

TWAC: Teaching Writing Across the Curriculum



Nine Strategies for Teaching Writing Across the Curriculum

A Free Teaching-Writing Resource Presented by:

Pattern Based Writing: Quick & Easy Essay

**The fastest, most effective way to teach students multi-paragraph
essay writing... Guaranteed!**

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Academic Vocabulary for Critical Thinking,
Logical Arguments, and Effective Communication

aka

Academic Vocabulary for Absolutely Everyone!



Be sure to print this out for a better reading experience and to help with active reading.



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The Page-One Checklist

The goal of this eBook is for you to understand this checklist so that you can use this checklist to take action and teach writing across the curriculum. If your goal is to improve your students’ writing, how you teach writing is more important than what you teach about writing. This checklist and this eBook will help you learn how to create a *Classroom Full of Writers*.

Nine Strategies for Teaching Writing Across the Curriculum										
TWAC Strategy #1: Connect the Writing Skills That You Teach Your Students in Explicit Grammar and Writing Instruction to Current Learning Across the Curriculum										
TWAC Strategy #2: Hold Your Students Accountable for Using Proper Writing Skills in Daily Writing Across the Curriculum										
TWAC Strategy #3: Assess Writing Across the Curriculum 1) Content/ Correct Answers, and 2) Writing										
TWAC Strategy #4: Teach New Writing Skills, Concepts, Strategies, and Techniques Across the Curriculum										
TWAC Strategy #5: Use the Reading/Writing Connection and Literary Analysis to Teach Writing										
TWAC Strategy #6: Use the Subject Content / Writing Connection to Teach Writing										
TWAC Strategy #7: Foster Student Ownership of Writing: Rethink the Red Pen										
TWAC Strategy #8: Work to Create a Classroom Full of Writers										
TWAC Strategy #9: Use Rubrics, Checklists, and Assessment Sheets (RCAs) to Teach Writing Across the Curriculum										

Be sure to check out [Pattern Based Writing: Quick & Easy Essay](#). This program IS the missing piece of the puzzle that makes everything else you teach about writing easy!

TWAC Outline: Section 1 and Section 2

TWAC Section 1: Three Questions

- a. **What is Teaching Writing?**
- b. **What is Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC)?**
- c. **What is Teaching Writing Across the Curriculum (TWAC)?**

Section 1a: What is Teaching Writing?

1. Teaching Writing Across the Curriculum and [Pattern Based Writing: Quick & Easy Essay](#)
2. Teaching Writing Lessons is Not Teaching Writing
3. What is Teaching Writing?
4. The Teaching Writing Test: Apples-to-Apples Comparisons
5. Writing is a Complicated and Complex Skill
6. CHECKLIST: Teaching and Improving the Nine Component Parts of Writing Success

Section 1b and 1c: What is Teaching Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC)?

What is Teaching Writing Across the Curriculum (TWAC)?

1. What is Teaching Writing Across the Curriculum? – Teaching Writing Across the Curriculum (TWAC) vs. Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC)
2. The Teaching Writing Across the Curriculum (TWAC) Mindset
3. Why Do We Want to Teach Writing Across the Curriculum? A Fifth-Grade Essay That Has No Capital Letters!
4. Takeaways From a Fifth Grade Student Who Didn't Use Capital Letters

TWAC Section 2: Nine Strategies for Teaching Writing Across the Curriculum

TWAC Strategy 1: Connect the Writing Skills That You Teach Your Students in Explicit Grammar and Writing Instruction to Current Learning Across the Curriculum

- a. Create Assignments Across the Curriculum
- b. Use the Reading/Writing Connection and Literary Analysis Across the Curriculum

TWAC Strategy 2: Hold Your Students Accountable for Using Proper Writing Skills in Daily Writing Across the Curriculum

- a. TWAC Strategy #9: Rubrics, Checklists, and Assessment Sheets (RCAs)
- b. Evaluation and Feedback by Grading Papers and Providing Written Feedback
- c. Evaluation and Feedback by Walking Around
- d. Probability and Possibility: Spot Checks, Exit Tickets, Popsicle Sticks, etc.
- e. Writing With-it-ness
- f. Illusion and Mystery

TWAC Strategy 3: Assess Writing Across the Curriculum: 1) Content/Correct Answers, and 2) Writing

TWAC Strategy 4: Teach New Writing Skills, Concepts, Strategies, and Techniques Across the Curriculum

- a. Create Assignments Across the Curriculum
- b. Use the Reading/Writing Connection and Literary Analysis Across the Curriculum

