Key Components of Writing Instruction

Writing is a necessary and important area of literacy that supports comprehension, critical and creative thinking across content areas. Students need a structured and supportive environment to be able to practice the habits and processes of successful writers. They need to engage in “writerly” habits and processes, apprenticing themselves to writers’ routines and rituals. Teachers of writing can support this process by creating a workshop-styled classroom where learning how to write is modeled and taught in the context of ongoing and purposeful student work (Harvey & Lamb, 2002). In a classroom organized for effort, students read and study a variety of genres, examine the work of published authors, and are guided to use the elements of the various genres in their own writing. Students create authentic products that reflect academic rigor for authentic purposes. The Minnesota Department of Education (nd) English Language Arts and the National Center on Education and the Economy (NCEE) Primary Literacy and Elementary Language Arts Performance Standards (2001) set the expectations for teaching and learning in the area of writing.

Critical writing skills include:
- using the writing process to practice the habits and processes of successful writers;
- writing in various modes or genres, including some that are primarily imaginative and some that are primarily informational;
- achieving clarity and coherence by communicating the central idea and related supporting details with clear use of elaboration and organizational structures;
- writing purposefully and for specific audiences;
- writing in response to higher level questions about the content they encounter in textbooks, articles and literature in every discipline;
- applying standard English conventions of spelling, grammar, and usage; and
- producing presentable handwritten and word processed documents.

Writer’s Workshop

Writer’s Workshop is organized around a daily one-hour writing structure. The workshop model supports learning as apprenticeship (see complete table, p. 8). The Principles of Learning are visible in the interactions of teachers and students as they work together to identify clear expectations of achievement and produce high quality and meaningful work. Explicit instruction on issues related to authors’ craft are taught by analyzing various texts and discussing authors’ strategies. Students write daily for a variety of purposes and publish original pieces of writing using authentic models from published authors. The content of the writing may come from any curriculum area. Artifacts that include standards, rubrics, texts, word walls, charts and posters, and collections of student work, along with firmly established classroom rituals and routines, contribute to a productive classroom environment for writing (Tompkins, 2000).

The structure of the workshop model includes three broad components: opening meeting, work period, and closing meeting which are described below.
1. During the opening meeting, the teacher delivers explicit instruction based on students’ developing needs, interests and Standards addressing workshop procedures, language skills, and author’s craft topics.

2. During the work period students engage in the various stages of the writing process: Planning, Drafting, Revising, Editing, and Publishing. Students practice skills and author’s craft topics introduced in the opening meeting.

3. During the closing meeting, students share their work and hear classmates’ and teachers’ responses. Teachers also use this time to note project deadlines and reflect back to the focus areas of mini-lessons (Harvey & Lamb, 2002).

Writing Instructional Strategies

The writing instructional strategies highlighted below all support a quality-writing program. Teachers demonstrate, guide and teach using these strategies to provide varying amounts of support based on the instructional purpose and student needs. These instructional strategies reflect five levels of support, and instruction moves from the highest level of support (modeled writing) to the lowest level of support (independent writing) as students assume more and more of the responsibility for themselves (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996) as writers. As students are apprenticed to think and work as writers, they begin to build the necessary knowledge, beliefs, skills and dispositions needed to write effectively in a variety of genres and modes. Through this process they become socialized as writers and able to manage their own learning.

Modeled Writing

*Modeled writing* allows the students to hear the thinking that accompanies the process of writing, such as topic choice, planning the piece, looking for a better word, revising and editing. The writing process is purposefully visible for students to enable them to see how writers think about their writing. This is the highest level of support.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher Roles</th>
<th>Student Roles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrates the habits of a writer through modeling and think alouds. Topics can include content choices, voice, conventions, structures, and language features of written text.</td>
<td>Listens to language used to describe the thinking processes involved in writing, observes and uses metacognitive strategies specific to the types of writing taught.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Shared Writing

In the *Shared Writing* process students contribute ideas while the teacher scribes. As they write, teachers demonstrate how expert writers write while the children observe. Through shared writing, written text is created for the classroom that students could not write independently. The language experience approach (LEA) is one type of shared writing. Finished text can be used for additional shared and independent reading.
### Interactive Writing

*Interactive Writing* occurs when the teacher and children “share the pen” to write and create text. Interactive writing is used to provide instruction and assistance to children as they engage in writing. The teacher provides a stimulus activity or sets the purpose prior to engaging students in the process of interactive writing.

