students. Consistently emphasize that the key to good writing is effort and the use of what you have learned.

Monitor students' writing progress. Confer with them about what they are doing well and what you plan to do to help them write better. Establish how you will help them develop the necessary



knowledge, skills, and strategies to improve their writing.

**Look for ways to motivate students every day.**

Set a positive mood during writing time. Be enthusiastic about writing and what your students write.

Show your students that you are a writer too. Share your writing with them. Talk about the different ways you use writing each day.

Connect writing to students' lives and the world in general. Have them document the types of writing they do outside of school. Develop a wall chart where the class identifies how they use writing away from school.

Provide incentives for writing at home. For example, have parents document that their child writes for twenty minutes at home a set number of nights for a month. Provide a special party for these students, allowing each to select a book to keep from an array of books donated by parents or a sponsoring business partner.

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# Mastering the Writing Process: Becoming a Strategic Writer

*“Well, they take all of their brainstorming ideas and put them on a piece of paper and just write the rough draft. Then they come back and find mistakes and think of some other ideas and do it over again.”*

## **Bernice Sandel, Grade 4**

According to Louis L’Amour, a popular writer of western novels, “A writer’s brain is like a magician’s hat. If you’re going to get anything out of it, you have to put something in first.” Part of what needs to go in is learning how to carry out the basic processes involved in writing. This strategic “know-how” includes:

- **Prewriting:** Writers spend time thinking about and planning their topic. They consider their purpose, their audience, and the focus of their topic. Writers make plans to guide the composing process, establishing goals for what to do and say. They gather possible ideas for their writing, drawing on memory and external sources such as books, interviews, articles, and the Internet. Writers make decisions about which information to include and how to organize it.
- **Drafting:** Writers draft or put their ideas into words, using the initial plans they developed as a guide. These plans are expanded, modified, and even reworked as writers create a first draft, often in a rough form.
- **Revising:** Although some revising may occur during planning and drafting, writers revisit and revise

their first drafts. They reread their drafts to see if they say what they wanted to say. They check to be sure the writing makes sense and that the meaning is clear for the reader. They consider whether their writing will have the desired impact on the reader. As they make changes in their text, writers discover new things to say and new ways to present their ideas.

- **Editing/Proofreading:** Writers edit their work. They recognize that spelling, grammar, and usage errors make it harder for others to understand and enjoy their published works. Writers know that readers are more likely to value their message when they correct these mistakes.
- **Publishing:** Writers go public with their work, sharing it with others. They read their work, or part of their work, to others. They publish their work in books, newspapers, magazines, anthologies, and so on.

Writing is a recursive process as authors move back and forth through writing activities—from planning to drafting to revising and back—to create their final pieces. It is a process of thinking, experimenting, and evaluating.

## Questions That Teachers Ask about Teaching the Writing Process

**How can I help students learn to carry out the basic processes and strategies involved in writing?**

Much of what happens during writing is not visible; it occurs inside the writer’s head. *SRA Imagine It!* makes these

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processes concrete and visible in the following four ways:

- Establishing a predictable writing routine whereby students are expected to plan, draft, revise, edit/proofread, and publish
- Using graphic organizers that help developing writers carry out basic writing processes such as planning, revising, and editing/proofreading
- Teaching strategies for planning, drafting, revising, editing/proofreading, and publishing
- Providing feedback during the writing process through writing conferences and student presentations of their works in progress and completed compositions

## Establish a Predictable Writing Routine

One way to make the basic writing processes more concrete is to create a predictable classroom writing routine, whereby students plan, draft, revise, edit/proofread, and publish their work. This establishes that these processes are important and ensures that time is provided for each one. It also allows students to work with minimum teacher direction and at their own pace. The establishment of a predictable writing routine where student responsibility is emphasized allows the teacher to provide help where needed and to confer with individual students about their writing.

What can teachers do to make a predictable writing routine work? As

with learning any other process, students initially need to be guided through the routine. One way of doing this is to model each step of the routine: prewriting, drafting, revising, editing/proofreading, and publishing. This basically involves making a dry run through the routine, with you directing the process and making your thoughts visible by modeling, or thinking out loud. To make sure students are engaged, they should help you carry out each task. For instance, during prewriting, students help you think about your purpose for writing and the intended audience. They also assist in the development of an initial writing plan.

Students also need to learn that the processes of writing do not always occur in the same order but rather are recursive. For example, revising may occur at any stage of the composing process. You should not only model this (by showing how this is done), but the predictable routine should vary at times to reflect this flexibility. Likewise, some writing projects take longer than others. *SRA Imagine It!* recognizes this and includes writing projects that vary in length from a single day to three weeks.

Another key element in creating a predictable classroom writing routine is



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to provide students with needed support. One form of support includes Workshop—a time when students can work independently. Students can work alone, with a partner, or in small groups. Have students participate in setting up their Workshop areas so they feel involved. It is also important that students know what materials are available and how to use them.

## Materials

Writing materials should include pencils, pens, crayons, and unlined paper of different sizes that can be used for drafting as well as for final copies. This is a good opportunity to use recycled paper in your school. Also, computer paper that has alternating green and white lines is great for drafting.

A list of “How to Develop Good Ideas for Writing” and books and magazines for authors to browse through for ideas are also helpful. Checklists for revising and editing/proofreading (discussed later in this guide), as well as information about genre and literary techniques, enable writers to monitor and check their work in progress. This is also a good place to keep a list of revising and proofreading symbols and dictionaries.