TWAC Strategy 5: Use the Reading/Writing Connection and Literary Analysis to Teach Writing

- a. Theory: Cognitive Theory and Pedagogy
- b. Practical Application
- c. Use Writing to Teach Reading
- d. Use Reading to Teach Writing

TWAC Strategy 6: Use the Subject Content / Writing Connection to Teach Writing

TWAC Strategy 7: Foster Student Ownership of Writing: Rethink the Red Pen

TWAC Strategy 8: Work to Create a Classroom Full of Writers

- a. Three Tools: 1) The Timed Writing System, 2) TWAC Strategy #9, and 3) At Least One Other Person
- b. Creating a Classroom Full of Writers: The Tipping Point
- c. A Classroom Full of Writers: Signs and Goals

TWAC Strategy 9: Use Rubrics, Checklists, and Assessment Sheets (RCAs) to Teach Writing Across the Curriculum [Read the free eBook on this critical strategy!](#)

Note: Please download my free 38-page [Definitive List of Writing and Grammar Skills, Strategies, Concepts, Categories, and Models](#). These *Nine TWAC Strategies* will help you create the mindset and create the systems to take action to teach any of those skills across the curriculum. Although I address a few specific writing and grammar skills here, I do not address 38 pages worth of skills. As you read this eBook, think about and create a list of writing and grammar skills that you want to teach your students across the curriculum.

TWAC Section 1: Three Questions

- a. What is Teaching Writing?
- b. What is Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC)?
- c. What is Teaching Writing Across the Curriculum (TWAC)?

Section 1a. What is Teaching Writing?

Teaching Writing Across the Curriculum and Pattern Based Writing: Quick & Easy Essay

Please Note: I don't discuss [Pattern Based Writing: Quick & Easy Essay](#) in the body text beyond this page. But I mention the curriculum now because I developed it while teaching writing across the curriculum.

Teaching writing across the curriculum is an important topic and activity because it helps teachers get the results that they need in the time that they have. In most serious discussions on the problems that teachers face in teaching writing, eventually, the issue of **time** comes up. How do teachers get the results that they need in the time that they have?

My entire model of teaching writing (which includes everything I write in this eBook) incorporates the fact that I walk into a classroom on day one, and I want to show objective and obvious writing results later in the year. Throughout the school year, I use an [unbiased timed-writing system](#) to monitor *the truth* of my students' writing progress.

Like many teachers, I am familiar with [what the research on teaching writing says works](#), but I also know that I must figure out what gets results with my students in my classroom. In other words, each day is a research project where I diligently attempt to determine what creates writing success with my students.

Although I have always used various types of writing and grammar lessons, I don't find that the lessons teach writing. Lessons are tools for teaching writing. In fact, I also view [Pattern Based Writing: Quick & Easy Essay](#) as a tool—the most valuable tool in the teaching-writing toolbox. It's the fastest, most effective way to teach beginning and struggling writers to create organized multi-paragraph writing.

With any age or grade, [Pattern Based Writing: Quick & Easy Essay](#) is the foundation and the framework I use for teaching writing across the curriculum. It's fun and logical and simplifies teaching writing across the curriculum. I invented the heart of the program on a whiteboard in front of a class while teaching writing across the curriculum, so the program is certainly helpful for any teacher who wants to teach writing more effectively across the curriculum.

If you already use [Pattern Based Writing: Quick & Easy Essay](#), I hope this ebook inspires you to teach more writing across the curriculum. My goal is to help teachers become highly effective writing teachers.

Teaching Writing Lessons is Not Teaching Writing

What is *teaching writing*? Let's answer this simpler question before we look at teaching writing across the curriculum. Most teachers know the frustration of teaching grammar and writing lessons only to discover that their students don't use what they learned in those lessons in their daily writing across the curriculum. Indeed, most teachers can teach writing and grammar lessons well enough, so what's the problem? Well, writing and grammar lessons don't teach writing—it's the teacher that teaches writing. By the end of this eBook, you will see what I mean.

When I first began teaching writing, I taught lots of traditional grammar and writing lessons. Although the lessons improved my students' writing somewhat, they didn't produce the results I wanted or expected to see. The lessons themselves went fine, but given all the time that I had invested, I didn't like what I saw in two types of independent writing:

1. Daily Writing Across the Curriculum
2. State and District Writing Assessments

That's when I began my mission to learn how to improve student writing—i.e., teach writing.

What is Teaching Writing?

