

Teaching Elementary School Students to Be Effective Writers

Summary of Evidence for Instructional Tips Based on the Educator's Practice Guide



Summary of evidence on instructional tips for:

- Assisting Students to Use Strategies for Writing
- Teaching Students to Write for a Variety of Purposes
- Helping Students Write Strong Sentences

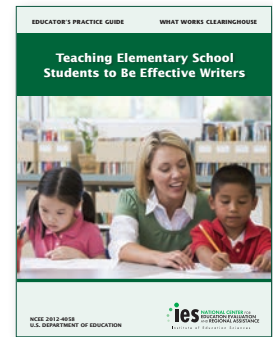
About the Summary of Evidence for WWC Instructional Tips

Instructional tips help educators carry out recommendations contained in IES Educator's Practice Guides. This summary of evidence describes the research evidence that supports the use of the instructional tips in classrooms and is based on a practice guide authored by *Steve Graham, Alisha Bollinger, Carol Booth Olson, Catherine D'Aoust, Charles MacArthur, Deborah McCutchen, and Natalie Olinghouse.*

About the Evidence

The evidence supporting the elementary writing instructional tips is drawn from research that meets What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) design standards and is summarized below.

To learn more about the research evidence, read the practice guide, *Teaching Elementary School Students to Be Effective Writers*.



Evidence
on

Assisting Students to Use Strategies for Writing (*Recommendation 2a, Steps 1 and 3*)

Supported by **fourteen studies** that meet WWC Group Design Standards and **ten supplemental studies**

Fourteen group design studies found predominantly positive effects of teaching students to use strategies for writing.¹

- One study tested an intervention in which teachers **introduced students to the reflexive writing process**. Students were then **taught parts of the writing process in separate sessions**, with each session focused on a specific component of the process.²
- In four studies, teachers taught students **strategies for planning their writing**.³ For example, in two related studies, teachers taught a planning strategy and then gave students different types of goals related to writing process or writing products to help them learn and apply the strategy in their writing.⁴
- In three studies, students learned and practiced **strategies for evaluating, revising, and editing their writing**.⁵ For example, in one study, students were taught to use rubrics to evaluate their writing, and then practiced evaluating writing samples based on the rubrics.⁶
- Six studies examined **self-regulated strategy development (SRSD) instruction**, an approach that teaches writing strategies by teaching background knowledge, describing and modeling the strategy, asking students to practice using it in groups and with assistance, and eventually asking students to apply it independently.⁷

Overall writing quality is identified in the practice guide as the most important type of outcome for writing instruction. Twelve of the studies related to this set of tips examined effects on students' overall writing quality, consistently finding positive effects on these outcomes immediately after the intervention and, when reported, after a follow-up period.⁸ However, four of these studies found no evidence of a positive effect on other types of writing outcomes (focused on specific components of writing, such as sentence structure).⁹ Two studies related to this set of tips did not examine overall writing quality but found positive effects on quantity of text produced.¹⁰

Supplemental evidence comes from ten single-case design studies that examined SRSD instruction and found improvements in student writing outcomes.^{11,12}

- Two studies examined SRSD implemented in whole class or paired settings with general education students.¹³
 - Eight studies examined SRSD implemented in small-group, paired, or individual settings with students who were at risk for writing difficulties.¹⁴
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Evidence
on

Teaching Students to Write for a Variety of Purposes (*Recommendation 2b, Steps 1 and 2*)

Supported by **five studies** that meet WWC Group Design Standards

Five group design studies tested the effectiveness of teaching students to write for a variety of purposes and predominately found positive effects on student writing.¹⁵

- In four studies, teachers **instructed students to compose, review or revise their writing for different genres or audiences.**¹⁶
 - For example, in one study, teachers gave students an audience awareness goal and guidelines that instructed them to think about who might disagree with their opinion, what reasons those people might give, and how to defend their own opinion.¹⁷
 - In one study, students participated in a lesson on reviewing and revising for each of two informational and persuasive essays.¹⁸
- In one study, instruction included specific sessions dedicated to **establishing the purpose and analyzing the audience of a writing task.**¹⁹

Three of the studies related to this set of tips examined effects on students' overall writing quality, and all found positive effects on these outcomes.²⁰ One of these studies found positive effects for the sixth-grade sample but not for the fourth-grade sample.²¹ Of the two studies related to this set of tips that did not examine overall writing quality, one found positive effects on quantity of text produced,²² and the other found improvements in sentence construction.²³



Helping Students Write Strong Sentences

(Recommendation 3, Step 3)

Supported by **two studies** that meet WWC Group Design Standards and **one supplemental study**

Two group design studies tested the effectiveness of sentence-construction interventions, and both found positive effects on at least one measure of student writing.²⁴

