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ABSTRACT

Intended for all teachers involved in writing instruction, this booklet serves as an inservice guide, focuses on writing as crafting and authoring, and examines components of instruction in writing as a process. The booklet discusses the following topics: (1) the public face of writing in schools, (2) the writing process, (3) the use of models for writing, (4) the writing environment, (5) the role of grammar and mechanics, (6) writing evaluation, (7) writing and special learners, (8) writing across the curriculum, (9) standards for writing programs, and (10) national and local efforts to improve writing programs. (HTH)

FASTBACK

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The Teaching of Writing in Our Schools

John M. Kean

PHI DELTA KAPPA
EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATION

JOHN M. KEAN

John M. Kean is a professor of curriculum and instruction at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. He has taught in the public schools in Ohio. His bachelor's degree is from Ohio University, and his master's and doctor's degrees are from Kent State University. He was a post-doctoral fellow at the Institute on School Learning and Individual Differences at the John F. Kennedy Center for Research on Education and Human Development, George Peabody College for Teachers, and has been a Fulbright Lecturer at the Institute of Educational Science, University of Santiago in Spain.

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This fastback is dedicated to all the National Writing Project teacher-consultants, who are transforming the teaching of writing.

Series Editor, Derek L. Burleson

The Teaching of Writing In Our Schools

by

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The Public Face of Writing in Schools

In the last 10 years a great deal of concern has been expressed regarding the public school's success at producing literate graduates. Much of the information the public has received through the popular media has been contradictory or confusing. Educators claim, for example, that studying grammar will not necessarily improve writing; yet most people over the age of 35 know that diagramming sentences was an integral part of their learning to write correctly. Educators state that spelling is being taught in the schools, but when asked to show the spelling books and scores, they cannot. The public is informed that national test scores are declining, but no one really explains what this means or gives evidence to prove that this is, in fact, the case.

In addition, little attention has been paid to the many additions to the school curriculum or even to simple statistics about the heavy workloads of teachers at all levels. A secondary English teacher who teaches 150 students, asks them to write once a week, and spends only 10 minutes reacting to each piece of writing, will, as a minimum, spend 25 hours outside of class reacting to student papers. In the face of such a time commitment, many teachers choose either not to expect writing or not to respond to it.

The teaching of writing has been a part of formal schooling in this country for over 200 years, yet many teachers, even as they worked with students, realized that they themselves knew little about the act of writing and even less about how they could assist students in improving their writing. Too often, schools merely provided time for students to write rather than opportunities that would provide the interaction,

models, and direct teaching that would encourage students to write better.

Within the last 25 years, systematic research on writing, as it is crafted and taught, has effected a change in our knowledge about ways to teach students to write effectively. In essence, our attention has shifted from the written product itself to what the student does to produce that product. We have learned that both teaching to write and learning to write are done much more effectively if we concentrate on the *writing process* rather than the written product.

Defining Writing

When the popular press and the professional journals have periodically raised the question of "why can't Johnny write," I assumed that there was a common understanding of what the question meant, until I heard this comment: "Well, my daughter's the same way. She got A's in writing in school, but the only way I can read what she's written is if she types it." Thus before proceeding further, it is important to be specific about what we mean when we use the term *writing*.

James Moffett has provided five definitions of writing that cover most senses in which the word writing is used: writing as 1) handwriting – the physical act of drawing letters, making graphic symbols; 2) transcribing and copying – taking dictation, recording one's own words or the words of others; 3) paraphrasing – summarizing the words of others, reporting what others have said or done; 4) crafting – constructing good sentences, paragraphs, and overall organization; and 5) authoring – revising inner speech into outer discourse for a specific purpose and a specific audience. He goes on to offer his own definition of writing as "the revision of inner speech to insure that writing be acknowledged as nothing less than thinking, manifested in a verbal way."[1]

Another useful definition comes from the National Council of Teachers of English Committee on Standards for Basic Skills Writing Programs: "Writing is the process of selecting, combining, arranging and developing ideas in effective sentences, paragraphs, and . . . longer units of discourse."[2] This definition is similar to the one Moffet categorizes as crafting.

All of these definitions are correct to some degree, and they indeed allow us to focus on what the writer does before, during, and after writing. In practice, they are activities that writers engage in simultaneously. This fastback will focus on writing as crafting and authoring.

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The Writing Process

Recent research and practice suggest that giving more attention to what students *do* as writers results in better writing. A focus on the writing process involves the prewriting stage, the writing stage, and the postwriting stage. Although the labeling of stages might suggest that writing is a linear process, it is not. Some teachers isolate the three stages in the classroom for didactic purposes, but in reality all three are interactive and recursive. As many writers can attest, the very act of writing produces thoughts and permits the shaping and reshaping of what is to be expressed. Of course, planning enters into the act of writing, but it has spontaneous dimensions too. As the slogan goes: Learn to write, write to learn.