I've developed a simple and practical definition of teaching writing. My definition of teaching writing came about primarily from my desire to get my students to write well in their daily writing across the curriculum. For me, the esoteric theories about teaching writing didn't capture what teaching writing really is. **Here is my definition of teaching writing:**

- ➔ Teaching writing is the act of improving students' **independent** writing.

It's that simple. **Independent** is the key word here, as the word **independent** reflects the writing skills that stick, and it demonstrates the writing skills that students own. I have learned not to interpret the kind of writing I can get students to produce in a writing lesson as real writing.

It's worth mentioning that multiple-choice standardized tests often require a different type of writing knowledge. And I do take that test-type of writing knowledge very seriously. In short, spotting a grammar error on a multiple-choice test requires a different kind of knowledge or skill from being able to write correctly in daily writing across the curriculum. While they are not mutually exclusive, they are not the same.

The Teaching Writing Test: Apples-to-Apples Comparisons

How do you know if you have taught writing successfully? It's easy. You give your students an independent writing assignment on day one, and then a few months later or at the end of the school

year, you give your students a similar assignment. The amount of improvement in the writing is the amount of writing you have taught. It's that simple.

Apples-to-apples comparisons (the same amount of time and the same type of assignment) are a potent and motivating teaching tool. With an apples-to-apples comparison, even the most reluctant and stubborn writers find it unacceptable not to show writing progress. That creates real motivation! And the teacher doesn't need to say a word!

Apples-to-apples comparisons also let the teacher know how effective their writing instruction has been. Early in my teaching career, I created a highly effective and fast system for using apples-to-apples comparisons to improve student writing. You can read all about it here:

1. [Writing Fluency: Teaching Children to Write FAST Using the Timed Writing System](#)
2. [Timed Writing System: Evaluate Student Writing Growth and Achievement Objectively](#)

Writing is such a complicated and complex skill that I need to see *objective progress* in INDEPENDENT student writing. This objective progress shows me that what I teach and how I teach is effective.

Writing is a Complicated and Complex Skill

Writing is a complicated and complex skill. We don't master difficult and complex skills simply by learning a compendium of rules. Early in my teaching career, after trying to get results by teaching an endless set of writing and grammar rules, I finally grasped what the modern theory on teaching writing was saying: Because writing is both complicated and complex, how we teach writing is more important than what we teach about writing.

Complicated is different from complex—and writing is both. When we look at a writing or grammar lesson, we usually grasp the complicated rules and the frustrating exceptions that exist in the content. However, when our students face a blank page, we often don't grasp the complex task of creating a whole composition.

A famous maxim in the writing world (attributed to many famous writers) is this: *It takes a million words to reach competency*. Why does it take so many words? Answer: Writing is a complicated and complex skill.

We can think of *independent writing* as being composed of component parts and skills: 1) Thinking Skills and Thought Processes, 2) Writing Knowledge, 3) Application of Writing Knowledge, 4) Understanding of Writing Beyond Knowledge, 5) Judgment, 6) Habits, and 7) Content Knowledge or Personal Experience—i.e., Writers must have something to write about.

Teaching Writing Across the Curriculum [Academic Vocabulary for Absolutely Everyone!](#)

Part of teaching writing is teaching lessons, but part of teaching writing is helping students develop those component parts of writing skill. How do teachers know if they are developing those skills? They monitor and track their students' INDEPENDENT writing progress across the curriculum and on writing assessments.

When teaching writing across the curriculum, teachers may want to consider what types of writing skills students are using and developing. Here is a checklist to help guide you. It isn't a definitive list, but it's an excellent start. It addresses three aspects of independent writing: 1) Thinking Skills, 2) Knowledge, and 3) Application.

Teaching and Improving Ten Component Parts of Writing Success										
1. Logical Thinking, Creative Thinking, and Critical Thinking										
2. Writing Judgment and Decision Making										
3. Knowledge of Writing Strategies, Techniques, and Concepts										
4. Application of Writing Strategies, Techniques, and Concepts										
5. Knowledge and Understanding of Writing, Genre, and Audience										
6. Knowledge and Understanding of the Writing Process										
7. Application of the Writing Process										
8. Understanding and Effective Use Of Grammar and Sentence Structure										
9. The Physical Aspects of Writing (dexterity, typing skills, etc.)										
10. Development of Habits										

Thus far, I have defined and clarified what teaching writing is and isn't. Now, let's look at teaching writing across the curriculum.

Create academic and professional success today with
[Academic Vocabulary for Critical Thinking, Logical Arguments,
and Effective Communication](#)
aka
[Academic Vocabulary for Absolutely Everyone!](#)

What is Teaching Writing Across the Curriculum?

