Professional Knowledge for the Teaching of Writing

Approved in February 2016, this revised statement replaces the *NCTE Beliefs about the Teaching of Writing* (November 2004), now sunsetted.

A subcommittee of the NCTE Executive Committee wrote the *NCTE Beliefs about the Teaching of Writing* in 2004. In over a decade since, the everyday experience of writing in people's lives has expanded dramatically. Increasingly, handheld devices are important instruments for people's writing, integrated tightly, nearly seamlessly, with their composing in video, photographs, and other media. Geographic location and embodied presence have become more salient to writing than at most times in human history. The ways writing and the spoken voice are mutually supportive in writing processes have become increasingly facilitated by technological capabilities. Globalized economies and relative ease of transportation have continued to bring languages into contact with one another, and US educational scholars and, sometimes, institutions have made progress in considering what it means for individuals to be adding new written languages to existing ones. Even as these expansions have enlarged the experience of writing outside school, implementation of the first USA nationwide standards in literacy--the Common Core State Standards--has, in some places, contributed to narrowing students' experience of writing inside school. In that contradictory and shifting environment, the NCTE Executive Committee charged a committee to update the *Beliefs about the Teaching of Writing,* attempting to reflect some of the historically significant changes of recent years. What follow are some of the professional principles that guide effective teaching.

Writing grows out of many purposes

Writing is not just one practice or activity. A note to a cousin is not like a business report, which is different again from a poem. The processes and ways of thinking that lead to these varied kinds of texts can also vary widely, from the quick email to a friend to the careful drafting and redrafting of a legal contract. The different purposes and genres both grow out of and create varied relationships between the writers and the readers, and existing relationships are reflected in degrees of formality in language, as well as assumptions about what knowledge and experience are already shared, and what needs to be explained. Writing with certain purposes in mind, the writer focuses attention on what the audience is thinking or believing; other times, the writer focuses more on the information she or he is organizing, or on her or his own emergent thoughts and feelings. Therefore, the thinking, procedures, and physical format in writing are shaped in accord with the author's purpose(s), the needs of the audience, and the conventions of the genre.

Often, in school, students write only to prove that they did something they were asked to do, in order to get credit for it. Or, students are taught a single type of writing and are led to believe this type will suffice in all situations. Since writers outside school have many different purposes beyond demonstrating accountability and they use more diverse genres of writing, it is important that students have experiences within school that teach them how writing differs with purpose, audience, and other elements of the situation. Even within more academic settings like college courses, the characteristics of good writing vary among disciplines; what counts as a successful lab report, for example, differs from a successful history paper, online discussion contribution, essay exam, reflection on service learning, or interpretative statement about a work of art.

Thus, beyond the traditional purposes that are identified in school, purposes for writing include developing social networks; reasoning with others to improve society; supporting personal and spiritual growth; reflecting on experience; communicating professionally and academically; building relationships with others, including friends, family, and like-minded individuals; and engaging in aesthetic experiences.

What does this mean for teaching?

In order to provide high-quality writing opportunities for all students, teachers need to understand

- The wide range of purposes for which people write and the different kinds of texts and processes that arise from those purposes;
- Strategies and forms for writing for public participation in a democratic society;
- Ways people use writing for personal growth, expression, and reflection, and how to encourage and develop this kind of writing;
- How people make creative and literary texts, aesthetic genres, for the purposes of entertainment, pleasure, or exploration;
- The ways digital environments have added new modalities while constantly creating new publics, audiences, purposes, and invitations to compose;

- The range of non-public uses of writing for self-organization, reflection, planning, and management of information, and the many tools, digital and otherwise, that people use for these purposes;
- Appropriate genres for varied academic disciplines and the purposes and relationships that create those forms;
- Ways of organizing and transforming school curricula in order to provide students with adequate education in varied purposes for writing;
- How to set up a course that asks students to write for varied purposes and audiences.

