

Teaching Elementary School Students to Be Effective Writers

Instructional Tips Based on the Educator's Practice Guide

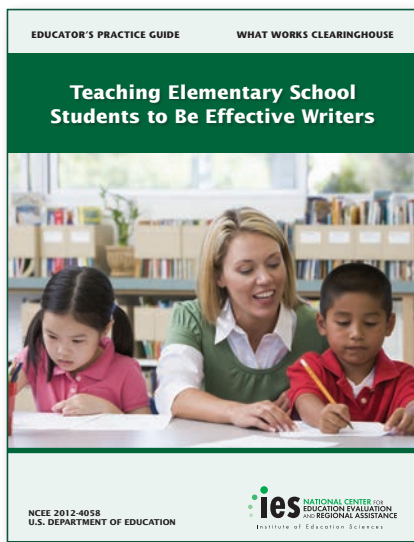


Instructional tips for:

- Assisting Students to Use Strategies for Writing
- Teaching Students to Write for a Variety of Purposes
- Helping Students Write Strong Sentences

About the WWC Instructional Tips

Instructional tips help educators carry out recommendations contained in IES Educator's Practice Guides. The tips translate these recommendations into actionable approaches that educators can try in their classrooms. These tips are based on a practice guide authored by *Steve Graham, Alisha Bollinger, Carol Booth Olson, Catherine D'Aoust, Charles MacArthur, Deborah McCutchen, and Natalie Olinghouse*. Each set of instructional tips highlights a key concept and presents relevant how-to steps in the practice guide that are actionable and supported by evidence.



About the Evidence Supporting the Tips

These practices were identified by a panel of experts and are supported by research evidence that meets What Works Clearinghouse design standards. To learn more about this evidence base, read:

- *Summary of Evidence for Instructional Tips Based on Teaching Elementary School Students to Be Effective Writers*
- *Educator's Practice Guide on Teaching Elementary School Students to Be Effective Writers*



Assisting Students to Use Strategies for Writing

Strategies for Writing

A **writing strategy** is a series of actions (mental, physical, or both) that writers undertake to achieve their goals. Strategies help students generate content and carry out components of the writing process. Students should acquire specific strategies for each component of the writing process. Many strategies can be used to assist students with more than one component.

The practice guide *Teaching Elementary School Students to Be Effective Writers* recommends teaching students about the **components of the writing process** and how to select and use appropriate **writing strategies**.

Tip: Break down the writing process into components.

- **Introduce** students to the components of the writing process: planning, drafting, sharing, evaluating, revising, editing, and publishing (see graphic below).
- **Students should learn** to move easily back and forth between components of the writing process, often altering their plans and revising their text along the way.



Tip: Describe and model age-appropriate writing strategies for components of the writing process.

- **Focus** on basic strategies, such as POW (Pick ideas, Organize their notes, Write and say more) and brainstorming and ordering, in 1st or 2nd grade.
- **Introduce** more complicated strategies, such as brainstorming and outlining, in 3rd grade or later.
- **Describe and model** strategies that can be used for one or more components of the writing process.

EXAMPLE. Age-appropriate writing strategies for planning

Writing Strategy	How Students Can Use the Strategy	Grade Range
POW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Pick ideas (i.e., decide what to write about) ▪ Organize their notes (i.e., brainstorm and organize possible writing ideas into a writing plan) ▪ Write and say more (i.e., continue to modify the plan while writing) 	1–6
Ordering Ideas/Outlining	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Brainstorm/generate ideas for their paper ▪ Review their ideas and place a number by what will go first 	1–2
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Brainstorm/generate ideas for their paper ▪ Decide which are main ideas and which are supporting ideas ▪ Create an outline that shows the order of the main ideas and the supporting details for each main idea 	3–6

Source: Adapted from Graham and Harris (2005).

Note: For the full list of age-appropriate writing strategies, please refer to Table 3, page 16, in the *Educator's Practice Guide on Teaching Elementary School Students to Be Effective Writers*.

Tip: Guide students to select and use appropriate writing strategies.

