

English Language Arts Strategies

Teaching Elementary School Students to Be Effective Writers

Grades K–6th

RECOMMENDATION 2a

Teach students the writing process.

RECOMMENDATION 2b

Teach students to write for a variety of purposes.

RECOMMENDATION 3

Teach students to become fluent in handwriting, spelling, sentence construction, typing, and word processing.

RECOMMENDATION 4

Create an engaged community of writers.

This document provides a summary of recommendations from the WWC Teaching Elementary School Students to Be Effective Writers Practice Guide (Graham et al., 2012).

Content Area	Level of Evidence	Grades
English Language Arts	 Strong	K 1 st 2 nd 3 rd 4 th 5 th 6 th

RECOMMENDATION 2a

Teach students the writing process.

Teachers can help students become effective writers by teaching and supporting them to apply a variety of strategies for each component of the writing process. Teachers should explain and demonstrate writing components and how they can be used alone or in combination in order to teach students to apply strategies flexibly throughout the writing process.

Strategies

1. Teach students strategies for the various components of the writing process.

Instructional strategies from the examples:

- Teach strategies for each component of the writing process.
- Teach basic strategies early on and introduce more complex ones later.

Students need to learn strategies for each component of the writing process. Basic strategies such as POW (pick ideas, organize notes, and write and say more) should be introduced in the early grades (1 or 2), while more complex strategies such as peer revising should be introduced in later grades. The table below provides a chart of various writing strategies, how students can use them, and the appropriate grade levels for each.

Examples of Writing Strategies

Component of the Writing Process	Writing Strategy	How Students Can Use the Strategy	Grade Range
Planning	POW	Pick ideas (i.e., decide what to write about). Organize their notes (i.e., brainstorm and organize possible writing ideas into a writing plan). Write and say more (i.e., continue to modify the plan while writing).	1–6
Planning	Ordering ideas/outlining	Brainstorm/generate ideas for their paper. Review their ideas and place a number by what will go first, second, third, and so on.	1–2
Drafting	Imitation	Select a sentence, paragraph, or text excerpt and imitate the author's form (see Recommendation 2b, examples 2 and 3).	1–6
Drafting	Sentence generation	Try out sentences orally before writing them on paper. Try multiple sentences and choose the best one. Use transition words to develop different sentence structures. Practice writing good topic sentences.	3–6
Sharing	Peer sharing	In pairs, listen and read along as the author reads aloud. Share feedback with their writing partner, starting with what they liked.	2–6
Sharing	Author's Chair	Sit in a special chair in front of peers and read their writing (see Recommendation 4, example 6, for more detail).	K–6
Evaluating	Self-evaluating	Reread and ask these questions: • Are the ideas clear? • Is there a clear beginning, middle, and end? • Does the writing connect with the reader? • Are sentence types varied?	2–6

Component of the Writing Process	Writing Strategy	How Students Can Use the Strategy	Grade Range
Evaluating	Self-monitoring	Self-assess and ask these questions, either out loud or internally: - Did I meet the goals I developed for my writing? If not, what changes should I make to meet my goals? - Did I correctly use strategies that were appropriate for this task? If not, what should I change? Record their answers to self-assessment questions on a chart or teacher-provided questionnaire in order to track their progress toward writing goals and strategy use. Congratulate themselves, and inform their teacher, when they meet their goals.	3–6
Revising and editing	Peer revising	Place a question mark (?) by anything they do not understand in their writing partner's paper. Place a caret (^) anywhere it would be useful to have the author include more information.	2–6
Revising and editing	COPS	Ask the COPS editing questions: - Did I Capitalize the first word in sentences and proper names? - How is the Overall appearance of my paper? - Did I use commas and end-of-sentence Punctuation? - Did I Spell each word correctly?	2–6

2. Gradually release writing responsibility from the teacher to the student.

Instructional strategies from the examples:

- Use gradual release to teach writing strategies.
- Provide background on the strategy, including why it is helpful.
- Model the use of strategy multiple times to introduce it.
- Evaluate student understanding and adjust as needed.