A variety of publishing materials, including cardboard, folders, tagboard, construction paper, and wallpaper samples for covers; magazines for photos; paints, crayons, and markers for illustrating; stencils for titles; and string, yarn, dental floss, staplers, and punches for binding should be available. Students can bring in pictures of themselves to use for their biographical sketches. Many teachers

enlist the help of the school librarian to provide circulation cards and pockets for students to put on their newly published books. Samples of favorite, commercially published books like pop-up books, picture books, and books in different shapes can be included to provide ideas. Useful materials are unlimited. A separate computer area can be established where students can draft, revise, edit/proofread, or publish their paper. This area should include publishing software that allows students to add pictures and other graphics, select fonts and borders, develop a cover, and so on.

Often when students are at a loss for writing ideas, browsing through commercially published books or student-published books, as well as magazines and newspapers, can stimulate them in their search for ideas. If students are working on a specific kind of writing project, such as writing folktales, this area should contain multiple examples of this story type.

Another way to provide students with support in carrying out the basic writing processes embedded in a predictable writing routine is by teaching specific writing strategies.

## Writing Strategies

A strategy involves a series of actions that a writer undertakes to achieve a desired goal. This is humorously illustrated in this legendary strategy for setting type:

Set type for as long as you can hold your breath without getting blue in the face, then put in a comma; when you yawn, put in a semicolon; and when you want to sneeze, then it's time for a paragraph.

The desired goal in this case is setting type correctly, and the series of actions are holding your breath, yawning, and sneezing. Using strategies effectively involves more than a goal and a plan of action. Students must know when and how to use them.

In ***SRA Imagine It!*** students are taught strategies to help them carry out each of the basic writing processes: prewriting, drafting, revising, editing/proofreading, and publishing. Each strategy also is designed to enhance one or more of the seven traits of good writing. Each of these traits is listed below along with an example of a writing strategy designed to promote it.

- Clearly presented and fully developed ideas (example: brainstorming)
- Writing that is easy to follow and logically organized (example: constructing a time line)
- Effective and precise word choice (examples: rereading text, circling words that are vague and replacing them with more precise words)
- Use of varied sentences to promote fluency, rhythm, and natural speech patterns (example: revising with the goal of varying sentence types to make the paper more fluent)
- Writing that captures appropriate tone or mood to make maximum impact on



the reader (example: forming a visual image of the characters' emotions to help set the mood for a story)

- Correct spelling, usage, and grammar (example: reading a composition out loud to help locate grammar miscues)
- A written product that is legible, attractive, and accessible (example: using a multimedia source to illustrate the composition)

## How do I teach writing strategies to students?

The ancient Chinese strategy below speaks directly to teaching writing strategies.

I hear and I forget. I see and I remember. I do and I understand.

Describing the strategy, how to use it, and why it is effective is essential, but this is only the start. Students need to see how the strategy works and practice using it themselves. The steps in teaching writing strategies include the following:

- Describe the strategy and the purpose for using it.
- Make it clear when students should use the strategy.
- Model how to use it in the context of writing.
- Provide students with the opportunity to apply the strategy, giving them needed assistance.
- Continue to encourage students to apply the strategy in appropriate situations.

The goal is for students to be able to use the strategy independently and to make it part of their writing tool kit. You are

asking students to change how they write and to use a new procedure that requires effort. How can you get students to buy into using the strategy? The following practices can help you achieve this goal:

- Be enthusiastic about learning the strategy.
- Establish the importance of effort in learning and using the strategy.
- Provide opportunities for students to see how the strategy improves their writing.
- Praise and reinforce students' use of the strategy.
- Foster students' ownership of the strategy.

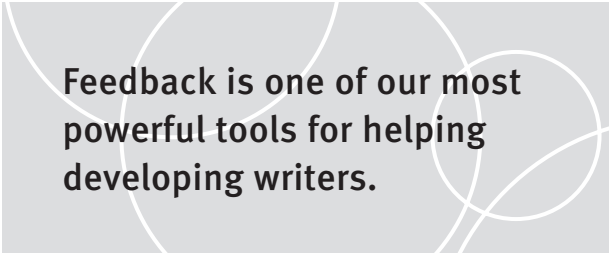
## What can I do to help students who experience difficulty learning writing strategies?

- Organize the class so that additional strategy instruction can be provided to these students.
- Supply additional explanations of the strategy, its parts, and how it works.
- Teach prerequisite skills and processes needed to use the strategy effectively.
- Model again how to apply the strategy, and then guide students through its use until they can utilize it independently.
- Develop mnemonic devices and charts to help students remember the steps of the strategy.
- Provide extended feedback and support as students practice using the strategy.

- Address roadblocks that interfere with learning the strategy.

## Providing Feedback

All writers need feedback throughout the writing process. They need reactions to ideas, drafts, and revisions. Feedback is one of our most powerful tools for helping developing writers. Writers want to know how their works in progress sound to someone else, if their compositions make sense, if any information is incorrect or misleading, and where and how to make changes.



Feedback is one of our most powerful tools for helping developing writers.

In *SRA Imagine It!* opportunities for feedback occur naturally throughout the process as

- teachers confer with authors during writing.
- teachers and peers react to authors' works in progress or completed papers when these are shared or presented in class.

Regular feedback encourages developing writers to solve problems and make meaningful changes throughout the writing process.

## Writing Conferences

Teachers may initiate conferences, but students also should be encouraged to request conferences on an as-needed basis. Because conferences can be

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held at various times throughout the writing process, the focus will vary. Conferences held during the early stages help students identify and refine a topic or identify research references. During revision, conferences can help students learn to elaborate and reorganize a piece, and during the final stages, to edit and proofread stories before they are published. Conferences offer an excellent opportunity for the teacher and the student to evaluate jointly the student's progress and set goals for future growth.

