



# INSTRUCTIONAL WRITING TIME

## WRITING TO READ RECOMMENDATION #3: HOW MUCH TIME?

### What Do the Experts Say?

Schools should specify when (a) explicit writing instruction will occur, and (b) when students will practice writing. It is critical that writing instruction and student engagement in writing practice occur across the curriculum.

Unfortunately, students often spend very little time in school participating in explicit instruction of having varied opportunities to practice their writing.

A national survey (Gilbert & Graham, 2010) indicates that primary grade students spend only 20 to 30 minutes per day actually writing, and very little time is devoted to teaching students how to write (e.g., to use the writing process).

In the intermediate grades, students spend approximately 25

minutes per day writing and about 15 additional minutes are spent directly teaching writing.

At the secondary level, many students spend little time writing in any of their academic subjects, including English (Applebee & Langer, 2006).

Specific guidelines are not provided for the amount of time required for explicit writing instruction, or how much time each day students should spend engaged in the writing process, but there is consensus among experts that schools should substantially increase the amount of time devoted to writing instruction and the amount of time students actually spend writing.

*The National Commission on Writing, recommends that the amount of time students write in school each day should at least be doubled, that writing assignments should be assigned across the curriculum, and that students should spend significantly more out-of-school time writing (National Commission on Writing, 2006). The Commission states that this change alone —will do more to improve student performance than anything else states or local leaders can do (p. 31).*

### What Does Teaching Writing Involve?

Overall, writing involves the integration of several skills. Effective written communication includes the clear expression of ideas and requires time to develop in students.



Writing is a different

type of engagement than learning mathematics or how to read with comprehension. Therefore, writing requires the consistency of dedicated time each school day.

It is important not to assume that writing is the flip side of reading and that if students are good readers, they must also be good writers. Good readers do not necessarily have all the skills necessary to become good writers just because they have been given some application and practice. Though research has found a strong association between reading and writing proficiency, improvements can't be expected by simply combining reading and writing together or by replacing one with the other. Although proficient reading is an important component to becoming a successful writer, many students learn to read and comprehend difficult academic material but still struggle to write coherent texts of their own (Fitzgerald & Shanahan, 2000). **Therefore, students must receive instruction in both reading and writing so that writing development will be influenced by reading instruction and reading development will be influenced by writing instruction.**

**Occasionally devoting short blocks of time to writing instruction (or incidentally when students appear to need it) while teaching other content such as reading will not provide the time necessary for students to become effective writers.**

**(National Commission on Writing)**

## Writing Instructional Time: Elementary

Elementary-level instructional time should focus on foundational aspects of writing, including basic skills like spelling and handwriting. Instruction on the mechanics of writing should be integrated with instruction on higher-level skills and other grade-specific standards outlined in the K-12 Illinois Writing Standards. For example, a writing lesson might include an instructional warm-up with

instruction focused on handwriting, spelling, or mechanics

(transcription skills) followed by instruction focused on composition and the writing process.



## Effective Use of Time

To ensure students' productive use of time throughout the school day, teachers should increase the amount of time each day they devote to teaching writing skills and processes. Long-time writing expert and researcher Donald Graves suggests that elementary grade teachers should spend at least 35-40 minutes on daily writing instruction and related student

writing activities starting in first grade. As writing demands become more complex, the amount of time for writing instruction should increase.

Teachers must set aside a time for writing instruction and practice, including writing that requires deep engagement with text – text students discuss, read, and consider as they learn to express their own ideas and

communicate effectively through their own writing.



## Content Writing



Limitless opportunities exist to teach and practice writing in content area classes.

Writing instruction should also be integrated into the content areas. Writing, like reading, has a discipline-specific aspect. Students who learn to write effectively about history, for example, require writing instruction and practice during history class. In an elementary science class, the teacher might explicitly teach a writing

strategy for summarization, and then assign the students a writing assignment to summarize findings about a science unit they just completed. In a mathematics class, students might first learn to complete a multi-step calculation then write a paragraph sequencing the steps to solve the problem. Limitless

opportunities exist to teach and practice writing in content-area classes.

## Writing Instructional Time: Secondary

The K-12 Illinois Standards for Writing include writing standards for history/social studies, science, and technical subjects. These standards are listed across content areas in grade level bands for students in grades 6-12.

Incorporating writing across the curriculum increases the opportunity for both writing instruction and practice opportunities. It also acknowledges that effective writing

can occur in different ways, with different structures, and with different production procedures depending

context, audience, and purpose for which written communication is produced.

upon the



### Effective Use of Time

Secondary students should spend at least one hour engaged in writing-specific tasks each day (Graves, 1994). The one hour daily recommendation can be distributed across secondary classes if subject-area classes deliberately schedule and coordinate how writing time is focused across classes. For example, a science class might include 15-minutes of daily writing instruction

related to hypothesis testing and the scientific method while a social studies/history class might devote a daily 20-minutes to argument-writing related to current or historical events.

For schools to double the amount of time for writing instruction and practice at the secondary level, writing instruction cannot be confined to the English classroom, but should

occur across the curriculum in all content areas.



### Content Writing

The research is clear: *discipline-based instruction in reading and writing enhances student achievement in all subjects (National Commission on Writing, 1993).* Reading and writing in science is not the same as reading and writing in social studies or a technical subject like drafting. This means that student achievement can

be enhanced by teachers who focus on helping their students develop strategies for reading and writing within their respective content areas. A written report for a science experiment, for example, will differ in process and form from a multi-paragraph essay prepared for an English class. Writing to advertise a product in a business

class requires a different approach from writing a persuasive piece on a contemporary issue in a social studies class. Learning to write across the curriculum helps students employ a life-long need to understand how audience, purpose, and type of writing task influence the written product.

**College instructors estimate that 50% of high school graduates are not prepared for college-level writing (Achieve, Inc., 2005). Recent reports by the National Commission on Writing (2004, 2005) reveal that the majority of both public and private employers say that writing proficiency has now become critical in the workplace and that it directly affects hiring and promotion decisions.**



History and writing are inseparable. How would we know about history if it wasn't documented? (Marius & Page, 2010)

## References

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FEEDBACK