

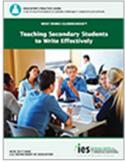


Supporting your middle or high schooler's writing skills at home



Introduction

Strong writing skills are crucial for students to communicate, succeed in school, and prepare for a career.^{1,2,3} Just like their younger peers, middle and high schoolers need opportunities to practice and improve writing skills.



Teaching Secondary Students to Write Effectively, a Practice Guide developed by the U.S. Department of Education's What Works Clearinghouse (WWC), makes [three recommendations for teachers](#) to help students in grades 6–12 sharpen their writing skills.

1. Explicitly teach students different strategies for components of the writing process.
2. Integrate writing and reading to emphasize key writing features.
3. Use assessments of student writing to inform instruction and feedback.

This resource describes several approaches that families and caregivers can use to support their middle or high schooler's writing skills while learning at home. You can pick and choose from these approaches, depending on which ones you are most comfortable trying. Talk to your student's teacher about how you can support writing goals and expectations. Encourage your middle or high schooler to check in with their teachers for additional guidance.

WWC CONNECTION The WWC Practice Guide recommends that teachers explicitly introduce different strategies to students for different stages of the writing process. You can use some of the following suggestions at home to help your middle or high schooler practice using these strategies throughout the writing process. (See "Stages of the writing process" table, below.)

Encourage your middle or high schooler to identify where they are in the writing process.

The writing process illustrated in the following table describes the six stages of writing. Identifying the stage on which the student is working helps them plan ahead and use appropriate strategies.



Stages of the writing process

Planning	Goal setting	Drafting	Evaluating	Revising	Editing
Brainstorm writing ideas through reading, thinking, and discussing.	Identify writing goals and plan how to achieve them.	Select words and sentences that most accurately convey ideas and turn into an initial written draft.	Use self-evaluation and feedback from others to assess how well the draft meets the writing goals.	Improve the draft based on self-evaluation and feedback from others.	Clarify words and sentences; address grammar, spelling, punctuation, and capitalization.

Ask your middle or high schooler about strategies they have learned related to the stage of the writing process on which they are working.

You might ask, "What strategies did your teacher share for working on this stage?" or "What has helped you with this part of the process in the past?"



Planning Stage

If your student is in the planning stage and needs to identify a topic for an informational essay, they might use a K-W-L chart to develop writing ideas. (See the directions below for using a K-W-L chart.)

K-W-L chart

K	W	L
What I <u>K</u> now About This Topic	What I <u>W</u> ant to Know About This Topic	What I <u>L</u> earned About This Topic

In the “K” column, the student lists what they already **know** about the topic. The “W” column is used to list what they **want** to know about the topic; this can guide their research. After researching and reading articles or watching videos, they can record what they **learned** about the topic in the “L” column. The student can build a K-W-L chart and use all three columns to organize their ideas for their draft essay.

Creating an outline can help your middle or high schooler with the planning stage for informative or persuasive writing.

Encourage your student to organize their main ideas and supporting details using an outline format. In the outline sample below, numbers are used to list main ideas and to arrange them in a logical order. Lowercase letters are used to include supporting details, figures, tables, and other points to support each main idea.



Outline sample

1. Main idea 1
 - a. Supporting idea 1
 - b. Supporting idea 2
 - c. Figure 1
2. Main idea 2
 - a. Supporting idea 1
 - b. Supporting idea 2
 - c. Supporting idea 3
3. Main idea 3
 - a. Supporting idea 1
 - b. Supporting idea 2
 - c. Table 1

Help your middle or high schooler focus on the specific audience and purpose of their writing assignment by having them reflect on the following questions.

To determine the audience, help your student reflect using questions such as the following:

- ▶ Who is my audience? What can I learn about my audience through online research?
- ▶ What does my audience already know or understand about this topic?
- ▶ What does my audience need to know? What questions might my audience have about this topic?



Goal-Setting Stage

Help your middle or high schooler identify their writing goals and plan how to achieve them.

Students should choose one or more goals to work on as they write. This process might include goals for maintaining focus on the topic, organization, and voice to meet the writing assignment purpose.



To support this stage, suggest that your middle or high schooler check in with their teacher(s) about how to help identify writing goals specific to their assignment, and follow up if needed.

Evaluating Stage

Help your student reflect on their writing throughout the school year, or when comparing first and final drafts.

Encourage your student to think about questions such as the following:

- ▶ After rereading drafts of your work, can you see evidence of your growth as a writer? Describe your successes or where you have grown as a writer.
- ▶ How well do you think you achieved the writing goal for this assignment? Explain your thinking, referring to examples from your writing, if possible.
- ▶ If you see improvement between your drafts, why were you successful? What was especially useful to you? For example, did one type of feedback help?



Revising Stage

When your student has finished a draft, a simple strategy for the revising stage is to encourage your student to write a “What I Really Mean Is...” or WRMI, statement.