Following are brief descriptions of these three stages, plus a fourth and final stage of the writing process, publication. Although not always necessary, the prospect of publication can be very useful in selecting an audience for the written work and in insuring that student writers write for real audiences.

The Prewriting Stage

Prewriting is, in a sense, all the knowledge and experience the writer brings to the writing process. In the classroom it typically means the specific activities and decision making that the teacher and students engage in to prepare for writing.

Among the many creative ways that teachers and students have spent their time preparing for writing are planning, plotting, inventing, brainstorming, creating, researching, motivating, inquiring, and

discovering. Students determine general topics, select more specific topics for writing, make decisions about their goals for writing, select their audiences, and make choices about the appropriate forms for writing. They examine other people's writing (writing models) to get some idea how others have expressed ideas similar to the ones that they themselves want to express.

It is in the prewriting stage that students work through the elements of rhetoric that culminate in effective writing. Individually or in groups, they make decisions about subject, purpose, form, speaker, and audience. Although all effective writers consciously or unconsciously attend to these elements, students need the opportunity to manipulate them consciously. As they manipulate these elements, they must also be involved in making decisions about them. For example, subjects that are "given" to students rarely generate the personal motivation from which good writing emanates. Certainly topics can be suggested and brainstorming can be helpful, but ultimately the student must have the opportunity to choose and select subjects.

In this stage, too, student writers' purposes are clarified. If the purpose is to inform, then students must identify an audience to inform. They must have the opportunity to consider how materials can be effectively presented in terms of structure, style, tone, and vocabulary. Also, they must make decisions about form. Will the piece be most effectively presented as a contrast, a comparison, a description, a narrative, or an analysis? Will the student write from a personal point of view, from another person's point of view, or from an objective, third-person point of view?

The prewriting stage is where students make decisions about how information is to be gathered and organized for use in writing. If the students are preparing to inform, they list the questions that they must answer. They share these questions with other students — a potential audience — to find out which questions students are interested in having answered and which ones should be dropped. If the information needed requires interviewing, they develop interview schedules and practice interviewing each other. If library sources are needed, they discuss likely references to consult. If a field trip is planned, they brainstorm the questions they need to ask to find answers.

The prewriting stage is also a time to learn or review special vocabulary needs, note-taking procedures for interviews, ways of organizing material, and the format for bibliographic entries.

The Writing Stage

The writing or composing stage is the one we are most familiar with but perhaps least understand. Writing is often assumed to be a simple, straightforward matter of following an outline, whereas in reality it is often chaotic and idiosyncratic, even for the most accomplished writers.

In this stage students are actually trying to get the inner speech into outer discourse by putting their ideas into writing. They are composing. They are arranging words and sentences in a manner consistent with decisions made in the prewriting stage, but at the same time are spontaneously making changes that the very act of writing about something suggests. It is here that the statement, "Writing is not speech written down," is best illustrated. It is here that the students who can orally tell what they mean, but can't write what they mean, need help with crafting and organizing their ideas. Some students in this stage of writing will need quiet time to reflect, others will need encouragement from the teacher and other students. Still others will want to move into the revising stage immediately after each sentence.

Teachers working with students in this stage need to emphasize that this is the time to get ideas down on paper, not the time to check mechanics or spelling, although some students do in fact do this. Rather, this is the time when students are forming ideas, making choices about words, comparing and contrasting their writing with models or with their own experience — all in an effort to put what is in their heads into a message that communicates. There is no one best strategy to use with all students at this stage, which is sometimes referred to as the "opaque box" because so little is actually known about what happens. Nevertheless, the drafts produced by students who have had appropriate prewriting experiences and support while writing are far superior to those who have not had such experiences.

The Postwriting Stage

In the postwriting stage students review, evaluate, and rewrite in

order to improve their initial drafts. There is also a time for proofreading to insure that the writing conforms to the standards of one's audience. In this stage students learn that writing in most cases requires revision.

The postwriting stage has been neglected in the past because teachers have assumed that they themselves were the best critics of students' writing. This does not appear to be the case. Students seem to respond much better to editorial criticism from a real audience — their peers — than they do from teachers. A roomful of editors and critics involved in evaluating each other's writing has several distinct advantages. Students assume responsibility for their own work. As student evaluators examine the writing of their peers, they become more adept at analyzing their own writing. They devise constructive ways to give and take criticism. They begin to develop a vocabulary to talk about writing. They also remove the responsibility from the teacher for examining every piece of student writing.

The Publishing Stage

Student writing deserves an audience beyond the teacher. It is in this sense that the term "publishing" is used. In school programs writing is considered published if it reaches its intended audience. Thus student writing may be considered published if it is posted on the bulletin board, mailed to an addressee, printed in the school newspaper, bound with other writings and catalogued and shelved in the school library, or shared in whatever form is deemed feasible by the students and the teacher.