Each writing strategy should be taught explicitly through a gradual release method. First, provide the necessary background knowledge on the strategy, including why the strategy is helpful. Next, articulate how to implement the strategy and model its use multiple times. Then allow small groups to apply the strategy while monitoring student performance. Once students can use the strategy in a group, give students the opportunity for guided practice of the strategy, with teacher support. Finally, provide students with opportunities to apply the strategy on their own.

During this process, be sure to evaluate students' understanding and adjust instruction when necessary. For example, for students who are struggling to acquire a particular writing strategy, more time can be spent in small-group instruction. Conversely, for those students who are moving more quickly, consider increasing the complexity of the strategy.

3. Guide students to select and use appropriate writing strategies.

Instructional strategies from the examples:

- Visually display strategies around the room.
- Design activities for the student to select certain strategies and evaluate their use of them.

After students have learned how to use various strategies independently, they will need to learn how to select appropriate strategies for a variety of writing tasks. To support them, consider visually displaying strategies around the room by illustrating each strategy and noting when to use it. As students' skills in using a variety of strategies increase, design activities in which students set goals to use specific strategies, evaluate their success, and think critically about how to make the strategy work even better.

4. Encourage students to be flexible in their use of the components of the writing process.

Instructional strategies from the examples:

- Teach students to use strategies flexibly.
- Design activities that require students to use multiple strategies and move back and forth between them.

Once students learn to use the various strategies, teachers need to provide instruction and practice using strategies in a flexible manner. Design activities that require students to move back and forth between the components (planning, drafting, sharing, evaluating, revising, editing, publishing) to strengthen their ability to apply writing strategies flexibly.

Potential Roadblocks



Students initially use the strategies/techniques of writing after they are taught; however, over time they tend to stop.

Suggested Approach. Once students begin independently applying strategies and techniques, teachers need to monitor their progress. As students develop skills with a specific component of the writing process (planning, drafting, sharing, evaluating, revising, editing, publishing), they may no longer need to rely on particular strategies. However, if a student has stopped using a strategy but is still struggling with a specific component of the writing process, the teacher should intervene and take necessary action, such as targeted one-on-one or small-group instruction.



Teachers need to prepare students to take state assessments, which tend to focus on only a few genres.

Suggested Approach. Writing for one genre often requires students to use skills they have learned for writing in another genre. For example, even when writing a persuasive essay, including a narrative example may be necessary to support an argument. Therefore, despite the specific prompts on a state assessment, students need to be prepared to write for multiple purposes. Teachers can point out particular skills they are learning that might be useful for the types of writing required for the state assessment.

Content Area	Level of Evidence	Grades
English Language Arts	 Strong	K 1 st 2 nd 3 rd 4 th 5 th 6 th

RECOMMENDATION 2b

Teach students to write for a variety of purposes.

Developing the ability to write for a variety of purposes provides students with the necessary skills for success in school and adulthood. Once students understand the different genres and purposes of writing, they are more likely to think critically about which type of writing they should use for each writing activity and audience.

Strategies

1. Help students understand the different purposes of writing.

Instructional strategies from the examples:

- Emphasize the purpose of writing and features of each type of writing.
- Relate each genre to real-life examples.

Students need to understand the different genres of writing to choose the best genre for their writing task. Teachers should emphasize the purpose (e.g., describing, narrating, informing, and persuading/analyzing) and features of each genre while relating the genre to real-world scenarios. See the table below for further details about the purposes of writing and examples of genres used to achieve those purposes.

