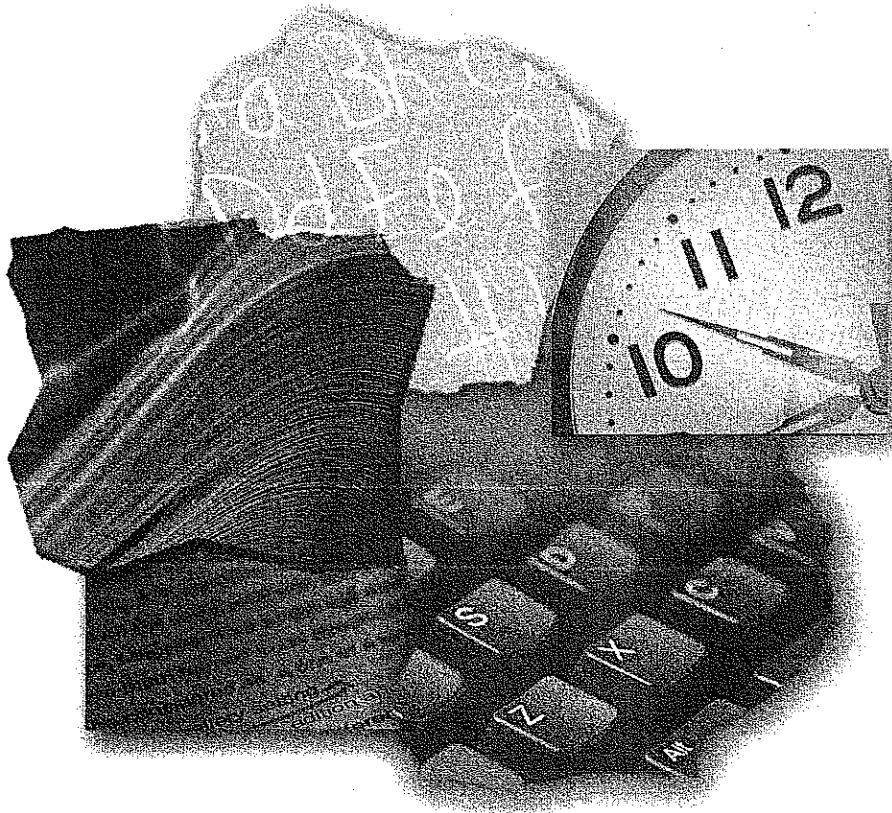


Teaching Writing

in the **Content Areas**



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The Role of Time

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

Why should I use valuable classroom time for writing activities?

Are there any unintended consequences if I don't use classroom time for writing?

How important are prewriting and revision?

What can I do to help those students who can't spell words they should know and don't have a clue about grammar?

Let's be honest. We know that time is the most coveted commodity in schools. Comments like "If I just had more time" and "Where did the time go?" abound in teachers' lounges and hallways across the nation. There just isn't enough time for the many responsibilities that have been entrusted to schools. Yet this lack of time makes using it efficiently and effectively that much more important.

The National Education Commission on Time and Learning's 1994 report *Prisoners of Time* posits that "time is learning's warden," yet the

National Commission on Writing (2003) report *The Neglected "R"* reminds us that "time is writing's great ally." And therein lies the rub. With only so much time available in a school day to devote to learning, let alone writing, how do you ensure that your students have sufficient opportunities to write? If you are going to ask them to write, what is the best use of that precious time? And if you are a science, mathematics, or social studies teacher, for example, why should you even consider setting aside time for your students to write?

In this section, we tackle this proverbial education dilemma by first addressing issues related to making time to write and then describing how to use that writing time, particularly for teachers of content areas where setting aside time for writing is not the norm. Throughout this section, there are two questions that we'd like you to keep in mind. First, do you subscribe to the belief that writing requires students to problem solve, and if you do, wouldn't you want to make the time for this important process during the course of your content-area instruction? And second, when you

do not make sufficient provisions for writing in your classrooms—including all of its necessary steps—but require students to complete written assignments, what message does this send regarding its importance?

