

## Writing Workshop

Writing workshop is an instructional framework utilized in many K-6 classrooms. The framework is designed to create conditions in classrooms that support students' growth as writers over time. Two essential beliefs have helped shape the writing workshop framework as it's typically described in professional literature on the teaching of writing. First, instruction should match—as closely as possible—what teachers know about the practices and processes of proficient writers. And second, students can be helped to become more proficient writers with good teaching.

Time is the first writing workshop essential. Students need to develop stamina for writing. Proficient writers are able to stay at the task of writing for long stretches of time, and are also able to return and continue working on the same projects until they are completed. Time for writing, then, is a mainstay of the instructional framework, but time is also part of the *curriculum* of writing. Students must be learning to manage themselves through time if they are to become proficient writers. Students who routinely spend thirty to fifty minutes in independent writing are developing the necessary stamina.

Choice is another writing workshop essential. Students need choices about *how* they go about their writing. Proficient writers go through a process every time they move from an idea to a finished piece of writing. The phases of this process are well-documented: most writers do some form of prewriting, and then they draft, revise and edit their way to publication. No two writers move themselves through these phases exactly the same way, however, and many writers change their processes depending on the writing task. Students must learn to use flexible writing processes that work for them, and they can only do this if they are allowed to make choices about how they do their writing. Related to this, many proficient writers report doing their best writing when they have chosen a meaningful topic or found a personally meaningful angle on an assigned topic. When students are encouraged to choose writing topics and projects that interest them, another essential condition for writing is served.

Teaching is another essential, and most workshops make time for both whole class teaching and individual writing conferences. Whole class teaching is often focused over time on a broad writing issue—for example, a particular genre of writing, distinct elements of writing craft, or strategies for process. Teachers use examples from published texts, their own writing or student writing as the basis for most whole class teaching. Writing conferences are focused on the needs of individual children or small groups of children, and they are usually conducted during independent writing.

Student talk about writing is essential to writing workshops and it serves several important functions. Talk is rehearsal for writing as students try out ideas. Talk helps students become articulate about their writing processes and provides an opportunity for students to learn from each other. Talk makes the solitary work of writing less lonely as students receive response from others.

An understanding of growth over time is essential in a writing workshop. During the year, students should create portfolios of finished writing in different genres. Reflective assessment about both the products and the processes of this writing are key to students and teachers understanding growth over time.

Writing workshop is an instructional framework, not a teaching style, and it is important to remember that while individual teaching styles vary, the conditions that support writers do not. The consistency of writing workshop essential conditions across diverse classrooms is testimony to this.

## Resources for Research Supporting Writing Workshop

<http://www.ncte.org/edpolicy/writing/research/122398.htm>

This page lists NCTE's research-based policy statements on writing and select studies behind them.

<http://www.ncte.org/prog/writing/research/113328.htm>

Writing in the early grades, K-2

<http://www.ncte.org/prog/writing/research/115617.htm>

Writing in the intermediate grades, 3-5

\*Dyson, A.H. and Freedman, S.W. 2003. "Writing." In *Handbook of Research on Teaching the English Language Arts*. Edited by J. Flood, D. Lapp, J. Squire, and J. Jensen. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates. pp. 967-992.

\*Farnan, N. and Dahl, K. 2003. "Children's Writing: Research and Practice." In *Handbook of Research on Teaching the English Language Arts*. Edited by J. Flood, D. Lapp, J. Squire, and J. Jensen. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates. pp. 993-1007.

These two chapters, along with others in the handbook, offer comprehensive reviews of research related to the teaching of writing.

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## Selected Resources for K-6 Classroom Practice in Writing Workshop

Calkins, L. 1994. *The Art of Teaching Writing*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Davis, J. and Hill, S. 2003. *The No-Nonsense Guide to Teaching Writing*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Fletcher, R. and Portalupi, J. 2001. *Writing Workshop: The Essential Guide*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Graves, D. 1994. *A Fresh Look at Writing*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Ray, K.W. 2001. *The Writing Workshop: Working Through the Hard Parts (And they're all hard parts)*. Urbana, IL: NCTE.

Ray, K.W. and Cleaveland, L. 2004. *About the Authors: Writing Workshop With Our Youngest Writers*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Routman, R. 2005. *Writing Essentials*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Short, K., Burke, C. and Harste, J. 1994. *Creating Classrooms for Authors and Inquirers*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.