To write a WRMI statement, your student completes the following sentence starter: “**What I Really Mean Is...**” and keeps a copy. They can then ask a family member or peer to read their draft and write a short “What I Think You Really Meant to Say Was...” statement in response to what they read. Suggest your student also share the goal for the assignment with that family member or peer and ask for feedback on how well they met that goal. The student can compare the two statements to see how well the draft communicates what they intended and shows progress toward their goal. Your student can then revise their draft accordingly.



Encourage your middle or high schooler to keep a process log to document self-reflection and feedback from peers or adults that can be used to guide revision.

A process log provides space for students to record information and reflections as they move through stages of the writing process. We have provided an example [process log](#) that students can use to guide their revision.





Because reading and writing are similar learning processes, the WWC Practice Guide recommends that teachers combine reading and writing assignments to help students build both skills. You can help your middle or high schooler build their writing skills at home through the following strategies that focus on reading.



Talk to your middle or high schooler about what they're reading, specifically the type of text and the key features of the text they are reading.

Helping your student think critically about texts they are reading also can help your student develop stronger writing skills. The types of texts and the key features of each type are listed in the following table.



Text types and key features

Type of text	Key features	Example
Argumentative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A proposition (the major premise of the argument) • Claims on which the proposition is built • Supporting evidence (facts and/or opinions) • Well-supported generalization (not fallacious reasoning) • Incorporation of anticipated objections • Strong closure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Newspaper or magazine editorial
Descriptive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Description of the person, place, object, or event • Use of descriptive and figurative language to help readers visualize the person, place, object, or event • Qualities or characteristics that may be listed or arranged in a particular order • Concrete details (sight, taste, touch, smell, sound, and movement) to bring the subject to life 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Travel blog
Narrative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A setting • An introduction of characters • A problem or goal • An attempt to solve the problem—often multiple unsuccessful attempts or embedded episodes of attempts within attempts • A solution to the problem • A resolution, conclusion, and/or moral 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Short story • Novel
Informational	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A topic or theme (may be repeated) • Present tense to evoke a timeless or generalizing quality • Technical vocabulary • Descriptive attributes and characteristic events • Definitions or explanations of terms • Visual elements such as diagrams, tables, and charts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Article about a certain place or situation
Technical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specialized topic • Instructions about how to do something 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Directions for setting up a new phone or computer
Persuasive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Main point or argument • Motivation and arguments for key points (including need, significance, and benefits) • Supporting evidence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Letter asking for funding or support for an organization
Reflective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A concrete occasion or anecdote in the beginning • Reflection of the universal significance of the occasion or anecdote • A process of discovery • A lesson about human nature in the conclusion • Rich, concrete details and sensory description 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Autobiography
Expressive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First person with informal language (for example, contractions, slang) • Often has dialogue • Chronological organization • Lots of description with extensive use of adjectives • Feelings are described in detail • Active verbs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diary entry

Drafting written responses to reading assignments supports student writing. Share sentence starters that your middle or high schooler can use to write about reading assignments from their teachers.

The following are examples of sentence starters from the WWC Practice Guide:

- ▶ At first, I thought..., but now, I think...
- ▶ My latest thought about this is...
- ▶ I'm getting a different picture here because...
- ▶ The big idea is...
- ▶ A conclusion I'm drawing is...
- ▶ The most important message is...
- ▶ This could be more effective if...
- ▶ A strong or impactful sentence for me is...
- ▶ This word or phrase stands out for me because...
- ▶ I like how the author uses ___ to show...



Look for and share published examples of different text types with your middle or high schooler.

For example, you and your student can review news articles as examples of informational writing or other types of text that your student will find engaging. You might also encourage your middle or high schooler to think about previous readings that use different text types.



Encourage your middle or high schooler to look for strong examples of different text types that they can use to inform their writing. Prompt them to ask their teacher(s) for recommendations. You can also follow up with your child's teacher for examples.

Encourage your middle or high schooler to evaluate their use of writing and reading strategies.

Assessing how well a given strategy supported their writing helps students deepen their understanding of the writing process; it also reinforces the use of effective strategies in future writing. Ask them to think about questions like, "How did this strategy help you achieve your writing goals?" and "What did you find challenging about using that strategy?"



Conclusion

Many middle and high school students see writing as a challenging activity. Students may believe that they lack the skills or talent needed to write well. You can support your student by emphasizing that improving at writing is a lifelong process and that feedback and practice are essential to growth. Using the approaches detailed in this resource, you can help motivate your student to work through their writing assignments and grow as a writer.

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This work was funded by the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences (IES) under contract 91990018C0002, administered by American Institutes for Research and under contract number ED-IES-17-C-0009 administered by Education Northwest. The content of the infographic does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of IES or the U.S. Department of Education, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. government.