Time: The Great Equalizer

Time is the great equalizer. This is precisely the way the authors of the *Prisoners of Time* study (1994) put it: “Used wisely and well, time can be the academic equalizer” (National Education Commission on Time and Learning, Limited Time Frustrates Aspirations for Reform section, ¶ 5). Time in classrooms breaks down into four essential types (Borg, 1980, as cited in Marzano, 2000): allocated time, instructional time, engaged time, and academic learning time. Marzano defines them as follows:

Allocated time—the time in the school day specifically set aside for instruction, such as classes, as opposed to noninstructional activities, such as recess, lunch, passing time, and the like.

Instructional time—the in-class time that a teacher devotes to instruction (as opposed to management-oriented activities).

Engaged time—the portion of instructional time during which students are actually paying attention to the content being presented.

Academic learning time—the proportion of engaged time during which students are successful at the tasks they are engaged in. (p. 54)

As Marzano goes on to explain, “academic learning time” has the greatest impact on student achievement and “allocated time” the least. Thus, students not only need time allocated for writing, but for the greatest benefit, they must also participate successfully in the process. This supports Dempster’s assertion (as cited in Stein & Dixon, 2001) that using new knowledge and skills helps students achieve a more thorough understanding of what they’ve learned and the ability to apply knowledge in new settings.

The other concept we encourage you to keep in mind is the unintended consequence of omitting writing instruction during instructional time. When students do not have the opportunity to engage in academic learning, we must consider the implicit message this sends to them about learning and effort. Consider the following revelation from a teacher reflecting on her habit of curtailing her students’ chances to revise their written work in class:

I had been ignoring the basic principle that giving them one chance to revise their papers was sending them the message that they had one shot to improve their grades, thereby taking away the motivation to improve as writers. (Bardine, Bardine, & Deegan, 2000, p. 99)

By denying students the time they need to engage in processes considered important, we implicitly contradict our own beliefs about learning. Given the time crunch that most teachers face, however, how can we overcome this challenge?

In the following section, we examine this question in the context of the stages of the writing process: prewriting, drafting, revising, and editing—stages identified by the seminal work of Janet Emig (1971) and John Hayes and Linda Flower (1980). These researchers studied practicing writers, from high school students to adults, to reveal the major habits and conditions of the writing process. Regardless of the writing genre—poetry, expository, short story, or lab report—writers intent on expressing what they know about a topic progress through certain steps with the goal of delivering a coherent message. Although these stages of the writing process will be addressed individually, we emphasize our belief that writing is a recursive practice. As such, no writer moves lockstep through the stages, crossing them off a writing “to do” list. Rather, writers constantly maneuver between these steps as their work progresses. We address them individually only for ease of presentation. A brief description of each stage follows:

- *Prewriting*: the period where writers get ready to write—gathering information, organizing ideas, identifying audience and purpose, and selecting genre.
- *Drafting*: the production stage of getting ideas down using complete sentences and reflecting the general conventions of writing.
- *Revising*: the time when writers review their work, checking for clarity of message, word choice, and organization.
- *Editing*: the process of checking written work for the conventions of writing and any lingering concerns with voice, tone, and style.

As we address each stage, we begin by reviewing the research and conclude with considerations and activities to help you incorporate these ideas in your classroom.

We have limited our discussion in this section to four writing stages—prewriting, drafting, revising, and editing. However, conventional wisdom often expands the writing process to six stages. We consider the additional stages—conferencing and publishing—equally important, and we address their attributes and strategies for implementation in the sections that follow. (For more information on conferencing see Section 4, and for more information on publishing, see Section 3.)

Prewriting: Understanding What the Writer Knows

Prewriting, or planning, often is a neglected and underestimated step in the writing process (Murray, 1985). In the early 1980s, Burtis, Bereiter, Scardamalia, and Tetroe (as cited in De La Paz & Graham, 2002) found that students often begin the composing process with little to no time devoted to planning what they will write or to determining what they know about their topic. Yet, as De La Paz and Graham explain, “high levels of planning are especially apparent in the composing behavior of skilled writers,” (p. 687) and this highlights the crucial nature of this step. While proficient writers exhibit extensive use of prewriting and planning activities, novice or developing writers do not.