In order to support conferences, you might want to set aside a special area of the classroom where you can work with students and where students can work with each other. During the year, peer conferencing should be encouraged during Workshop. As students engage in peer conferencing, note which students are participating, the types of questions they ask, and the comments they make. Use this information to help students become more effective in peer conferencing. You might need to structure peer conferences, asking students to explain first what they liked about the composition and teaching them how to give constructive feedback.

The basic procedure for writing conferences is as follows:

- Have the student read his or her first draft aloud. Offer a specific comment.
- Encourage the student to review feedback received on his or her draft during peer conferencing and to think aloud about possible changes.
- Ask questions that will help the student clarify her or his thinking

about how to revise. (Try not to lead the student with content questions. You want to teach how to revise, not what to write.)

- Review strategies and references that the student could use to improve her or his work.
- Conclude the conference by having the student state his or her plan or goal for continuing work on the piece.

During writing conferences, the following responses to student writing might be used.

- To open communication with the writer:  
*How is the writing going?*  
*Tell me about your piece.*  
*How did you get your ideas?*
- To validate the writer's work and give encouragement:  
*I like the part where . . .*  
*I like how you open your piece by . . .*  
*I like your description of . . .*
- To get the writer to think about clarity of meaning:  
*I wonder about . . .*  
*What happened after. . .?*  
*Why did . . .?*
- To get the writer to think about direction and about writing strategies:  
*What do you plan to do with your piece?*  
*What strategies do you know that could help you here?*  
*How will you go about doing that?*  
*What could I do to help you?*

Be sure to confer regularly with every student to check that each one is continuing to revise and publish.

Following are suggested writing conference comments and questions to help you get started.

- How can we say the same thing in different words?
- What might be another way to end the story?
- Tell me about your story. How was the story you told different from what you wrote? (This can lead naturally into revision.)
- I am having trouble imagining what you wrote. What other information can you give me?
- During writing conferences, the group felt your story was too long. What kinds of things could you do? (Solutions might include making two stories or using chapters.)
- You are writing a fairy tale. What have we learned in reading that will help you? (Going to the Writing Center and looking up characteristics of fairy tales might be a good start.)
- You are writing a newspaper article, but you do not have enough information. What are some ways of solving that problem? (Try doing some more reading, talking with the librarian or someone who knows about the content area, or interviewing someone.)

Keep in mind the following:

- Teachers do not have to meet with every student every day.
- Conferences should be brief. Do not overwhelm students with too many comments or suggestions. Several short conferences are often more effective than one long one.



- If appropriate, suggest that students take some notes to help them remember where changes are to be made.
- Do not take ownership of the students' works. Encourage students to identify what is good and what needs to be changed, and let the students make the changes.
- Focus on what is good about the students' works; discuss how to solve problems rather than telling the student what to do.
- Have sign-up sheets for students who need help each day.
- Identify students with particular strengths in planning, revising, or editing, and appoint them as student, or peer, helpers.

## Presenting

Students need to have plenty of opportunities to share their completed and in-progress work with their peers. Presenting provides another opportunity for students to receive feedback. During class presentation time, a few students will have the opportunity to share their work

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and receive feedback from their peers. Student presentations can involve the following:

- Presenting an initial idea or plan for a writing project.
- Sharing a first draft of a paper.
- Presenting orally part or all of a final piece of writing.

When a selection from a finished composition is shared, student authors should explain why they chose a particular section; for example, it is a part they particularly like or one with which they are having problems.

At the start of the year, some simple rules should be established:

- Everyone must listen carefully and provide constructive feedback. Focus on what is good about a piece and ways to make it better.
- The student author has ownership and can decide which suggestions to use. The author does not have to incorporate all suggestions from participants.

Following are some practical tips from teachers.

- Have a chair designated as the “Author’s Chair” from which the student author can read his or her work or share ideas. This lends importance to the activity.
- The student author should be encouraged to give a bit of background, including where he or she is in the writing process, why he or she chose a particular part, or what problem he or she is having. This helps orient the class listeners.

- Short pieces can be read in their entirety. As students become more proficient and write longer papers, they should be encouraged to read just a part of the piece; for example, a section they need help with, an area that has been revised, or a part that they particularly like.
- Take notes during presentations, and encourage students who can to do the same.
- Be sensitive to the attention span of the class and the feedback being given. Sometimes students tend to repeat the same comments to each author.

During writing presentation, students can share developing ideas, rough drafts, and completed compositions with one or more peers. The same principles that apply to whole-class presentations apply here as well.

## Developing Basic Writing Skills

*“You need to write neat and spell the words right; get rid of the mistakes. Make it easy to read.”*

### **Alphonso Wright, Grade 3**

Developing writers need to learn many basic writing skills to the point where they can be executed with little effort or thought. Why? The thinking processes involved in writing are demanding. Planning, drafting, monitoring, evaluating, revising, and editing/proofreading require considerable mental energy. Likewise, the mechanics of writing are also demanding

for developing writers. Energy that students must expend to type or write letters, figure out how to spell a word, determine the proper punctuation, or construct a sentence is not available for carrying out essential thinking processes such as planning, evaluating, and revising. In fact, the mechanics of writing are so demanding for young writers that they generally minimize their use of these thinking processes. Thus, an important goal is to help developing writers become fluent enough with mechanics that they do not interfere with the process of writing.

The mechanics of writing, however, never become so fully automated that they require no thought. For example, when students decide to write a final draft neatly, they have to think consciously about what they are doing. Likewise, no matter how good students are at spelling, there will always be some words that they do not know how to spell. Sentence construction skills require conscious attention and effort. You cannot write a sentence without thinking about how ideas will be turned into words and how these words are crafted into a sentence. Even so, the mental energy needed to construct sentences can be reduced by helping students become familiar with different sentence types and become more proficient in building them.

