

Writing in the Classroom

to Learn, to Demonstrate Learning and for Publication

Developing the communication skills necessary to function in a complex and changing civilization is a foundational goal of the Kentucky Academic Standards. This intention is echoed across content areas, guiding teachers to provide opportunities for students to engage in discipline specific literacies. Writing, therefore, becomes a mode of learning, serving as an effective teaching tool to develop writers *and* deepen content understanding.

Writing Anchor Standard 10 calls for students to write routinely over extended time frame (time for research, reflection and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes and audiences.

Therefore, an effective school-wide writing program will provide regular opportunities for all students to engage in the three types of writing:

Writing to Learn

Writing to Demonstrate Learning

Writing for Publication

Although all three types of writing are important, the purpose, audience and form may differ. Students use writing-to-learn and writing -to-demonstrate-learning strategies to make sense of their reading and learning experiences. Students write with a specific, authentic purpose and audience as they write for publication. Teachers should consider these differences when developing tasks and/or prompts and match these to meet the instructional goals of the unit.

***Writing today
is not a frill for
the few, but an
essential for
the many.***

*The National
Commission on Writing
in America's Schools
and Colleges*

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Writing to Learn

Teachers include writing to learn primarily as an instructional tool to promote learning. The goal in writing to learn is not to produce a formal composition; usually, writing to learn is an informal, single-draft writing. The goals are to use this writing to deepen the student's understanding of subjects studied; to engage students in thinking, applying/extending knowledge and developing skills; and to help students reflect on themselves as learners.

Writing to learn has great potential in helping students learn – as well as developing thinkers, readers and writers. Teachers can adapt this practice to serve their own goals, but considering some typical features can help teachers across grade levels and disciplines make decisions about how they will use writing to learn

Characteristics

- ◆ Focuses on something relevant to learning and the learner
- ◆ Is done regularly in the classroom (and sometimes outside of the class) as an instructional tool
- ◆ Is an informal, single draft writing; length varies, but usually this type of writing is brief
- ◆ Is sometimes held in a collection, such as a learning journal
- ◆ May be teacher or student prompted
- ◆ Has the learner as the primary audience.
- ◆ Is sometimes shared and discussed to promote learning and understanding of content
- ◆ Is not usually done for an “authentic” purpose or audience or in a “real-world” form
- ◆ Emphasizes the student's thinking and learning – not formal composition skills
- ◆ May use different ways to communicate and understand such as, diagrams, charts, lists, graphic organizers, as well as sentences, paragraphs, etc.
- ◆ Is not “marked” for conventions
- ◆ May or may not be graded. If graded, it may be done following a basic rubric, letter grades, points, check marks, scores for “best entries,” etc.

If students are to make knowledge their own, they must struggle with the facts, and rework raw information and dimly understood concepts into language they can communicate to someone else. In short, if students are to learn, they must write.

The Neglected “R”

Writing, therefore, becomes a mode of learning, serving as an effective teaching tool to develop writers and deepen content understanding.

Examples of Writing-to-Learn Strategies:

Learning Journal, Learning Log, Class Journal: These are collections of writing-to-learn entries done by the student to prompts provided by the teacher or the student. Usually the journal or log is maintained as a regular instructional tool in the classroom and is used frequently to promote learning. A variation is the **Traveling Log**, in which each day a different student writes to record thoughts, summarize ideas or lessons, etc. Sometimes the log is made available to students who have been absent. Another variation is the **Sketch Journal** that contains drawings and writings relevant to the student's study: sketches of rooms for family and consumer sciences, plants in a science study, scenes from study of history or geometric figures found in the real world. Other options include **Math Logs**, **Science Logs** or **Professional Notebooks**.

Dialogue Journal: In this approach, the writing becomes a conversation of learners. One student writes an entry or note and another student replies or a page in the journal is divided and one student writes on one side. Another student then writes on the other side, responding to the prompt AND to the classmate's entry.

Double-entry Journal/Split-page Journal: Students divide journal pages in half and use each side for a different purpose (examples: one side for quoted lines from the text read and the other side for their response to the quote; one side for mathematical calculations and the other side for a written explanation of the process).