Purposes of Writing and Examples of Genres

Purpose	Explanation	Examples of Genres
Describe	To describe something, such as a person, place, process, or experience, in vivid detail	• Descriptions (e.g., people, places, or events) • Character sketches • Nature writing • Brochures (personal, travel, and soon)
Narrate	To tell a story of an experience, event, or sequence of events while holding the reader's interest	• Diary entries (real or fictional) • Folktales, fairy tales, fables • Short stories • Poems • Eyewitness accounts
Inform	To examine previously learned information or provide new information	• Summaries of new or previously learned information • Instructions or directions • Letters • Newspaper articles • Science reports
Persuade/analyze	To give an opinion in an attempt to convince the reader that this point of view is valid or to persuade the reader to take a specific action (writing to express an opinion or make an argument has a similar purpose); to analyze ideas in text, for example, by considering their veracity or comparing them to one another	• Persuasive essays • Editorials • Compare-and-contrast essays • Reviews (e.g., of books and movies) • Literary analysis

2. Expand students' concept of audience.

Instructional strategies from the examples:

- Have students write for a variety of audiences.
- Allow students to choose an audience.
- Teach the word choices and tone appropriate for each audience.

To support students in understanding the role of audience in writing, teachers should design lessons where students can write for various audiences. Doing so will break students out of the mindset that writing is an isolated task completed in school for the teacher to read. To aid with an expanded view of audience, teachers can generate lists of potential audiences and allow students to choose different audiences during writing activities.

Teachers should also focus on teaching students how to adjust tone and word choice for particular audiences. For example, writing a description to someone who has knowledge of a particular topic would look different than writing a description of that same topic to someone who has little or no knowledge of the topic.

3. Teach students to emulate the features of good writing.

Instructional strategies from the examples:

- Have students analyze exemplary texts.
- Read text aloud and explain and discuss how the text demonstrates characteristics of effective writing.
- Stop to highlight key features.
- Ask students to emulate the features of exemplary writing.

Teachers should expose students to a variety of exemplary texts. Analyzing exemplary texts with students can enhance their writing styles. In choosing texts, make selections that support instructional goals, are grade-level appropriate, and provide exemplars of what students are being asked to do in writing activities.

The exemplary texts should be read aloud by teachers or students. Teachers should explain and students should discuss how each text demonstrates characteristics of effective writing in that particular genre. Be sure to stop frequently to highlight key features of the text that support the instructional goals of the lesson. Use activities that ask the student to emulate the features of exemplary text. See below for examples of activities that can be used with students at different levels to emulate good writing.

Story Emulation of *Rosie's Walk* with 1st Grade Students

**Original text of
Rosie's Walk, by Pat
Hutchins**

Rosie the hen went for a walk
across the yard
around the pond
over the haystack
past the mill
through the fence
under the beehives
and got back in time for dinner.

**Frame of *Rosie's Walk*,
provided as a worksheet
by the teacher**

_____ went for a _____
across the _____
around the _____
over the _____
past the _____
through the _____
under the _____
and got back in time for _____.

**Text developed by
a 1st-grade student**

Ms. Foster the teacher went for a **stroll**
across the **playground**
around the **jungle gym**
over the **jump rope**
past the **swings**
through the **bicycle racks**
under the **basketball hoop**
and got back in time for **the morning message**

Poem Emulation of “Where I’m From” by George Ella Lyon

Original text of “Where I’m From” by George Ella Lyon	Text developed by a 6 th grade classroom
I am from clothespins, from Clorox and carbon-tetrachloride. I am from the dirt under the back porch. (Black, glistening, it tasted like beets.) I am from the forsythia bush the Dutch elm whose long-gone limbs I remember as if they were my own. I’m from fudge and eyeglasses, from Imogene and Alafair. I’m from the know-it-alls and the pass-it-ons, from Perk up! and Pipe down! I’m from He restoreth my soul with a cotton ball lamb and ten verses I can say myself. I’m from Artemus and Billie’s Branch, fried corn and strong coffee. From the finger my grandfather lost to the auger, the eye my father shut to keep his sight. Under my bed was a dress box spilling old pictures, a sift of lost faces to drift beneath my dreams. I am from those moments— snapped before I budded— leaf-fall from the family tree.	I am from elastic strain, from the focus and the epicenter. I am from the destructive surface waves that run through the 40–200 kilometer fault zones. I am from the “Ring of Fire,” the tectonic and lithospheric plates. I can cause tsunamis and fires. I am from convergent, divergent, and transform plate boundaries. I am from seismographs that determine my strength. I am from speedy but weak p-waves, from slow and hardy s-waves, but I do not reach. Seismic waves are caused by me. Who am I? An earthquake.