Some schools have found other ways to encourage writing for publication. Young Authors Conferences, in which students at all grade levels enter their best pieces of writing to be judged by a panel of other students or by a panel of community authors, administrators, and teachers, have been conducted in many areas of the country. In some communities local newspapers have agreed to publish selected student writings. Local chambers of commerce have sponsored student-written tourist guides. Many communities have responded positively to student-written local history material, some of which appears on restaurant place mats.

The process approach to writing emphasizes a high degree of student involvement, attention to planning in the prewriting stage, direct instruction in the skills of writing, and assistance in writing through direct coaching. The process approach provides students with the opportunity to write for real purposes and to learn the craft of writing at the same time.

The Use of Models for Writing

The term "models for writing" is used here in two distinct senses. Teachers are model writers for their students, and published materials are patterns for writing. That teachers of writing should write is axiomatic in modern writing programs that stress the process approach. And the use of published passages as models is an old and good, though often misused, teaching strategy.

Student writers need to interact with people who write. They need to recognize the importance of writing not only in school but in other social and work environments. Teachers who write, particularly if they engage in the same kinds of writing they expect from their students and share their work with students, provide students a better insight into the writing process. The teacher is more aware of the tasks required of students when they write and, consequently, can plan writing activities that are appropriate for the kinds of writing tasks assigned. Also, by having an actual demonstration of writing by the teacher, students come to realize that writing is respected by the teacher and that procedures suggested by the teacher for improving student writing do produce the desired results.

Published passages that are used as models have many uses throughout the writing process. In the prewriting stage the teacher can direct students in an analysis of models to show how the writer relates a topic to an audience, how main ideas and supportive evidence are ordered and connected, how the writer creates impressions and moods, and how the writer draws conclusions and makes judgments. Models can be used during the writing stage itself when imitation is appropriate. They can

be used in the rewriting and editing stages to illustrate writing conventions and standards. In sum, models provide an opportunity for students to examine the ways writers practice their craft.

Models may be drawn from literature appropriate to the age level of the writer, from the writing of other students, or from the writing of teachers. Many of us can remember the freshman English casebooks in college that contained models to emulate. These models, drawn from the works of the world's great writers and thinkers, were often more intimidating than helpful. Many were uninteresting and irrelevant to the lives of college freshmen. Teachers who used a casebook more than likely assigned students to read a passage (selected by the teacher), explicate it, reconstruct its "meaning," and deduce the author's intent. This was usually followed by an assignment to attempt a piece of writing on a similar topic in a similar style. Obviously, there was no need to be concerned about the author's "intent," as that was taken care of by the assignment itself.

Models, as they are used in good writing programs today, are employed much differently. The models come from child and adolescent literature, from youth-oriented magazines, or from newspaper columnists and reporters who are writing about contemporary issues. They are drawn from the entertainment and business media as well as religious, political, and academic media. They are drawn from sources that students can readily understand and successfully use as models for their own writing. Teachers, through questions and demonstration, help the students understand how the writers craft their language to achieve their desired purpose. In this process, passages are not necessarily examined in their entirety. A single sentence might be analyzed, a descriptive paragraph might be used to sharpen observational skills. Students might examine a reporter's write-up of an interview and compare it with the notes. They might also visit a manuscript library and examine various drafts of a published author's work. Models drawn from other students' writing are effective ways for students to discover their own inner voice.

In summary, models can be used to stimulate, to emulate, and to serve as a comparison for students' own writing.

The Environment for Writing

In a lecture delivered a half century ago, Virginia Woolf made what she called a minor point, "A woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction." She went on to offer her opinions on the inner drive to create in words and on the frustrations and problems that the woman writer faces. A paraphrase of her famous line might read: A writer needs the time to experience, to think, to wrestle with ideas and language, and to experiment; and a writer needs the psychological and physical space in which to write.

The environment for writing in schools should provide flexible time, flexible space, flexible organization, and easy access to equipment and reference material. According to most authorities on teaching writing, it needs more time than it is currently being given. Writing is not an activity that is done in short regular bursts in a 50-minute hour on alternate Mondays. Students need to write regularly, but the time arrangements should be as flexible as possible, given the constraints imposed by scheduling both inside and outside the classroom. Elementary teachers have more flexibility in arranging the time to do the task than do most secondary teachers, who generally have only one period per day to work with a group of students. But even when time is available, it is not always used appropriately. One recent national study of writing in the secondary school found that in a typical writing situation, three minutes elapsed from the time the teacher began to discuss an assignment until the students began to write. The same study noted that activities to help students while they were writing were almost nonexistent, and that the major instructional technique was the teacher's comments and corrections written on completed work.[1]

Teachers who use the writing process approach spend most of their class time preparing students for writing and providing help when students are actually writing. Although there are no definitive rules for the prewriting stage, three minutes is clearly not sufficient. For most writing tasks even five hours may not be sufficient for all of the activities recommended in the early stages of writing. The time needed for writing tasks must be based on realistic assessments of the requirements of the task and the abilities of the students.

