



Teach students to become fluent with handwriting, spelling, sentence construction, typing, and word processing



When students are beginner writers, they lack the basic writing skills needed to produce high-quality writing. Teachers need to take the time to focus writing activities on building basic skills, such as handwriting, spelling, and sentence construction.

Spelling mistakes and poor handwriting can make it difficult for readers to understand what a student is trying to communicate. Word-processing programs can make the writing process more manageable for students. Teaching them how to type can help them become more efficient at writing on a computer. Additionally, fluency with computers is a necessary skill for daily life in today's world.



How to carry out the recommendation

1. Teach very young writers how to hold a pencil correctly and form letters fluently and efficiently.
2. Teach students to spell words correctly.
3. Teach students to construct sentences for fluency, meaning, and style.
4. Teach students to type fluently and to use a word processor to compose.

Potential roadblocks

1. Writing can be frustrating for students who struggle to develop handwriting and spelling skills.
2. Students do not consistently use the words learned during spelling lessons in their writing.
3. The school's ELA curriculum only includes isolated grammar lessons that use worksheets or copying tasks to teach sentence writing.

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

1. Teach very young writers how to hold a pencil correctly and form letters fluently and efficiently.

Early writing instruction should begin with teaching students how to comfortably hold a pencil in order to fight off hand fatigue. Teachers should demonstrate how to write letters in print or cursive efficiently and neatly. Teachers should also provide opportunities for students to practice writing from memory without the support of handwriting practice diagrams. Lastly, because handwriting is a motor skill, it is recommended that teachers allot multiple short practice sessions into their lesson plans for handwriting. It is important to remember that though targeted handwriting practice is important, teachers should be sure to include opportunities for students to practice these skills during authentic writing activities.

2. Teach students to spell words correctly.

Teachers should focus on teaching the words that are more commonly used. Though some schools have a spelling curriculum separate from the writing curriculum, prioritize connecting spelling with writing as often as possible. Also, be sure to teach and demonstrate skills such as phonological awareness (K–2), spelling phonics (K–3), and morphological spelling (2–6). These skills allow students to spell words relatively correctly while reducing the disruption to the draft writing process. The youngest of writers should be encouraged to use inventive spelling. Teachers can also teach students to spell by analogy. For example, “If I can spell *hug*, I can figure out how to spell *rug*.” During the editing process, guide students to use dictionaries to check their spelling. For younger students, use of a personal dictionary listing the correct spelling of words commonly misspelled by that student can be helpful.

3. Teach students to construct sentences for fluency, meaning, and style.

Students should learn to write sentences that are engaging and clearly communicate meaning. Teachers should focus on the importance of sentence mechanics (punctuation, capitalization, etc.) to form high-quality sentences. In kindergarten, begin developing students’ understanding of sentences and the basic mechanics such as capitalization and punctuation. Demonstrate what sentences are and how to use capitalization and punctuation by writing out sentences that convey the ideas that students share orally. In grades 1 and 2, work with students to identify run-on sentences and demonstrate how to break them down into separate sentences. As students’ ability increases, teach them how to increase sentence complexity by demonstrating a variety of sentence types. Teachers can also develop activities that allow students to practice sentence construction. As students practice sentence construction skills, they can work with their teacher to evaluate the sentences for meaning, style, and grammatical correctness. Be sure to demonstrate how to revise sentences and allow opportunities for students to practice the evaluation and revision process themselves. More proficient students can leverage each other during peer review sessions to evaluate one another’s sentences for fluency, meaning, and style.

4. Teach students to type fluently and use a word processor to compose.

Teachers should instruct students on how to type fluently using correct fingering and without looking at the keyboard. Students should be introduced to typing as early as grade 1 and be able to type as fast as they can write by hand by grade 2 or 3. Teachers should also teach students the features of word processing software and how the technology can be useful in their writing exercises. Consider turning off features such as grammar and spell checks during the drafting process so students can focus on conveying their ideas without distraction. These features can be turned back on during the editing process. Be sure to explain to students that these features are not a substitute for careful editing and proofreading. For example, though the spell checker feature is valuable, the spell checker may flag proper nouns as an error when they are in fact correct. It will also not flag words as misspelled if they are real words (e.g., their and there).

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Potential roadblocks and how to address them

Roadblock	Suggested Approach
<i>Writing can be frustrating for students who struggle to develop handwriting and spelling skills.</i>	If the student has significant difficulty with spelling and handwriting, teachers may want to consider switching to typing as a primary means of writing. Teachers will need to provide additional support to aid students in the use of the word processing software.
<i>Student do not consistently use the words learned during spelling lessons in their writing.</i>	When students are focusing on getting their ideas down on paper, they may misspell words. Teachers should emphasize that proofreading is a part of the editing process. Teachers should connect spelling instruction to authentic writing activities, using strategies such as the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Encourage students to include their spelling words in their own writing as much as possible. Have students read over their work, circle the new spelling words used, and check that they spelled those words correctly. Create a bulletin board where students can post their examples of how they used new spelling words correctly in their writing.• Review student work to identify common errors and include those words in spelling instruction. Work with students to set goals focused on identifying spelling errors during the editing phase and track student progress toward that goal.
<i>The school's ELA curriculum only includes isolated grammar lessons that use worksheets or copying tasks to teach sentence writing.</i>	When grammar instruction is disconnected from authentic writing, it is hard for students to apply what they learn in their own writing. Teachers can follow the grammar curriculum's scope and sequence but use the materials provided in innovative ways that incorporate the strategies described in the practice guide, such as gradual release. Additionally, teachers should have students practice spelling skills during writing activities to further connect spelling and writing.



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.