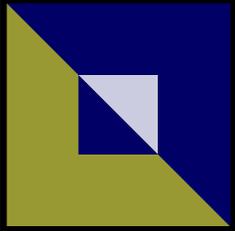
Reading-response Journal or Reading Responses: This approach engages students in responding to reading materials relevant to their learning. Often, the teacher provides a prompt that is "open" in nature, meaning that the teacher makes a request or provides a question and the student is expected to approach the prompt as he or she thinks best, making decisions and developing and supporting his or her thoughts about something read.

Writer's Notebook: This notebook includes a variety of entries relevant to the student as a writer. Entries may be single-draft writings done to a prompt, written exercises aimed at giving the student experience trying out a technique or writing strategy, clippings and quotes from reading materials, resources the student might use in developing as a writer, etc. Many options are available. Some students include a section devoted to language, grammar, usage and conventions. Sometimes a separate **Grammar Notebook** is used for this work.

Entrance (Admit) or Exit Slips: Students may bring these writings to class or complete them just before leaving. Usually brief "quick writes," this writing can serve a number of instructional purposes:

- focusing student attention on the lesson to be taught that day or the next
- setting the tone for the class lesson prompting students' thinking relevant to the lesson
- helping students access prior experience/knowledge
- troubleshooting
- reflecting done by the student and assessing self

Extended Response: Teachers may ask students to respond to open response type items in an informal way prior to using these kinds of questions as formal assessments. Students' responses may be in their journals or learning logs and can serve to prepare students for small group and whole group discussion of key concepts they need to master.



Writing to Demonstrate Learning

This type of writing is necessary in every classroom in order for a teacher to ascertain whether or not students understand the content and/or concepts being taught. Regularly asking students to think and write at the higher levels of Bloom's Taxonomy (i.e., analysis, synthesis, evaluation) can help students not only think through the content but also reveal the depth of their knowledge. Though this kind of writing certainly can promote learning, it is used especially to help teachers understand how well students are learning.

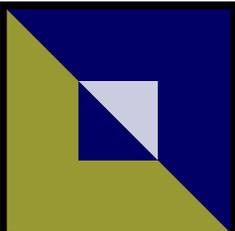
Characteristics

- Is intended to help the teacher assess students' learning or ability to complete a task
- Is a response to a school exercise, question, prompt, or teacher assignment
- Focuses on content knowledge or ability to apply learning and use skills taught
- May or may not lead students to demonstrate ownership; may lead all students to write pretty much the same thing, showing their knowledge, memory, etc. for a question or prompt
- Is usually in the form of a school exercise, not a form suitable for publication.
- Typically has the teacher as the intended audience
- May be a single-draft writing, though in some cases such writings are taken through the writing process
- Is graded, marked or scored by the teacher following a scoring guide, rubric, etc.; comments usually focus on the student's learning but may also address compositional skills

Writing to demonstrate learning is intended to help the teacher assess students' learning or ability to complete a task.

Examples of Writing-to-Demonstrate Learning:

- answers to extended-response prompts
- answers to test questions
- summaries of reading or an activity
- explanation of a process or content
- research papers which primarily present information
- lab reports that summarize activities from an experiment
- test essays



Writing for Publication

Authentic writing for publication is writing for authentic audiences and purposes that has been taken through the complete writing process. “Publication” suggests the writing has the potential to be shared with its intended audience and approximates writing done in a variety of real world settings such as workplace, academic, professions and trades, military, service as a citizen, etc.

Pieces for publication are produced for an authentic audience and purpose and **are also directly relevant to students’ learning**. Ideally, students make decisions about audience, purpose, and/or form based on their interests, experiences or inquiry.

These pieces of writing are more successful when the writers pay careful attention to success criteria for writing. Teacher and/or student created rubrics may address audience/purpose, idea development, organization, word choice and conventions, as well as the content of the subject matter.

Pieces for publication are written with a specific, authentic purpose, with awareness of authentic readers, in real-world forms.

