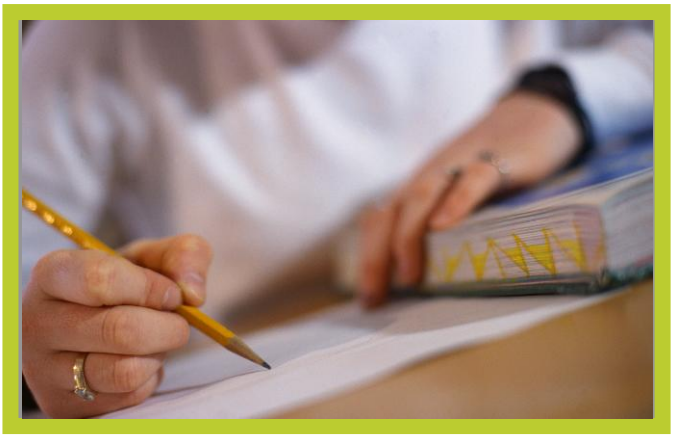
Developing a Schoolwide Writing Plan



Writing is the purposeful act of thinking and expression that uses language to explore ideas and communicate meaning to others. It is a complex, multifaceted act of communication.

This guidance document is designed to help schools develop, implement and monitor school writing plans. It offers questions to consider in reflecting on the curriculum, instruction, assessments and supports that will ensure students' literacy needs are met related to writing and communication skills.

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What can schools do to ensure writing plans are in place to meet students' needs related to writing and communication skills? Develop, implement and monitor a plan—a strong, living plan is essential to a successful literacy initiative.

School Writing Policies

A school's policies for the writing program should address

- communication skills
- grading procedures and feedback to students regarding their writing and communication skills
- the responsibility for review of the portfolios and feedback to students
- other policies to improve the quality of an individual student's writing and communication skills

Key Components of a Writing Plan

1. **multiple opportunities for students to develop complex communication skills for a variety of purposes**
2. **access to and use of technology tools**
3. **access to and use of language resources**
4. **procedures for developing and monitoring portfolios**
5. **feedback to students regarding writing and communication skills**

Kentucky Revised Statute 158.6451 (2009)

Schools provide multiple opportunities for students to develop complex communication skills for a variety of purposes

Kentucky Revised Statute 158.6451 (2009)

Communication skills include reading, writing, speaking, listening and observing. Ensuring that students are actively engaged in using communication skills regularly in every class is perhaps the most important part of a school's plan.

Consider:

- **Does the school have a literacy team and a literacy plan that includes communication as a component of the plan?**
- **How are communication skills being taught?**
- **Are teachers providing effective literacy instruction across the curriculum?**
- **How do teachers build written and oral literacy skills through effective instruction?**
- **How do teachers facilitate engaging classroom discussions and questioning to construct meaning and make connections about a variety of texts?**
- **How do teachers challenge students to communicate complex written and spoken arguments and to substantiate claims clearly?**
- **How do teachers integrate the application of inquiry and research skills into a variety of experiences to support students' literacy skill development?**
- **Do students have regular opportunities across the curriculum to use writing to learn, writing to demonstrate learning, and writing for publication?**
- **Do students have opportunities to revise current and past work to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences for a variety of purposes?**

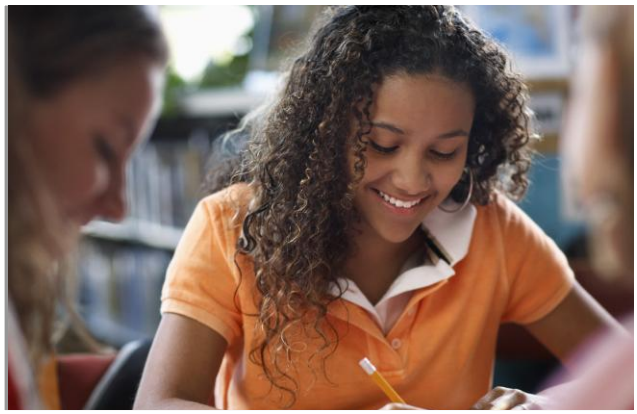
"Ensuring that students are actively engaged in using communication skills regularly in every class is perhaps the most important part of a school's plan."

