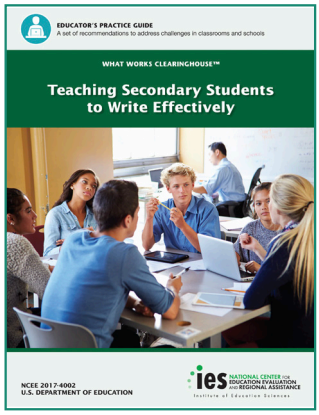
Practice Guide: Teaching Secondary Students to Write Effectively



The What Works Clearinghouse practice guide Teaching Secondary Students to Write Effectively is a free resource for educators that provides three evidence-based recommendations for supporting students in grades 6–12 to develop effective writing skills. **Effective writing** can be defined as the skillful composition of text that achieves the writer's goals, aligns with the specific audience and context, articulates ideas with clarity, and prompts the intended response from the reader. The recommendations in this practice guide are rooted in two themes: **writing encourages critical thinking** and **writing occurs in every discipline**.

What is in the practice guide?

- Three evidence-based recommendations for teaching effective writing skills to students in grades 6–12.
- Summaries and ratings of research-based evidence supporting each recommendation.
- Specific, actionable guidance for educators on implementing practices in their classrooms and suggestions for addressing obstacles.

RECOMMENDATION 1

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

- Explicitly teach strategies for planning and goal setting, drafting, evaluating, revising, and editing.
- Instruct students on how to choose and apply strategies appropriate for the audience and purpose.
- Model strategies for students.
- Provide students with opportunities to apply and practice modeled strategies.
- Engage students in evaluating and reflecting upon their own and peers' writing and use of modeled strategies.

RECOMMENDATION 2

Integrate writing and reading to emphasize key writing features.

- Teach students to understand that both writers and readers use similar strategies, knowledge, and skills to create meaning.
- Use a variety of written exemplars to highlight the key features of texts.

RECOMMENDATION 3

Use assessments of student writing to inform instruction and feedback.

- Assess students' strengths and areas for improvement before teaching a new strategy or skill.
- Analyze student writing to tailor instruction and target feedback.
- Regularly monitor students' progress while teaching writing strategies and skills.

Secondary Writing Toolkit (Coming Soon)

Teacher-friendly Resources for Using Evidence-based Practices to Teach Writing

Building on the recommendations in the Teaching Secondary Students to Write Effectively practice guide, this toolkit provides educators with **tools for understanding their own instructional practices and professional learning resources and activities** for teams of teachers.

WHO IS THE TOOLKIT FOR?

The toolkit is designed to support professional learning communities (PLCs) in applying evidence-based strategies to help middle school students write effectively. Through collaborative learning experiences, educators expand their knowledge base as they read, discuss, share, and apply the key ideas and strategies presented in the practice guide.

WHAT WILL BE INCLUDED IN THE PUBLISHED TOOLKIT?

The toolkit is organized by four topical modules that support English Language Arts teachers in bringing **the writing process** (see diagram) to life in their instruction. Each module includes an overview video and classroom videos that illustrate how to implement the practice guide recommendations.

Module 1: Reading and Writing to Improve Students' Arguments
Module 2: Writing Strategies for Planning, Goal Setting, and Drafting
Module 3: Writing Strategies for Evaluating, Revising, and Editing
Module 4: Formative Assessment to Improve Students' Writing

The toolkit resources will include:

- **Participant Workbooks** for teachers participating in the PLC.
- **Facilitators' Guides** for the facilitator of the PLC.
- An **Administrators' Guide** and a **Facilitator's Sustainability Guide** for the school team to support the implementation and sustainability of the PLC.
- **Going Deeper Resources** for teachers, including sample lesson plans, quick-start guides, templates, student work examples, and other instructional resources.

The practice guide and toolkit cover strategies used by effective writers during each component of the writing process.

Who and what is involved in the making of the toolkit?

The Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) Pacific, which includes a team of cross-organization industry partners, is managing the development, usability testing, and evaluation of the Secondary Writing Toolkit. REL Pacific received invaluable support from the Hawai'i Department of Education and Hawai'i schools through the development process.

The toolkit is currently in the evaluation study phase, with an expected publication date of 2025.

Timeline
2022–2023 Development
2023 Usability Testing
2024 Evaluation Study
2025 Expected Publication

IES Institute of Education Sciences
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