Characteristics

- ◆ Is written with a specific, authentic purpose, with awareness of authentic readers, in real-world forms
- ◆ Is intended to help students develop skills in communication and to promote their learning and thinking
Authentic writing assesses skills in communication and may assess understanding of content in the study area along with students’ abilities to apply learning and experiences to accomplish authentic purposes.
- ◆ Indicates how well students communicate ideas about their learning, experience, and inquiry
- ◆ Reveals student ownership: purposes, ideas, methods of support, use of learning and experiences, choices about readers and forms, etc.
- ◆ Shows students’ thinking; is not merely a summary, transcription, or record of an activity, or answer to test question
- ◆ Is usually taken through a full writing process—prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, publishing.
- ◆ May be written in response to a prompt provided by the teacher but may also be defined to some extent by the individual student

Important Features of Writing for Publication:

Authentic writing driven by specific purpose—what the student wishes to accomplish through the piece. Whether the piece is written to share human experience, to make a point through fiction, to persuade a readership to take an action or to help readers gain a better understanding of a subject, the writer has an authentic reason for writing beyond that of simply demonstrating learning to the teacher.

Written in one of the Three Modes of Writing.

- ◆ Opinion/argument
- ◆ Informational/explanatory
- ◆ Narrative

Authentic form suited to the purpose and the audience that reveals the purposeful use of the characteristics of the selected form. The student may use a variety of techniques or approaches appropriate to the audience and discipline.

Student ownership. When students make decisions about their own piece, when they use their own ideas, purposes, approach, experience, learning, inquiry, organization, etc., then they are truly taking ownership of the writing.

Well-developed ideas that reflect the student's thinking, understanding of content, and the ability to explain in order to help readers and to accomplish the purpose. The student develops ideas with depth and complexity to provide insight, support and clarification of the topic through the use of appropriate and effective examples, details, facts, explanations, descriptions or arguments.

Awareness of authentic readers. In creating audience

- awareness, writers help readers by
- ◆ providing details,
 - ◆ conveying ideas of relevance,
 - ◆ providing background information,
 - ◆ revealing critical thinking to anticipate readers' needs,
 - ◆ employing appropriate tone,
 - ◆ organizing ideas.

Three Modes of Writing in the Kentucky Academic Standards

Anchor Writing Standard 1

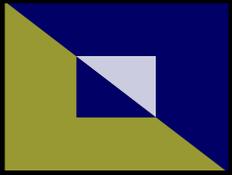
Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

Anchor Writing Standard 2

Write informational/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization and analysis of content.

Anchor Writing Standard 3

Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details and well-structured event sequences.



Authentic Purposes

Instructional Issues: Focus and Purpose

Having a purpose—or reason to write—is critical if students are to write authentically and move toward proficiency. Given the various types of writing used in Kentucky classrooms, it is important for teachers to understand that in Writing for Publication, the purpose must be realistic, beyond that of (but including) showing academic understanding of content.

Establishing an authentic purpose prior to writing is not enough, however. Students must have that purpose in mind and develop a **controlling idea** to establish that focus.

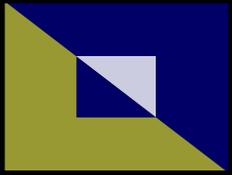
Therefore, the focus becomes the way a writer achieves his or her purpose.

Some teachers might refer to the controlling ideas as a “thesis” or a “main idea” of a piece. Still others might call it a “focusing statement.”

Whatever the wording, students must articulate their controlling idea to establish and maintain unity and cohesiveness through the piece. It simply isn’t enough to say, “I’m writing to explain...” in the piece, as students often lose track of that notion as they write. If the statement is incorporated into the introduction, the student is much more likely to follow its lead and develop that statement throughout the writing. Students must “establish **and** maintain” the narrowed purpose to move toward proficiency. .

SAMPLE PURPOSES

- Evaluate
- Analyze
- Interpret
- Defend an idea
- Solve a problem
- Propose a change
- Explain a procedure
- Draw conclusions from inquiry
- Support an idea
- Clear up a misconception
- Provide needed information
- Persuade readers
- Present a needed plan
- Convey emotions and ideas about human experiences
- Create artistic expressions
- Reflect on experiences
- Entertain



Authentic Audiences

Instructional Issues: Authentic Audience Awareness

Students adapt their communication in relation to audience, task, purpose, and discipline. They appreciate nuances, such as how the composition of an audience should affect tone when speaking and how the connotations of words affect meaning.