However, this trend may be shifting. Current research in writing suggests that students are devoting more attention and time to prewriting activities. For example, Zhang (2001) found that nearly 100 percent of Delaware students in grades 5, 8, and 10 used some type of prewriting strategy in the course of completing their statewide writing assessments, and 77 percent of the 3rd graders spent time prewriting. Granted, students were given questions to spark their thinking about the writing prompt, and a section of the test was devoted to prewriting, with the suggestion that students spend no more than 20 minutes planning. But the fact that students actually used the time to plan their compositions may signal a change in student perceptions about the importance of prewriting. This greater attention to prewriting probably reflects what students encounter in their academic classes. In fact, teachers who responded to survey questions during the 1998 and 2002 administration of National Assessment of Educational Progress (the Nation’s Report Card) writing assessments indicated that they almost always asked their students to plan their writing (<http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/naepdata/search.asp>).

You may be wondering why prewriting is such an important step in the writing process. More important, you may not see how making the time for students to complete prewriting activities will support your content-area instruction. For one, when students allow sufficient time for prewriting, it enables them to understand what they know about their topic (Lindemann, 1995). In fact, the ultimate goal of any prewriting activity is to emphasize what students know and to prepare them for the drafting process. In a typical 8th-grade science class, students might be expected to demonstrate their understanding of waves, including their characteristic properties and behaviors. You may decide to assess this knowledge through short essay answers or an in-depth research report. Prewriting allows your students to sketch out—orally or in writing—what they know about wavelengths or the properties of refraction.

Aside from this example or the typical high-stakes assessment environment where students are required to write on demand, one recognizes that prewriting

includes more than sketching out an outline. To be sure, this planning method can be effective, but equally important is the time devoted to reading about a topic, discussing it, asking questions, and when appropriate, working on a topic of personal interest. All of these conditions encourage writers to fill up on information. With a “full tank,” they are more prepared to pour their newfound knowledge onto the page. Keeping this in mind, we describe several prewriting conditions before suggesting actual activities. In addition, we provide specific prewriting strategies that you can use in your classroom in Section 5.

Reading

The suggestion that “the more you read the better you write” reigns supreme. As we more fully explore in Section 4: *The Role of the Teacher*, reading influences the quality of writing that students produce (e.g., Ray, 1999), but it is also essential to learning. In the prewriting stage, students explore what they know about a topic, so reading to learn more is often a logical first step.

Reading about a topic also exposes students to a broad range of writing. Authors such as Robert M. Hazen, James Trefil, and Stephen Jay Gould show students that science writing, for example, varies greatly. Even more, reading about scientific phenomena in publications other than the typical middle school science tome can spark much more interest in a topic, leading to higher levels of thinking and knowing.

Dialogue

Pope and Prater’s (1990) study of effective prewriting strategies found that talking about the topic helped students prepare for the drafting task. Even more, students preferred dialogue over other prewriting strategies, such as looping and clustering. One of the reasons students appreciated the opportunity to talk about their topic was because of its social nature, another neglected aspect of the writing and learning process. Talk, particularly during the prewriting phase, can engage students in purposeful discourse while at the same time clarifying what they know and don’t know about a topic.

Inquiry

Inquiry also plays a major role as students engage in the writing process (Hillocks, 1995). Asking questions gets students thinking about what they know, need to know, and want to know about a given topic. Smith (1992) theorizes that the use of questions promotes shared investigations. Whether engaging with text, peers, or the teacher, these shared investigations lead to mutual understanding, a necessary element when writers are trying to figure out what they know. As Langer (1995) contends, “Questions are

necessary and normal when a person is exploring horizons and possibilities” (p. 94). Prewriting is all about exploration and expanding the possibilities.

Personal Interest

Although students will not always have the opportunity to write about a topic that personally interests them, the more you can encourage this, the more it will motivate them to write (Hillocks, 1995; Friedman, 2000). This alone can positively influence the amount of time and energy your students are willing to devote to prewriting activities.