Flexible space is needed, which allows for both small-group work and individual work. Students need the kind of space found in writing laboratories or writing centers, space that facilitates individual tutorials. Writing classes should be actual working sessions for student writers. The space and the equipment should facilitate such activity.

Flexible organization is necessary in order to accommodate the writing preferences of students, to form work groups spontaneously, and to conduct individual tutoring when required. Providing students opportunities to work in small groups encourages active participation in the writing process.

The environment for effective writing also requires an adequate supply of reference material and equipment, from dictionaries and grammar handbooks to typewriters and word processors. At this time few schools have enough word processors for every student in a writing class, but if they are to learn to communicate in the electronic age, students must have the opportunity to learn to use these machines. Word processor computers not only remove a lot of the drudgery from revising, editing, and proofreading, but they also provide students an opportunity to practice writing in situations they will increasingly find in the world of work.

The Role of Grammar and Mechanics in Writing

Battles are still being waged over the role of grammar study in the teaching of writing. Some argue that grammar is not being taught and should be, while others argue that grammar study is archaic and has very little to do with how students learn to write. Some raise questions about the amount of grammar to be included in a writing program, while others worry about when it should be included. Some ask what grammar to teach — traditional, transformational, etc.

In the argument surrounding the study of grammar, at least three definitions are in use: 1) grammar as a description of how the structural elements of sentences are arranged into communication units, 2) grammar as a set of language conventions that are preferred by educated writers, and 3) grammar as a set of rules that a writer intuitively develops and uses to communicate. Good teachers of writing accept all three definitions to some degree as they work with student writers. But these teachers deal with grammar on a need-to-know basis when the writing that students are doing calls for it.

Grammar study should be subordinate to helping students develop writing skills. Handled in any other way, its contribution to the improvement of writing is minimal at best and damaging at worst, because it often steals time away from actual opportunities to write. Grammar can be taught without learning a lot of terminology. Teachers and students can talk about sentence sense, mechanics, grammatical structure, diction, usage, and relationships between sentences, but this does not require an elaborate labeling system. Students learn grammar from

attempting to communicate, rather than through drill and practice. By writing and having their work reviewed by the teacher and their peers, they find out what works and what doesn't. This can only happen when students write frequently.

There is no ready formula as to how frequently students should write. But it seems clear that one cannot refine skills by practicing only every other week. Physical fitness experts tell us that we cannot keep our bodies in shape unless we exercise at least three times a week. They also tell us we need to exercise every other day, not three times at the end of the week, and certainly not all week once a month. So it is with writing. Regular opportunities to write short pieces are probably much more productive than the massive burst of energy required to produce a term paper once a semester.

Teachers and researchers have developed many ways to ensure that students grasp grammatical principles and learn to apply them. Students learn to craft better sentences through such exercises as sentence building and sentence combining rather than through the analytical process of diagramming sentences. Through such exercises students learn to manipulate sentences, to take simple sentences and combine them into a single more complex sentence, and to arrange sentence elements in specified ways leading to more mature sentences. Such exercises, when used regularly for short periods of time in conjunction with regular writing activities, result in better writing.

Many teachers use the entire class as peer editing groups, with the specific responsibility for grammatical editing. Such grammar editing groups have been used successfully from second grade through graduate school to improve writing.

Mechanics of Writing

The teaching of mechanics — capitalization, punctuation, and spelling — is an integral part of writing instruction from prewriting through editing and proofreading. Some critics contend that these mechanical skills are not being given enough attention in modern writing programs. Yet a review of current research on students' use of capitalization, punctuation, and spelling leads to the conclusion that students who write are doing as well and maybe even better than students of earlier generations.

In the writing process approach, instruction in mechanics is provided

on a need-to-use basis, with drill or practice used sparingly to support actual composition situations. For example, students who are confused about comma rules learn far more quickly if their readers misunderstand them than if they practice exercises in a workbook outside the context of real writing.

Teachers can provide many opportunities to practice using correct punctuation in the context of writing or sentence combining exercises. If students are writing scripts or stories, they are taught directly the rules for quotation marks with dialogue. If they are writing "if-then" sentences, they are taught the use of commas for setting off subordinate clauses.

Students continue to refine their understanding and use of these punctuation marks as they learn to communicate more complex ideas. Eight-year-olds may demonstrate mastery of basic punctuation marks, but they still need to review their function when, as sixteen-year-olds, they are using them in more complex constructions.