Teaching Writing Across the Curriculum (TWAC) has two parts:

1. Teaching Writing Across the Curriculum (TWAC)
2. Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC)

As the two boxes below illustrate, Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) is a part of Teaching Writing Across the Curriculum (TWAC). In other words, teachers use students' Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) to teach students to write better. In short, teachers find ways to teach writing skills, writing knowledge, and the writing process while students learn content across the curriculum. Quite often, teachers harness the Reading-Writing Connection to teach both reading and writing.

Here is what TWAC and WAC are composed of and how they relate to each other:

Teaching Writing Across the Curriculum (TWAC)

1. **Write:** Students write across the curriculum to learn how to write. Students write to improve their writing skills, their writing process, and their writing knowledge.
2. **The Reading-Writing Connection:** Students read across the curriculum and learn how to write by analyzing the texts they read. Students learn to read like a writer.
3. **Teach:** Teachers find teaching moments across the curriculum as students read and write. Teachers also teach mini-lessons and create writing assignments across the curriculum that teach writing.

Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) (Subset)

4. Students write to learn content.
5. Students write to demonstrate learning of content.

Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) is NOT a subset of TWAC if the teacher's goal is not to Teach Writing Across the Curriculum (TWAC). If students write poorly and without care in their daily schoolwork, all that writing will do little to improve their writing. Of course, this kind of careless writing across the curriculum will still improve students' learning of the content. That said, our focus here is on Teaching Writing Across the Curriculum (TWAC) and improving our students' writing.

The Teaching Writing Across the Curriculum (TWAC) Mindset

Teachers need a special kind of mindset to teach writing across the curriculum. My mindset comes down to four components:

1. “Nobody but a reader ever became a writer.” – *Richard Peck – 2001 Newberry Award Winner*
2. “You can only learn to be a better writer by actually writing.” – *Doris Lessing – 2007 Nobel Prize in Literature Winner*
3. **Maximum Writing Activity for Maximum Students**
4. Always be Teaching Writing – Don’t focus on writing just when it’s writing time. Keep one eye on writing when reading with students. Also, when students write in daily schoolwork across the curriculum, keep one eye on the subject content (correct answers) and the other eye on writing.

Why Do We Want to Teach Writing Across the Curriculum? A Fifth-Grade Essay That Has No Capital Letters!

When I was in fifth grade, I arrived home with a paper with no capital letters. In shock and disgust, my mom (an English major in college) cried out, “What’s going on here?” I replied, “My teacher doesn’t care.” My mom, in turn, bellowed, “Well, I do! I don’t ever want to see a paper like this again!”

A few things confuse me about that story. I’ll admit, it does sound like me in fifth grade and like many fifth-grade students I have met. But it doesn’t sound like my fifth-grade teacher. She was a strict disciplinarian and taskmaster with a military background. So, it makes me wonder: What was going on with her writing instruction? Was this particular paper just an anomaly? Or did she not care? Or did she find it difficult or impossible to hold fifth-grade students accountable for using proper writing skills across the curriculum?

Of course, teaching writing was quite different back in 1975. In fact, today’s popular models for teaching writing didn’t even exist back then. I’ve also heard it said that my generation wasn’t even taught how to write. In short, I don’t know what was going on back in my fifth-grade classroom, but that story reveals a great deal about the many challenges of teaching writing today.

Takeaways From a Fifth-Grade Student Who Didn’t Use Capital Letters:

1. **Monitoring Writing:** Monitoring student writing is hard work for the teacher. If students write as much as they should across the curriculum, the teacher can’t scrutinize every piece of writing. Therefore, students will produce pieces of writing that are less than perfect. How do we want to handle all of these pieces of paper? Teachers need systems.

2. **Setting Standards:** Teachers need to set standards for acceptable writing quality across the curriculum. No capital letters on a piece of paper is always unacceptable. It demonstrates gross negligence and carelessness. If the teacher does not clarify that gross negligence and carelessness are unacceptable, students will think it is acceptable.
3. **Make It Stick:** Failure to set and maintain high expectations in daily writing across the curriculum means that many grammar and writing skills students learn don't stick.
 - ➔ **The Problem:** "Decades of research (Elly, 1979, Hillocks, 1986, Freedman, 1993, Freedman and Daiute, 2001) have shown that instructional strategies such as isolated skill drills fail to improve student writing."
 - ➔ **The Solution:** Teachers need to hold their students accountable for the writing skills they teach them (using isolated skill drills) in their daily writing across the curriculum if they wish to make the skills stick.
4. **Communicate What's Important:** Students care about what the teacher communicates and stresses are important. It will be important to the students if it's important to the teacher. If the teacher has not communicated that something is important, students will think it is unimportant.
5. **Sometimes We Are Lazy or Careless:** Students (and people in general) are sometimes lazy or careless. We don't always try to do our best. Sometimes, we only do what is required, and sometimes, we try to get away with doing less than is required. To be our best, most people need someone to help them be their best. This need for guidance is why we have bosses, coaches, and teachers and join groups and take classes. These people help us be our best and strive for greatness. In short, students need teachers to help them become the writers they can be.
6. **Low-Stakes Writing is Not No-Stakes Writing:** A certain amount of student writing across the curriculum is low-stakes writing, and the research says that low-stakes writing is an important component of teaching writing. But even in low-stakes writing, I don't encourage carelessness. Writing that has no capital letters is always unacceptable. Low-stakes does not mean no-stakes.