<table>
<thead>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Shares the pen” with students while guiding and focusing their attention on concepts of print and sounds in words.</td>
<td>Takes turns writing the text word-by-word on chart paper and/or white boards.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provides the stimulus/opportunity for students to work in small groups to write together for a variety of purposes.</td>
<td>Writes in small groups (after they can write words fluently) on chart paper as part of literature, social studies, math and science content instruction and for other purposes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posts completed charts to support students shared and independent reading and writing.</td>
<td>Rereads completed charts and may use words and sentences from chart for other writing activities.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### Guided Writing

*Guided Writing* provides an opportunity for teachers to work with groups of students or an individual student on effective writing strategies that are determined to be important through observation of student behaviors and work.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Student Roles</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Confers with student groups or individuals on effective writing strategies and provides specific coaching based on student work and standards based rubrics.</td>
<td>Confers with teacher and peers about the writing process and products.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guides the process of writing and editing, providing instruction when needed.</td>
<td>Actively plans and constructs the text, including editing for a correct finished product.</td>
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</table>
Independent Writing

*Independent writing* provides an opportunity for students to practice using the writing skills and strategies supported through modeled, shared, interactive, and guided writing instruction.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher Roles</th>
<th>Student Roles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Provides opportunities for students to practice writing in a variety of genre.</td>
<td>Writes for authentic purposes and in a variety of genres.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confers with students about their writing throughout the writing process</td>
<td>Confers with teacher and peers throughout the writing process towards publication of work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Models use of standards based rubrics to self-monitor writing process and products</td>
<td>Self-monitors own learning of writing strategies and skills and produces authentic writing products using standards based criteria.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Five Stages of the Writing Process

When students engage in the writing process as writers, they are apprenticed and socialized in the knowledge, beliefs, skills and dispositions of published writers. When developed in this way, students advance steadily through each of the stages. Writing is a purposeful activity and time to write becomes a gift. The five stages of the writing process are described below.

**Planning/Prewriting**

Students choose a topic and recognize a purpose and audience. Students generate, select and organize ideas and details to develop their topic. Students maintain a writer’s notebook where they can express their ideas, write words they find interesting and respond to what they have read or heard. The teacher supports this process through the introduction and modeling of strategies using a variety of graphic organizers and such strategies as listing, note taking, outlining and webbing. Students are apprenticed as writers through this first stage by learning how published authors generate ideas for writing, by reading and identifying elements of a variety of genre, brainstorming, role playing, drawing, taking notes, interviewing, visualizing, listening, and viewing.

**Drafting**

Students use their planning tools to begin to compose sentences quickly and freely. Students take responsibility to write their ideas down and to write as much as possible knowing that they will rework the initial draft again and again as they are apprenticed to writing in a particular genre and for a specific authentic purpose. This intermediate expectation gives students the freedom to express their ideas knowing that they will be supported by peers and the teacher in moving their writing towards expected standards.

**Revising**

Students seek responses to what they have written from the teacher during individual conferences. They receive feedback from peers in response groups and when presenting their work from the author’s chair. Feedback from these sources supports student’s revising of their
own work and self-management of the development of the select pieces of writing as well as themselves as writers.

**Individual Conferences** are the most significant component of the writing workshop. These enable instruction and assessment to be tailored to individual student needs. This part of the process focuses on improving elements of the first draft, including its clarity, organization, coherence and fluency. Students are expected to raise questions, ask for help with specific writing problems and set goals for improving their writing. Students make active use of prior knowledge and learning, adding transitional words, concrete language and sensory details, delete extraneous and repetitive details and make new word choices.

