



## Teach students to write for a variety of purposes



*Developing the ability to write for a variety of purposes provides students with the necessary skills for success in school and adulthood. Once students understand the different genres and purposes of writing, they are more likely to think critically about which type of writing they should use for each writing activity and audience.*



### How to carry out the recommendation

1. Help students understand the different purposes of writing.
2. Expand students' concept of audience.
3. Teach students to emulate the features of good writing.
4. Teach students techniques for writing effectively for different purposes.

### Potential roadblocks

1. Students initially use the strategies/techniques of writing after they are taught; however, over time they tend to stop.
2. Teachers need to prepare students to take state assessments, which tend to focus on only a few genres.

*Reference:* Graham, S., Bollinger, A., Booth Olson, C., D'Aoust, C., MacArthur, C., McCutchen, D., & Olinghouse, N. (2012). *Teaching elementary school students to be effective writers* (NCEE 2012-4058). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance. Retrieved from <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/PracticeGuide/17>



How to carry out the recommendation

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**1. Help students understand the different purposes of writing.**

Students need to understand the different genres of writing in order to choose the best genre for their writing task. Teachers should emphasize the purpose (e.g., describing, narrating, informing, and persuading/analyzing) and features of each genre while relating the genre to real-world scenarios. See table 2 on page 21 of the practice guide referenced on the first page of this document for further details about the purposes of writing and examples of genres used to achieve those purposes.

**2. Expand students' concept of audience.**

To support students in understanding the role of audience in writing, teachers should design lessons where students can write for various audiences. Doing so will break students out of the mindset that writing is an isolated task completed in school for the teacher to read. To aid with an expanded view of audience, teachers can generate lists of potential audiences and allow students to choose different audiences during writing activities. Teachers should also focus on teaching students how to adjust tone and word choice for particular audiences. For example, writing a description to someone who has knowledge of a particular topic would look different than writing a description of that same topic to someone who has little or no knowledge of the topic.

**3. Teach students to emulate the features of good writing.**

Teachers should expose students to a variety of exemplary texts. Analyzing exemplary texts with students can enhance their writing styles. In choosing texts, make selections that support instructional goals, are grade-level appropriate, and provide exemplars of what students are being asked to do in writing activities. The exemplary texts should be read aloud by teachers or students. Be sure to stop frequently to highlight key features of the text that support the instructional goals of the lesson. See page 22 of the practice guide for examples of activities that can be used with students at different levels to emulate good writing.

**4. Teach students techniques for writing effectively for different purposes.**

Teachers must explicitly teach the techniques specific for each purpose of writing. To do so, describe each technique, model its use, and gradually release more responsibility to students. See Table 5 on page 26 of the practice guide for examples of specific techniques for each of the four purposes of writing (i.e., describe, narrate, inform, and persuade/analyze) and the grade levels for which they are appropriate.

Potential roadblocks and how to address them

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Roadblock	Suggested Approach
<i>Students initially use the strategies/techniques of writing after they are taught; however, over time they tend to stop.</i>	Once students begin independently applying strategies and techniques, teachers need to monitor progress. As students develop skills with a specific component of the writing process (planning, drafting, sharing, evaluating, revising, editing, publishing), they may no longer need to rely on particular strategies. However, if a student has stopped using a strategy but is still struggling on a specific component of the writing process, the teacher should intervene and take necessary action, such as targeted one-on-one or small-group instruction.
<i>Teachers need to prepare students to take state assessments, which tend to focus on only a few genres.</i>	Writing for one genre often requires students to use skills they have learned for writing in another genre. For example, even when writing a persuasive essay, including a narrative example may be necessary in order to support an argument. Therefore, despite the specific prompts on a state assessment, students need to be prepared to write for multiple purposes. Teachers can point out particular skills they are learning that might be useful for the types of writing required for the state assessment.



*For more information on the research evidence and references to support this recommendation, or for more detailed explanation from the What Works Clearinghouse committee who developed this recommendation, please refer to the practice guide cited at the bottom of the first page of this document.*