**A reader cannot determine the message if the writing is illegible.**



The mechanics of writing are also important because of the impact they have on the reader. A reader cannot determine the message if the writing is illegible. Readers may be unwilling to read a paper that is full of spelling, grammar, or sentence mistakes because it just takes too much work. If they do read it, they may devalue the writer's message, as such errors have a negative impact on judgments of writing quality.

Considerable controversy surrounds the issue of how to help students master the mechanics of writing. On the one hand, some think that these skills develop naturally when students are given plenty of opportunities to write and

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read for real purposes; they capitalize on teachable moments and provide skill-based mini-lessons as the need arises. In contrast, others think that these skills need to be taught directly and explicitly. Of course, these two positions are not incompatible. Both formal (explicit instruction) and informal methods (e.g., engaging in writing and reading) of instruction contribute to the development of basic writing skills. The following two examples illustrate this point.

It is not a good idea to let students discover for themselves how to form letters (or type for that matter). They often develop inefficient habits, and these habits are frequently difficult if not impossible to break. Penmanship fluency, however, mostly develops as a result of writing frequently.

While students learn how to spell some words simply through the process of reading and writing, this approach is not powerful enough for them to master many of the skills they need to learn. For instance, most of the common spelling demons are words that occur frequently in children's reading materials.

An effective writing program combines formal and informal approaches to learning. This includes

- teaching basic writing skills.
- tying explicit skills instruction directly to students' writing to make it more functional and concrete.
- providing plenty of opportunities for students to write for real purposes and audiences, as this fosters skill development, provides the context for applying what is taught, and promotes fluency.

## What writing skills should be taught?

Teaching students penmanship (or typing), spelling, and sentence construction not only improves these skills, but has a positive impact on other aspects of writing, such as text quality (Graham, 2006). While little evidence indicates that teaching grammar enhances students' writing, this may be a consequence of how it typically is taught. Not much direct connection is found between grammar instruction and students' writing. We think that making this connection part of the instruction is essential.

One challenge in teaching basic writing skills is to decide which skills need to be taught. We should teach only skills that students are likely to use. For instance, there is no reason to teach students how to spell words that they rarely use when they write. Nor is it useful to teach spelling skills that can be applied to only a small number of words. Likewise, skills that are so complex that even adults have difficulty with them are poor candidates for instruction.

## Sentence Construction

A fundamental skill in writing is to craft our thoughts into sentences that convey our intended meaning. Sentences are the vessels in which our ideas are carried. Writing a sentence involves turning our ideas into words to form a complete thought—one that is clear and grammatically correct.

We are typically more deliberate when constructing sentences during writing

**Sentences are the vessels in which our ideas are carried.**

than when talking. Although sentence construction always requires conscious attention and effort, it can be especially demanding in writing, as the writer faces a more daunting communication challenge. The writer cannot rely on nonverbal cues to convey meaning, and the writer cannot immediately monitor whether the audience understood the message.

## Questions That Teachers Ask about Teaching Sentence Construction

### What can I do to make sentence construction a more manageable task for developing writers?

The answer is straightforward—teach students how to construct different kinds of written sentences. Such instruction translates into better written text (Graham & Perrin, 2006). This is not



surprising, as a well-crafted sentence makes the reader want to read more, and writers use sentences not only to convey their ideas clearly, but to structure the tempo of their text.

As with other writing skills, sentence construction skills should not be taught in isolation. Students need to be encouraged to apply what they learn as they write.

### How can I teach sentence construction skills?

Methods for teaching sentence construction skills include sentence frames, sentence expansion, and sentence combining.

#### Sentence frames.

With sentence frames, students are given part of a sentence and asked to generate the rest of it. For example, students can be taught to write a simple sentence, with a single subject and predicate, by giving them a frame containing the subject and asking them to complete the sentence by telling what happened.

The dog \_\_\_\_\_.

The dog ran.

#### Sentence expansion.

With sentence expansion, students are given a kernel sentence and asked to expand it by adding words. For example, students can be taught to make sentences more colorful by adding descriptive words to a kernel sentence.

The cat and the dog like the toy.

The gray cat and the big dog like the fuzzy little toy.

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## Sentence combining.

With sentence combining, students are taught how to combine two or more kernel sentences into a single, more complex sentence. For example, students can be taught to produce sentences with relative clauses by combining the following two kernel sentences.

John will win the race.

John is very fast. (who)

John, who is very fast, will win the race.

Other examples of sentence combining include:

- Inserting adjectives and adverbs  
The girl drank the water.  
The girl was thirsty.  
The thirsty girl drank the water.
- Creating compound subjects and objects  
Bill liked to run.  
Sandy liked to run.  
Bill and Sandy liked to run.
- Creating compound sentences with *but*, *and*, or *or*  
Jill wanted to go swimming.  
Alphonso wanted to play baseball. (but)  
Jill wanted to go swimming, but Alphonso wanted to play baseball.
- Producing sentences with adverbial clauses, using connecting words (because, after, until, and when)  
My friends went to the fair.  
My friends wanted to have fun. (because)  
My friends went to the fair because they wanted to have fun.

## What happens during a sentence-framing, sentence-expansion, or sentence-combining lesson?

When teaching sentence construction skills, it is always important to do the following:

- Describe the skill, establish why it is important, and model how to do it. **(TEACH)**
- Provide students with assistance until they can apply the skill correctly and independently. **(GUIDED PRACTICE)**
- Ask students to apply the skill when they write. **(APPLY)**

The sentence expansion lesson below illustrates these three principles in action. The lesson focuses on making sentences more descriptive.