Spelling is also an important part of the writing process. (In most schools, however, it is taught primarily through commercial workbooks that do not require students to perform realistic spelling tasks for their own communication purposes.) In the writing program, spelling for some realistic purpose is emphasized. Spelling is taught in relation to vocabulary that is needed to communicate. Students who know the meaning of words tend to be able to spell them correctly. Students, who have first had the opportunity to talk and read and then base their writing on what they have read and talked about, tend to become successful spellers by developing strategies for spelling that go beyond the phoneme-grapheme strategy used by most poor spellers. They memorize words that they write frequently. They use mnemonic devices for others. They make greater use of the dictionary, other print sources, the teacher, and peers.

As teachers and students prepare for writing, they discuss words that will be needed and words that students have had problems with in the past. In the editing/proofreading stage, both the teacher and peers help each student correct spelling. In a real sense, these processes help students cope with spelling problems in common words (e.g., where, were; quiet, quite) and learn the skills for using outside sources such as dictionaries to help them proofread and edit their work.

The Evaluation of Writing

In the memory of many of us, the evaluation of our writing often took the following sequence: teacher assigns a paper; student writes paper; student hands in final copy; teacher, without any interaction with the student, finds and marks the faults in the paper; teacher makes some comments and assigns a grade; teacher returns the paper to the student. The teacher's comments might go something like this:

> *You have dealt with the meanings of the novel quite well — good understanding and substantiation most of the time. One major problem, however, is that your sentence structure really presents difficulty. You should take time to go to the Writing Lab to rectify your writing problem — for future classes and papers. Unfortunately, it has affected your grade on the paper (as it must) and probably will continue to do so on future writing.*

On this eight-page typed paper, the English teacher found four comma faults, three fragments, and several awkward sentences. The comments were not only confusing but neatly got the teacher out of doing anything about the student's writing problem. Such an evaluation, which emphasizes only the negative aspects of the paper, could lead the student to believe that good writing is based on specific grammatical and mechanical improvements rather than on the quality of ideas and style.

The evaluation of student writing is one of the most perplexing tasks of the writing teacher, but it is an essential element of an effective writing program. In the last 15 years, much progress has been made in

evaluation procedures that provide both reliable and valid assessments of students' competence in persuasive, informative, and expressive writing. These procedures require that evaluators be trained in specific rating systems that can be applied to a collection of student writing samples. Called holistic evaluation procedures, they are used to assess the overall quality of a given piece of writing by comparing it with other pieces of writing or by scoring it for certain features important to a particular kind of writing.

Holistic evaluations have been used successfully by the National Assessment of Educational Progress writing evaluation committees and by state assessment committees. They have also been employed by school staff to examine the quality of writing programs on a systemwide or schoolwide basis. Such procedures, when supplemented by specific analyses of grammatical and mechanical aspects of student writing, provide a global picture of writing competence. With such evaluative data English teachers can pinpoint needs in various aspects of school writing programs; for example, helping students to organize their writing, teaching students how to make better transitions between paragraphs, and assisting students in improving their work through revision.

Holistic evaluation procedures, while valuable for overall program evaluation and curriculum revision, do not necessarily provide the kind of data to help the teacher working with individual students in the classroom. Continuing evaluation in the classroom is still needed to assist the students in learning how to write more effectively, with the emphasis on the writing process rather than the final written product.

The central element in evaluating writing is giving students responses to what they write, human responses to the messages that the students are communicating, responses that show respect for students as they struggle to share their inner voices with the outside world. Teachers should be aware of the strengths and weaknesses of each student at each stage of the writing process, so that they can coach individual students in problem areas and point to progress as it occurs. What is being evaluated will change throughout the writing process — idea generation at one stage, organization at another, and grammar and mechanics at yet another. The student writers themselves, their peers, and their teachers all participate in the evaluation process.

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Teacher feedback in tutorial conferences helps students to concentrate on specific weaknesses that can be responded to before the paper is turned in. Teacher analyses of common writing problems provide the content for direct instruction in writing clinics for the total class or for peer editing assignments. Such evaluation procedures reduce the amount of teacher paperwork and provide students with more time to work on complex writing problems. As students sharpen their editing skills on the papers of their peers, they also develop a better understanding of how to evaluate their own work. Students learn to use the power of the group, but they also develop self-reliance and autonomy as they do more writing.

Writing and Special Learners

Every writer is unique but at the same time shares common problems associated with communicating effectively. Nonetheless, the unique characteristics of some student learners require special mention. This section will discuss three such categories of special learners: the gifted student, the mainstreamed student, and the reluctant student.