Prewriting Considerations and Activities

As we have explained, prewriting is a necessary step, one not to be taken lightly. The key is to allow the time needed. To this end, prewriting activities should not be tedious (Pope & Prater, 1990). Rather, some of the less structured methods have proven most effective, and students are apt to like them. Moreover, these activities should be natural extensions of your content-area instruction. For example, cubing is a prewriting exercise, but it's complicated. In this strategy, students look at a topic or object from multiple perspectives and then write about each perspective. This can be a challenging exercise for your students because they may find it difficult to see beyond the obvious. They may focus most of their attention on thinking about what the different perspectives could be instead of examining them in depth. This complicated strategy may also frustrate you, leaving less time for prewriting strategies such as freewriting and talking. It is just as likely that multiple ways of viewing an object or concept will arise through simpler strategies, but in a natural rather than a contrived way.

Freewriting

Talking is a helpful prewriting strategy—one that highlights the social nature of writing. But an equally effective activity that achieves the same goal is freewriting, which Pope and Prater (1990) refer to as “talking written down.” The process is simple. As Weinstein (2001) lightheartedly explains:

In its pure form, freewriting has but one rule: Write continuously—taking ne'er a break for thinking or revising—for ten whole minutes. Do not let that pen—or cursor—stop even if you find yourself saying, “I have nothing to say. I have nothing to say. I have nothing to say.” (p. 61)

Supporting this method, Hillocks (1995) reminds us that freewriting not only helps writers learn what they know about a topic, but it can also reveal the purpose of the writing, which is not always clearly defined when writers begin their work.

Also included in this category are techniques such as learning logs (see Strategy 27 in Section 5) and quick writes, five-minute writing assignments related to the day's lesson. The processes associated with these activities mirror those of freewriting because they are focused on having students express what they know. Like freewriting, these strategies are unstructured and not graded.

Talking

Talking is an effective prewriting strategy in part because it is low risk. When students discuss a topic, they engage in an exercise that comes naturally to them. After all, most students clamor for this type of interaction with their peers. If classroom management is a concern, you may want to consider using protocols (see Strategy 5 in Section 5)—guidelines to structure the conversation. When used correctly, protocols level the playing field by establishing a structured way for all students to participate equally and ensuring that students stay on task. Whether you use protocols or not, talking is an activity that allows students to interact with their peers as they focus their discussions on specific topics. In the process, they build on the ideas of others (Hillocks, 1995) and evaluate the clarity of their own thinking. Describing this process, Pope and Prater (1990) write that “students are able to hear themselves and others think aloud while simultaneously being stimulated to discover other areas which they may not have originally considered” (p. 68).

Given the proliferation of teacher-directed instruction in classrooms, students have limited opportunities to participate in meaningful discussions with their peers. Yet research has shown this to be a worthwhile use of classroom time. Structures and a clear purpose can reduce your anxiety about using this strategy.

Brainstorming and Making Lists

The beauty of brainstorming is its nonjudgmental quality. If done properly, students do not censor their ideas on a brainstorming list. Rather, anything goes. Like freewriting and talking, when students use this strategy, they discover what they know about a given topic and can see what they may need to learn more about. This strategy works well in several venues—alone, with a peer, or as a class. The versatility of brainstorming makes it an ideal prewriting technique for myriad situations.

Outlines and Other Graphic Organizers

Although Pope and Prater (1990) found that students prefer to do outlines once they complete their writing, informal outlining can still be a helpful technique during the prewriting stage. Freewriting, talking, and brainstorming all help students recognize what they know about their writing topics, but outlines and other graphic organizers help students frame their thoughts. Lindemann (1995)

explains that “informal outlines serve a useful purpose. Outlining can help students shape raw material generated by other prewriting activities” (p. 106). Outlines assist writers during the prewriting process, but like all prewriting techniques, the less elaborate they are the better. Prewriting is an essential writing activity, regardless of the genre or the content area. Without attention to prewriting, students are not prepared for the next step—drafting.

Drafting: Moving Thoughts and Ideas into Text

In his study reflecting the impact of high-stakes writing assessments on classroom learning, Hillocks (2002) found that of all these steps, teachers consistently incorporated drafting into their instructional time. This finding should not be surprising. After all, at some point, students have to begin composing. In short, drafting is inevitable.