A highly intelligent fifth-grade student (he says modestly) comes home from school with an essay with no capital letters. How can that be? Answer: If we let students write that way—many students will write that way. To teach writing effectively, we must think about *writing across the curriculum*. Let's examine how to do that!

It's Time to Transform Student Writing!
[Pattern Based Writing: Quick & Easy Essay](#)

TWAC Section 2: Nine Strategies for Teaching Writing Across the Curriculum (TWAC)

TWAC Strategy #1: Connect the Writing Skills That You Teach Your Students in Explicit Grammar and Writing Instruction to Current Learning Across the Curriculum

- a. Create Assignments Across the Curriculum
- b. Use the Reading/Writing Connection and Literary Analysis Across the Curriculum

TWAC Strategy #2: Hold Your Students Accountable for Using Proper Writing Skills in Daily Writing Across the Curriculum

- a. TWAC Strategy #9: Rubrics, Checklists, and Assessment Sheets (RCAs)
- b. Evaluation and Feedback by Grading Papers and Providing Written Feedback
- c. Evaluation and Feedback by Walking Around
- d. Probability and Possibility: Spot Checks, Exit Tickets, Popsicle Sticks, etc.
- e. Writing With-it-ness
- f. Illusion and Mystery

TWAC Strategy #3: Assess Writing Across the Curriculum: 1) Content/Correct Answers, and 2) Writing

TWAC Strategy #4: Teach New Writing Skills, Concepts, Strategies, and Techniques Across the Curriculum

- a. Create Assignments Across the Curriculum
- b. Use the Reading/Writing Connection and Literary Analysis Across the Curriculum

TWAC Strategy #5: Use the Reading/Writing Connection and Literary Analysis to Teach Writing

- a. Pedagogy and Cognitive Theory vs. Practical Application
- b. Use Writing to Teach Reading
- c. Use Reading to Teach Writing

TWAC Strategy #6: Use the Subject Content / Writing Connection to Teach Writing

TWAC Strategy #7: Foster Student Ownership of Writing: Rethink the Red Pen

TWAC Strategy #8: Work to Create a Classroom Full of Writers

- a. Three Tools: 1) The Timed Writing System, 2) TWAC Strategy #9, and 3) At Least One Other Person
- b. Creating a Classroom Full of Writers: The Tipping Point
- c. A Classroom Full of Writers: Signs and Goals

TWAC Strategy #9: Use Rubrics, Checklists, and Assessment Sheets (RCAs) to Teach Writing Across the Curriculum [Read the free eBook on this critical strategy!](#)

Nine Strategies for Teaching Writing Across the Curriculum (TWAC)

Teaching writing across the curriculum is active—so teachers need techniques and strategies. Below, you will find nine TWAC strategies. But before we look at the Nine Strategies, I want to make things very simple: It all comes down to reading and writing.

Reading and Writing: We have two ways to teach writing across the curriculum: 1) Reading and 2) Writing. Everything that students learn about writing across the curriculum involves reading and writing.

- ➔ **Teachers** teach writing across the curriculum with 1) Reading and 2) Writing.
- ➔ **Students** learn writing across the curriculum by 1) Reading and 2) Writing.

Here are the specific verbs that teachers and students use: write, read, teach, analyze, evaluate, discuss, explain, compare, question, apply, assign, grade, think, fix, check, practice, memorize, review, reinforce, monitor, and make connections. TWAC truly is this simple!

Now, let’s look at the Nine Strategies. You’ll notice that I placed the strategies in the form of a checklist. Ask yourself this question: How many strategies can I check off daily?

