



Elements for Better Writing from the *Writing Next* Report

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At the beginning of 2007, the Alliance for Excellent Education released a publication called *Writing Next: Effective Strategies to Improve Writing of Adolescents in Middle and High Schools*. This report examined research studies to find out what strategies were most effective for improving students' writing. This article is a brief summary of the report.

Although writing is considered the "flip side" of reading, good readers are not necessarily good writers. Readers consider the thoughts of others but writers must form their own thoughts and convey them in an organized way using the conventions of spelling and grammar.

The workplace demands a greater quantity and quality of writing than ever before. As a result, almost a third of government and private sector employees require on-the-job training in basic writing skills. Postsecondary education also requires writing ability at the proficient or advanced levels.

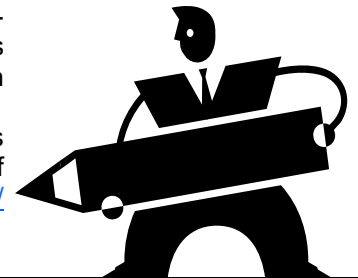
In the classroom writing plays two roles: It uses strategies to accomplish various tasks, and it is a way for students to extend and deepen their knowledge of subject matter. Because of these dual roles, it is important to teach writing in the context of GED subjects or real-life situations.

Although the research that was examined to determine the elements of effective writing instruction for the Writing Next report was conducted with adolescents, these elements can and should be used in adult literacy and GED classrooms. The research examined the quality of writing - coherently organized essays containing well developed ideas, supporting examples, and appropriate details - the same qualities teachers look for in GED essays.

Using just one or two of the elements from the Writing Next report will probably not be effective and trying to use them all may be overwhelming. Based on your students' needs, use a blend of several of these elements to help your students become successful writers.

While teaching students essay writing is an important part of writing instruction, making it the only part of writing instruction is a disservice to your students. Successful writers must also be flexible writers and know how to adapt their writing to a variety of situations in the home, the workplace, or in a postsecondary classroom.

What follows is the list of elements with a brief description of each. In future articles each element will be discussed in more detail and teaching suggestions will be provided. If you would like to read the entire Writing Next report, it is available online at <http://www.all4ed.org/publications/WritingNext/index.html>



- **Writing Strategies**, which involves teaching students strategies for planning, revising, and editing their compositions
- **Summarization**, which involves explicitly and systematically teaching students how to summarize texts
- **Collaborative Writing**, which uses instructional arrangements in which students work together to plan, draft, revise, and edit their compositions
- **Specific Product Goals**, which assigns students specific, reachable goals for the writing they are to complete
- **Word Processing**, which uses computers and word processors as instructional supports for writing assignments
- **Sentence Combining**, which involves teaching students to construct more complex, sophisticated sentences
- **Prewriting**, which engages students in activities designed to help them generate or organize ideas for their composition
- **Inquiry Activities**, which engages students in analyzing immediate, concrete data to help them develop ideas and content for a particular writing task

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- **Process Writing Approach**, which interweaves a number of writing instructional activities in a workshop environment that stresses extended writing opportunities, writing for authentic audiences, personalized instruction, and cycles of writing
- **Study of Models**, which provides students with opportunities to read, analyze, and emulate models of good writing
- **Writing for Content Learning**, which uses writing as a tool for learning content material

Grammar Instruction: The research examined for the Writing Next report found that teaching grammar as an isolated activity is **not** effective. The research did show that teaching grammar *in the context of writing* has very good results:

- teach only the grammar the students need to edit their current piece of writing
- as students revise their writing, use individual conferences to teach them the grammar they are struggling with the most
- choose a grammar issue the whole class seems to be struggling with (e.g. commas) and teach a mini lesson during the revising/editing stage. The students can immediately apply what they have learned to the pieces they are currently writing.
- encourage students to read extensively. This allows them to see correct grammar in use.

For more information on teaching grammar in context read *Writing: Keeping it Real* <http://literacy.kent.edu/Oasis/Pubs/0300-30.pdf>. For lessons containing writing activities visit Eureka! Lesson Plans <http://literacy.kent.edu/eureka/lessons/index.html>

Graham, S., & Perin, D. (2007). *Writing Next: Effective Strategies to Improve Writing of Adolescents in Middle and High Schools - A Report to Carnegie Corporation of New York*. Washington, DC: Alliance for Excellent Education.