4. Teach students techniques for writing effectively for different purposes.

Instructional strategies from the examples:

- Explicitly teach the techniques specific to each purpose.
- Describe each technique.
- Model its use.
- Gradually release responsibility to the student.

Teachers must explicitly teach the techniques specific to each purpose of writing. To do so, describe each technique, model its use, and gradually release more responsibility to students. See table below for examples of specific techniques for each of the four purposes of writing (i.e., describe, narrate, inform, and persuade/analyze) and the grade levels for which they are appropriate.

Examples of Techniques for Four Purposes of Writing

Purpose	Specific Technique	How Students Can Use the Technique	Grade Range
Describe	Sensory details	Use their five senses, as applicable: • What did you <i>see</i>? How did it <i>look</i>? • What sounds did you <i>hear</i>? • What did you <i>touch</i>? How did it <i>feel</i>? • What could you <i>smell</i>? • What did you <i>taste</i>?	K–3
Narrate	Story grammar	Consider the following questions when developing their story: • <i>Who</i> are the main characters? • <i>When</i> does the story take place? • <i>Where</i> does the story take place? • <i>What</i> do the main characters want to do? • <i>What</i> happens when the main characters try to do it? • <i>How</i> does the story end? • <i>How</i> does the main character feel?	1–3
Narrate	Story grammar	In older grades, expand the strategy in the following ways: • Tell the story from the point of view of a character other than the main character. • Add an interesting or surprising twist to the story.	4–6

Purpose	Specific Technique	How Students Can Use the Technique	Grade Range
Inform	Report writing	Complete a K-W-L chart: • What I Know • What I Want to know • What I Learned In the K-W-L chart, gather appropriate information: • Brainstorm. (What do I know about the topic?) • Extend brainstorming. (What do I want to know about the topic? What other information would be helpful to learn about the topic?) • Gather additional information and add to the chart. (What have I learned? Did I list anything during brainstorming that was inaccurate and needs to be crossed off the chart?) Review the K-W-L chart and circle the most important ideas to include in the report. Develop an outline, showing which ideas will be included in the report and the order in which they will be presented. Continue planning while writing, gathering new information, and adding to the outline as needed. Implement each aspect of the plan as they write.	2–6
Persuade/ analyze	STOP	Before they write, STOP and: • Suspend judgment. • Take sides. • Organize ideas. • Plan to adjust as they write.	4–6
Persuade/ analyze	DARE	DARE to check their paper to be sure they have: • Developed their thesis. • Added ideas to support their ideas. • Rejected arguments on the other side. • Ended with a strong conclusion.	4–6
Persuade/ analyze	TREE	As they write, use TREE: • Tell what they believe. (State a topic sentence.) • Provide three or more Reasons. (Why do I believe this?) • End it. (Wrap it up right.) • Examine. (Do I have all my parts?)	2–3
Persuade/ analyze	TREE	In older grades, expand the TREE strategy as follows: • Replace the Examine step with Explain reasons. (Say more about each reason.)	4–6

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Content Area	Level of Evidence	Grades
English Language Arts	 Minimal	K 1 st 2 nd 3 rd 4 th 5 th 6 th

RECOMMENDATION 3

Teach students to become fluent in handwriting, spelling, sentence construction, typing, and word processing.

When students are beginner writers, they lack the basic writing skills needed to produce high-quality writing. Teachers need to take the time to focus writing activities on building basic skills, such as handwriting, spelling, and sentence construction.

Spelling mistakes and poor handwriting can make it difficult for readers to understand what a student is trying to communicate. Word-processing programs can make the writing process more manageable for students. Teaching them how to type can help them become more efficient at writing on a computer. Additionally, fluency with computers is a necessary skill for daily life in today's world.

