



Intermediate Edition

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<http://thewritingsite.org>

Top 10 Countdown:

Why Teachers Should Encourage Writing at Home

10. Because **THEY** say so.

From the National Commission on Writing's report, "The Neglected R", April 2003 — "We suggest more use of out-of-school time for writing. From elementary school on, students should be expected to produce written work as part of their normal homework assignments. Just 15 minutes of writing four nights a week would add 33 percent to the amount of time the average elementary student spends writing. Parents should be writing partners with their children sharing their own writing with them and reviewing written work as their children complete it. Research is crystal clear. Schools that do well insist that their students write every day and that teachers provide regular and timely feedback with the support of parents."

9. Good Health.

Asking students to write at home every day promotes a healthy, life-long habit. Journal writing homework allows children to take time for self-reflection, a rare commodity in these busy times. (cont. Top 10 Countdown p.2)

Writing Across the Curriculum: A Dialogue by Amy Schultz

Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) is an approach that attempts to weave writing assignments throughout all content areas. Whether you are an English teacher, other content area specialist or in a self-contained full curriculum spectrum classroom, you undoubtedly already implement WAC to some degree. The question is, should you be more intentional about it?

What is WAC, anyway?

The infusion of Writing Across your Curriculum is said to improve writing skills, thinking skills, and understanding of content. WAC is most often implemented in schools through one of the following two approaches as quoted from NWREL:

- *Writing in the Disciplines (WID):* Writing in the disciplines is premised on the idea that students become better readers, thinkers, and learners in a discipline by working with the forms and conventions specific to it. A biology teacher might ask students to write lab reports, for example, while an art teacher might assign artists' statements or gallery reviews. Journalistic articles, business plans, memos, and oral histories are additional examples of genres common to particular fields.
- *Writing to Learn (WTL):* Rejecting the notion that writing serves primarily to translate what is known onto the page, advocates of writing to learn suggest teachers use writing to help students discover new knowledge—to sort through previous understandings, draw connections, and uncover new ideas as they write (NWP & Nagin, 2003). WTL activities may also be used to encourage reflection on learning strategies and improve students' metacognitive skills. Examples, ... include journals, learning logs, and entrance/exit slips. (Brewster & Klump, 2004)



Isn't it just another fad movement that will soon fade-away?

In fact, WAC began in the mid-1970's as a way to improve undergraduate literacy in our nation's universities. After 20 years on the education scene, WAC is now used and expanded upon in K-12 classrooms as well as colleges across the country.

What's the point?

One middle school project in Texas proclaimed, "school wide writing across the curriculum efforts do appear to produce significant improvements in student writing ability." (van Allen, 1992, p. vii) Also, the National Commission on Writing confirms an "impressive positive correlation between the frequency of informative writing assessments and academic achievement in every subject area." Consequently, the Commission urges increased use of writing across the curriculum (in math classrooms, too!). It states, "Writing is not simply a way for students to demonstrate what they know. It is a way to help them understand what they know. At its best, writing is learning." (National Commission on Writing in America's Schools and Colleges, 2003)

(see WAC Resources on pg. 2)

8. It's the real world.

Home is where a child witnesses real world literacy for the first time. The more authentic writing they see happening at home, the less they will ask, "But why do I need to know this?" Teachers can take advantage of the writing already in place: lists, letters, notes, emails, etc.

7. Family bonding.

Family writing homework assignments can strengthen bonds within families by providing opportunities for positive interactions, and avenues to discussion and communication within the family.

6. Security.

Time spent together working on a family writing assignment will create secure kids and enhance self-esteem, in turn establishing a child ready to learn at school and at home.

5. Parent Cooperation.

Writing homework designed to educate and involve parents in the writing process will enable parents to understand teacher expectations, to speak a common language, and to effectively guide their children in writing.

4. Parent Education.

Parents will come to recognize which writing skills are age-appropriate and will be able to work along side the teacher more effectively to challenge or bolster writers.

3. Influencing Home Habits

Students who come from a language-rich home have an easier time learning to read and write.

2. Future Success.

Reading and writing skills have a direct correlation to a child's future job success, socio-economic condition, and general quality of life. Enlist all the help you can find to ensure student success in learning these important basic skills.