In the drafting stage, writers are striving for one thing—getting their ideas down on the page in a relatively coherent way. Drafting represents the challenging transition from planning, or prewriting, to formulating the words and putting them on paper. Tentative though drafting may be, its importance in the process is critical, for it is only when writers have put pen to paper or fingers to the keyboard that they have a written representation of what they know. Murray (1985) eloquently refers to this step as discovery.

As difficult as it may be to put knowledge, thoughts, or ideas on paper, drafting is also the step that gives writers the greatest amount of freedom. At this point, no rules apply. Writers do not have to be especially careful about their word choice or strict about the essentials of grammar, for their chief concern while drafting is shifting the intended message from the nebulous thoughts floating in their heads to more definitive words on a page that can be referred to at a later time. Keep in mind that based on past school experiences, many students are conditioned to make their work “perfect.” That is, they have learned that “neatness” counts and that following the rules will help them earn a higher grade. But in its truest sense, drafting defies the conventional wisdom of perfection. Encourage your students to take chances during the drafting phase. Help them understand that no one’s writing—even that of professional authors—is perfect at this stage.

What we want to emphasize here is that drafting is only part of the writing process. And as Hillocks (2002) explains, it is a step that most teachers honor. But drafting alone will not produce a polished final product. We advise you to include drafting in your instructional time, even assign it for homework, but students’ writing abilities improve when you emphasize the other steps of the writing process with equal energy. Students need sustained, equal treatment of all of the steps of the writing process, not just drafting.

Drafting Considerations

It should come as no surprise that our drafting suggestions are limited. Remember, drafting is about getting ideas down on paper. Just as your students need time during class to practice applying new skills such as the use of unfamiliar algorithms, students benefit from having the time to draft in your presence. When you give your students class time to draft, you can interact with them as they write and clarify any misconceptions before they become too entrenched. Keep in mind that students need not finish their drafts during class; in-class drafting time simply gives you a quick snapshot of what your students know and how you can focus your follow-up instruction.

Another effective way to encourage students in the drafting phase is to assign it as homework. Because drafting is by nature imperfect, students can complete it outside of class time. It really is as easy as writing down all of your ideas, closing the notebook, and looking at the results at a later time. In addition, this step is one that does not need to be graded—a time-saving step for you and a liberating step for students. Anne Lamott (1994), the author of *Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life*, offers both witty and salient advice in this regard. She explains, “Almost all good writing begins with terrible first efforts. You need to start somewhere. Start by getting something—anything—down on paper . . . the first draft is the down draft—you just get it down” (p. 25).

Revising: Clarifying the Message

As freewheeling as the drafting process can be, the central craft or art of writing is revision. Although revising and editing are frequently discussed simultaneously, they are quite different processes. When writers revise, they reconsider, rethink, and reshape their writing, wrestling with the tension created by what they intended to say and the words that actually found their way to the page (Lindemann, 1995). The process is similar to tuning a musical instrument. Musicians tighten pegs to achieve the proper tone, and writers cut, rearrange, and add, tweaking the language and structures so that the message will achieve its intended purpose. As Faigley and Witte (1981) explain, “Successful revision results not from the number of changes a writer makes but from the degree to which revision changes bring a text closer to fitting the demands of the situation” (p. 411). Thus, understanding the purpose of the writing as well as understanding the audience both play a significant role in a writer’s ability to successfully reconsider a piece.

The distinction between revising and editing is an important one. Students often confuse the two and easily mistake making corrections in punctuation for revision (MacArthur, Graham, & Schwartz, 1991). To internalize this

difference, students need multiple experiences to review their written texts. In addition, they need your assistance, or that of another knowledgeable person, to identify when they have dropped the thread of an intended message, omitted essential information, or neglected to completely reorganize the composition. For these reasons, revision is a stage that requires a substantial amount of metacognition on the part of the writer. Writers must place themselves in the role of the reader, anticipating when the text may confuse or when syntactical choices fail.