- **Explain** when, how, and why to use the strategies throughout the writing process.
- **Match** a list of strategies with a list of situations in which they can be used. Ask students to participate in matching. Students can add more situations to the list, including those in other content areas.
- **Encourage** students to set a goal of using strategies in one or more of the situations on the list.
- **Discuss** how the strategies can be modified for different situations.

EXAMPLE. Wall chart for teaching when to use writing strategies

When should I use writing strategies?

Strategies	Situations
• POW	• Brainstorming ideas for a newspaper article
• Ordering ideas/outlining	• Writing a science report for the first time
• Imitation	• Asking classmates for feedback on a short story
• Sentence generation	• Re-reading an essay written last week
• "Author's chair"	
• Self-evaluating	
• Self-monitoring	
• Peer revising	



Teaching Students to Write for a Variety of Purposes

Writing Purposes

Writing is used for a variety of **purposes**, such as conveying information, making an argument, providing a means for self-reflection, sharing an experience, enhancing understanding of reading, or providing entertainment. Understanding different writing purposes helps students adjust their writing to be most effective.

The practice guide *Teaching Elementary School Students to Be Effective Writers* recommends teaching students the connection between **different genres** and writing purposes, as well as how to write for a **variety of audiences**.

Tip: Teach students that different genres of writing serve different purposes.

- **Teach** students about different genres of writing that fit specific purposes, such as to describe, narrate, inform, persuade, or analyze.
- **Explain** how the features of a genre serve the purpose of the text. For example:
 - A short story includes a description of characters, places, and events, which serves the author’s purpose of telling a story that is interesting to the reader.
 - Instructions include an ordered list of steps, which serves the author’s purpose of informing the reader about how to do something.
- **Relate** genres to real-world scenarios to help students understand when and how to use certain genres.
- **Ask** students to practice selecting a genre and composing text to serve a specific purpose.

A **genre** is a form of writing with specific features that provides context and structure for a particular purpose and audience.

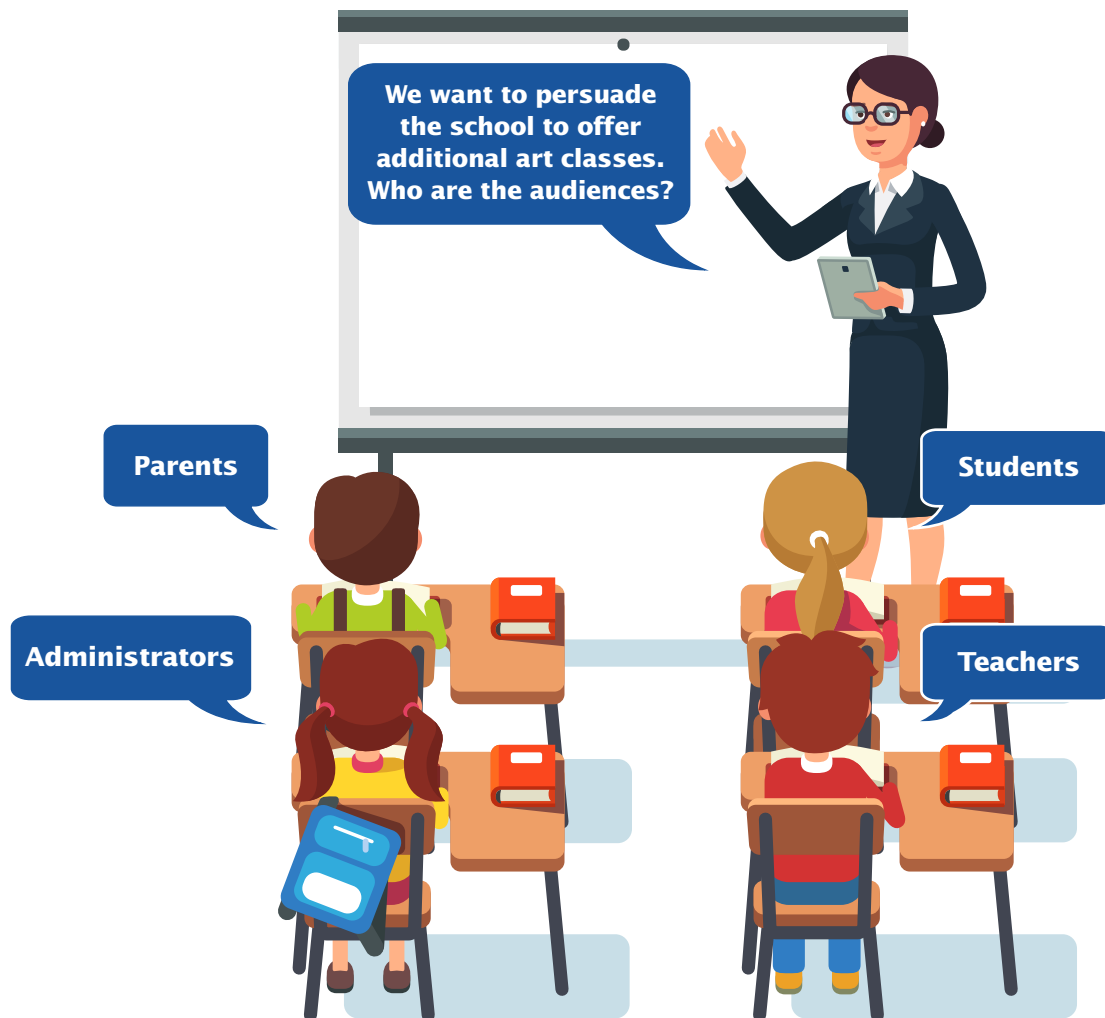
EXAMPLE. Relating real-world scenarios to purpose and genre and selecting the appropriate genre