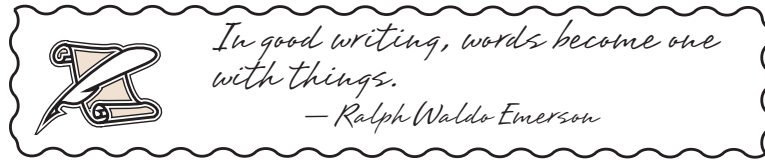
...and the top reason to involve parents in student writing activities is...

1. Parents are a child's first and most influential teachers.

The Collins Writing Program presents a model for writing-across-the-curriculum and writing to learn. Founder Dr. John Collins draws from extensive research and twenty years experience working with teachers and students to create a practical program that requires students to engage in curriculum content as they improve writing, thinking, listening, and speaking skills. The program defines five types of writing assignments with clear methods of evaluation for each:

1. **Capture Ideas** (brainstorm, outcomes evaluated by \checkmark or -)
2. **Respond Correctly** (to a specific question, grade as a quiz)
3. **Edit for Focus Correction Areas** (substantive content, read aloud)
4. **Peer Edit for Focus Correction Areas** (2 drafts, peer critiqued then author revised)
5. **Publish** (quality writing, multiple drafts, published work)

More details at <http://thewritingsite.org/resources/approaches/collins/>



W A C Resources

References...

"Dialogue" (pg. 1)
National Writing Project & Nagin, C. (2003) *Because writing matters: Improving student writing in our schools*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Brewster, C.& Klump, J. *Writing To Learn, Learning To Write*. Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory: www.nwrel.org/request/2004dec/classroom.html

National Commission on Writing in America's Schools and Colleges, (2003). *The Neglected "R": The Need for a Writing Revolution*. New York, NY: College Entrance Exam Board. Retrieved February 25, 2006, from www.writingcommission.org/prod_downloads/writingcom/neglectedr.pdf

van Allen, L. "The Effect of Writing Across the Curriculum Programs on Student Writing Improvement: A study of selected middle schools in Texas" (Doctoral dissertation, Univ. of Texas at Austin, 1991) *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 52(07), 2398.

"Implementing WAC" (pg. 3)
Bazerman, C. et al. *Reference Guide to Writing Across the Curriculum*, Parlor Press and the WAC Clearinghouse, c2005.

Kelley, S. *Writing-to-Learn / Writing-to-Think Activities*. Retrieved February 25, 2006 from <http://emedia.leeward.hawaii.edu/writing/WTL-WTTIdeas.htm>


NWREL: "At the Classroom Level: Writing in the Disciplines and Writing to Learn" Retrieved on February 25, 2006 from <http://www.nwrel.org/request/2004dec/classroom.html>

Other Resources...

The Writing Corner (Writing Across the Curriculum) <http://www.psesd.org/wac> Content provides a useful framework of writing across the curriculum expectations for all K-12 learning environments.

The Writing Fix and WAC http://www.writingfix.com/Writing_Across_Curriculum.htm This site has free ready-to-use WAC lesson ideas for classroom teachers.

Ready, set, write!

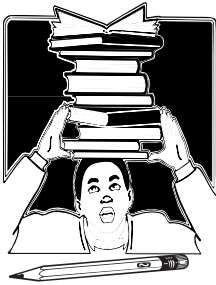


In Math
At the board, in front of your class, solve a grade-level appropriate math problem, — incorrectly! Ask students to write, in complete sentences or a paragraph, to explain what you did wrong in solving the problem.

In Science
Encourage students to write a complete description of the parts of a plant, the water cycle or other scientific process as a quiz to check their understanding of a topic presented in a recent lesson.

In Social Studies
Students, in small groups or teams, discuss then draft a *Students' Bill of Rights*.

Implementing WAC in Your Elementary Classroom



Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) is an approach that attempts to weave writing assignments throughout all content areas. Writing to Learn (WTL) is a supporting method, "based on the observation that students' thought and understanding can grow and clarify through the process of writing." (Bazerman, 2005). Try some of these Writing To Learn tools to build better writers and better thinkers.