Related:

Writing Now: A Policy Research Brief Produced by the National Council of Teachers of English [http://www.ncte.org/library/NCTEFiles/Resources/Magazine/Chron0908Policy_Writing_Now.pdf]

CCCC Statement on the Multiple Uses of Writing [http://www.ncte.org/cccc/resources/positions/multipleuseswriting]

Writing is embedded in complex social relationships and their appropriate languages

Writing happens in the midst of a web of relationships. Most clearly, the relationship between the writer and the reader can be very specific: writers often have a definite idea of who will read their work, not just a generalized notion that their text will be available to the world. Furthermore, particular people surround the writer--other writers, friends, members of a given community--during the process of composing. They may know what the writer is doing and be indirectly involved in it, though they are not the audience for the work. In workplace and academic settings, writers often write because someone in authority tells them to. Therefore, power relationships are built into the writing situation. In every writing situation, the writer, the reader, and all relevant others live in a structured social order, where some people's words count more than others, where being heard is more difficult for some people than others, where some people's words come true and others' do not.

Writers start in different places. It makes a difference what kinds of language writers spoke while growing up and may speak at home now, and how those experiences relate to the kinds of language they are being asked to take when composing. It makes a difference, too, the culture a writer comes from, the ways people use language in that culture and the degree to which that culture is privileged in the larger society. Important cultural differences are not only linguistic but also racial, economic, geographic, and ideological. Digital environments have created new contexts in which new languages are being invented continuously, and young people are often leading innovators of "digitalk." The Internet brings global languages into contact, even as it provides new contexts for each language – written and oral – to change.

What does this mean for teaching?

The teaching of writing should assume students will begin with the language with which they are most at home and most fluent in their speech. That language may be a variety of English or a different language altogether. The languages students learn first are the bedrock upon which all other language traditions and forms will be constructed. The ultimate goal is not to leave students where they are, however, but to move them toward greater flexibility, so that they can write not just for their own intimates but for wider audiences. Teachers will want to engage in respectful inquiry with students about significant differences between patterns in their use of their first language and more conventionally written English. Even as they move toward more widely used English, writers find that it is not necessary or desirable to eliminate the ways their family and people in their neighborhood use words to express themselves. The teaching of excellence in writing means adding language to what already exists, not subtracting. Further, expert writing teachers deliberately teach students to incorporate their heritage and home languages intentionally and strategically in the texts they write. The goal is to make more relationships available, not fewer.

In order to provide high-quality writing opportunities for all students, teachers need to understand:

- How to find out about students' language use in the home and their neighborhoods, the changes in language context they may have encountered in their lives, and the kinds of language they most value;
- The ways wider social situations in which students speak, write, read, and relate to other people affect what feels to them natural or unnatural, easy or hard;
- How mixing languages within a text can promote students' acquisition of academic language, deeper competence in a repertoire of codes, ability to communicate complex thoughts, and ways of communicating with various audiences;
- How teachers who do not speak or understand a student's home language can embrace and support the use of home languages in the classroom;
- How to discuss respectfully with students expectations for flexibility in the employment of different kinds of language for different social contexts in order to gain access to some powerful social worlds;
- How to help students negotiate maintenance of their most familiar and cherished language practices while developing strength in academic classroom English;
- Control and awareness of their own varied and strategic ways of using language and the social contexts that expect them;

- An understanding of the relationships among group affiliation, identity, and language;
- Knowledge of the usual patterns of common dialects in English, such as African American English, Spanish, and varieties of English related to Spanish, common patterns in American rural and urban populations, predictable patterns in the English varieties of groups common in their teaching contexts;
- The online spaces through which students communicate, and how their uses of digitalk differs from conventional written English.