The Gifted Student

Gifted students are not necessarily gifted writers. Their creativity and divergent thinking must be directed if those special qualities are to find expression in their writing. In the prewriting stage with gifted students, teachers should capitalize on the connections between oral and written language by providing many opportunities to engage in story telling, dramatics, pantomime, debates, and other exercises from which potential writing topics will evolve. Gifted students, in particular, should be allowed to explore their own interests in an informal environment where they are given the opportunity to discover and explore, to investigate through inquiry methods, and to engage in frequent active discourse with other students and with teachers. From such an environment, they will be able to choose their own topics and write about them in greater detail and with more sophistication.

Young authors' conferences and competitions, although not only for gifted students, are excellent ways to challenge talented young writers. Such programs, whether within a school or districtwide, provide an opportunity for students to interact with adult writers in the community and to share their writing with other audiences through publication.

The Mainstreamed Student

The mainstreamed student with special needs, who is placed in the regular classroom, also needs differentiated treatment. Teachers of writing who have implemented the writing process model, with its emphasis on informal environments, interaction among students, and the direct teaching of writing skills in class, have found that the model is successful in integrating the special needs student into the mainstream of learning. It allows the children "to participate with the class during every stage of the writing process, to engage in every instructional activity, and to experience success in even first compositions."[4]

Interestingly enough, the specific recommendations for working with mainstreamed students — using small groups, working in pairs, peer tutoring, varying the length of writing assignments, establishing individual performance criteria, allowing extra time for assignment completion, breaking long-term projects into shorter assignments, using task-analysis models — are inherent in the writing process model and are appropriate for all student writers. Task-analysis, in particular, helps teachers modify assumptions they may have made about a student's readiness for writing tasks. Teachers experienced in working with mainstreamed students have learned how to do task-analysis. Teachers of writing must learn to do likewise.

The Reluctant Student

Reluctant students find writing difficult and meaningless. They are often discouraged when their meager efforts result in low grades, negative responses, and corrections they don't understand. Joseph Mersand has described five characteristics of reluctant writers. They lack the desire to excel scholastically or intellectually. They are slow in grasping abstractions and often incoherent in their thinking. They lack self-reliance and initiative and are highly imitative. They tend to be anti-school and anti-teacher. And they lack desirable work and study habits.[5]

Teachers using the writing process model have identified many activities to help them work with these reluctant writers. They emphasize practical writing for real purposes; for example, survival writing such as

job applications, insurance claim forms, or consumer requests, and letter writing such as letters of regret, condolence, or congratulations. As with the mainstreamed writers, breaking the writing task down into steps that students can successfully manage is important. Group writing projects are effective with these students. Generous praise encourages them to write more. Selective criticism that concentrates on a few errors of similar types rather than many errors of different types is more likely to result in correct writing.

Writing Across the Curriculum

As the teaching of reading is the responsibility of all teachers, so is the teaching of writing. Traditionally, the teaching of writing has rested primarily with English language arts teachers, but opportunities for writing exist in almost every area of the curriculum. Prototypic accident reports can be written in driver education classes; lyrics in music; food essays, cookbooks, and microwave cooking safety brochures in home economics; candidate speeches and local histories in social studies; field notes in engineering; laboratory notes in chemistry; and fitness reports in health classes. From short-answer essay tests and research reports to informative and persuasive essays, there are opportunities for writing in each and every discipline area. While the English language arts teacher has the major responsibility for teaching general writing, teachers in other disciplines can support the work of the English language arts teacher by providing students opportunities to learn writing skills that are peculiar to the specific discipline being taught.

Writing, in all discipline areas, is one of the best ways to help students understand what they are taught, to integrate new knowledge, and to relate it to other life experiences. E. Fred Carlisle states it this way:

> No matter how well a student understands a scientific concept or regardless of how well he or she may have done an experiment, unless that student can explain (or represent in some way) the concept or experiment clearly, something will be lost, and it may be that he or she does not, in fact, understand either the concept or experiment very well.[6]

Other opportunities are available for both interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary writing when English language arts teachers join with

other teachers to develop thematic units that focus on the humanities, creative arts, science, or social studies. In these units communication takes place in a variety of forms. A fourth- or fifth-grade teacher might develop a unit with students around a topic such as flight. At the secondary level a teaching team might focus on global government, nuclear disarmament, or the citizen's right to privacy. In each case these interdisciplinary units help student writers and their teachers to become aware of the problem-solving processes, the concepts, and the questions that underlie each discipline and that comprise the information base needed for any writing.

As useful as these interdisciplinary efforts are for improving writing across the curriculum, subject matter teachers also need a better understanding of the functions of writing within their specific disciplines. To this end, many school districts have set up a multidisciplinary committee to establish uniform standards for writing in all areas of the curriculum. Such a committee might establish guidelines for writing assignments at various grade levels and subject matter areas. The uniform standards might cover the enabling skills of grammar and mechanics; the investigative skills of interviewing, notetaking, and library research; and the manuscript form requirements for research papers (e.g., organization, footnoting, bibliographies). Such standards provide students with consistent information about expectations and about how the writing process is handled in various areas of the curriculum.