Real-world scenario	What’s the purpose of writing?	What genres serve this purpose?	What genres are most effective for this scenario and audience?
Convince school to offer additional art classes	To persuade	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Persuasive letter ▪ Editorial ▪ Compare-and-contrast essay ▪ Literary analysis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Persuasive letter ▪ Editorial ▪ Compare-and-contrast essay ▪ Literary analysis
Teach a friend how to knit a scarf	To inform	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Newspaper article ▪ Letter ▪ Instructions ▪ Science report 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Newspaper article ▪ Letter ▪ Instructions ▪ Science report

Tip: Expand students' concept of audience.

- **Design** writing activities that naturally lend themselves to different audiences.
- **Help students generate a list** of potential audiences for a given writing assignment. Students then can choose the audience that best fits their writing topic.
- **Encourage** students to practice writing about the same topic for different audiences, to develop the skill of adjusting tone and word choice to suit the audience. For example:
 - When writing persuasive letters, students could practice writing to parents, friends, or teachers.
 - When writing a narrative, students could practice writing a short story for a magazine or a fable for a preschool class.

EXAMPLE. Listing potential audiences for a specific writing purpose





Helping Students Write Strong Sentences

Strong Sentences

Strong sentences enable students to convey their intended meaning and engage readers. Students need to first understand how mechanics, such as punctuation and capitalization, interact to form strong sentences. Students can then gradually move from writing with a series of simple sentences to including more complex and interesting sentences in their compositions.

The practice guide *Teaching Elementary School Students to Be Effective Writers* recommends teaching students different types of sentence construction with a variety of activities, as well as providing students with **criteria for evaluating** sentences based on meaning, style, and grammar.

Tip: Use sentence construction activities to help students learn and practice different types of sentence structures.