Clearly, revision is an indispensable step in the writing process, but it is also one of the most difficult to master. Schriver's work (1992) reveals that writers typically experience difficulty with revision for at least two reasons: (a) they do not recognize problems within the message, or (b) they notice problems but do not have the tools or the flexibility to correct them. Schriver adds, "If writers fail to notice text problems in the first place, no revision occurs" (p. 181). Even when writers acknowledge textual problems, they must recognize those that are consequential to the purpose at hand. Faigley and Witte (1981) and Yagelski (1995) studied inexperienced writers and found that their revisions tended toward surface changes such as spelling, word choice, or punctuation. Experienced writers, on the other hand, were more concerned with meaning. Their rethinking caused them to add, delete, consolidate, and redistribute their words, improving their writing by keeping the purpose and the audience always in mind.

More current research devoted to revision indicates that this discrepancy still exists (e.g., De La Paz & Graham, 2002; Zhang, 2001). Engaging in this "problem-solving activity" (Apthorp, 2001) requires sufficient time, access to explicit models, and a considerable amount of thinking aloud.

Revision Considerations and Activities

We recognize that you may find setting aside time for revision difficult, but this step—in addition to prewriting—has the potential to significantly improve student writing. To assist you in this process, we suggest that you help students see the benefit of distancing themselves from their written drafts, discuss revision choices by modeling the changes you make to your own writing and explaining why you made them, incorporate peer review into your classrooms, and make substantial use of word processing programs.

Distance from the Draft

One of the reasons that time is so essential to the writing process is the need for distance from the draft. If students do not have opportunities to detach themselves

sufficiently from their writing, they cannot see the textual changes that would help improve their written messages. In addition, when students allow their writing to “marinate,” it is easier to find conventional errors.

Weinstein (2001) refers to this process as “giving it a rest.” He explains, “The first thing for a draft to do when it’s complete is to absent itself—to hide away in a drawer somewhere, and not to come out again until its author no longer has on the tip of his tongue the things he intended to say in it” (p. 63). As this statement illustrates, writers often cannot see the changes possible in their compositions until the writing appears new. Giving writing—and authors—a rest makes this possible. Of course, this strategy requires that you build in the time for it to happen. One way to help students appreciate the need for “marinating time” is to collect their drafts. Simply keep them in a drawer or folder for several days—enough time so that when students reread their work, they can fill in the holes that will become more obvious after they’ve had time away from their writing. In the meantime, you can spend some of your classroom time talking about techniques you and other writers use to improve compositions.

Model Revision Strategies

As we explore in greater detail in Section 4, your own model of the writing process significantly affects how students proceed. As researchers have found (e.g., Pope & Prater, 1990), students will model the processes and techniques their teachers model for them. Moreover, students seem interested in these examples.

Revision does not come naturally to students; they must be guided through the process. The examples you share can help them determine how to make the kinds of structural changes to their writing that result in the improvement you want to see your students make. To this end, Friedman (2000) shared an experience she had working with a language arts colleague. She explained, “What seemed especially interesting to students was listening to [us] talk about content and negotiate what we thought did or did not belong in the essay as part of class discussion” (p. 108). Telling students that a piece of writing lacks clarity is one thing, but showing them how to recognize the murkiness and then how to make the changes to improve the message are strategies that are much more meaningful. In fact, it is precisely what they need.

In the beginning, you may find that this type of instruction takes up a substantial amount of class time. In the end, this will be time well spent, especially if students receive similar instruction and reinforcement in their other classes. Student writing success in Kentucky exemplifies this model. Because of the state’s commitment to the use of writing portfolios in its original statewide assessment system, many students experienced multiple opportunities to write, not only in their language arts classes

but in other content-area classes as well. Highly functioning schools reported that students were more prepared to grapple with sophisticated writing techniques because of their continuous exposure to the writing process (Coe et al., 1999).

