

Next Steps for Implementing Effective Writing Instruction in Middle and High Schools

This tool serves as a companion resource to the EdResearch for Action brief, “*Evidence-Based Practices for Teaching Writing in Middle and High School*.”

The evidence base on effective writing instruction points to a set of practices that improve student outcomes. However, research studies often focus on what works under specific conditions and provide less guidance on how to implement these practices in real-world classrooms and systems.

To support implementation, the examples below illustrate how schools and districts are putting these evidence-based principles into practice. While some examples are informed by existing studies, others reflect common approaches used by educators and systems and have not necessarily been rigorously evaluated. They should be viewed as practical starting points- ideas that leaders can adapt to their local context, test, and refine over time.

The goal is not to prescribe a single model, but to provide clear, actionable pathways for applying research in ways that are feasible, sustainable, and responsive to students’ needs.

START WITH A BASELINE: UNDERSTAND CURRENT WRITING PRACTICES

Before implementing new strategies, it is important to understand current writing practices across classrooms. Conducting a simple baseline analysis can help identify gaps, prioritize supports, and track progress over time.

School and district leaders can:

- ❑ **Assess students’ current writing proficiency.** Review student writing samples using common criteria (e.g., organization, use of evidence, clarity of expression) to identify strengths, gaps, and patterns across grade levels and student groups.
- ❑ **Assess how much writing students are currently doing across subjects and grade levels.** Conduct a survey or audit of writing tasks (including both instruction and assignments) across disciplines to understand frequency, length, and type of writing.
- ❑ **Examine when and how feedback is provided.** Determine whether students receive feedback during the writing process (e.g., drafting and revision) or primarily after final products are graded.
- ❑ **Collect and review existing writing rubrics.** Gather rubrics currently used across classrooms and subjects to identify alignment, consistency, and clarity of expectations.

EXPLICITLY TEACH AND SCAFFOLD THE WRITING PROCESS

Teacher Practices

- ❑ Break writing into clear stages (planning, drafting, revising, editing) and model each step using think-alouds
- ❑ Use scaffolds such as graphic organizers, sentence frames, and outlines to support students' thinking
- ❑ Teach specific strategies (e.g., how to develop a claim, organize evidence, or revise for clarity)
- ❑ Provide students with exemplars of strong writing and analyze them together
- ❑ Share and use rubrics during writing, not just for grading, to clarify expectations

School and District Supports

- ❑ Adopt or develop shared writing frameworks and rubrics across grades and subjects
- ❑ Provide professional development on explicit writing strategy instruction
- ❑ Ensure curriculum materials include scaffolds, exemplars, and structured writing supports
- ❑ Align expectations for writing quality across classrooms and content areas

EXTEND WRITING BEYOND THE ENGLISH CLASSROOM

Teacher Practices

- ❑ Incorporate writing-to-learn activities (e.g., explanations, summaries, arguments) into content instruction
- ❑ Design writing tasks that require students to analyze and explain disciplinary concepts
- ❑ Collaborate with colleagues across subjects to reinforce shared writing expectations
- ❑ Use short, frequent writing tasks to deepen content understanding

School and District Supports

- ❑ Establish writing as a schoolwide or districtwide priority across subjects
- ❑ Support interdisciplinary collaboration (e.g., PLCs focused on writing across content areas)
- ❑ Provide training for non-ELA teachers on integrating writing into instruction
- ❑ Align curriculum and assessments to include writing in multiple disciplines

PROVIDE ACTIONABLE FEEDBACK

Teacher Practices

- ❑ Focus feedback on 1–3 key areas at a time to make it manageable and actionable
- ❑ Provide feedback during drafting, not just after final submission
- ❑ Use comments that explain how to improve (e.g., questions, suggestions, examples)
- ❑ Build in structured time for students to revise based on feedback
- ❑ Incorporate peer feedback with clear protocols and guidance

School and District Supports

- ❑ Provide PD on giving targeted, process-oriented feedback and structuring revision
- ❑ Support collaborative analysis of student writing (e.g., scoring with shared rubrics)
- ❑ Encourage grading practices that prioritize feedback over scoring during drafting
- ❑ Provide access to tools that support feedback while maintaining a focus on instructional quality

FOSTER MOTIVATION AND SELF-EFFICACY

Teacher Practices

- ❑ Use goal-setting and self-monitoring to help students track progress
- ❑ Highlight growth and improvement over time to build confidence
- ❑ Provide opportunities for student choice in topics, formats, or audiences, and encourage authentic publishing opportunities for student writing
- ❑ Incorporate collaborative writing and peer interaction
- ❑ Design authentic writing tasks connected to students' experiences and interests

School and District Supports

- ❑ Create schoolwide expectations that prioritize writing across subjects
- ❑ Provide time and resources for teachers to collaborate on writing instruction
- ❑ Encourage instructional practices that promote student ownership
- ❑ Support classroom environments that emphasize growth, effort, and revision
- ❑ Support curriculum that includes opportunities for authentic and meaningful writing tasks
- ❑ Align grading and assessment practices to support growth, not just performance