Schools provide technological tools to assist students in being creative and innovative members of a global society

(Partnership for 21st Century Skills Framework)

Consider:

- What opportunities are available for students to create, analyze and evaluate multi-media texts?
- Does the school encourage students to use digital technologies, communication/networking tools and social networks appropriately to access, manage, evaluate and create information?
- Does the school think beyond a paper portfolio?
- How do teachers use innovative teaching methods that integrate the use of supportive technologies, inquiry- and problem-based approaches, higher order thinking skills, creative and critical thinking, and collaboration?
- What opportunities do teachers provide for students to make some of their thinking public beyond the classroom?
- Do teachers and students apply a fundamental understanding of the ethical/legal issues surrounding the access and use of information technologies?
- How do teachers use a balance of technology-enhanced, formative and summative assessments that measure student growth in 21st century skills?
- Do students use technology as a tool to research, organize, evaluate and communicate information?



Schools provide access to a variety of language resources.

"Without 21st century skills, students are being prepared to succeed in yesterday's world—not tomorrow's" (enGAUGE, 2003).

Consider:

- **How are students encouraged to articulate thoughts and ideas?**
- **Do students have access to information and media literacy?**
- **Do students have access to digital technologies for communicating?**
- **How are students asked to apply listening, speaking, reading, writing and thinking in the process of learning?**
- **How do teachers build written and oral vocabulary through effective instruction?**
- **How do teachers integrate a variety of learning resources with classroom literacy instruction to increase learning options and products?**
- **Do students articulate thoughts and ideas effectively using oral, written and nonverbal communication skills in a variety of forms and contexts?**

Schools support teachers in developing themselves as teachers of writing and create procedures for developing and monitoring portfolios consisting of samples of individual student work that represent the interests and growth of the student over time.

Consider:

- What types of student work can be collected in a "portfolio" to represent the creative and innovative literacy opportunities offered?
- How does the school focus on a writing program rather than writing pieces to be produced by students?
- How does the school provide administrative and professional support for innovative literacy instruction?
- How does the school encourage teachers from all content areas to teach writing to learn, writing to demonstrate learning, and writing for publication?
- What opportunities do teachers provide for authentic social and collaborative communications that emphasize research, discussion, communication and interaction?
- How do teachers pose questions that promote inquiry, expand thinking, increase curiosity, and are of interest to the students?
- How do teachers explicitly teach revision strategies throughout instruction and provide time for revision of current and past work to allow students to apply and refine skills?
- How do teachers use technology to differentiate literacy instruction and support student learning?
- Do teachers set high expectations for oral and written responses?
- Do teachers utilize best practice in writing instruction?
- Do students make choices about what they explore, research and communicate?

Schools develop a system for providing descriptive feedback to students regarding the writing and communication skills demonstrated in their portfolio.

"Rubrics can be a powerful self-assessment tool if teachers disconnect them from grades and give students time and support to revise their work" (Andrade, Educational Leadership, vol. 65 no. 4).

Consider:

- How should feedback on students' writing be provided?
- Does the school encourage all teachers across content areas to use coaching and ethical markings to provide descriptive feedback on student writing and products by allowing for multiple revisions of writing and products?
- How do teachers design writing instruction and mini lessons in response to student's needs?
- How do teachers guide students in development of rubrics aligned with standards?
- How do teachers engage students in reflection on their writing and their progress as communicators?
- Do teachers use models to clarify expectations of literacy products?
- Do teachers provide parents and students access to literacy products and feedback on literacy performance?
- Do teachers provide opportunities for students to evaluate their own and others' work?
- Do teachers provide opportunities for students to participate in writing response groups/peer conferencing?
- Do students use and recognize the value of feedback and make appropriate adjustments in writing, listening, reading and speaking?
- How often do students co-develop and use rubrics to understand characteristics of quality writing and communication?

References and Resources:

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