Peer Review

Provided that students have experienced sufficient modeling, they can make quite capable peer reviewers. By obtaining feedback from their peers, students will make revisions before turning their final work in for a grade. However, the key is for you to provide the model. Without this necessary step, students will offer their peers superficial and inconsequential changes that waste time, ultimately making their final written pieces ineffective. As your students engage in focused discussions about the content of their writing, you can use this time to browse, visiting with students to offer thoughts about issues they may not have considered or to correct misconceptions. Consider this another opportunity to informally evaluate what your students know and don't know about a given topic.

Students also benefit from the additional time they have to discuss content related to the subject matter in the written text. Students learn more about the topic at hand and on a deeper level by asking clarifying questions and noting instances when the writing lacks logic or misstates facts. In fact, many students can recognize textual problems in a peer's writing easier than they can in their own (MacArthur, Graham, & Schwartz, 1991). Think about the times you have written something incoherent on the board or in the directions for an assignment and a student called you on it. The same principle applies during peer review. At some level, it is easier to see the textual problems in another's writing than it is to see them in your own.

Of course, students must be able to recognize a murky sentence when they see it and then offer the type of advice that will help their peers fix it. This is where the role of the teacher is indispensable. Teachers who share their own lack of understanding give their students permission to admit confusion when reading a peer's text. When teachers ask questions to gain a better understanding of students' intent, they provide examples of what their student writers can do to improve their writing. (How to give writing advice is explored more thoroughly in Section 4.) Effectively using time for revision and peer review gives students the feedback they need to make improvements to their writing while maintaining focus on the content.

Word Processors

Perhaps one of the greatest tools to use in the revision process is the word processor. The ease with which students can move sections of text around, remove sentences or whole paragraphs, and even quickly access alternative word choices,

makes this a crucial revision tool. Although it still requires thoughtful consideration on the part of the writer and care when making decisions to delete sections, using word processing programs eliminates the tedium of rewriting by hand. This frees mental energy to focus on clarity of message. The use of word processing will be explored in more depth in Section 3.

Editing

When the planning, drafting, and revising is done, the final stage for authors who intend to share their work is editing. When writers revise, they are attending to language quality and message cohesion. But when writers edit, they often concentrate on mechanics. And while editing frequently occurs simultaneously during revision (less so in drafting), it is also distinct. Making sure that sentences have appropriate punctuation, correct grammar, and proper spelling is significantly different from tending to the crafting of words that will convey a message embedded with accurate facts, imagery, and emotion. Murray (1985) refers to the editing phase as one in which the writer becomes his or her own devil's advocate, in search of things that are "bad," or ungrammatical, in the writing. Donald Graves (1983), on the other hand, focuses on spelling:

Spelling is a form of etiquette that shows the writer's concern for the reader. Poor spelling in the midst of a good piece of writing is like attending a lovely banquet but with the leavings of grime and grease from the previous meal still left on the table. Poor spelling can also show the writer's lack of consideration for the reader. The banquet may be fine but it is tainted by a distracting factor—poor spelling. (p. 183)

Whether the primary focus is on grammar or spelling, they are both necessary considerations for writers during the editing stage. Here, attending to the conventions or consciously choosing to ignore them, such as in the work of e e cummings, is the principal aim. You may find few instances in your content-area writing assignments where unconventional usage is acceptable. In fact, we suspect that disregarding generally accepted rules of language will be more the exception than the rule. Regardless of genre, you want students to be conscious of their editorial decisions and apply usage rules appropriately.

The main purpose of content writing is to convey information to others. Yet published writers often challenge generally accepted rules regarding writing conventions. In fact, many make their mark by a general lack of regard for commonly accepted grammatical rules. However, when writers—novice students or professional authors—make decisions to break grammar rules, they should do so consciously and to achieve a particular effect. If readers do not recognize these

authorial decisions, the intended effect fails to make its point and meaning is lost. Paraskevas (2004) helps us see this point:

There is a fine line between error and craft, and identifying it lies in knowledge and intention: A writer must want to emphasize a particular construction in a particular context, and the reader must recognize it as a deliberate move, as evidence of craft, similar to other crafting techniques used in the text. (pp. 43–44)

Thus it must be clear that an author made a conscious decision to ignore a grammatical or punctuation rule.

