

HOW STUDENTS CAN DEVELOP THEIR WRITING.

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Annotation: This article provides information about how to develop students' writing skill through effective and efficient methods and ways.

Key words: writing, draft, receptive, vocabulary

Writing is an activity with many moving parts. A student must bring together vocabulary, grammar and mental processing, and then rely on the physical aspect of handwriting or typing out the words. That's why it requires ample practice and extensive exposure to language for students to develop strong writing skills. And because young learners can't just sit down and write the perfect draft, they need to learn the art of revision too. For students to improve their English writing skills, they need to practice as often as possible, learn how to type so they can write quickly on a computer, and be introduced to strategies that will help them develop their skills.

Encourage reading. Good writers tend to be avid readers and there is a reason for this. The more a child reads, the more they will be exposed to new vocabulary in context and the more words they will learn. Once a word is part of their receptive vocabulary, it is a lot easier for it to make the transition into productive use (to the delight of parents and teachers who want children to "flex their vocabulary muscles" in writing). Reading also exposes kids to different ways of using words and a variety of sentence structures that they can use in their own writing.

Help them get started. A blank page can be intimidating, even for the seasoned author. Children may do fine once they get started but you often need to help them get the first few words or sentences down. Ask them a thought provoking question, make a list or mind-map of ideas that relate to the topic they are writing about or work with them to organize an outline they can turn into a draft. Taking

away the stigma of writing the perfect sentence is also key. Once they have some text to work with, it can always be re-shaped and revised. The trick is to encourage free writing from the start, in order to record whatever thoughts come to mind. They can always worry about revisions later.

Teach working in drafts. Brainstorming, putting ideas down on paper, ensuring the language and thoughts flow and revising for typos and errors are all different steps in the process of writing. Children need to understand that a perfect sentence doesn't just come out of nowhere, it develops through a back and forth process as the writer writes, reviews and revises his or her text. This is one reason it's helpful for kids to write on a computer. It saves erasing and allows children to make multiple attempts at getting their thoughts down, until they find the phrasing they want. Writing on the computer also make it more efficient to reorganize longer pieces of writing, to help information flow better.

Ask parents to help outside of school. Kids learn to write through example. Completing an initial draft alone is sometimes important, particularly if the task requires sharing personal thoughts and experiences, but it also helps to have someone else there to review it. Parents can make a huge difference in how their children's writing skills improve by agreeing to read early drafts. Use the child's words to suggest optimized phrasing and/or help them pinpoint what they are trying to say through conversation. This makes it easier for the ideas to be written down.

Allow the use of spell and grammar checks. It's easy to dismiss technology-use as being lazy, but spelling and grammar feedback can actually be extremely helpful for a child who is learning how to write or trying to improve. This is because sometimes there are multiple suggested corrections that force a child not only to notice the awkward phrasing or misspelled word, but to spend some extra cognitive energy thinking about how to correct it. Computers also provide an opportunity to correct errors without the embarrassment or stigma of multiple eraser marks on a hand-written copy.

Incentivize free writing at home and school. When children learn to write

well they are not just cultivating academic skills, they're also opening up a new avenue for self-expression. Creative tasks foster positive associations with writing, so children see it not just as an activity for learning and reporting information at school, but a way of getting their thoughts across. It doesn't matter who reads what they are writing or even what it is about, it's just a good idea if it becomes a regular activity. Parents might suggest keeping a personal diary with a journal entry a day resulting in a special treat at the end of the week. It's also important for teachers to encourage any and every opportunity for writing, as the more kids write, the more they will improve and hone their skills.

Suggest copying activities. Copying or memorizing favorite poems, quotes or any other pieces of written language can help children focus their attention on form, use and meaning and incorporate new structures into productive use. While no parents or teachers would advocate plagiarism, borrowing sentence structures for your own ideas is how children learn to write and improve their writing. They will lift phrasing from everything they read and you can help encourage the process by providing them with specific materials to work with.

View the improvement of students' writing as your responsibility. Teaching writing is not only the job of the English department alone. Writing is an essential tool for learning a discipline and helping students improve their writing skills is a responsibility for all faculty.

Let students know that you value good writing. Stress the importance of clear, thoughtful writing. Faculty who tell students that good writing will be rewarded and poor writing will be penalized receive better essays than instructors who don't make such demands. In the syllabus, on the first day, and throughout the term, remind students that they must make their best effort in expressing themselves on paper. Back up your statements with comments on early assignments that show you really mean it, and your students will respond.

Regularly assign brief writing exercises in your classes. To vary the pace of a lecture course, ask students to write a few minutes during class. Some mixture of in-

class writing, outside writing assignments, and exams with open-ended questions will give students the practice they need to improve their skills.

Provide guidance throughout the writing process. After you have made the assignment, discuss the value of outlines and notes, explain how to select and narrow a topic, and critique the first draft, define plagiarism as well. Don't feel as though you have to read and grade every piece of your students' writing.

Ask students to analyze each other's work during class, or ask them to critique their work in small groups. Students will learn that they are writing in order to think more clearly, not obtain a grade. Keep in mind, you can collect students' papers and skim their work. Find other faculty members who are trying to use writing more effectively in their courses. Pool ideas about ways in which writing can help students learn more about the subject matter. See if there is sufficient interest in your discipline to warrant drawing up guidelines. Students welcome handouts that give them specific instructions on how to write papers for a particular course or in a particular subject area.

Give students opportunities to talk about their writing. Students need to talk about papers in progress so that they can formulate their thoughts, generate ideas, and focus their topics. Take five or ten minutes of class time for students to read their writing to each other in small groups or pairs. It's important for students to hear what their peers have written.

Explain the importance of grammar and sentence structure, as well as content. Students shouldn't think that English teachers are the only judges of grammar and style. Tell your students that you will be looking at both quality of their writing and the content.

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