Strategies

1. Teach very young writers how to hold a pencil correctly and form letters fluently and efficiently.

Instructional strategies from the examples:

- Teach students to comfortably hold a pencil.
- Demonstrate how to write letters in print and cursive.
- Practice writing from memory.
- Provide multiple short practice sessions.

Early writing instruction should begin with teaching students how to comfortably hold a pencil to fight hand fatigue. Teachers should demonstrate how to write letters in print or cursive efficiently and neatly. Teachers should also provide opportunities for students to practice writing from memory without the support of handwriting practice diagrams. Lastly, because handwriting is a motor skill, it is recommended that teachers allot multiple short practice sessions into their lesson plans for handwriting. It is important to remember that though targeted handwriting practice is important, teachers should be sure to include opportunities for students to practice these skills during authentic writing activities.

2. Teach students to spell words correctly.

Instructional strategies from the examples:

- Teach commonly used words.
- Connect spelling with writing whenever possible.
- Connect phonic skills to writing.
- Teach students to spell by analogy.
- Use dictionaries while writing to correct spelling.

Teachers should focus on teaching the words that are more commonly used. Though some schools have a spelling curriculum separate from the writing curriculum, prioritize connecting spelling with writing as often as possible. Also, be sure to teach and demonstrate skills such as phonological awareness (K–2), spelling phonics (K–3), and morphological spelling (2–6). These skills allow students to spell words relatively correctly while reducing the disruption to the draft writing process. The youngest of writers should be encouraged to use inventive spelling. Teachers can also teach students to spell by analogy. For example, “If I can spell hug, I can figure out how to spell rug.” During the editing process, guide students to use dictionaries to check their spelling. For younger students, the use of a personal dictionary listing the correct spelling of words commonly misspelled by that student can be helpful.

3. Teach students to construct sentences for fluency, meaning, and style.

Instructional strategies from the examples:

- Focus on sentence mechanics to form high-quality sentences.
- Use activities to practice sentence construction.
- Teach students to evaluate sentences for meaning, style, and grammatical correctness.
- Demonstrate sentence revision.
- Use peer review to evaluate other’s sentences.

Students should learn to write sentences that are engaging and clearly communicate meaning. Teachers should focus on the importance of sentence mechanics (punctuation, capitalization, etc.) to form high-quality sentences. In kindergarten, begin developing students’ understanding of sentences and the basic mechanics such as capitalization and punctuation.

Demonstrate what sentences are and how to use capitalization and punctuation by writing out sentences that convey the ideas that students share orally. In grades 1 and 2, work with students to identify run-on sentences and demonstrate how to break them down into separate sentences.

As students’ ability increases, teach them how to increase sentence complexity by demonstrating a variety of sentence types. Teachers can also develop activities that allow students to practice sentence construction.

As students practice sentence construction skills, they can work with their teacher to evaluate the sentences for meaning, style, and grammatical correctness. Be sure to demonstrate how to revise sentences and allow opportunities for students to practice the evaluation and revision process themselves. More proficient students can leverage each other during peer review sessions to evaluate one another's sentences for fluency, meaning, and style.

4. Teach students to type fluently and use a word processor to compose.

Instructional strategies from the examples:

- Teach fluent typing.
- Teach the features of word processors.
- Turn off grammar and spell checks to allow students to focus on ideas.
- Use grammar and spell check features to support manual editing and revision, not as a substitute.

Teachers should instruct students on how to type fluently using correct fingering and without looking at the keyboard. Students should be introduced to typing as early as grade 1 and be able to type as fast as they can write by hand by grade 2 or 3. Teachers should also teach students the features of word processing software and how the technology can be useful in their writing exercises. Consider turning off features such as grammar and spell checks during the drafting process so students can focus on conveying their ideas without distraction. These features can be turned back on during the editing process. Be sure to explain to students that these features are not a substitute for careful editing and proofreading. For example, though the spell checker feature is valuable, the spell checker may flag proper nouns as an error when they are in fact correct. It will also not flag words as misspelled if they are real words (e.g., *their* and *there*).