Nine Strategies for Teaching Writing Across the Curriculum Presented by: Pattern Based Writing: Quick & Easy Essay					
TWAC Strategy #1: Connect the Writing Skills That You Teach Your Students in Explicit Grammar and Writing Instruction to Current Learning Across the Curriculum					
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TWAC Strategy #1: Connect the Writing Skills That You Teach Your Students in Explicit Grammar and Writing Instruction to Current Learning Across the Curriculum

Teachers have two ways to apply this strategy:

1. Create Assignments Across the Curriculum
2. Use the Reading/Writing Connection and Literary Analysis Across the Curriculum

Most teachers use some kind of curriculum to help them teach grammar and writing. Additionally, most reading curriculums also instruct students on various skills that relate to writing. In short, most teachers and curriculums do their best to teach students how to write. Unfortunately, a great deal of the instruction fails to improve student writing. Here's why: Much of it is isolated skill drills, and "[Decades of research](#) (Elly, 1979, Hillocks, 1986, Freedman, 1993, Freedman and Daiute, 2001) have shown that instructional strategies such as isolated skill drills fail to improve student writing."

The research fails to address the fact that few people are genuinely qualified to teach grammar and writing without using isolated skill drills. That's why so many curriculums are (in reality) isolated skill drills. Having said that, teachers can make isolated skill drills work better than the research says is possible. They simply need to use TWAC Strategy #1.

TWAC Strategy #1 is a Two-Step Process:

Step 1: Teach your reading and writing curriculums as usual—but faster. Save time for Step #2. Once I changed my mindset, I quickly realized that I had spent way too much time on what should have been quick lessons.

Step 2: Connect the lessons in those curriculums to the materials students study in other subjects.

Example 1 – Let's Create an Assignment: Let's say that your students just finished a lesson on verbs. The next day, when your students are reading in their science books, choose a paragraph and (as a class or independently) have the students list the verbs in each sentence. Does the information they learned yesterday in the verb lesson match what they found in today's science paragraph?

Example 2 – Let's use the Reading/Writing Connection and Literary Analysis: The teacher says, "We have been learning about genres. We are reading our science textbook, so the text is primarily expository. But what's going on with this paragraph? The scientist is telling us about what happened when she discovered the fossil. What do we call that?" Answer: Narrative.

In short:

1. Always be thinking about teaching writing.
2. Find or create teaching moments across the curriculum that address what students learned in explicit grammar and writing instruction. Show them that the lessons, models, and theories hold true in real writing.

Do You Want Better Results Faster? [Pattern Based Writing: Quick & Easy Essay](#)

TWAC Strategy #2: Hold Your Students Accountable for Using Proper Writing Skills in Daily Writing Across the Curriculum

In fifth grade, I arrived home with a paper with no capital letters on it. My mom reprimanded me with fury and disgust, “I don’t want to see a paper like this ever again.” And she meant it. That’s holding a student accountable.

Of course, a statement like that from a parent carries the weight of many years of communication and consequences. In other words, it’s not that difficult for a parent with writing knowledge to prevent careless gross negligence in writing.

In contrast, for a teacher, it takes a significant amount of time and many systems to achieve what my mother achieved with a single sentence. Still, teachers must hold their students accountable for using proper writing skills across the curriculum. If they don’t, much of their time teaching writing will go to waste. Here are two reasons why:

1. The skills don’t stick if students don’t use them. And if teachers don’t hold their students accountable, students don’t use the skills.
2. Furthermore, careless writing creates a careless writing habit. Practice makes perfect, and if students practice writing carelessly, they soon become experts at writing carelessly.

So, how do we hold our students accountable? Well, this falls into the category of classroom management. Running a writing classroom requires effective classroom management routines and systems. Teachers must hold students accountable but also inspire, encourage, and motivate them.

For this reason, teachers should consider their class composition, which undoubtedly contains students with varying levels of skill and knowledge. Let's ask ourselves four questions:

1. What can I do to make sure that *all* my students do their personal best to apply proper writing skills?
2. How can I encourage, support, and hold students of different skill levels accountable?
3. How can I be demanding but fair with struggling student writers?
4. How can I encourage students to reach for the stars by using new skills and knowledge and then deal with the less-than-perfect outcomes that accompany growth and risk-taking?