- One study found that the quantity of text students produced increased when teachers taught **Standard English conventions and strategies**.²⁵
- In another study, teachers **explained and modeled the use of a specific sentence-combining strategy**, and then student pairs practiced the procedure. This study found positive effects on measures of writing quality but negative effects on quantity of text produced.²⁶

Supplemental evidence comes from one single-case design study, which found that sentence-combining instruction improved the overall writing quality of at-risk students. This study found no discernible effects on a measure of sentence structure.²⁷

Notes

- ¹ Curry (1997); Garcia and de Caso-Fuertes (2007); Garcia-Sanchez and Fidalgo-Redondo (2006); Glaser and Brunstein (2007); Graham, Harris, and Mason (2005); Graham, MacArthur, and Schwartz (1995); Guastello (2001); Harris, Graham, and Mason (2006); MacArthur, Schwartz, and Graham (1991); Pritchard and Marshall (1994); Schunk and Swartz (1993) [article summarizes two studies: study 1, process goals; study 1, product goals; study 2, process goals; study 2, product goals]; Tracy, Reid, and Graham (2009); Troia and Graham (2002).
- ² Garcia and de Caso-Fuertes (2007).
- ³ Pritchard and Marshall (1994); Schunk and Swartz (1993) [article summarizes two studies]; Troia and Graham (2002).
- ⁴ Schunk and Swartz (1993) [article summarizes two studies].
- ⁵ Graham, MacArthur, and Schwartz (1995); Guastello (2001); MacArthur, Schwartz, and Graham (1991).
- ⁶ Guastello (2001).
- ⁷ Curry (1997); Garcia-Sanchez and Fidalgo-Redondo (2006); Glaser and Brunstein (2007); Graham, Harris, and Mason (2005); Harris, Graham, and Mason (2006); Tracy, Reid, and Graham (2009).
- ⁸ Curry (1997); Glaser and Brunstein (2007); Graham, Harris, and Mason (2005); Graham, MacArthur, and Schwartz (1995); Guastello (2001); Harris, Graham, and Mason (2006); MacArthur, Schwartz, and Graham (1991); Pritchard and Marshall (1994); Schunk and Swartz (1993) [article summarizes two studies]; Tracy, Reid, and Graham (2009); Troia and Graham (2002).
- ⁹ Graham, Harris, and Mason (2005); Schunk and Swartz (1993) [study 1, process goals; study 1 product goals; study 2, product goals]; Troia and Graham (2002).
- ¹⁰ Garcia and de Caso-Fuertes (2007); Garcia-Sanchez and Fidalgo-Redondo (2006).
- ¹¹ Danoff, Harris, and Graham (1993); Graham et al. (1992); Graham and Harris (1989); Lane et al. (2008); Lienemann et al. (2006); Mason and Shriner (2008); Saddler (2006); Saddler et al. (2004); Troia, Graham, and Harris (1999); Zumbrunn (2010).
- ¹² While group design studies contribute to the level of evidence rating for a recommendation, at the time of this practice guide's release, single-case design (SCD) studies could not raise the level of evidence above minimal. SCD studies were included as supplemental evidence for the recommendations in the guide.
- ¹³ Danoff, Harris, and Graham (1993); Zumbrunn (2010).
- ¹⁴ Graham et al. (1992); Graham and Harris (1989); Lane et al. (2008); Lienemann et al. (2006); Mason and Shriner (2008); Saddler (2006); Saddler et al. (2004); Troia, Graham, and Harris (1999).
- ¹⁵ Berninger et al. (2006); Ferretti, Lewis, and Andrews-Weckerly (2009); Ferretti, MacArthur, and Dowdy (2000); Garcia and de Caso-Fuertes (2007); Midgette, Haria, and MacArthur (2008).
- ¹⁶ Midgette, Haria, and MacArthur (2008); Berninger et al. (2006); Ferretti, MacArthur, and Dowdy (2000); Ferretti, Lewis, and Andrews-Weckerly (2009).
- ¹⁷ Midgette, Haria, and MacArthur (2008).
- ¹⁸ Berninger et al. (2006).
- ¹⁹ Garcia and de Caso-Fuertes (2007).
- ²⁰ Ferretti, MacArthur, and Dowdy (2000); Ferretti, Lewis, and Andrews-Weckerly (2009); Midgette, Haria, and MacArthur (2008).
- ²¹ Ferretti, MacArthur, and Dowdy (2000).
- ²² Garcia and de Caso-Fuertes (2007).
- ²³ Berninger et al. (2006).
- ²⁴ Fogel and Ehri (2000); Saddler and Graham (2005).
- ²⁵ Fogel and Ehri (2000).
- ²⁶ Saddler and Graham (2005).
- ²⁷ Saddler, Behforooz, and Asaro (2008).