Related:

CCCC Statement on Second Language Writing and Writers
[http://www.ncte.org/cccc/resources/positions/secondlangwriting]

Resolution on the Student's Right to Incorporate Heritage and Home Languages in Writing
[http://www.ncte.org/positions/statements/homelanguages]

Composing occurs in different modalities and technologies

Composing has always required technology, whether it's the technology we associate with print--including pens, pencils, and paper--or the technology we associate with the digital--including word processors, digital imaging software, and the Internet. Like all texts, print texts are multimodal: print, whether hand-created or machine-produced, relies for meaning on multiple modalities, including language, layout, and the visual characteristics of the script. Moreover, print has often included visuals--including maps, line drawings, illustrations, and graphs--to create a fuller representation of meaning, to tap the familiarity of a visual to help readers make meaning in a new genre, to add aesthetic value, and to appeal to a wider audience. Film, television, and video involve such combinations of modalities, as do presentation software and websites. As technologies for composing have expanded, "composing" has increasingly referred to a suite of activities in varied modalities. Composers today work with many modalities, including language, layout, still images, other visuals, video, and sound. Computers, both the stationary and mobile varieties, provide a work environment where composers can employ and combine these modalities. Moreover, the Internet not only makes a range of new and diverse materials available to writers, but also brings writers and readers closer together and makes possible new kinds of collaborations. Thus, when students have access to a computer with full Internet access, composing opportunities expand.

Additionally, increased access to various modalities and technologies has created opportunities for students with a wide range of abilities, backgrounds, and languages to compose with more independence and agency. As more digital tools become available, and more forms of expression are not only accepted but expected, more students are able to employ these tools independently.

What does this mean for teaching?

Writing instruction should support students as they compose with a variety of modalities and technologies. Because students will, in the wider world, be using word processing for drafting, revision, and editing, incorporating visual components in some compositions, and including links where appropriate, definitions of composing should include these practices; definitions that exclude them are out-of-date and inappropriate.

Because many teachers and students do not have access to the most up-to-date technologies, such as portable devices with cameras, teaching students to compose multimodally may best be accomplished by foregrounding multimodal dimensions of composing in low-tech environments. An assignment for students to create picture books, for example, can allow them to consider how languages and images complement each other and assist the reader. Similar kinds of visual/verbal thinking can be supported across the school curriculum through other illustrated text forms, including journals, design notebooks, and posters. Attention to modalities in assignments and genres like these demonstrates the extent to which "new" literacies are rooted in older ones.

In order to provide high-quality writing opportunities for all students, teachers need to understand:

- A range of new genres that have emerged on the Internet;

- Open-source platforms that students can use for composing and electronic portfolios;

- Design and layout principles for print and digital publication;

- Conventions for digital communication, including email, chat, text messages, social networking, and online discussion forums;

- Ways to navigate both the World Wide Web and Web-based databases;

- Ways to access, evaluate, use, and cite information found on the Internet;

- Theory about and history of modalities, technologies, and the affordances they offer for meaning making;

- Operation of hardware and software that composers use, including resources for solving software and hardware problems;

- Tools that help students compose as independently as possible, in the modalities that best fit their needs and purposes;

- Internet resources for remaining up-to-date on technologies.

Related:

Resolution on Composing with Nonprint Media [http://www.ncte.org/positions/statements/composewithnonprint]

Position Statement on Multimodal Literacies [http://www.ncte.org/positions/statements/multimodalliteracies]

CCCC Position Statement on Teaching, Learning, and Assessing Writing in Digital Environments [http://www.ncte.org/cccc/resources/positions/digitalenvironments]

21st-Century Literacies: A Policy Research Brief [http://www.ncte.org/library/NCTEFiles/Resources/Positions/Chron1107ResearchBrief.pdf]

Conventions of finished and edited texts are an important dimension of the relationship between writers and readers

Readers expect writing to conform to their expectations. For public texts written for a general audience, contemporary readers expect words to be spelled in a standardized way, for punctuation to be used in predictable ways, for usage and syntax to match that used in texts they already acknowledged as successful. They expect the style in a piece of writing to be appropriate to its genre and social situation. With that in mind, writers try to use these surface elements strategically, in order to present the identity, create the relationships, and express the ideas that suit their purpose.

What does this mean for teaching?