### TEACH

- Generate a sentence with adjectives that tell what something looks like and how many there are. Write it on the board.
- Underline the words that describe.
- Generate another sentence with describing words, write it on the board, and have students underline the describing words.
- Define adjectives, and tell why it is important to use describing words when you write.
- Write three words on the board (dog, running, girl). Model how to write a sentence using these words and adding adjectives that tell what something looks like and how many there are.

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## GUIDED PRACTICE

- Write three more words on the board (John, kick, ball). Generate a sentence with the class, adding describing words. Repeat this process with other sets of words until students understand the process.
- Ask students to work with a partner to generate sentences, using the procedures described previously. Ask each pair of students to share their best sentence and identify the adjectives.
- Have each student generate two sentences using two or three describing words. Ask students to share their best sentence with a peer and identify the adjectives.

## APPLY

- Remind students that when they write, they should say more by using adjectives to better describe something or tell how many.
- Ask students to look at one of the compositions in their writing portfolio and revise several sentences to say more by adding describing words.
- Encourage students to write descriptive sentences and to add descriptive words when revising in subsequent writing assignments.

## What can I do to help students who experience difficulty with sentence construction?

- Organize the class so that additional sentence instruction can be provided to these students.
- Provide extra modeling and guided practice.

- Use more than one method to teach a sentence pattern.
- Ask students to monitor how often they use taught sentence patterns.
- Encourage students to set goals to use taught sentence patterns.

## Penmanship

Imagine being asked to type something on a Chinese keyboard. This is the most complex keyboard in the world, with close to six thousand characters. As you laboriously search for the characters needed for the next word, some of the ideas you are trying to hold in your memory, including the rest of the sentence you are composing, are likely to be lost. The process of turning words into print is so taxing with this keyboard that it is difficult to do anything else. Even an expert can type only about eleven words per minute.

Fortunately, most of us will never experience the challenge of using a Chinese keyboard. We have, however, at one time or another experienced the frustration of losing something we were trying to remember because we could not get our ideas onto paper quickly enough. This happens much more often for young writers who have not yet mastered handwriting or typing. Students need to become fluent enough with handwriting (or typing) that it does not interfere with other writing processes. At the same time, their handwriting needs to be legible enough that it can be read easily.

Two basic concepts in handwriting are legibility and fluency. Legibility refers to the overall readability of text in terms of its physical features, including neatness and

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more specific elements such as spacing, alignment, letter formation, size, and slant. Fluency involves how quickly letters can be produced correctly. Legibility typically continues to improve until about fourth grade, whereas handwriting fluency continues to increase through high school.

The primary goal of handwriting instruction is to help students develop handwriting that is legible and can be produced quickly with little conscious attention. An important ingredient in achieving this goal is to teach students an efficient pattern for forming individual letters (both lowercase and uppercase). This includes the following:

- Modeling how to form the letter
- Describing how the letter is similar and different from other letters
- Using visual cues, such as numbered arrows, as a guide to letter formation
- Providing practice tracing, copying, and writing the letter from memory
- Keeping instructional sessions short, with frequent review and practice
- Asking students to identify or circle their best formed letter or letters
- Encouraging students to correct or rewrite poorly formed letters
- Monitoring their practice to ensure that letters are formed correctly
- Reinforcing their successful efforts and providing corrective feedback as needed

In addition to learning how to write the letters of the alphabet correctly, students must be able to produce them quickly. Handwriting fluency generally develops as a consequence of writing frequently. As a result, we need to provide students



with plenty of opportunities to write. It is important to keep in mind that asking a student to write more quickly will likely result in a decrease in legibility and vice versa. Handwriting fluency develops gradually over time.

## Questions That Teachers Ask about Teaching Penmanship

### What else can I do to help students master penmanship?

- Make sure that each student develops a comfortable and efficient pencil grip.
- Encourage students to sit in an upright position, leaning slightly forward, as they write.
- Show them how to place or position their paper when writing.
- Provide students with plenty of opportunities to use different types of writing tools and paper.
- Implement appropriate procedures for left-handed writers, such as how to place or position their paper properly when writing.
- Monitor students' penmanship, paying special attention to their instructional needs in letter formation, spacing, slant, alignment, size, and line quality.

- Encourage students to make all final drafts of papers neat and legible.
- Expect that students will inevitably develop their own handwriting style, adapting how they write letters so they can be produced most efficiently.

### What can I do to help students who experience difficulty mastering penmanship?

- Organize the class so that additional penmanship instruction can be provided to those who need it.
- Place special emphasis on the teaching of difficult letters, such as *a*, *j*, *k*, *n*, *q*, *u*, and *z*, as well as reversals.
- Ask students to set goals for improving specific aspects of handwriting.
- Dramatize students' progress by posting legibly written papers.
- Consider whether an alternative to handwriting, such as an Alpha Smart keyboard, is warranted.
- Have students copy a short passage several times, trying to write it a little faster each time to increase handwriting fluency.
- Help students develop a positive attitude about handwriting.

## Spelling

What is needed to become a good speller? According to J. Donald Adams, you “need the eye of a hawk, the ear of a dog, and the memory of an elephant.” This is evident when we examine what a good speller does when writing. Most words are spelled with little thought, as the correct

spellings are drawn directly from memory. If a spelling is unknown, a possible spelling may be generated by segmenting the word's pronunciation into phonemes, morphemes, or syllables and accessing the corresponding letters. After the possible spelling is generated, it can be verified by checking to see if it looks right. The writer may bypass this process by consulting an external aid such as a spell checker, a dictionary, or another person to obtain the correct spelling.

This description of a good speller highlights the most essential aspects of learning to spell. Students need to learn to spell correctly and easily the words they are most likely to use when writing. They also need to develop the skills needed to generate and check plausible spellings as well as how to use external sources such as spell checkers to ensure correct spelling during writing.