Writing and the Other Language Arts

Writing cannot be taught separately from the other language arts. Students also need to develop communication competence as speakers, listeners, and readers. Even an understanding of body language as communication is important.

Research on the interactions among the various modes of communication has not proceeded to the point of drawing direct implications for the writing program in the curriculum, but it does support the theoretical positions of those who emphasize an integrated approach to the language arts. For example, the use of talking in groups as a part of the prewriting process not only provides students with an entry point to

writing but the opportunity to develop a range of speaking and listening skills as well. Using models from the written work of others fosters analytical reading skills. Writing dialogue for dramatic scripts improves interpersonal communication skills.

Although drama and oral interpretation, as modes for communicating personal and vicarious experiences, differ in some ways from writing, the techniques used such as pause, emphasis, and gestures are not unlike the techniques used in good writing. Drama and other oral activities also facilitate students' learning to work together in small groups, which carries over to writing groups as well. What students learn about the elements of characterization, mood, tension, and climax in dramatic performance contributes to their understanding of the rhetorical skills needed for writing.

Reading, of course, acquaints students with "book language" as distinquished from spoken language. Children should learn to write at the same time as they are learning to read. Too often artificial barriers have been raised between the two activities, which has not been beneficial to learning either reading or writing well. Although some teachers continue to teach reading and writing separately, those who use the writing process model usually integrate them.

If the communication curriculum for the schools is to provide practical, real-world experiences in speaking, listening, reading, and writing, the activities for students must be integrated. If teachers want students to learn reporting skills, then students must become reporters on real things that they want to, or need to, learn about. Reporters interview, they investigate, they look things up, they compare notes. They draft their reports, frequently on computer terminals. They edit at terminals. Their work is proofread by copy editors and then sent for approval/disapproval by the managing editor. Their work is published! Student writers should experience this same process — a process that clearly calls for integrating the language arts in the classroom. This emphasis on real purposes, real audiences, and publication is necessary if students are going to learn to write well.

Integration across the language arts curriculum occurs when students write about their own real-world activities. The high school student who is a member of the Society for Creative Anachronisms (an organization

that studies the medieval period in Europe and stages "events" depicting the historical characters, music, and lifestyle of that period) and shares her experiences with her classmates, has integrated the study of history, music, drama, and government with all of the language arts. Likewise, the computer club member who teaches his peers how to compose on the computer is integrating the language arts, but in quite a different way. Actually, it is difficult *not* to integrate the curriculum when students are writing about topics that have personal meaning to them and when they are writing for a real audience.

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Standards for Writing Programs

The National Council of Teachers of English (N.C.T.E.) has published a set of 19 standards for basic skills writing programs. These standards were developed by a committee of teachers, supervisors, and writing specialists for use by states and school districts interested in establishing comprehensive writing program plans. They are appropriate for all writing programs, basic and advanced.

N.C.T.E. Standards for Teaching and Learning

1. There is evidence that knowledge of current theory and research in writing has been sought and applied in developing the writing program.
2. Writing instruction is a substantial and clearly identified part of an integrated English language arts curriculum.
3. Writing is called for in other subject matters across the curriculum.
4. The subject matter of writing has its richest source in the students' personal, social, and academic interests and experiences.
5. Students write in many forms (e.g., essays, notes, summaries, poems, letters, stories, reports, scripts, journals).
6. Students write for a variety of audiences (e.g., self, classmates, the community, the teacher) to learn that approaches vary as audiences vary.
7. Students write for a wide range of purposes (e.g., to inform, to persuade, to express the self, to explore, to clarify thinking).
8. Class time is devoted to all aspects of the writing process: generating ideas, drafting, revising, and editing.

9. All students receive instruction in both (a) developing and expressing ideas and (b) using the conventions of edited American English.
10. Control of the conventions of edited American English (supporting skills such as spelling, handwriting, punctuation, and grammatical usage) is developed primarily during the writing process and secondarily through related exercises.
11. Students receive constructive responses — from teachers and from others — at various stages in the writing process.
12. Evaluation of individual writing growth:
    a. is based on complete pieces of writing;
    b. reflects informed judgments, first about clarity and content and then about conventions of spelling, mechanics, and usage;
    c. includes regular responses to individual pieces of student writing as well as periodic assessment measuring growth over a period of time.