Every teacher has to resolve a tension between writing as generating and shaping ideas and writing as a final product, demonstrating expected surface conventions. On the one hand, it is important for writing to be as correct as possible and for students to be able to produce correct texts so that readers can read and make meaning from them. On the other hand, achieving correctness is only one set of things writers must be able to do; a correct document empty of ideas or unsuited to its audience or purpose is not a good piece of writing. There is no formula for resolving this tension. Though it may be desirable both fluently to produce writing and to adhere to conventions, growth in fluency and control of conventions may not occur at the same time. If a student's mental energies are focused on new intellectual challenges, he or she may attend less fully to details of grammar and punctuation.

Such uneven development should be tolerated and, in fact, encouraged. Too much emphasis on correctness can actually inhibit a writer's development. By the same token, without mastering conventions for written discourse, writers may find their efforts regarded less highly by readers they had wanted to influence. Each teacher must be knowledgeable enough about the entire landscape of writing instruction to guide particular students toward a goal, including increasing fluency in new contexts, mastering conventions, and perhaps most important, developing rhetorical sophistication and appropriateness--all of which work together. NCTE's stated policy over many years has been that conventions of writing are best taught in the context of writing.

Most writing teachers teach students how to edit their writing that will be shared with audiences. This is often considered a late stage in the process of composing, because editing is only essential for the words, visuals, and other materials that are left after all the cutting, replacing, rewriting, and adding that go on during revision. Writers keep an image in their minds of conventional grammar, spelling, and punctuation in order to compare what is already on the page to what their audience expects. They also need to be aware of stylistic options and larger language choices that will best articulate their ideas and produce the most desirable impression on their readers. Language choices may be a matter of the identity a writer seeks to project, and those identities may not be productively standardized. In digital environments, there may be an expected way of using language due to the nature of the platform, such as in texting or blogging, where the conventional usage might differ from language in other contexts.

An area of consideration with respect to conventions in writing is the development of language proficiency for students learning English as an additional language. Experienced teachers understand that these multilingual students will enter the classroom at different stages and vary in the pace with which they acquire their new language. Knowledge of students' cultural and linguistic background and the way that background intersects or differs from English language conventions helps ensure that students are receiving instruction appropriate for their current stage of language learning. Writers who are learning English as an additional language will have multiple possible patterns in mind for phonology, morphology, syntax, and often genre and pragmatics as well. That is, they know more, and are sorting through that knowledge. Some may require support in analyzing the expectations of a wider English-dominant audience in contrast to the patterns of their earlier language(s). For many, patterns from the first language will persist and should be treated with the respect and generosity that should be afforded to spoken accented English.

In order to provide high-quality writing opportunities for all students, teachers need to understand:

- Developmental factors in writing, including the tension between fluency with new operations or content and the practices that produce accepted spelling, punctuation, syntactic, and usage conventions;
- Diverse influences and constraints on writers' decision making as they determine the conventions that apply to this situation and this piece of writing;
- A variety of applications and options for most conventions;
- Appropriate conventions for writing for a particular public audience;
- Linguistic terminology that is helpful for teaching particular kinds of usage without employing excessive linguistic terminology;
- Linguistic terminology helpful for communicating professionally with other educators;
- The relationship among rhetorical considerations and decisions about conventions, for example, the conditions under which a dash, a comma, a semicolon, or a full stop might be more effective;
- Conventions beyond the sentence, such as effective uses of bulleted lists, mixed genres and voices, diagrams and charts, design of pages, and composition of video shots;
- The conditions under which people learn to participate in new social situations, both personal and professional, with language;
- How to understand technologies such as grammar and spelling checkers to decide which changes are applicable in a given editing situation.

Related:

Students' Right to Their Own Language [http://www.ncte.org/cccc/resources/positions/srtolsummary]

CCCC Statement on Second Language Writers and Writing [http://www.ncte.org/cccc/resources/positions/secondlangwriting]

Everyone has the capacity to write; writing can be taught; and teachers can help students become better writers

Developing writers require support. This support can best come through carefully designed writing instruction oriented toward acquiring new strategies and skills. Certainly, writers can benefit from teachers who simply support and give them time to write. However, high-quality instruction matters. Teachers of writing should be well versed in composition theory and research, and they should know methods for turning that theory into practice. They should be capable of teaching writing in both print and digital environments.