**Response Groups** give students the opportunity to meet with a small group or a partner to revise a draft, socializing intelligence for all the students. Students engage in *accountable talk* using the language of standards and criteria in writing rubrics as a basis for providing responses. Since revision is an on-going process, there might be a first draft, a revision, a second draft, and another revision until both writer and response partners are satisfied. This self-management of learning helps the writer and others with ideas and ways to enhance and improve their drafts with the goal of moving to the final draft.

**Author’s Chair** is a more formal event in which students schedule their turn at “taking the chair” to gain feedback for further revision of their work-in-progress. Students’ efforts are recognized, connecting the thinking process and product at all levels of development.

**Editing**
This stage of the process focuses on mechanics such as grammar, spelling and punctuation. The writer works with peers and confers with the teacher during a writing conference at this stage. Rubrics based on exemplars that meet the standards are clear and visible to enable the student to see their progress toward expected standards. Not every piece gets a final edit, but all published pieces require this step. Grade level standards for editing appear in the MN standards under Elements of Composition and in the NCEE standards under Language Use and Conventions.

**Publishing**
Students produce an appropriately formatted document and present it to their intended audience. A published document’s format and manner of presentation depend entirely on a student’s purpose and audience and is graded against absolute standards that have been clear throughout the writing process. Students may present their completed piece of writing to the class during *Author’s Chair* as a culminating recognition of accomplishment and to other public audiences.

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**Common Characteristics of Quality Writing**

6 +1 Trait® Writing

The 6 + 1 Trait components are the foundation for the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory’s (NWREL) (2007) writing assessment model and the basis for the descriptive criteria used to define the characteristics of good writing. Teachers of beginning writers can build strong foundations by engaging students in the study of a variety of literature and other genres and apprenticing them as writers through student storytelling, drawing and writing. While developing student writing knowledge and habits, teachers can emphasize the characteristics of the 6+1 Traits as they are aligned to the MN State Standards and NCEE Standards. As students
writing skills advance, the 6+1 Traits foundation supports students in meeting the standards, assessing their own writing using established rubrics and their use of Accountable Talk\textsuperscript{sm} in writing response groups. The 6 + 1 Trait Writing analytical model for assessing and teaching writing is made up of 6 + 1 key qualities that define strong writing. These are:

1. **Ideas/Content**
   Ideas are the heart of the message, the content of the piece, the main theme, together with the details that enrich and develop that theme. The ideas are strong when the message is clear. The writer chooses details that are interesting, important, and informative, often the kinds of details the reader would not normally anticipate or predict.

2. **Organization**
   Organization is the internal structure of a piece of writing, the thread of central meaning, the logical and sometimes intriguing pattern of ideas. Organizational structure can be based on comparison-contrast, deductive logic, point-by-point analysis, development of a central theme, chronological history of an event, or any of a dozen other identifiable patterns. Connections are strong and bridges from one idea to the next hold up.

3. **Voice**
   The voice is the heart and soul, the magic, the writ, along with the feeling and conviction of the individual writer coming out through the words. When the writer is engaged personally with the topic, a personal tone and flavor comes through the piece that is unmistakably the authors.

4. **Word Choice**
   Word choice is the use of rich colorful, precise language that communicates not just in a functional way, but also in a way that moves and enlightens the reader. Strong word choice is characterized by the skill to use everyday words well to clarify and expand ideas and move the reader to a new vision of things.

5. **Sentence Fluency**
   Sentence fluency is the rhythm and flow of the language, the sound of word patterns, the way in which the writing plays to the ear, not just to the eye. Fluent writing has cadence, power, rhythm, and movement. Sentences vary in length and style, and are crafted so that the reader moves through the piece with ease.

6. **Conventions**
   Conventions are the mechanical correctness of the piece, i.e., spelling, grammar and usage, paragraphing, use of capitals, and punctuation. Writing that is strong in conventions has been proofread and edited with care.

+1 **Presentation**
   Presentation combines both visual and verbal elements. It is the way the message is “exhibited” on paper. Guidelines for presentation are present making the piece inviting to read.
References