Standards for Support Mechanisms

13. Teachers with major responsibility for writing instruction receive continuing education reflecting current knowledge about the teaching of writing.
14. Teachers of other subjects receive information and training in ways to make use of and respond to writing in their classes.
15. Parent and community groups are informed about the writing program and about ways in which they can support it.
16. School and class schedules provide sufficient time to ensure that the writing process is thoroughly pursued.
17. Teachers and students have access to and make regular use of a wide range of resources (e.g., library services, media, teaching materials, duplicating facilities, supplies) for support of the writing program.

Standards for Writing Program Evaluation

18. Evaluation of the writing program focuses on pre- and post-program sampling of complete pieces of writing, utilizing a recognized procedure (e.g., holistic rating, the Diederich Scale,

primary trait scoring) to arrive at reliable judgments about the quality of the program.

19. Evaluation of the program might also include assessment of a sample of student attitudes; gathering of pertinent quantitative data (e.g., frequency of student writing, time devoted to writing activities); and observational data (evidence of prewriting activities, class anthologies, writing folders, and student writing displays).[7]

National and Local Efforts to Improve Writing Programs

Efforts to improve the teaching of writing have expanded greatly since the early Seventies. National, state, and local resources have provided the impetus for reform. The most successful effort to date has been the National Writing Project, which has either supported or inspired the development of over 200 teacher-training programs across the country. The primary focus of the project has been inservice programs for teachers, but its work is beginning to affect the preservice education of teachers as well.

The National Writing Project is a model of everything it espouses. The key elements are based on three assumptions. Teachers of writing must write. Teachers are the best teachers of other teachers. A substantial body of relatively new knowledge about the teaching of writing, generated by both teachers and researchers, is available and must be shared.

Each summer across the country, teachers gather at writing project sites to write, to learn about the latest research on teaching of writing, and to prepare themselves to instruct their colleagues on the most effective techniques for the teaching of writing. The project participants are exposed to models based on current research and to models that previous writing project teachers have developed. They assume an active role in their own learning, using all of the writing process techniques discussed in this fastback. Instructors do not dominate but instead allow the participants to exchange and learn from each other. Participants' own experiences are freely incorporated into group discussions. Writing

is viewed as a means of learning as well as a subject that can be mastered.

The teacher participants in these summer institutes emerge as consultants and leaders in their own communities to improve the teaching of writing. The National Writing Project, although suffering from insufficient funds nationally and operating on only modest funds within most states, continues to spread. The National Writing Project Model, originating at the University of California as the Bay Area Writing Project under the direction of James Gray, has been written into law in California as the official model for inservice training in writing for the entire state — an achievement unequaled, as yet, in other states.

The National Council of Teachers of English and its affiliates have also provided leadership for improving the teaching of writing at all grade levels by providing numerous excellent resources for curriculum committees and individual teachers. A selected list of these publications is included in the bibliography at the end of this fastback. Also, N.C.T.E national and regional meetings emphasize reform in writing instruction.

The movement toward competency testing in many states has spurred state departments of education and local school districts to reexamine their expectations for students in many areas, including writing. State task forces have begun to generate statements about writing competencies expected of students when they graduate from high school. As a consequence, these attempts to define writing competencies are forcing school systems to review their writing curriculum and to assess their students' writing. The debate about competency assessment, particularly as it relates to writing, is certainly not over. There is not yet agreement about how best to assess competency in writing, but almost serendipitously the attempt to define it has resulted in a long-needed reexamination of how writing is being taught. Some people believe that the way teachers taught writing generations ago simply needs to be reinstated. This should not be allowed to happen. There are better ways. We have learned much from the experience of writers and what they do, from reexaminating theories of rhetoric, from new studies in language development, from recent anthropological studies of child and adolescent writers, and from contemporary empirical research on writing pro-

grams using the process approach. We cannot look back; we must look ahead armed with both research and the practical experience of dedicated teachers. Only then can we begin to develop a nation of effective writers.

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Footnotes

1. James Moffett, "Integrity in the Teaching of Writing," *Phi Delta Kappan*, December 1979, pp. 276-79.
2. "Standards for Basic Writing Skills Programs," *SLATE*, April 1979, p. 1.
3. Arthur N. Applebee, *Writing in the Secondary School: English and the Content Areas*, NCTE Research Report No. 21 (Urbana, Ill.: National Council of Teachers of English, 1981), p. 90.
4. Rachel Brickner, et al., *A Guide to Tailoring Writing Assignments for the Mainstreamed Student* (University of Wisconsin-Madison: Wisconsin Writing Project, 1980), p. 19.
5. Joseph Mersand, *The English Teacher: Basic Traditions and Successful Innovations* (Port Washington, New York: Kennikat Press, 1977).
6. E. Fred Carlisle, "Teaching Scientific Writing Humanistically: From Theory to Action," *The English Journal*, April 1978, pp. 35,36.
7. "Standards for Basic Writing Skills Programs," *SLATE*, April 1979, pp. 2,3.

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