### What words should I teach students how to spell?

Instruction will have its strongest impact if students are taught how to spell words they use when writing. Fortunately, a relatively small number of words account for most of the words elementary students use when writing. For example, 850 words account for eighty percent of words used in students' writing in the elementary grades.

In first grade, the weekly spelling list should contain five to ten words. By second and third grade, the weekly spelling list contains twenty to twenty-five words. Such lists are often constructed so that good spellers already can spell about half of the words

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correctly. This will not be the case for students who find spelling challenging, as they may know the correct spellings of just a few or even none of the new words. It might be necessary to make adjustments in the number of new spellings these students are asked to learn each week.

The weekly spelling list should be constructed so that students not only learn the spellings of individual words, but also acquire information that will help them spell other words. Whenever possible, the weekly spelling list should be constructed so that it illustrates two or three different but related spelling patterns. For example, one weekly list might contain words that illustrate two possible spellings for the long *e* sound: *ee* and *ea*. A subsequent spelling list might contain words that illustrate how the letters *ea* can be used to spell the long *e* and short *e* sounds.

Students should compare and contrast the spelling patterns contained in each weekly spelling list. Word sorting activities provide an excellent technique for analyzing spelling patterns. For example, you can select a single word to represent each of the target spelling patterns such as *street* for *ee* and *neat* for *ea*. Write both words on the board, side by side. Using a word from the weekly spelling list, model your thinking about which pattern the word illustrates. Write the word directly under the appropriate key word: *street* or *neat*. Demonstrate with several more words, asking students to help you. Ask students to sort the remaining words and identify additional words that fit each pattern.

## Questions That Teachers Ask about Teaching Spelling

### What else can I do to help students learn and use the words on their weekly spelling list?

- Administer a pretest to identify which words need to be studied.
- Teach students an effective strategy for studying words.
- Have students practice their words together.
- Administer a posttest to determine which words were mastered.
- Ask students to correct words that were misspelled during testing.
- Monitor students' ability to continue to spell mastered words correctly over time.
- Provide additional study for words that were not mastered or maintained over time.
- Reinforce the correct spelling of taught words in students' writing.

### How can I help students acquire the skills needed to spell words that I do not teach directly?

It is neither possible nor desirable to directly teach students to spell all the words they eventually will use in their writing, as this will involve 10,000 to 15,000 words. Some of these words will be learned through reading. Others will be learned through writing, as students generate plausible spellings and check the accuracy of their responses. The effectiveness of these processes can be enhanced by increasing students' knowledge about the spelling



system. In addition to word sorting, the following instructional practices provide students with the skills and tools for generating and checking plausible spelling:

- Make sure that each student can segment words into sounds as well as add, delete, and substitute one sound for another in a word.
- Show students how the sounds in a word are related to print.
- Teach them common sound/symbol associations, spelling patterns, and helpful spelling rules.
- Have students build words from letters or letters and phonograms (e.g., *c - at*).
- Teach strategies for determining and checking the spelling of unknown words.

### **What else can I do to help students become good spellers?**

- Provide students with plenty of opportunities to read and write, as new spellings are learned through these activities.
- Model correct spelling and correcting spelling errors when you write something in front of the class.

- Encourage students to correct misspellings in all final drafts of papers.
- Provide instruction and practice in proofreading.
- Encourage students to use spell checkers, dictionaries, and so forth to determine the correct spelling of unknown words.

### **What can I do to help students who experience difficulty with spelling?**

- Organize your class so that you can provide additional spelling instruction to those who need it.
- Adjust the number of words students have to learn each week, as struggling spellers will know fewer words at the start on their weekly spelling list.
- Provide students with a personalized list of words to study.
- Ask students to set goals for how many new words they will learn to spell each week.
- Determine whether students are using an effective procedure to study spelling words.
- Set aside additional time for students to study their spelling words at school.
- Present only a few words to be studied at one time.
- Test students' daily progress on the words they are studying.
- Encourage them to monitor their study behavior and subsequent spelling performance.
- Use spelling games and computer programs to reinforce the learning of spelling words and skills.

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- Teach students spelling mnemonics for words that are especially difficult to spell.
  - Provide them with a personalized dictionary that contains an alphabetical listing of the correct spellings of words they are likely to misspell.
  - Place spelling demons and other difficult words on wall charts.
  - Dramatize progress in spelling by posting papers with few or no misspellings.
  - Help students develop a positive attitude about spelling.

## Grammar, Usage, and Mechanics

Traditional methods of teaching grammar, usage, and mechanics skills are not effective. With such instruction, students are initially provided with an abstract definition, such as “an adjective is a word that describes a noun or pronoun.” This is often followed by asking students to practice applying the skill correctly without actually generating any textual material longer than a word or a phrase. For example, for adjectives, this might involve adding an adjective in sentences that have a blank before one or more nouns: The \_\_\_\_\_ wagon rolled through the \_\_\_\_\_ town. It also might involve circling the adjectives in a series of sentences or providing a list of adjectives and having students decide where to place them in a set of sentences like the one above. It is not surprising that many students do not understand the “rules” they are taught or how to use them in their own writing, as such instruction is abstract and decontextualized.

## Questions That Teachers Ask about Teaching Grammar, Usage, and Mechanics

### How can I make grammar, usage, and mechanics instruction effective?

Five principles for accomplishing this goal are presented below. These principles are illustrated with the rule for *capitalizing the first letter in a person’s name*.