Potential Roadblocks



Writing can be frustrating for students who struggle to develop handwriting and spelling skills.

Suggested Approach. If the student has significant difficulty with spelling and handwriting, teachers may want to consider typing as a primary means of writing. Teachers will need to provide additional support to aid students in the use of the word processing software.



Students do not consistently use the words learned during spelling lessons in their writing.

Suggested Approach. When students are focusing on getting their ideas down on paper, they may misspell words. Teachers should emphasize that proofreading is a part of the editing process. Teachers should connect spelling instruction to authentic writing activities, using strategies such as the following:

- Encourage students to include their spelling words in their own writing as much as possible.
- Have students read over their work, circle the new spelling words used, and check that they spelled those words correctly.
- Create a bulletin board where students can post their examples of how they used new spelling words correctly in their writing.

Review student work to identify common errors and include those words in spelling instruction. Work with students to set goals focused on identifying spelling errors during the editing phase and track student progress toward that goal.



The school's ELA curriculum only includes isolated grammar lessons that use worksheets or copying tasks to teach sentence writing.

Suggested Approach. When grammar instruction is disconnected from authentic writing, it is hard for students to apply what they learn in their own writing. Teachers can follow the grammar curriculum's scope and sequence but use the materials provided in innovative ways that incorporate the strategies described in the practice guide, such as gradual release. Additionally, teachers should have students practice spelling skills during writing activities to further connect spelling and writing.

Content Area	Level of Evidence	Grades
English Language Arts	 Minimal	K 1 st 2 nd 3 rd 4 th 5 th 6 th

RECOMMENDATION 4

Create an engaged community of writers.

Students need both the skill and the will to develop as writers. Teachers should establish a supportive environment in their classroom to foster a community of writers who are motivated to write well. In a supportive writing environment, teachers participate as writers, not simply instructors, to demonstrate the importance of writing. By taking part in writing lessons and activities, teachers convey the message that writing is important, valued, and rewarding.

To further develop students' motivation to write, teachers should include opportunities for students to choose their own topics and/or modify teacher-selected prompts related to the purposes and genres being taught. When students choose their own topics, they may become more engaged and motivated to write. Such engagement and motivation could potentially lead students to write more frequently and become more involved in the writing process and the writing community.

Students and teachers also should have regular and structured opportunities to interact through giving and receiving feedback as well as collaborating on writing activities. Collaboration can increase the sense of community in a classroom, as well as encourage students to become engaged in the writing process with their peers. When students feel connected to one another and to the teacher, they may feel safe participating in the writing process and sharing their writing with peers. Publishing students' work also can help them feel valued in their community.

Strategies

1. Teachers should participate as members of the community by writing and sharing their writing.

Instructional strategies from the examples:

- Teachers should model writing for students, thinking aloud to make the act of writing more visible.
- Teachers could collaborate on a writing project with their students.
- Discuss the parts of the sentences that are not making sense and provide feedback on student thinking.
- Teachers can take part in a writing assignment, sharing their work with students.

Teachers should model how the ability to write affects their daily lives, demonstrate the importance of writing to communicate, model the perseverance required to create a good piece of writing, and express the satisfaction that can come from creating a meaningful text.

For example, a teacher could draft a letter or an email to a friend in front of students, thinking out loud to make the invisible act of composing—which occurs internally for experienced writers—more visible to students. A teacher also could collaborate with all students on a writing project, such as composing a how-to guide for carving a Halloween pumpkin or writing a class newsletter. Teachers also should take part in writing assignments. For instance, if students are asked to describe a favorite family tradition, the teacher could offer their own example, actively conveying how selecting a topic one is interested in can generate excitement about writing.