Students are different from one another, and they bring to the experience of writing a wide range of resources and strengths. At the same time, any writer can be positioned as weak, struggling, or incompetent. All writers need to learn multiple strategies and modalities to compensate for moments when they feel stuck or defeated, to get on with the business of composing.

As is the case with many activities, becoming a better writer requires that students write. This means actual writing for real audiences, not merely listening to lectures about writing, doing grammar drills, or discussing readings. The more people write, the more familiar it becomes and the more they are motivated to do it. Writers learn from each session with their hands on a keyboard or fingers on a pencil as they draft, rethink, revise, and draft again. Improvement is built into the experience of writing when writers revise, strategizing ways to make their writing better.

What does this mean for teaching?

Writing instruction must include ample in-class and out-of-class opportunities for writing, including writing in digital spaces, and should involve writing for a variety of purposes and audiences, including audiences beyond the classroom. Teachers need to support students in the development of writing lives, habits, and preferences for life outside school. We already know that

many students do extensive amounts of self-sponsored writing: emailing, keeping journals or doing creative projects, instant messaging, making websites, blogging, creating fan fiction. Though critically important for college and career, the teaching of writing should also be geared toward making sense in a life outside of school, so that writing has ample room to grow in individuals' lives. It is useful for teachers to consider what elements of their curriculum they could imagine students self-sponsoring outside school. Ultimately, those are the activities that will produce more writing.

In order to provide high-quality writing opportunities for all students, teachers need to understand:

- How to interpret curriculum documents, including standards, skills, strategies, concepts, and content that can be taught while students are actually writing, rather than one dimension of composing at a time to all students at once;
- How to create writing lives for the world beyond school;
- How to construct social structures that support independent work;
- How to confer with individual writers;
- How to assess students' work while they are in the process of writing--formatively--in order to offer timely assistance during the composing process;
- How to plan what students need to know in response to ongoing research;
- How to create a sense of community and personal safety in the classroom, so that students are willing to write and collaborate freely and at length;
- How to effectively employ a variety of technologies such as brainstorming tools, collaborative word processors, and bibliography managers for students to engage in writing fully;
- How to ensure that every student has the tools and supports necessary to be as independent as possible;
- How to encourage and include students writing in their home languages.

Related:

NCTE Beliefs about Students' Right to Write [http://www.ncte.org/positions/statements/students-right-to-write]

Resolution on Students' Right of Expression [http://www.ncte.org/positions/statements/rightofexpression]

What We Know about Writing, Grades K-2 [http://www.ncte.org/writing/aboutearlygrades]

How to Help Your Child Become a Better Writer (English) [http://www.ncte.org/positions/statements/howtohelpenglish]

How to Help Your Child Become a Better Writer (Español) [http://www.ncte.org/positions/statements/howtohelpspanish]

Writing is a process

Often, when people think of writing, they think of texts--finished pieces of writing that stand alone. Understanding what writers do, however, involves both thinking about what texts look like when they are finished as well as thinking about what strategies writers might employ to produce those texts, especially when using a variety of technologies. Knowledge about writing is only complete when writers understand the ensemble of actions in which they engage as they produce texts. Such understanding has two aspects, at least. First is the development, through extended practice over years, of a repertory of routines, skills, strategies, and practices, for generating, revising, and editing different kinds of texts. Second is the development of reflective abilities and meta-awareness about writing. The procedural knowledge developed through reflective practice helps writers most when they encounter difficulty, or when they are in the middle of creating a piece of writing. How does someone get started? What do they do when they get stuck? How do they plan the overall process, each section of their work, and even the rest of the sentence they are writing right now? Research, theory, and practice in the teaching of writing have produced a rich understanding of what writers do, those who are proficient and professional as well as those who struggle.

Two further points are vital. First, to say that writing is a process is decidedly not to say that it should--or can--be turned into a formulaic set of steps or reduced to a set of traits. Experienced writers shift between different operations according to their audience, the purpose of the writing task, the genre, and circumstances, such as deadlines and considerations of length, style, and format.

