

Best Practices in Teaching WRITING

- **Increase collaboration and communication within and across grade levels.** All teachers should feel responsibility for promoting writing skills. Strong administrative support is critical.
- Align **curriculum content maps** with **State Framework, writing assessment objectives**, and other initiatives and identify **challenging, attainable, and high expectations** for *all* students. After clear goals for writing are established, monitor to ensure program consistency and clarity of expectations for achievement.
- **Increase the use of writing across the curriculum** as a tool for learning rather than only teaching writing during language arts period. Students who engage in meaningful writing experiences daily, find writing less difficult than those who write infrequently. Appropriate incorporation of writing into other subject areas is productive in skill development.
- **The use of commonly agreed upon procedures, terms (i.e., vocabulary), guidelines, requirements, grading methods, and rubrics** (to the extent possible) contributes to consistency of expectations and greater student success.
- **Increase student ownership and responsibility** by guiding students in choosing some of their own topics, using brief teacher-student conferences, and teaching students to review their own progress and set goals for improvement. Collaborating with students in determining learning objectives is more motivating than when they are determined by the teacher alone. A balance in free choice and assigned topics is advocated.
- **Increase students' confidence in their ability to be successful writers**--attitude plays a big part in the amount of effort a student is willing to put into his/her writing. Administering attitudinal surveys (beginning and end of year) is a way to become aware of students' self-perceptions. Develop specific strategies to promote enthusiasm and enjoyment of writing. Discussion of "good," enjoyable literature (i.e., writing), as with author studies, is productive.
- **Increase teacher modeling writing** - drafting, revising, sharing - as a fellow author, and as demonstrator of processes. Teachers who share their thoughts, decisions, choices, etc. as they approach and complete tasks provide students with appropriate models for the writing process. Students need to see that revision is a big part of writing--not many people get it right the first time!
- **Increase the amount of class time spent on writing whole original pieces.** Establish real purposes for writing helps to more actively engage students in the task. Reduce writing assignments that are given briefly, with no context or purpose, and those that can be completed in one step.
- **Increase instruction in and support for all stages of writing process** -pre-writing, drafting, revising, and editing. Involve students as partners in brainstorming topics and ideas and as peer coaches (i.e., editors) during all phases. Use "writers' workshop" as early as kindergarten.
- **Increase use of research-based instructional strategies for teaching writing.** A wide repertoire of strategies helps to meet the diverse needs of students. For example, use scaffold writing with emergent writers. The teacher asks the students to tell them about a picture they have drawn. The teacher draws a blank for each word in the students's sentence. The teacher guides the students in writing the words (or even writing the first letter of the word). Other examples are using guided imagery, actual objects, and graphic organizers (webs).

Numerous internet sites provide valuable resources.

- **Promote students' vocabulary development.** Learning Dolch words, considered “service words,” will help students read and write with more ease. Use a variety of approaches, especially those that are interactive (as opposed to workbook type activities), to help students. Use of students' Multiple Intelligences can be helpful. Before a word becomes part of a students' vocabulary, it must be seen, read, spoken, written a number of times. Word walls are advocated for primary teachers. Five new words selected each week, posted with the beginning letter, then used in a variety of exercises (crossword puzzles, riddles, pictures, etc.) during the week (and reinforced thereafter). Learning fewer words in depth is preferable to be exposed to more than can be internalized.
- **Incorporate the learning of grammar and mechanics in context,** at the editing stage, and as items are needed. Reduce the amount of time spent on isolated drills on “subskills” of grammar, vocabulary, spelling, penmanship, etc. (Daily Oral Language is a productive way to maintain a consistent focus without being overly tedious or boring.) Isolated grammar lessons, taught out of context (in textbook order not part of the writing process) are of limited help in transferring correct grammar to everyday use.
- **Increase instruction and feedback on writing given to specific individuals and small groups** on an as needed basis (thus decreasing the need for extended instruction given to the whole class).
- **Increase writing for real audiences,** publishing for the class and for wider communities rather than for the teacher alone. Having students write letters to the editor, principal, school board, President, etc. is one way. Class newspapers, writing festivals, making and binding own books, Wee Deliver in-school Postal System are some other ways to provide authentic writing opportunities.
- **Make the classroom a supportive setting for shared learning,** using active exchange and valuing of students' ideas, collaborative small group work, conferences and peer critiquing that give responsibility for improvement to authors. Help the students see that they are not competing individuals, but are cooperative partners in producing quality work. Productive talk among students viewed as appropriate, not seen as cheating or disruptive.
- **Use constructive and efficient evaluation** that involves brief informal oral responses as students work, thorough grading of a few student selected polished pieces, a focus on a few errors at a time, and a cumulative view of growth and self-evaluation. Avoid evaluation being a negative burden for the teacher and students by marking all papers heavily for all errors. Develop a grading system that is seen as positive, focused on growth rather than on errors. Encourage risk-taking and honest expression.

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