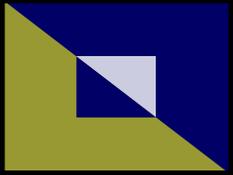
Writing for Publication should indicate an awareness of the audience's needs. In other words, what does the audience need to know to fully understand the purpose of the writing? Many times a writer will state the audience in a greeting (Dear Mr. Smith) or ask the audience questions in order to communicate with an audience (Have you ever considered...?). However, this approach fails to fully address the audience's needs.

To accomplish this, the writer must have a clear understanding of the purpose and its real world connection to the readers. This will help the writer develop ideas and support that will satisfy the needs of the audience.

Too often we see students trying to contrive an audience for writing that he or she could not possibly address or adopt a persona in the writing that is not their role. When this happens, the authenticity of the writing is gone. For example, it is not a good idea to have students pretend to be someone they are not (e.g., pretend you are a Union soldier writing a journal entry during the Civil War). Unless the goal is literary writing (and a fictional perspective is acceptable), this contrivance makes the task inauthentic, and creates little chance of the student performing well.

SAMPLE AUDIENCES

- An individual
- A group
- Classmates
- Readers of a publication
- People concerned about a problem
- Citizens, members of the community
- People interested in a hobby
- Parents
- People who requested a report (e.g., supervisor/boss)
- People interested in literature
- Readers of literary magazines



Authentic Audiences

Instructional Issues: Authentic Audience Awareness

When we have students write academic pieces, it would be a mistake to think that a student (regardless of grade level) would be able to take on the role of a university scholar to write to other university scholars about, say, *Hamlet*. What would a high school student say about *Hamlet* that someone else hasn't said already? How would middle school students write about *Gathering Blue*, etc.?

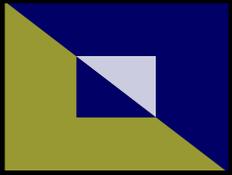
However, students can certainly write about *Hamlet* (or any book or academic topic). They must enter into the academic conversation (to understand what others are already saying) and write about their own ideas in regard to that academic conversation. The writers must use their research as support for their own ideas. Students are approximating the role of a university scholar by writing to other learners in the discipline (in this example, other students studying *Hamlet*), their classmates. That is an authentic application of academic writing. Student writers may approximate the role of a university scholar, but they should not be expected to imitate a role they do not understand.

The same principle holds true for technical and workplace writing. Certainly a middle school or high school student could approximate the role of a person working in a business, but he or she could not pretend to be a business executive, for example.

Contriving an audience or the writer's persona is almost certain to create a problem for the student before he/she even begins writing.

SAMPLE AUDIENCES

- People interested in ideas about human experience
- School leaders (principal, teachers, site-based council)
- Participants in a conference, meeting or seminar
- Learners in the study area or discipline
- People serving in workplace roles
- Public officials
- People who can act on a proposal
- Scholarship committees



Authentic Forms

Instructional Issues: Idea Development

Writing that is intended for publication should be in an authentic, real-world form. However, **form alone does not ensure a well-developed piece of writing**. The focus of instruction on form is certainly important; however, to work with form without first working with idea development and support usually will not result in a quality piece of writing.

Effective writers know that different disciplines call for different types of evidence (e.g., documentary evidence in history, experimental evidence in science) Students cite specific evidence when offering an oral or written interpretation of a text. They use relevant evidence when supporting their own points in writing and speaking, making their reasoning clear to the reader or listener, and they constructively evaluate others' use of evidence.

They develop the capacity to build knowledge on a subject through research projects and to respond analytically to literary and informational sources

The writer consistently **organizes** the writing by using a logical progression of ideas that flows within and between paragraphs. The writer consistently uses a **variety of sentence lengths and structures**. The writing includes a variety of transitional words and phrases that connects ideas and guides the reader. The writer uses organizational techniques (e.g., comparison/contrast, cause/effect, order of importance, reasons/explanations) and language appropriate to the discipline.

SAMPLE FORMS

- Articles (academic, technical, general, special interest, workplace, etc.)
- Essays
- Written speeches
- Letters
- Review or critiques (movie, book, theatre, art, music, etc.)
- Proposals
- Memoirs
- Short stories
- Editorials
- Reports
- Research papers
- Plays/scripts
- Poems
- Email
- Blog