Second, writers do not accumulate process skills and strategies once and for all. They develop and refine writing skills throughout their writing lives, as they take up new tasks in new genres for new audiences. They grow continually, across personal and professional contexts, using numerous writing spaces and technologies.

What does this mean for teaching?

Whenever possible, teachers should attend to the process that students might follow to produce texts--and not only specify criteria for evaluating finished products, in form or content. Students should become comfortable with prewriting techniques,

multiple strategies for developing and organizing a message, a variety of strategies for revising and editing, and methods for preparing products for public audiences and for deadlines. In explaining assignments, teachers should provide guidance and options for ways of accomplishing the objectives. Using formative assessment to understand the processes students follow--the decisions they make, the attempts along the way--can be at least as important as evaluating the final product with a holistic score or grade. Moreover, they should understand how various digital writing tools--mind mapping, word processing, bibliography managers--can be employed in academically useful ways. At least some of the time, the teacher should guide the students through the process, assisting them as they go. Writing instruction must provide opportunities for students to identify the processes that work best for themselves as they move from one initial idea to final draft, from one writing situation to another.

Writing instruction must also take into account that a good deal of workplace writing and other writing takes place in collaborative situations. Writers must learn to work effectively with one another to create writing, provide feedback, and complete a final draft, often with the use of collaborative technologies.

In order to provide high-quality writing opportunities for all students, teachers need to understand:

- The relationship between features of finished writing and the actions writers perform to create that writing;
- What writers of different genres, including political arguments, stories, poems, blog posts, technical reports, and more, say about their craft;
- The process of writing from the inside, that is, what the teachers themselves as writers experience in a host of different writing situations;
- Multiple strategies for approaching a wide range of typical problems writers face during composing, including strategies for invention, audience, and task analysis, incorporation of images and other visuals, revision, and editing;
- Multiple, flexible models of the writing process, the varied ways individuals approach similar tasks, and the ways that writing situations and genres inform processes;
- How to design time and possibly staged intervals of work for students to do their best work on a given assignment;
- A range of digital writing tools that writers might find useful in their processes, including word processors, databases, outliners, mind mapping software, design software, shared-document websites, and other hardware, software, and Web-based technologies.

Related:

Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing [http://wpacouncil.org/framework]

CCCC Principles for the Postsecondary Teaching of Writing [http://www.ncte.org/cccc/resources/positions/postsecondarywriting#principle5]

Writing is a tool for thinking

When writers actually write, they think of things that they did not have in mind before they began writing. The act of writing generates ideas; writing can be an act of discovery. This is different from the way we often think of writers--as the solitary author who works diligently to get ideas fixed in his or her head before writing them down. The notion that writing is a medium for thought is important in several ways and suggests a number of important uses for writing: to solve problems, to identify issues, to construct questions, to reconsider something one had already figured out, to try out a half-baked idea. This insight that writing is a tool for thinking helps us to understand the process of drafting and revision as one of exploration, and is nothing like the idea of writing as transcribing from prerecorded tape. Nor is the writing process simply fixing the mistakes in an early draft; rather, it involves finding more and more wrinkles and implications in what one is talking about.

What does this mean for teaching?

In any writing classroom, some of the writing is for the writer and some for other audiences as well. Regardless of the age, ability, or experience of the writer, the use of writing to generate thought is still valuable; therefore, forms of writing such as personal narrative, journals, written reflections, observations, and writing-to-learn strategies should be included in the curriculum.

In order to provide high-quality writing opportunities for all students, teachers need to understand:

- How to employ varied tools for thinking through writing, such as journals, writers' notebooks, blogs, sketchbooks, digital portfolios, listservs or online discussion groups, dialogue journals, double-entry or dialectical journals, and others;

- The kinds of new thinking--such as questioning, discovery, and invention--that occur when writers revise;

- The varieties of thinking people do when they compose, and what those types of thinking look like when they appear in writing;

- Strategies for getting started with an idea, or finding an idea when one does not occur immediately;

- Exploring various technologies such as drawing tools and voice-to-text translators for brainstorming and developing one's initial thinking;

- Ways to accommodate differences among students, such as those who find writing physically challenging, by using oral rehearsal of ideas, gesture, diagramming, or other options that would still allow exploration and development of thought.