There is a science to teaching writing, but it is also an art. Ask yourself the four questions above, and then think about how you can use these five techniques to hold your students accountable:

- a. TWAC Strategy #9: Rubrics, Checklists, and Assessment Sheets (RCAs)
- b. Evaluation and Feedback by Grading Papers and Providing Written Feedback
- c. Evaluation and Feedback by Walking Around
- d. Probability and Possibility: Spot Checks, Exit Tickets, Popsicle Sticks, etc.
- e. Writing With-it-ness
- f. Illusion and Mystery

Let's take a quick look at each of these techniques:

- a. **TWAC Strategy #9: Rubrics, Checklists, and Assessment Sheets (RCAs):** Rubrics, Checklists, and Assessment Sheets (RCAs) are common techniques for holding students accountable. Of course, they are not without their own set of problems. Teachers must learn how to close the loopholes and eliminate ambiguities. Still, it's difficult to run a writing classroom without RCAs.
- b. **Evaluation and Feedback by Grading Papers and Providing Written Feedback:** Everyone needs concrete feedback. I once handed back a graded paper to a sixth-grade student, and the student replied, "This grade lets me know that I need to work harder." After spending many years in third and fourth grade, I was new to sixth grade, and that comment let me know that I needed to grade more papers with these students.

Also, I once took over a fifth-grade GATE classroom for the final two months of their school year, and I was shocked to discover that the students would not produce their best work (or even acceptable work) if the work wasn't graded. I had to start grading almost everything.

But remember: Our goal with TWAC is to hold students accountable and inspire, encourage, and motivate students. Point being: I've also been in classrooms where a constant focus on grades disheartens and demotivates a large percentage of the class. Many students (especially younger

students) will work harder for a tenacious and kind teacher who they want to please than for a cold, hard grade.

- c. **Evaluation and Feedback by Walking Around:** Walking around and keeping a close eye on students' work is vital in holding students accountable. I've found that the younger the students or the lower the skill level, the more impactful this practice is. Young and struggling students frequently respond better to knowing that the teacher will walk by than to receiving a grade. However, everything is a tradeoff in time, and in many classrooms (usually older), it's a better use of time to grade papers. Naturally, teachers must balance these two aspects effectively—they must find what works for them and their students.

Some teachers grade papers while students write; others walk around and require excellence. Depending on the teacher and the students, these two activities may produce the same outcome—or one may create a superior result. Teachers should certainly use both strategies, but they should also know which motivates students more.

Personally, I like to interact and keep an ever-watchful eye, but I have been in classrooms where this is a waste of time compared to grading papers and providing concrete feedback.

- d. **Probability and Possibility: Spot Checks, Exit Tickets, Popsicle Sticks, etc.:** Teachers frequently use an assorted bag of tricks to communicate to students that every piece of work has a chance of being extremely important. Example: If students know that the teacher will send home one paper each week to be signed by a parent, the students understand that every paper is important. Teachers must be fair with students and not take them by surprise. On the other hand, done properly, this is a game that students (and people in general) enjoy.

Teachers can also attach this strategy to ideals and standards of excellence:

- ➔ *Ex.* We never know which knowledge or which skills will turn out to be important in life. If we can't predict which paper will be spot-checked, how can we predict which knowledge and skills will be valuable ten years down the road? So, it's all important and valuable, and we should always do our best to learn everything we can.
- ➔ *Ex.* It is the small, daily habits that create a successful life. We should take pride in all of our daily work, even when it's not graded and even when no one is looking. We don't want careless gross negligence to become a part of our daily habits.
- ➔ *Ex.* We may not always achieve our best, but we always know when we have achieved an acceptable level of effort.

- e. **Writing With-it-ness:** With-it-ness is a classroom management term that means *knowing what's going on in every inch of the classroom*. It's related to the age-old concept that skilled teachers have eyes in the back of their heads.

We can apply this concept to writing across the curriculum and call it *Writing With-it-ness*. We want to know and keep track of what our students are doing in their writing, what they have done in the past, and what they want to do and will do if we let them. Equally important: We want our students to know that we know. We want our students to see that we care about their writing and are always looking at it and always thinking about it.

- f. **Illusion and Mystery:** I don't grade every piece of student work, but I try not to tell my students that the work they just finished was only a learning exercise and has no impact on their grades. I treat almost every piece of paper as an important assignment—I collect them, put a paper clip on the set of papers, and place them on my desk. Later, I may skim and scan through a few papers (for every student to see). In short, students have good reason to believe that I evaluate every piece of paper or place every piece of paper into a file to be discussed later—possibly at parent conference time.

Be sure to hold your students accountable in these two areas:

1. Hold them accountable for what you have specifically taught them.
2. Hold them accountable for the basics that every student their age should have learned multiple times over the years.

TWAC Strategy #3: Assess Writing Across the Curriculum: 1) Content/ Correct Answers, and 2) Writing

I briefly discussed “Evaluation and Feedback by Grading Papers and Providing Written Feedback” in TWAC Strategy #2. Clearly, when we grade papers, we are holding students accountable. But, assessment is more than simply holding students accountable.