Editing Considerations and Activities

Many student writers consider editing to be tedious, but it is a necessary task, and students need to become proficient at it. Writers use a variety of tools to help them edit their work. Yet some of these tools include so much information that digging through them to answer a simple usage question becomes overwhelming. The suggestions that follow and the strategies included in Section 5 of this guidebook are designed to help you and your students efficiently and effectively edit written work.

Make No-Excuse Words Available

One of the most common editing issues that teachers complain about is a student who consistently misspells words, especially those he or she should already know. “No-excuse” words—such as “their, there, or they’re” and “your and you’re”—are the ones that students have been exposed to for years but some still have not mastered. One way to combat this pervasive problem is to make the words easily available. You may want to consider displaying commonly misspelled words on a word wall or making a list of the content words and giving them to students (Isaacson & Gleason, 1997, as cited in Stein & Dixon, 2001). In either case, students should have ready access to the words they need. Key to the success of this strategy, however, is holding students accountable. If these really are no-excuse words, then there should be no excuse for students continuing to misspell them. This means that you have to let your students know that errors exist and then make sure that they make the changes rather than you. It is more helpful to give students the opportunity to correct their own errors than to give in to your frustration and correct their spelling.

Common Error Checklists

Weinstein (2001) encourages teachers to assess students for common errors and to create an individualized proofreading checklist. Students can then refer to these

checklists as they write. The thinking behind this process is similar to that of the no-excuse words. Highlighting common errors and giving students a handy tool that they can use while writing helps them attend to these problems. Plus, limiting the checklist to one page makes the information less intimidating than a fat grammar reference text and does not require much student effort.

Be Explicit

As you will see throughout this guidebook, we believe it is important for students to get explicit instruction, especially when it comes to understanding the conventions of writing. However, we do not endorse those endless worksheets where students circle, underline, and get lost in the minutiae of grammatical rules. Instead, we encourage you to help students see the common tendencies (Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech, & Svartvik, 1985) of the English language, as well as the generally accepted conventions for a given discipline. This is a role that you are most uniquely qualified to play.

Summary

We have attempted to tackle the age-old problem: so little time, so much to do. Yet even in a full school day, time set aside for the writing process is time well spent. When you provide your students with the time they need to prewrite, draft, revise, and edit, you are helping them improve as writers. Moreover, building in writing time sends a clear message to your students about the importance of proficient writing in all content areas, not just English class.

How can you save time by incorporating writing instruction with your content-area instruction? First, by spending time reviewing the writing process at the beginning of the school year, you save time later in the school year. In addition, assign writing for homework—you maintain valuable classroom time for content-area instruction and other stages of the writing process, stages that encourage students to think about what they know and don't know about a given topic. Finally, trust that your students can give their peers the valuable feedback they need to clarify their written pieces. Remember that they are discussing content while they are revising or editing their texts. Writing is about expressing knowledge, and you want your students to express their knowledge as thoughtfully and clearly as they can. Make time for your students to engage in the writing process. You will be pleased with the results.

Suggestions for Further Reading

Sorenson's *Student Writing Handbook, 3rd ed.* (New York: Macmillan, 1997) describes several types of writing and includes samples of how the genres were

used in different content areas. Although the text is written for students, it is a helpful guide for teachers, too.

For sample lessons to teach additional revision strategies, see Fletcher and Portalupi's *Craft Lessons: Teaching Writing K-8* (York, ME: Stenhouse, 1998) and Portalupi and Fletcher's *Non-Fiction Craft Lessons: Teaching Information Writing K-8* (Portland, ME: Stenhouse, 2001).

There are brief and straightforward articles about the writing process available from the Web site <http://www.poynter.org/>. Although this site is created for journalists, it provides sound writing advice that students can access easily.

Many colleges and universities have staffed writing centers that their students can turn to when completing writing assignments. In some cases, these writing centers have created Web sites that include resources and strategies that facilitate the writing process. The University of Kansas (<http://www.writing.ku.edu>), Gallaudet University (<http://depts.gallaudet.edu/englishworks/writing/main/index.htm>), and Texas A & M University (<http://uwc.tamu.edu>) have Web sites that are user-friendly for students and teachers.

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