- Grammar, usage, and mechanics skills need to be defined in a functional and concrete manner. The rule of *capitalizing the first letter in a person’s name* can be introduced by writing a sentence with two or three familiar names on the board. With the students’ help, identify each name in the sentence, and ask them what they notice about the first letter in each name (i.e., They are capital letters.). Repeat this process with a second sentence, and then establish the “capitalization rule” with students’ help.
- After the skill is functionally described or defined, establish why it is important—*Capitalizing the first letter in a person’s name* makes the name stand out and shows respect for the person named. This is an important rule for writing.
- Show students how to use the skill when writing. Generate a sentence using the names of students in the class, or have students help you generate such a sentence. Write it on the board; as you write each name, capitalize the first letter while simultaneously telling the class what you are doing.



- Provide students with guided practice in applying the skill when writing. Generate with the class another sentence that includes three of your students' names. Tell the class you will write the sentence on the board, but they will need to tell you when you need to capitalize a word. Have students work together in pairs to generate two sentences using names of their friends, being sure to capitalize the first letter in each name. Provide help as needed. Have each student generate one sentence of his or her own, containing the names of two favorite cartoon characters and being sure to capitalize the first letter in each name. Have them share this sentence with a peer.
- Ask students to apply the skill in their compositions. Have students look at one of the papers in their writing portfolio and correct any capitalization mistakes involving people's names. Remind students to capitalize people's names when writing and revising subsequent writing assignments.

The principles above are consistent with recommended procedures for teaching sentence construction skills described earlier. These include the following:

- Defining the skill, establishing its importance, and modeling how to do it (**TEACH**)
- Providing students with assistance until they can apply the skill correctly and independently (**GUIDED PRACTICE**)
- Asking students to apply the skill when they write (**APPLY**)

### What can I do to help students who experience difficulty with grammar, usage, and mechanics?

- Organize the class so that additional instruction can be provided to these students.
- Provide extra attention to defining grammar, usage, and mechanics skills in a concrete manner.
- Provide extra modeling and guided practice for students.
- Ask students to correct other students' papers, focusing on specific grammar, usage, and mechanics rules and mistakes.
- Encourage students to read their papers out loud when revising, as this helps them spot grammar, usage, and mechanics mistakes.

## Enhancing Writing Knowledge

*"Stories have a beginning, middle, end, title, characters, and pictures."*

**Juan De La Paz, Grade 2**

Writing can be used to communicate, entertain, inform, reflect, persuade, and learn. To take full advantage of this flexible tool, students must

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acquire knowledge about the different purposes and forms of writing as well as information about the topics of their compositions. They also need to become familiar with specific techniques, such as foreshadowing and flashbacks, and the general characteristics of good writing.

## What types of writing do students need to master?

By the end of elementary school, students need to be able to use writing to:

- Communicate with others (e.g., personal letters, business letters, notes, cards, e-mail)
- Create personal narratives (e.g., journal writing, autobiography, writing about a personal event, and so forth)
- Entertain (e.g., stories, plays, poems, and so forth)
- Learn (e.g., learning log, reports, journal entries, summarizing, biography)
- Inform (e.g., writing lists, explaining how to do something, describing an object or a place, describing an event, news report, reports, biography)
- Respond to literature (e.g., book evaluations, book reports, book reviews)
- Persuade (e.g., advertisements, opinion about a controversial topic)
- Demonstrate knowledge (e.g., traditional classroom tests, high-stakes tests involving writing, and high-stakes tests involving multiple choice answers)

Students should be expected to engage in the following writing activities at all grade levels: story writing, poetry, writing a play, journal writing, summarizing, responding to reading through writing, book review, report writing, writing a description, writing an explanation, learning logs, letter writing, and e-mails. They also should use writing to gather, think about, and report what they have learned when doing extended Inquiry projects. In fact, such projects provide an excellent venue for students to apply what they have learned in writing.

These writing activities should become more complex from grade to grade. For example, in second grade it is reasonable to expect that students' persuasive text will contain a statement of belief or premise, three or more supporting reasons, and a concluding statement. By fifth grade, however, students should also refute counterarguments and provide more sophisticated explanations and examples. As a result, what students need to know about writing changes, expands, and becomes more integrated as they become more skilled.

For some of these writing activities, students need to have effective strategies for gathering information to write about. Students need to be taught effective strategies for the following:

- Locating information in written and electronic sources
- Obtaining information through interviews or surveys
- Summarizing these different types of information in notes
- Referencing informational sources

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## Questions That Teachers Ask about Helping Students Acquire Knowledge Regarding Writing

**How can I help students acquire knowledge about the features of different writing genres, the characteristics of good writing, and writing devices such as foreshadowing and flashback?**

Much can be learned about writing through reading. Reading well-crafted literature, for example, provides a model that illustrates the characteristics of good writing, such as how authors:

- Present, develop, and organize ideas
- Use words to evoke specific images and feelings



- Manipulate sentences to speed up or slow down the flow of text
- Set and change the mood to match the action of the characters
- Use illustrations to reinforce and sharpen readers' understanding

Knowledge about the different purposes and forms of text also can be acquired through reading. As students read stories, for example, they are likely to notice that the main character is often trying to solve a problem or achieve a particular goal. They may further notice that some stories have a message or try to teach something about life. A particularly astute reader might even notice that some authors use techniques, such as cliff hangers, to enhance the reader's interest.

Students clearly acquire some knowledge through reading, but how much they learn is unknown, and they might not apply what they learn in their own writing. You can enhance what they learn and apply by taking an active role in these processes. One method for doing this is to have students “read with a writer's eye.” This involves thinking carefully about how the author crafted text to achieve certain purposes. For example, after reading a mystery, you encourage discussion, directing students' attention to important features of text, such as how the author planted a false lead to make the story more interesting and complex. Students are then encouraged to use the same technique in a mystery they write.

