

The Writer's Toolkit

Write about what really interests you, whether it is real things or imaginary things, and nothing else.

C.S. Lewis

It's the season for writing sessions. As teachers, it is our role to help students develop the tools they need to become confident, competent writers. Here are some concrete strategies to set your students up for success.



Pre-writing

Stations. Create stations with writing activities related to linking words, proofreading, using a Thesaurus/dictionary and other skill sets. Use an online timer or stopwatch to help the groups complete each activity within a set amount of time. Highlight the importance of teamwork!

Break down evaluation criteria. Do students really understand how their writing be evaluated? Use the think-pair-share strategy so that students can discuss what will be evaluated when it comes to content, language and structure. Then, rewrite the evaluation criteria using the students' own words.

Evaluate examples of student work. Many students find this activity highly motivating. By looking at example texts written by other students, they form a better understanding of what is required of them. Working in pairs, the students can discuss: what did this writer do well? Which tips would you give this writer? **TEACHER TIP:** UDIR has made student texts from earlier exams available online.

Use expert groups to work with the preparation material. Students often receive preparation material that they are expected to read, understand and be prepared to write about in a relatively short amount of time. Divide the class into groups. Each group receives one text that they must read in-depth and teach to the other students. This is a cooperative learning activity that helps students take ownership of the time they have to prepare.

The Day of the Writing Session

Get organized. Remind students to format their document before writing. They should also open any programs that will help them write including a dictionary, Thesaurus and other websites/programs that will be available.

Plan first, then write. Encourage students to highlight or underline key words in the task. Also, students should make use of the “Plan Your Factual or Fictional Text” on p. 101 in Enter Basic Skills.

Brainstorm in pairs. After students receive the task, they can work in pairs for 10 minutes to check their understanding of the task and share ideas. A helpful strategy to overcome writer’s block.

Proofreading. Before students turn in their work, they can give each other feedback in pairs. This part of the writing process can also be completed independently. The “Checklist for good writers” on p. 100 in Basic Skills is a helpful tool. If possible, encourage students to listen to their text read out loud using a program that has a text-to-speech function.

Give formative feedback. At which point in time is a student most receptive to feedback? Perhaps we should provide more feedback during the writing process instead of after a text is completed? In this way, students will be more likely to use the feedback they receive in order to improve their writing.

Post-writing

Focus on patterns. When evaluating student texts, don’t comment on every error. Look for patterns in order to discover the student’s strengths as well as their areas of improvement. You are a writing coach, not the grammar police!

Writer conferences. Gather students who have received similar feedback so that they can work on the same skill set as a team.

Self-reflection. Good writers are self-aware. Does your student know what they did well and what they can improve next time? Self-evaluation is a starting point for a dialogue between the teacher and student. Attached is a document that allows a student comment on their own work.