2. Give students writing choices.

Instructional strategies from the examples:

- Provide students choice in writing assignments.
- Students can keep a notebook to record possible writing topics and add and refer to the notebook frequently.
- Encourage students to write for a variety of audiences.
- Provide instruction and opportunities to write to prompts.
- Writing prompts should inspire students to write, while being aligned to instructional purpose. They should also clearly state expectations and give room for students to express themselves.

Teachers should provide opportunities for student choice in writing assignments—for example, choice in selecting writing topics or the freedom to modify a teacher-selected prompt. One way to foster choice is for students to keep a notebook in which they record topics for writing, such as memories, pets, vacations, “firsts” (e.g., first time riding a bike, first soccer goal, first day at camp), and favorite holidays. Students should add topics often and consult their notebooks throughout the school year. Teachers also can encourage students to write for themselves, their peers, an imaginary audience (e.g., a character in a story), adults (e.g., their parents or an author), or a wider, unknown audience.

Teachers need to provide instruction and opportunities for students to practice writing to prompts. A prompt should inspire students to write while ensuring that students practice writing skills aligned with the teacher’s instructional purpose (e.g., a specific genre or a specific purpose).

The prompt should clearly state expectations with regard to content and writing skills, while still giving students room to express themselves. For example, students might be prompted to write about a historical figure or a character from a story. Prompts enable teachers to emphasize specific content standards as well as promote engagement and community-building.

Example Writing Prompts

The Westward Movement Prompt

Choose a group of people who interested you during our study of the Westward Movement. These people might be settlers, pioneers, or explorers. Consider the challenges these people faced in moving West.

Write a multi-paragraph paper that describes two or three difficulties or problems encountered by these people. Describe how they solved, or attempted to solve, these problems and whether or not their solutions worked. You are writing an explanation, not telling a story. Your paper will be used as the opening article in our class book on the Westward Movement and will be followed by first-hand accounts from settlers and explorers.

In your explanatory paper:

- Write in the third person (the “they” point of view)
- Identify and explain their challenges/problems
- Describe how they solved or tried to solve their problems
- Explain whether or not their solutions worked
- Choose vocabulary words that clearly illustrate the problems and solutions
- Use correct spelling, punctuation, and grammar

Adapted for Early Elementary

Choose a character from a story you read or a story read to you. Describe a problem that this character had. Describe how this character solved, or tried to solve, this problem. Explain whether the solution worked.

Examples of a character and a problem to be solved:

- Ramona Quimby having to give a speech
- Little pig protecting himself from the hungry wolf

3. Encourage students to collaborate as writers.

Instructional strategies from the examples:

- Ask students to collaborate as writers by brainstorming topics together, or providing peer feedback.
- Assign collaborative writing assignments.

Teachers can encourage students to collaborate throughout the writing process by brainstorming ideas about a topic, responding to drafts in a writing group, or helping peers edit or revise their work. Collaboration also can take the form of collaborative writing, whereby students jointly develop a single text. Younger students, for example, can take turns sharing the pen as they create a message on chart paper.

Older students can collaborate by publishing a class newspaper or composing stories to share with their friends or classmates. One collaborative activity that helps build a community of writers is “Star of the Day.”

Star of the Day

In the “Star of the Day” activity, each student is celebrated on their own day. Seated at the front of the classroom, the Star of the Day answers interview questions from peers using a pretend microphone. After the interview, students compose one sentence about the Star of the Day. These sentences are shared and combined into a class paragraph, which is then displayed on the class bulletin board, as demonstrated by this example from a 1st grade classroom:

Jordan is the Star of the Day. He likes the color blue. He loves to eat ice cream. His favorite animal is a tiger. Jordan lives in Irvine. It’s his birthday today!

4. Provide students with opportunities to give and receive feedback throughout the writing process.

Instructional strategies from the examples:

- Ask students to share their writing and respond to feedback from teacher and peers.
- Teach students to provide effective feedback.
- Develop rules and procedures for providing and sharing feedback on writing.
- Model and provide sample language for providing verbal feedback.