Another way to facilitate students' acquisition and use of writing knowledge is to provide them with models of specific types of writing. For instance, when introducing students to story writing, a good starting place is to examine one or more stories to

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identify common features, such as placing the story in a particular place and time. After the basic elements of a story are established, model stories can be used to explore other aspects of good story writing, such as using words that create a clear image. As with “reading with a writer’s eye,” students can be asked to use what they have learned when writing their own stories. One way to do this is to have them generate possible ideas for each of the basic parts of the story before writing it. Models also provide a concrete example of a finished product—one that can be emulated by students.

## Monitoring Writing Development: Assessment in the Classroom

It is important to monitor how well your students are learning to write. Monitoring student progress provides information for determining whether adjustments need to be made in the writing program or if some students need extra help. While published writing tests or district and state competency tests give you a snapshot of students’ writing achievement at a single point in time, they do not provide an ongoing assessment of your students—an assessment that allows you to make instructional adjustments throughout the school year. Opportunities for monitoring students’ writing progress are built into the *SRA Imagine It!* program in the following forms:

- Writing portfolios, which are a collection of students’ writing in a personal portfolio, provide an ongoing record of each student’s work and progress

- Writing conferences, which provide opportunities to examine completed papers and work-in-progress as well as observe how students solve problems, make decisions about their work, and take responsibility for the development and completion of pieces

## Monitoring Writing Progress Using Writing Portfolios

Students’ writing portfolios present an excellent opportunity for monitoring students’ progress because they contain samples of students’ writing over a period of time. In reviewing students’ work, look for changes that indicate growth in understanding the characteristics of good writing, use of the writing processes and strategies, knowledge about writing, basic writing skills, and motivation to write.

The writing portfolio provides a place for students to keep their writing work. Writing samples should include the finished product as well as relevant plans, drafts, revisions, and self-evaluations or personal reflections on the process or the composition. The paper and accompanying material should be clipped together, dated, and arranged chronologically.

When comparing pieces contained in the writing portfolio, here are some ideas to keep in mind.

- Does the work show an understanding of the basic features, forms, and purposes of the different genres?
- How does the writing reflect awareness of the intended audience?

- What does the work reveal about growth in planning, drafting, revising, editing/proofreading, and publishing?
- What does the work reveal about growth in the use of writing strategies?
- How do the pieces reflect the use of writing strategies taught in class?
- Do the pieces contain fully developed ideas that are easy to follow and well organized?
- Does the work reveal the student's use of voice?
- What does the writing reveal about word choice?
- Does the work show increasing growth of sentence construction and varying sentences to achieve fluency, rhythm, and natural speech patterns?
- Does the paper employ author strategies highlighted during reading?
- Do final drafts show an improvement in the use of correct spelling, grammar, and usage?
- What do the pieces and self-reflections reveal about the student's motivation?
- How does the student integrate ideas from reading, content learning, or other sources into writing?

In addition to keeping student work over time in portfolios, students need to keep materials for any writing project currently underway. Students also can keep their best work, most interesting piece, most challenging piece, most unusual piece, piece that showed the most improvement, and so on. Criteria can be set up that will help the student, or the teacher and student together, make selections for placement in the writing portfolios. Letting the students make the final selection

encourages them to reflect on their work yet another time and involves them in the evaluation process. The writing portfolio can be shared with parents and given to the teachers that the students will have the next year.

## Monitoring Writing Progress through Conferences

Writing conferences provide a low-risk time to observe developing writers as they share work in progress, think aloud about problems and solutions, and demonstrate their understanding of the writing process. During discussions, listen for the following cues that indicate growth.

- The author is excited about the work in progress.
- The author talks about the mood or tone of the piece.
- The author identifies problems.
- The author talks about possible strategies and solutions and why they might or might not work.
- The author is making thoughtful changes.
- The author can identify unnecessary details.
- The author identifies places that need elaboration.
- The author spontaneously changes or revises after reading a piece to you.
- The author makes use of books, electronic resources, and other sources to obtain possible information for writing.

- The author talks about the needs of his or her audience.
- The author can identify how the composition is structured.
- The author discusses the purpose of the composition.
- The author talks about using sentences to create rhythm.

Some teachers like to hold formal evaluation conferences with students. Be sure to involve the students in the process by having them help select the piece or pieces to be discussed and evaluated. Try asking *some* of the following questions that focus on understanding and lead to change.

- Why did you choose this piece?
- What makes it good or interesting?
- What problems did you have writing this piece?
- How did you solve those problems?
- How did you revise this piece after you wrote the initial draft?
- How did you follow through on the writing process?
- What new things did you learn from writing this piece?
- What are your plans for the next marking period?
- What new ideas do you plan to explore?
- Did you enjoy writing this paper? Why?
- Did you try anything new as you wrote this piece?

After the writing conference, it is helpful for the teacher and the student to put the results of the conference in writing and keep a copy of it in the student's writing portfolio. This can be used for the next evaluation conference and also is good to share with parents.



## Final Comments

Writing is a complex task, and teaching it cannot be left to chance. A basic foundation of a good writing program is frequent writing for real purposes and audiences. This is not enough, however. Students must master writing for a variety of different purposes, including writing to communicate, entertain, inform, reflect, persuade, and learn. They need to:

- Become knowledgeable about the features and forms of each of the different types of writing
- Acquire the thinking strategies for carrying out the basic writing processes
- Master the writing skills of sentence construction, spelling, penmanship, grammar, usage, and mechanics
- Develop confidence in their writing ability and a desire to write

***SRA Imagine It!*** provides a balanced writing program, informed by the latest research on evidence-based practices. The program is designed to ensure that students develop the **Knowledge, Strategies, Skills, and Will** to become a skilled writer.

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