Related:

[*CCCC Statement on the Multiple Uses of Writing*](http://www.ncte.org/cccc/resources/positions/multipleuseswriting) [http://www.ncte.org/cccc/resources/positions/multipleuseswriting]

[*Resolution on Writing Across the Curriculum*](http://www.ncte.org/positions/statements/writingacrossthecurr) [http://www.ncte.org/positions/statements/writingacrossthecurr]

Writing has a complex relationship to talk

From its beginnings in early childhood, through K-12 and college classrooms, and throughout a variety of workplaces and community settings, writing exists in an environment of talk. Speakers often write notes or scripts. Writers often talk in order to rehearse the language and content that will go into what they write, and conversation often provides an impetus or occasion for writing. Writers sometimes confer with teachers and other writers about what to do next, how to improve their drafts, or how to clarify their ideas and purposes. Their usual ways of speaking either may or may not feed into the sentences they write, depending on intricate, continuous, important decisions.

What does this mean for teaching?

In early childhood, teachers expect lots of talk to surround writing, since children are figuring out how to get speech onto paper. Early teaching in composition should also attend to helping children get used to producing language orally, through telling stories, explaining how things work, predicting what will happen, and guessing about why things and people are the way they are. Early writing experiences will often include students explaining orally what is in a text, whether it is printed or drawn.

As they grow, writers still need opportunities to talk about what they are writing about, to rehearse the language of their upcoming texts and run ideas by trusted colleagues before and as they take the risk of committing words to paper. After making a draft, it is often helpful for writers to discuss with peers what they have done, partly in order to get ideas from their peers, partly to see what they, the writers, say when they try to explain their thinking. Writing conferences, wherein student writers talk about their work with a teacher, who can make suggestions or reorient what the writer is doing, are also very helpful uses of talk in the writing process.

In order to provide high-quality writing opportunities for all students, teachers need to understand:

- Ways of setting up and managing student talk in partnerships and groups;

- Ways of establishing a balance between talk and writing in classroom management;

- Ways of organizing the classroom and/or schedule to permit individual teacher-student conferences;

- Strategies for deliberate insertions of opportunities for talk into the writing process: knowing when and how students should talk about their writing;

- Ways of anticipating and solving interpersonal conflicts that arise when students discuss writing;

- Relationships--both similarities and differences--between oral and literate language;

- The uses of writing in public presentations and the values of students making oral presentations that grow out of and use their writing;

- How technologies such as voice recording apps on smartphones and audio editing tools can be used as students create podcasts, videos, or other multimedia work in which they share their writing through oral production.

Related:

Writing and reading are related

Writing and reading are related. People who engage in considerable reading often find writing an easier task, though the primary way a writer improves is through writing. Still, it's self-evident that to write a particular kind of text, it helps if the writer has read that kind of text, if only because the writer then has a mental model of the genre. In order to take on a particular style of language, it also helps to have read that language, to have heard it in one's mind, so that one can hear it again in order to compose it.

Writing can also help people become better readers. In their earliest writing experiences, children listen for the relationships of sounds to letters, which contributes greatly to their phonemic awareness and phonics knowledge. Writers also must learn how texts are structured, because eventually they have to compose in different genres, and that knowledge of structure helps them to predict and make sense of the sections and sequencing of the texts they read. The experience of plotting a short story, organizing a research report, or making line breaks in a poem permits the writer, as a reader, to approach new reading experiences with more informed eyes.

Additionally, reading is a vital source of information and ideas. For writers fully to contribute to a given topic or to be effective in a given situation, they must be familiar with and draw on what previous writers have said. Reading also creates a sense of what one's audience knows or expects on a topic.

What does this mean for teaching?

One way teachers help students become better writers is to make sure they have lots of extended time to read, in school and out. Teachers also make sure students have access to and experience in reading material that presents both professionally published and student writing in various genres. If one is going to write in a genre, it is very helpful to have read in that genre first.

