Strong writing skills can be essential for students to express themselves, work with others, and succeed in educational and career opportunities. The need to develop writing skills extends far beyond the early grades. Secondary students need opportunities to practice and improve writing skills, which can lead to stronger critical thinking ability and increased postsecondary success.

*Teaching Secondary Students to Write Effectively*, a Practice Guide developed by the What Works Clearinghouse (WWC), makes three recommendations for teachers to help students in grades 6–12 sharpen their writing skills. The following recommendations include tips on how to implement each recommendation along with the level of evidence supporting each recommendation's effectiveness.

**Explicitly teach appropriate writing strategies using a Model-Practice-Reflect instructional cycle**

Eleven studies found that explicitly teaching writing strategies using Model-Practice-Reflect had positive effects on at least one writing outcome.

Educators can help students understand, choose, and apply effective strategies for each step of the writing process. The following are example strategies for each step of the writing process, and more strategies can be found in the Practice Guide.

**Planning**
- K-W-L (Know-Want to Know-Learn) diagram
- Outline

**Goal Setting**
- Individualizing goals
- SCHEME (Skills check-Choose goals-Hatch plan-Execute-Monitor-Edit)

**Drafting**
- 3-2-1 (3 things you’ve learned, 2 you’d like to learn, and 1 question)
- DARE (Develop-Add-Reject-End)

**Evaluating**
- Ranking the evidence
- Color coding

**Revising**
- Peer feedback
- WIRMI (What I Really Mean Is...)

**Editing**
- COPS (Capitalization-Overall appearance-Punctuation-Spelling)
- Job cards
Teachers can use the Model-Practice-Reflect approach to reinforce writing strategies.

**TIP**
Use the Model-Practice-Reflect instructional cycle to teach strategies to help students learn from teachers, peers, and their own written work.

"I do" Demonstrate the practice and explain the thought process behind it

"We do" Have students incorporate the practice in their work

"You do" Engage students in analyzing how the practice worked and the outcomes

**HOW TO**
Integrate writing and reading to emphasize key writing features

- WWC LEVEL OF EVIDENCE: MODERATE  
  Seven studies found that integrating reading and writing had positive effects on at least one writing outcome. One study found indeterminate effects.

Reading and writing share four types of cognitive processes and knowledge. Educators can build reading and writing skills by doing the following:

**TIP**
Use a diverse set of written texts to highlight key reading and writing features.

Teachers can use the following strategies to foster reading and writing skills together:

- **Using sentence starters** to prompt students to think critically about writing and reading assignments.
- **Identifying story impressions** or key words that define a story’s narrative.
- **Synthesizing multiple texts or multiple perspectives** on the same text.
- **Sharing exemplars of different writing styles** (e.g., persuasive, narrative, reflective).
- **Having students reflect on the writer’s Role, Audience, writing Format, and Topic (RAFT).**
- **Doing a Copy/Change exercise** to apply different writing structures to the student’s own work.

How can you support secondary students’ literacy development? Check out this REL Southwest infographic and Ask A REL reference desk response to learn more.
Use assessments of student writing to inform instruction and feedback

**TIP**

Use iterations of formative assessment to assess student mastery of key concepts, use the assessment results to adjust instruction, and help students meet the intended learning goals.

**TIP**

Support students’ individual learning needs using these strategies.

- Assess students’ strengths and opportunities for growth before diving into new content. The following assessment models can be easily incorporated:
  - On-demand writing prompts.
  - Graphic organizers.
  - Exit slips to check understanding after a lesson.
  - Error analysis, or reviewing student work for specific writing challenges.

- Analyze student work and tailor instruction:
  - Customize activities for individual students or small groups that build on opportunities for growth.
  - Collaborate with other teachers to tailor instruction across classrooms, grades, or subjects.
  - Provide students with opportunities to receive feedback from multiple avenues such as teacher feedback—highlights a student’s strengths and provides scaffolding and support for improvement.
  - Peer feedback—teaches students to analyze and provide meaningful feedback to others.
  - Self-assessment—helps students recognize their own strengths and opportunities for improvement along with reflecting on the overall writing process.

- Monitor students’ progress on a regular basis.

To learn more, browse the full WWC practice guide.
References


6. For more information about what each level of evidence entails, watch this short video.

7. The selected examples were chosen for ease of understanding by a novice audience, not for a particular methodological reason.


18. The WWC evidence rating of “minimal” indicates that the Practice Guide panel did not uncover an established body of research that demonstrates the practice’s positive effect on student achievement either because of a lack of experimental research on the topic or weak or conflicting evidence of effectiveness. However, a minimal evidence rating does not indicate that the recommendation is any less important than other recommendations with a strong evidence or moderate evidence rating.

