

Best Practices

Writing

Recommendations for Teaching

Increase

Student ownership and responsibility by:

Helping students choose their own topics and goals for improvement

Using brief teacher-student conferences

Teaching students to review their own progress

Class time spent on writing whole, original pieces through:

Establishing real purposes for writing and students' involvement in the task

Instruction in and support for all stages of writing process

Prewriting, drafting, revising, editing

Teacher modeling writing—drafting, revising, sharing—as a fellow author and as demonstration of processes

Learning of grammar and mechanics in context, at the editing stage, and as items are needed

Writing for real audiences, publishing for the class and for wider communities

Making the classroom a supportive setting for shared learning, using:

Active exchange and valuing of students' ideas

Collaborative small-group work

Conferences and peer critiquing that give responsibility for improvement to authors

Decrease

Teacher control of decision making by:

Teacher deciding on all writing topics

Suggestions for improvement dictated by teacher

Learning objectives determined by teacher alone

Instruction given as whole-class activity

Time spent on isolated drills on “subskills” of grammar, vocabulary, spelling, paragraphing, penmanship, etc.

Writing assignments given briefly, with no context or purpose, completed in one step

Teacher talks about writing but never writes or shares own work

Isolated grammar lessons, given in order determined by textbook, before writing is begun

Assignments read only by teacher

Devaluation of students' ideas through:

Students viewed as lacking knowledge and language abilities

Sense of class as competing individuals

Work with fellow students viewed as cheating, disruptive

Best Practices

Increase

Writing across the curriculum as a tool for learning

Constructive and efficient evaluation that involves:

Brief informal oral responses as students work

Thorough grading of just a few of student-selected, polished pieces

Focus on a few errors at a time

Cumulative view of growth and self-evaluation

Encouragement of risk taking and honest expression

Decrease

Writing taught only during "language arts" period—i.e., infrequently

Evaluation as negative burden for teacher and student by:

Marking all papers heavily for all errors, making teacher a bottleneck

Teacher editing paper, and only after completed, rather than student making improvements

Grading seen as punitive, focused on errors, not growth

Best Practices

Reading Recommendations for Teaching

Increase

Read aloud to students

Time for independent reading

Children's choice of their own reading materials

Exposing children to a wide and rich range of literature

Teacher modeling and discussing his/her own reading processes

Primary instructional emphasis on comprehension

Teaching reading as a process:

- Use strategies that activate prior knowledge
- Help students make and test predictions
- Structure help during reading
- Provide after-reading applications

Social, collaborative activities with much discussion and interaction

Grouping by interests or book choices

Silent reading followed by discussion

Teaching skills in the context of whole and meaningful literature

Writing before and after reading

Encouraging invented spelling in children's early writings

Use of reading in content fields (e.g., historical novels in social studies)

Evaluation that focuses on holistic, higher-order thinking processes

Measuring success of reading program by students' reading habits, attitudes, and comprehension

Decrease

Exclusive emphasis on whole-class or reading-group activities

Teacher selection of all reading materials for individuals or groups

Relying on selections in basal reader

Teacher keeping his/her own reading tastes and habits private

Primary instructional emphasis on reading subskills such as phonics, word analysis, syllabication

Teaching reading as a single, one-step act

Solitary seatwork

Grouping by reading level

Round-robin oral reading

Teaching isolated skills in phonics workbooks or drills

Little or no chance to write

Punishing preconventional spelling in students' early writings

Segregation of reading to reading time

Evaluation focus on individual, low-level subskills

Measuring success of reading program only by test scores

Best Practices

Classroom Structures

Indicators of Best Practice

Note on the Arrows: In this chart, growth does not necessarily mean moving from one practice to another, discarding a previous instructional approach and replacing it forever. Instead, teachers add new alternatives to a widening repertoire of choices, allowing them to alternate among a richer array of activities, creating a richer and more complex balance (e.g., lecturing isn't discarded, but is done less as other, new choices become available).