Quick Writes are short pieces of writing designed to focus students' thinking. Teachers can:

- Assess prior knowledge before instruction to set the stage for new information. (ex. create a list of keywords, a list of questions, 3 things I know/don't know)
- Give students time to write briefly on the day's topic before contributing to class discussions.
- Pause in the middle of instruction to check for understanding, or to make connections and predictions. (ex. paraphrase, ask a question, write a definition)
- Summarize main points, form opinions, or reflect on what was learned after instruction. (ex. 3 things I learned, 2 things I wonder about, 1 thing I could teach someone else)

Evaluation tips:

- Model "poor", "adequate", and "excellent" responses (check minus, check, check plus). Look for content, quantity, appropriateness, elaboration, etc.
- Assess as done/not done, correct/not correct, or trade for peer review.
- Evaluate content only, never for grammar.

Journals or Learning Logs give students an informal place to explore and interact with class content. Students can:

- Summarize newly acquired knowledge.
- Write vocabulary terms in your own words.
- Define what was most interesting or confusing.
- Create a list of questions or possible topics for future research.
- Explain math or science problems or terms in writing.
- Make connections (between new information and prior knowledge, experiences, or opinions).
- Write their own study or test questions (for peer responses).

Evaluation tips:

- Define grading requirements. Well-kept journals could be a boost to final grade or could be a given test grade status.
- Collect a different portion of your students' journals at a time.
- Occasionally respond with your own writing or comments. Use different color highlights for most thoughtful entries, ideas for possible exploration, or needs more attention.

Self-assessments allow students to reflect upon their own learning and teachers to check for understanding. Students may be asked:

- What was the most difficult part of this assignment? Why?
- What part are you most satisfied with?
- What will this project show me that you have learned?

Evaluation tips:

- Model "poor", "adequate", and "excellent" responses (check minus, check, check plus). Look for content, quantity, appropriateness, elaboration, etc.
- Assess as done/not done or correct/not correct.
- Evaluate content only, never for grammar.



Literature Links

*Because of Winn-Dixie**
by Kate DiCamillo

"My name is India Opal Buloni, and last summer my daddy, the preacher, sent me to the store for a box of macaroni-and-cheese, some white rice, and two tomatoes, and I came back with a dog." Thus begins one of the most charming, poignant tales written. Opal learns about her mother, about friendship, and about forgiveness, all because of the dog she adopts, Winn-Dixie. Students can read the story then compare it to the recent major motion picture.

Kate DiCamillo Web Site:

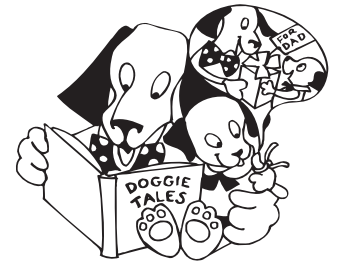
<http://www.katedicamillo.com/>

Because of Winn-Dixie Official Movie Web Site:

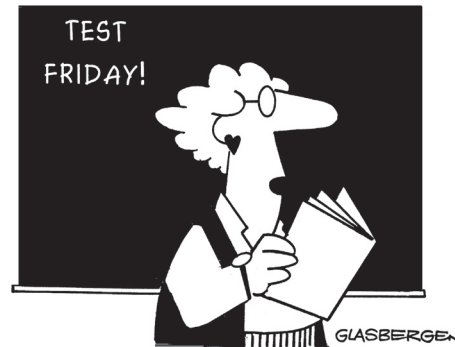
<http://www.becauseofwinndixiemovie.com/>

More Literature links are available at <http://thewritingsite.org/resources/literature/>

* published by Candlewick Press, c2000

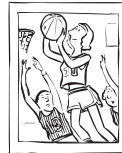


cartoons with class



"Class, I've got a lot of material to cover, so to save time I won't be using vowels today.
Nw lts bgn, pls pn t pg 122."

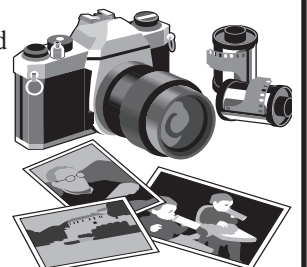
write at home!



Enlist the help of your students' parents to encourage and practice writing skills. Try this fun family activity.

Family Photo Stories

Peruse your family album and select a photo that shows details of action, dress, or scenery (rather than a formal portrait). Each family member should then write his/her own paragraphs describing the event, time, place or action depicted in the photo. These can be real or imaginary scenarios. Read each other's stories.