Overall, frequent conversations about the connections between what we read and what we write are helpful. These connections will sometimes be about the structure and craft of the writing itself, and sometimes about thematic and content connections.

In order to provide high-quality writing opportunities for all students, teachers need to understand:

- How writers read for the purposes of writing--with an eye toward not just what the text says but also how it is put together;

- The psychological and social processes reading and writing have in common;

- The ways writers imagine their intended readers, anticipating their responses and needs;

- That text structures are fluid enough to accommodate frequent exceptions, innovations, and disruptions;

- How writers can identify mentor or exemplar texts, both print and digital, that they may want to emulate in their own writing.

Related:

Assessment of writing involves complex, informed, human judgment

Assessment of writing occurs for different purposes. The most fundamental and important assessment of writing is that of the writer, whose efficacy and growth demands that she or he determine and intend what to work on next, throughout the process of producing a single text and across experiences as she or he grows through a writing life. Sometimes, a teacher assesses in order to decide what the student has achieved and what he or she still needs to learn. Sometimes, an agency or institution beyond the classroom assesses a student's level of achievement in order to say whether he or she can go on to some new educational level that requires the writer to be able to do certain things. At other times, school authorities require a writing test as a mechanism for requiring teachers to teach writing, or a certain kind or genre of writing. Still other times, as in a history or literature exam, the assessment of writing itself is not the point, but the quality of the writing is evaluated almost in passing.

In any of these assessments of writing, complex judgments are required. Human beings need to make these judgments, not software programmed to score essays, because only human beings can be sensitive enough to purposes, audience, quality and relevance of evidence, truth in content, and the like. Furthermore, such judgments should be made by professionals who are educated and informed about writing, writing development, the various ways writing can be assessed, and the ways such assessments can support writers.

Instructors of composition should know about various methods of assessment of student writing. Instructors must recognize the difference between formative and summative evaluation and be prepared to evaluate students' writing from both perspectives. By formative evaluation here, we mean provisional, ongoing, in-process judgments about what students know and what to teach next – assessments that may be complex descriptions and not reduced to a grade or score and that are intended to support students' writerly development. By summative evaluation, we mean final judgments about the quality of student work (typically reflected in a grade).

In order to provide high-quality writing opportunities for all students, teachers need to understand:

- How to find out what student writers can do, informally, on an ongoing basis;

- How to use that assessment in order to decide what and how to teach next;

- How to assess occasionally, less frequently, in order to form and report judgments about the quality of student writing and learning;

- How to assess ability and knowledge across multiple different writing engagements;

- What the features of good writing are, appropriate to the context and purposes of the teaching and learning;

- What the elements of a constructive process of writing are, appropriate to the context and purposes of the teaching and learning;

- What growth in writing looks like, the developmental aspects of writing ability;

- Ways of assessing student metacognitive process as they connect writing to reading;

- How to recognize in student writing (in both their texts and their actions) the nascent potential for excellence at the features and processes desired;

- How to deliver useful feedback, appropriate for the writer and the situation;

- How to analyze writing situations for their most essential elements, so that assessment is not of everything about writing all at once, but rather is targeted to outcomes;

- How to analyze and interpret both qualitative and quantitative writing assessments and make decisions about their usefulness;

- How to evaluate electronic texts;

- How to use portfolios to assist writers in their development and how to assess portfolios;

- How self-assessment and reflection contribute to a writer's development and ability to move among genres, media, and rhetorical situations;

- How to employ a variety of technologies--including screencasting and annotation, embedded text and voice comments, and learning management systems--to provide timely, useful, and goal-oriented feedback to students.

Related:

Writing Assessment: A Position Statement of CCCC [http://www.ncte.org/cccc/resources/positions/writingassessment]

NCTE Position Statement on Machine Scoring [http://www.ncte.org/positions/statements/machine_scoring]

NCTE Resolution on Grading Student Writing [http://www.ncte.org/positions/statements/gradingstudentwrit]

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