



Research to Practice

Elements for Better Writing from the *Writing Next Report: A Closer Look at Word Processing, Sentence Combining, and Prewriting*

Part 4 of a 7 part series

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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. Part One of this series contained a brief summary of the *Writing Next* report and a list of the recommended elements for improving students' writing. Part 2 dealt with strategies and summarizing and Part 3 with collaborative writing and specific product goals. The rest of the articles in this series will take a closer look at the elements of inquiry activities, process writing approach, study of models, and writing for content learning. All articles can be found under the "Research to Practice" heading in the publications section of the OLRC website, <http://literacy.kent.edu>.



Word processing

Using a computer word processing program to write their compositions is an effective way for student writers to improve their writing, especially low achieving writers. Students can add, delete, and move text easily and they don't have to worry about what their handwriting looks like. Additionally, learning how to use a computer is an important skill for students who are transitioning to work or postsecondary education. If you are lucky enough to have computers in your classroom, help your students learn how to use the word processing program for writing and then encourage your students to use it.

Sentence Combining

Sentence combining is an effective alternative to traditional grammar instruction. Students are taught to construct complex, sophisticated sentences by combing two or more basic sentences. The result is higher quality writing. Sentence combining works best when teachers model the process and provide support until the students become proficient. Sentence combining is a good activity for students to do in pairs. A simple form of sentence combining would be to combine two related sentences with the connector words "and", "but", and "because." Sentence combining activities are available in published materials and on-line. Two websites that

may be helpful are AboutEd.Com <http://grammar.about.com/od/tests/a/introsc.htm> and Literacy Education On-line <http://leo.stcloudstate.edu/style/sentencev.html>.

Prewriting

Prewriting helps students generate and organize their ideas for their writing and thus can improve the quality of that writing. A well known prewriting activity is brainstorming but there are others that students can use as well. One of these is the herringbone <http://literacy.kent.edu/eureka/strategies/herringbone.pdf>. The herringbone can help students think about the main idea and supporting details for a piece of writing. Another prewriting strategy is clustering <http://literacy.kent.edu/eureka/strategies/clustering.pdf>. Group discussion of a topic can also serve as an effective prewriting activity and give students a chance to learn from their classmates.

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.

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Enhancing Adult Literacy

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