



HANDOUT: WRITING

The Writing Process

Having a consistent process to use when writing helps learners become more confident writers. It provides them with a structure they can follow when they are unsure of where to start. It relieves the pressure of being perfect because it allows time to go back and fix mistakes. It provides the structure needed for them to write independently. And ultimately, it results in a final product they can be proud of. Follow the process below when writing with learners.

Prewriting

This is the first step in the writing process. Here, learners decide what to write about and brainstorm their ideas. This is probably the most important step in the writing process, but it is also often the step that teachers and learners pay the least attention to. The more time spent in the prewriting step, the easier the remaining steps will be. Ideas may come from conversation between you and the learner, a practical need, or thoughts generated from reading. If a learner wants to do practical writing—such as writing a resume and cover letter or birthday invitations— you might start by analyzing examples of that type of writing. Mind mapping is a good way to capture and organize the ideas generated in this step.

First Draft

The first draft is a learner's first attempt to give structure to his or her ideas. For the first draft, the focus is on the message rather than on punctuation, spelling, grammar, or handwriting. It is not even necessary for the first draft to contain complete sentences. A learner who has difficulty with a word or phrase can guess, draw a symbol, or ask for help.

Revise

This is where the learner works to clarify and expand the content. When revising, the learner should focus on the overall organization of information, adding and removing information, description and detail, and word choice. You can help by asking the learner to read his or her first draft and then asking questions about it. Read the piece aloud yourself and ask the learner to listen critically.

Edit

This is where the learner makes improvements in the mechanics—spelling, punctuation, and grammar. The amount of editing will depend on the learner’s level and the purpose of the piece. For beginning writers, focus on editing to correct one or two reoccurring problems rather than trying to make the piece perfect. For example, you might have a learner edit a piece specifically for noun/verb agreement, proper use of apostrophes, and the spelling of words that have double letters because you know these mechanics give that learner the most trouble. Create a customized editing checklist for the learner to follow that includes what he or she is looking for as well as common mistakes and ways to fix them.

Final Draft

This is where the learner publishes what they have written. Publishing means creating a clean copy of a piece and then using it or sharing it with others. Publishing might mean sending off a resume and cover letter to a potential employer or putting envelopes with birthday party invitations in a daughter’s backpack to deliver to her friends at school. Publishing is very important because it represents the end of the writing process. Learners may go through the revise and edit cycle several times. Without publishing, revising, and editing can become an endless loop. If a learner has written something he or she is especially proud of, consider ways of publishing the writing to enhance that pride. This might involve submitting the writing to be published in the literacy program’s newsletter or on their website or taking a collection of the learner’s writings to a printer and having them bound and published. This can go a long way toward changing a learner’s attitude about writing from negative to positive.

Instructional Strategies for Writing

The following strategies have a positive impact on the overall quality of learners’ writing.

Process Writing

Having a consistent process that learners can use when writing results in a consistently higher quality product. The process provides learners with a way to start when they are unsure of what they want to say. It also allows them to focus their efforts on smaller components of writing, improving each component.

Strategy Instruction

When you teach learners strategies for writing, revising, and editing their work, they can draw upon these strategies when writing on their own. When learners can effectively use strategies, it changes their self-image from a poor writer to a competent and capable writer. Examples of strategy instruction would include teaching a learner to brainstorm ideas about one small part of the writing subject at a time to improve description and detail, or to edit their writing

beginning with the last sentence and working back to the beginning so they accurately read what's on the page.

Summarization

Teaching learners to summarize in writing what they have read improves writing as well as reading comprehension. Summarization specifically helps learners to organize their writing and provide explanation and detail.

Collaborative Writing

Providing opportunities for learners to work together when writing improves the overall quality of their writing. In addition to benefiting from other people's feedback in the revising and editing stage, collaborative writing removes much of the pressure learners feel about thinking of something to say.

Setting Specific Product Goals

Understanding the purpose for writing improves a learner's ability to write effectively. It is important for learners to have clear, specific goals and to understand how the writing will ultimately be used.

Word Processing

Teaching learners to write using computers with word processing programs and other tools is helpful. These tools often make it easier for learners to revise and edit their drafts and to proof for correct spelling and sentence structure.

Sentence Combining

Teaching learners to combine simple sentences into compound or complex sentences can have a significant impact on the quality of their writing and can also improve their reading skills.

Prewriting

As we've mentioned earlier, this is a very important step in the writing process. Learners often think good writers just sit down and start writing. Teaching them that brainstorming, and planning are important and providing them with useful tools and strategies improves their overall writing. It is especially important to emphasize how vital prewriting is with learners who will be taking timed tests like the GED. When time constraints are introduced into the writing process, the prewriting step often suffers. When this happens, the quality of the learner's final product will likely also suffer.

Inquiry Activities

In inquiry activities, learners are presented with data. They analyze that data, draw conclusions, and then write about those conclusions. For example, you might put several objects in boxes where learners could feel the objects but not see them. Learners would write about their touch observations. Then they would be given a chance to discuss their observations, touch the objects again, and refine their descriptions. The cycle of continuous inquiry, discussion, and writing results in a narrower focus and increased specificity of detail in the writing.

Models

Studying models is a good way to introduce learners to different writing genres. Discuss the different elements, patterns, and forms of the writing model or models, and then analyze how effectively they were executed. Examples of models might include poems for a creative writing project, biographies to help learners write their own stories, resumes and cover letters for job related writing, absentee notes for real world writing, or five-paragraph essays for learners preparing to take high school equivalency exams.

Grammar

Understanding grammar rules is important for producing high quality writing. However, writing instruction that emphasizes grammar or treats it as something independent from composition has a negative effect on the overall quality of learner writing. Effective grammar instruction involves the practical application of grammar rules to what the learner is writing. It is part of the editing process and the effort to improve the final product.

Correcting Grammar Mistakes

One of the reasons people do not like to write is that they are afraid they do not know or remember all the grammar rules for writing, so whatever they write will be incorrect. Learners want their writing to be correct, but instruction focused purely on grammar is ineffective. When providing grammar instruction to correct mistakes, follow these strategies:

- **Base grammar instruction on the learner’s gaps in knowledge.** This means that you should teach the grammar rules a learner doesn’t know or has trouble with, not the things he or she already knows. How do you know what a learner knows and doesn’t know about grammar? Get the learner to write, and observe which errors show up. This means you shouldn’t start teaching grammar until a learner has produced a body of writing—about three to five writing activities.
- **Grammar instruction requires the direct instruction model:**
 - Explain the grammar rule and how to apply it.
 - Provide examples of application of the grammar rule. Also provide examples of common errors and how to fix them
 - Provide guided practice with worksheets and examples from the learner’s own work.
 - Have the learner edit future writing for the specific grammar rule.
- **Simplify grammar rules.** Remember, one of the reasons that people do not like to write is the perception that there are a lot of grammar rules they need to remember. You are trying to help learners improve their writing by eliminating frequent errors. Simplifying grammar rules will facilitate this.
- **Model common errors and how to fix them.** Learners need to easily recognize the errors they make and have specific strategies for fixing them. Sometimes these strategies involve applying grammar rules. A strategy might be to rewrite the sentence.
- **Apply the grammar rule during the editing process.** Once a learner understands the grammar rule, it is important for him or her to edit work by specifically applying that grammar rule. Once learners have learned to recognize and correct an error in their work, it is unlikely that they will continue to make that error.