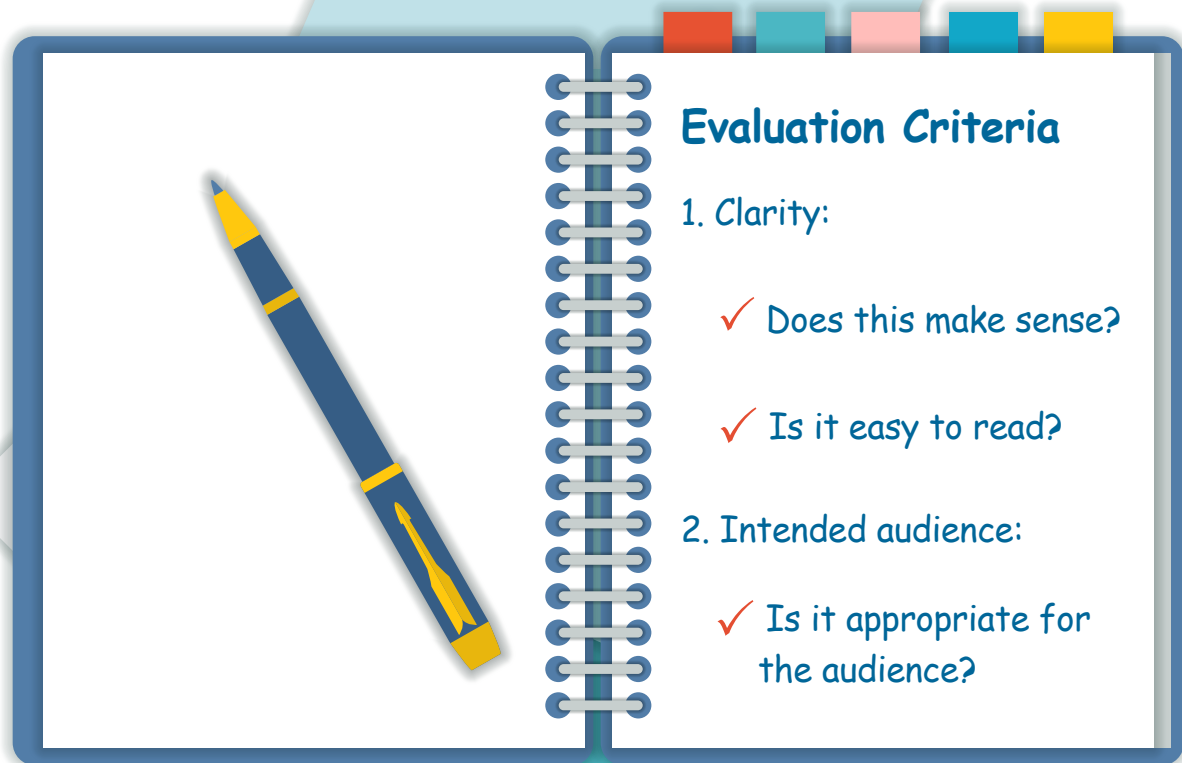
- **Introduce** a sentence construction activity to teach students how to use different sentence structures. Students should learn the following sentence types:
 1. *Compound sentences* have at least two independent clauses that are joined. For example: Jane reads novels, but Tom reads comics.
 2. *Complex sentences* have an independent clause and at least one dependent clause. For example: Although Jane reads novels, Tom reads comics.
 3. *Compound-complex sentences* have at least two independent clauses and at least one dependent clause. For example: Jane reads novels, but Tom reads comics because he likes the pictures.
- **Use** books in the classroom, activities in the lives of students, school events, newspaper or magazine articles, or students’ own writing to engage students in the activity.
- **Model** how to construct different types of sentences with the selected activity.
- **Provide** students with opportunities to practice the sentence construction activity on their own.
- **Ask** students to discuss their sentences in pairs or small groups.

Activity	Example
Sentence framing	I like _____. I like to _____ and _____. When I _____, I like to _____.
Sentence expanding	The dog napped. The brown dog napped. The brown dog napped on the couch. The lazy, brown dog napped on the couch.
Sentence combining	The boy was riding his bike. The boy was careless. The boy ran into a tree. The boy was careless while riding his bike, so he ran into a tree.

Source: Adapted from Saddler, Behforooz, and Asaro (2008); Saddler (2005); Saddler and Graham (2005).

 **Tip: Provide a list of evaluation criteria to help students review and revise their sentences.**

- **Introduce** students to evaluation criteria to help them assess sentences based on meaning, style, and grammar. For example:
 - Clarity
 - Intended audience
- **Demonstrate** how to revise a sentence if it does not meet the evaluation criteria. For example, identify missing parts, incorrect punctuation, wordiness, or words that are too simple or complex for the intended audience.
- **Review** students' work using these criteria. For older students, ask them to use these criteria to review one another's work.



Source: Adapted from Neman (1995).