Physical Facilities

Setup for teacher-centered instruction (separate desks) → Student-centered arrangement (e.g., tables)

Rows of desks → Clusters → Centers (varied learning stations for writing, computers, math, etc.)

Bare, unadorned space → Commercial decorations → Student-made artwork, products, displays

Few materials → Textbooks and handouts → "Stuff"—books, materials, manipulatives, pets, etc.

Classroom Climate/Management

Management by punishments and rewards → Order maintained by engagement and community

Teacher creates and enforces rules → Students help set and enforce norms

Students are silent/motionless/passive/controlled → Purposeful talk, movement, and autonomy

Students in fixed group based on "ability" → Flexible grouping based on tasks and choice

Rigid, unvarying schedule → Predictable but flexible time usage based on activities

Student Voice and Involvement

Balanced with teacher-chosen and teacher-directed activities:

→ Students often select inquiry topics, books, writing topics, audiences, etc.

→ Students maintain their own records, set own goals, self-assess

→ Some themes/inquiries are built from students' own questions; "negotiated curriculum"

→ Students assume responsibility, take roles in decision making, help run classroom life

Activities and Assignments

Teacher presentation and transmission of material → Students actively experiencing concepts

Whole-class teaching → Centers and cooperative small groups → Wide variety of activities

Teacher in front, directing whole class → Teacher hard to find, working with groups

Uniform curriculum for all → Jigsawed curriculum; different topics by kids' needs or choices

Short-term lessons; one day at a time → Extended activities, multi-day, multi-step projects

Focus on memorization and recall → Focus on applying knowledge and problem solving

Short responses; fill-in-the-blank exercises → Complex responses, evaluations, writings, artworks

One-way assignments/lessons → Accommodation for multiple intelligences and cognitive styles

Best Practice: New Standards for Teaching and Learning in America's Schools, second edition
By Steven Zemelman, Harvey Daniels, and Arthur Hyde

Best Practices

Language and Communication

Forced constant silence → Noise and conversation alternates with quiet time

Short responses → Elaborated discussion → Students' own questions and evaluations

Teacher talk → Student-teacher talk → Student-student talk

Writing: All channels are open (student-teacher, student-student, student-parent)

Talk and writing focuses on: Facts → Skills → Concepts → Synthesis, evaluation

Time Allocations

Time allocations are **BALANCED** between:

- Teacher-directed and student-directed work

- Subject-specific lessons and integrated, thematic, cross-disciplinary inquiries

- Individual work/small-group or team work/whole-class work

- Intensive, deep study of selected topics/extensive study of wide range of subjects

Fundamental recurrent activities happen on daily/regular basis

- Independent reading (SSR, reading workshop, or literature circles)

- Independent writing (journals or writing workshops)

- Reading aloud to students

- Teacher-student and student-student conferences

Students can explain the time allocations and recurrent activities/procedures in their classrooms

Student Work and Assessment

Products created for teachers and grading → Products created for real events and audiences

Classroom/hallway displays: no student work posted → "A" papers only → All students represented

Identical, imitative products displayed → Varied and original products displayed

Teacher feedback is scores and grades → Teacher feedback is substantive, varied, and formative

Products are seen and rated only by teachers → Public exhibitions and performances are common

Teacher gradebook → Student-maintained portfolios, with self-assessments and conferences

All assessment by teachers → Student self-assessment in official element → Parents are involved

Standards set during grading → Standards available in advance → Standards codeveloped with students

Best Practices



Teacher Attitude and Initiative

Toward Students:

Distant, negative, fearful, punitive → Positive, respectful, encouraging, warm

Blaming students → Reasoning with students

Directive → Consultative

Toward Self:

Helpless victim → Risk taker/Experimenter → Creative, active agent

Solitary adult → Member of team with other adults in school → Member of networks beyond school

Staff development recipient → Chooses and directs own professional growth

Conception of Job Roles:

Expert, presenter → Coach, mentor, model, guide