For more *Write at Home* suggestions for intermediate grade students, go to <http://thewritingsite.org/resources/parent/intermediate.asp>.



Frakeshurd rases

Straight from the pencils of our young writers we found the following interestingly spelled words and funny phrases:

- “egzasteed” (as in very tired)
- “toldle osm” (valley girl talk for “great!”)
- “whole tail” (overnight lodging)
- “ice step results” (Indiana test scores)



I Love That Teaching Idea

<http://ilovethatteachingidea.com>

Writing and Language Arts activities and lesson plans that go along with various literature at grades K through 6

Writing Topics

<http://thewritesource.com/topics.htm>

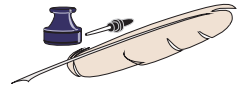
Though a commercial site, it includes a nice section suggesting writing topics as well as presenting model papers for grades 1-12.

Teachnology Writing Ideas

<http://www.teach-nology.com/ideas/subjects/writing/>

Find and share teaching ideas for writing and other content areas at this site. It also includes an online forum to discuss issues of teaching and learning at various grade level groupings.

Celebrate Writers!



The following authors have birthdays in March and April.

- Lois Lowry, author of *The Giver*, *The Messenger*, and *Number the Stars* among many other children’s books was born on March 20, 1937.
- Mary Stolz, author of *The Bully of Markham Street*, *The Cuckoo Clock*, and others was born on March 28, 1920.
- Hans Christian Anderson, author of over 160 fairy tales and stories, including *The Little Mermaid* was born 201 years ago on April 2, 1805.
- Beverly Cleary, famous author of the *Ramona Quimby* series books was born on April 12, 1916.

Celebrate these author’s birthdays by reading a passage aloud to your class sometime during their birth months from your favorites of these authors’ stories.



writing calendar

March 2 — Read Across America Day

- Make a poster advertising your favorite book.
- Write a letter to younger students, persuading them to spend more time reading and less watching television.

April 28 — National Arbor Day

- Draw or write a description of a tree found on the school grounds. Challenge other students to identify which tree by using the description.
- Write about the economic or environmental impact of deforestation in our country or world.

May 10 — National School Nurse Day

- Write a thank you letter to your school nurse. How does your school nurse help keep your school healthy?
- Do a favor for your school nurse. Make posters to promote good health and hygiene practices. (hand washing, covering nose and mouth when sneezing, etc.)

The Digital Camera: An Engaging Writing Tool



Photos can elicit powerful stories. Children are fascinated by cameras and taking pictures. Digital cameras, satisfy another youthful expectation of instant gratification, and can be used effectively to engage students in writing. If the old cliché, “a picture is worth a thousand words,” has some basis in truth, we can certainly leverage this technology to elicit some fraction of those words from our budding authors. Consider these ideas:

- Students explore the school grounds to capture images of objects comprised of geometric shapes and solids (triangles, circles, squares, etc.) They then write about their captured image, i.e. “The playground swing is like a triangle when. . .”
- A team of students creates a photographic essay comprised of 6 to 10 images to illustrate a concept, story, or how to do something. Without narration, they show their slide show to the class. (Many cameras have this built-in feature when hooked up to a television or computer.) Students in the audience then interpret the story and write it in their own words.
- Using the “macro” feature of the camera, students take pictures of small details of larger objects with the aim to challenge others with the question, “What is this?” Images are printed then exchanged in class. Students write in descriptive words and phrases about the texture, color and shapes shown in the image then composes a paragraph that describes the object and where they believe the photographer found it.

Your school may already own several digital cameras that you can check out for use from the library media center. If not, digital cameras are affordable within most classroom budgets, starting at prices less than \$100. Top considerations for selecting a new camera are ease of use and connectivity to classroom or lab computers, printers or TV monitors. If you use several different cameras in your classroom and they have removable memory chips or sticks, consider purchasing a digital card reader to hook up to your computer and/or classroom television to quickly share and transfer images from a variety of memory card media. These devices are available at electronics stores in a price range of \$20 to \$50, dependent upon specific features.

Remember: Sign up to receive future copies of this newsletter at <http://thewritingsite.org/list/form.asp>