

This document provides a summary of Recommendation 4 from the *Teaching Elementary School Students to Be Effective Writers*. Full reference is on the last page.

CONTENT: **Writing**
GRADE LEVEL(S): **K-6**
LEVEL OF EVIDENCE: **Minimal**

Recommendation

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.

How to carry out the recommendation

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.

South Carolina standards alignment

ELA: K-2.W.RC.6, 3-5.W.RC.6

TEACHER: INST.PIC.3, INST.PIC.2

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 his or her 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.

South Carolina standards alignment

ELA: K-2.W.MCC.1, K-2.W.MCC.2, K-2.W.MCC.3, K-2.W.RC.6, 3-5.W.MCC.1, 3-5.W.MCC.2, 3-5.W.MCC.3, 3-5.W.RC.6

TEACHER: INST.AM.9

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 prompt

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.

South Carolina standards alignment

ELA: K-2.1.5, 3-5.1.5

TEACHER: INST.AM.7, INST.AF.5, INST.GS.1, INST.GS.2, INST.GS.3, INST.GS.4

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.

South Carolina standards alignment

ELA: K-2.1.5, 3-5.1.5

TEACHER: INST.MS.3, INST.AM.5, INST.AF.1, INST.AF.2, INST.AF.3, INST.AF.4, INST.AF.5

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, reads his or her work to peers as they sit on the rug. The teacher then models and facilitates giving kind, verbal comments, such as the following:

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.

South Carolina standards alignment

ELA: K-2.W.RC.6, 3-5.W.RC.6

TEACHER: INST.TCK.1, INST.TCK.2, INST.TCK.3, PLAN.SW.2

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 also can 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 and how to address them

Roadblock	Suggested Approach
<i>Teachers may be uncomfortable with their own writing and therefore hesitant to share their writing and discuss the writing process with their students.</i>	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.
<i>If students are allowed to choose their own topics for writing, teachers may not be able to focus on the content standards adequately.</i>	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.
<i>Providing feedback on all student writing is overwhelming and time-consuming.</i>	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.

Reference: Graham, S., Bollinger, A., Booth Olson, C., D’Aoust, C., MacArthur, C., McCutchen, D., & Olinghouse, N. (2012). Teaching elementary school students to be effective writers (NCEE 2012-4058). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance. Retrieved from <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/PracticeGuide/17>