Students need to know whether their writing is accurately and appropriately conveying its message. One way students can determine this is by sharing their writing and responding to written and verbal feedback from the teacher and their peers. Although teachers should provide feedback to students through teacher-student conferences and rubrics, peers also should be encouraged to participate in the feedback process. Students may be able to identify problems in other people’s writing more easily than they can identify issues in their own work. Additionally, when students provide written feedback and assessment to peers, their comments and observations may enhance their understanding of their own writing.

Students need to be taught strategies and appropriate language for written feedback. Without explicit instruction in how to provide and receive feedback, students may focus solely on the conventions of writing. For example, if teachers focus only on spelling errors as they grade writing assignments, student writers will likely point to similar mistakes when providing feedback to peers. Therefore, teachers should develop rules and procedures for providing and sharing feedback on writing. When teachers emphasize meaning over form and correctness in early drafts, students may learn to do the same.

Teachers also should model and provide sample language to encourage appropriate verbal feedback. During “Author’s Chair,” for example, teachers can encourage students to practice giving “kind comments”—constructive comments and positive statements about peers’ writing.

Author's Chair Activity

During the “Author’s Chair” activity, one student, sitting in a special chair or rug, reads a piece of work to peers. The teacher then models and facilitates giving kind, verbal comments, such as:

- I really like ____.
- A standout line in your text for me is ____ because ____.
- I could really picture ____ because ____.

5. Publish students’ writing, and extend the community beyond the classroom.

Instructional strategies from the examples:

- Share student work in a variety of ways, including bulletin boards.
- Develop activities to share and provide feedback on stories for the larger school community.
- Include an “About the Author” page with shared student writing.

Students may begin to see themselves as writers if they have opportunities to publish their writing. Publishing can take a variety of forms, including displaying student work prominently in the classroom. For example, teachers can create a “Wall of Fame” featuring the best excerpts from students’ writing on a bulletin board in the classroom.

Teachers can also use publishing to extend the community beyond the classroom. Students can publish stories in books that include an “About the Author” page. These books can be made available in the school or classroom library. Students’ work also can be displayed in the hallway or administration building, and teachers can have students participate in a “Gallery Walk.”

In this activity, students frame their poems or stories on poster board, decorate them, and hang them around the school or classroom to simulate an art gallery. Students then circulate around the “gallery,” reading one another’s pieces, writing kind comments on sticky notes, and attaching the notes to the work on display. Publishing student work in this manner celebrates writing and helps create a physical environment that is conducive to learning.

Potential Roadblocks



Teachers may be uncomfortable with their own writing and, therefore, hesitant to share their writing and discuss the writing process with their students.

Suggest Approach. Part of creating a community of writers involves establishing a supportive environment in which every member of the community has room to grow and it is acceptable to take risks and make mistakes.

Writing is a lifelong skill, and it is important for students to understand that writing requires effort even when you are older and have been writing for many years. Making mistakes, demonstrating how to recognize those mistakes, and then correcting mistakes or revising word choice or sentence structure to make the writing more compelling can be a powerful model and learning experience for all members of the class.



If students are allowed to choose their own topics for writing, teachers may not be able to focus on the content standards adequately.

Suggest Approach. Teachers can expose students to the genres of writing required in the content standards and still allow students an element of choice. For example, when teaching the personal narrative, teachers can have students select a photograph of a vacation, favorite place, or important event and use their writing to dramatize what happened. When teaching persuasive writing, teachers can allow students to select an issue, or select which side of an argument to defend.



Providing feedback on all student writing is overwhelming and time-consuming.

Suggest Approach. It is not necessary for the teacher to provide feedback on all student writing; teachers should share the responsibility of providing feedback with students through student self-evaluation and peer evaluations. In fact, students should be able to write without expecting that every piece of writing will be assessed by the teacher. When students do complete writing pieces for teacher review and feedback, teachers should focus on specific elements, and they should discuss these expectations with students in advance. In this way, teachers can focus their comments on specific elements, such as a compelling opening, descriptive language, or effective use of transition words. Providing targeted feedback will help students better understand how to improve their writing.

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