Writing assessment is an enormous topic. Assessing writing across the curriculum is also a large topic. Here's the good news: I'll soon post a free [Assessing Writing Across the Curriculum](#) eBook! Be sure to check back and see if it's available!

But until I post that, I wish to address the most important concept relating to assessing writing across the curriculum. **IMPORTANT CONCEPT:** We must separate assessing writing from assessing correct answers (a.k.a. assessing learning, assessing content knowledge, etc.). Put simply: we must not penalize a science genius for an excellent answer in science just because their writing sucks. Doing so will make the science genius lose interest in both science and writing. And that's lose/lose!

Most teachers are familiar with the Six Traits of Writing. The Six Traits of Writing is not designed to grade writing across the curriculum. Reason being: The Six Traits of Writing is designed to evaluate *writing*. That's it! Of course, we can use the Six Traits of Writing as an essential foundation for assessing writing across the curriculum, but it's not a perfect or efficient fit right out of the box.

Writing is not our sole concern when grading student work across the curriculum. We can't neglect teaching the subject content just to teach writing. Truthfully, good writing and good answers often go hand in hand, but we must still clarify the division for our students. Students must understand what the teacher will grade them on and what their grades represent. Struggling writers need to know that they are not penalized in science for poor writing if their science answer is correct. Admittedly, there is an art to all this.

The original version that I became aware of decades ago was to assign a separate grade for each of these two traits:

1. Content	2. Mechanics
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As a writing teacher and content teacher, this model opened up the door for effective assessment of everything I taught my students across the curriculum. However, this model was just a beginning. Once teachers make that division, they need to figure out what exactly they want to grade in each of the two columns:

Column 1	Column 2
1. Correct Answers Content Knowledge Content Learned	2. Writing: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Assess a single writing or grammar skill.• Assess a collection or category of writing skills.• Assess using Six Traits.

In short, teachers can assess students on whatever they want to hold them accountable for. The critical point is that we must separate our writing and content assessments across the curriculum. It's only fair.

Academic Vocabulary for Critical Thinking, Logical Arguments, and Effective Communication

Improve the way you think and communicate forever!

TWAC Strategy #4: Teach New Writing Skills, Concepts, Strategies, and Techniques Across the Curriculum

The opportunities for teaching writing across the curriculum are nearly unlimited. It's easy to turn everything across the curriculum into a writing or language arts lesson. Since we shouldn't do that, we must be smart and use our time wisely. To maintain student interest and motivation, we must find the right balance and be clear on what we want to teach. We must never forget that we have two goals when teaching writing across the curriculum: 1) teach writing and 2) teach content.

Truthfully, I overdo it sometimes and place too much emphasis on writing and language arts across the curriculum. Students catch on. I don't want students to become aware that I angle so much towards writing and language arts. On the other hand, all roads in school really do lead to Rome.

The research strongly supports teaching writing across the curriculum. From a learning-content perspective, a learning-to-read perspective, and a learning-to-write perspective—it's win, win, win! That's a lot of winning! However, teachers must still analyze and reflect on their results.

It's one thing to hold students accountable for writing properly across the curriculum, and it's another to teach new writing skills across the curriculum. Before we look at how to teach new writing skills across the curriculum, we must ensure we have the time available. In a sense, we have to take time from somewhere else. How do we do this?

In reality, most teachers will need writing and grammar curriculums (often isolated skill drills or worksheets) to guide them in covering all the required grade-level skills. Instead of seeing these lessons as full-length lessons, see them as Writer's Workshop might see them—as mini-lessons. The research says that [these types of lessons don't improve student writing](#), so why not take the time from these types of lessons? When I finally grasped this and decided to take time from these types of lessons, I cut my time on them by 30-50%. Students learn the information just as well—and in reality, it's holding them accountable for using the skills in real writing that makes it stick.

Just as with TWAC Strategy #1, we have two ways to apply this strategy:

1. Create Assignments Across the Curriculum
2. Use the Reading/Writing Connection and Literary Analysis Across the Curriculum

Once again, think mini-lesson! It's probably more effective to teach writing consistently across the curriculum than it is to teach the occasional big lesson.

Remember: When we teach writing across the curriculum, we want to teach two things simultaneously: 1) subject content and 2) writing.

Here is one example of how this works: When we teach students about the Roman Empire, we teach them various thought patterns that help them understand the Roman Empire: e.g., definition, cause-effect, pro-con, problem-solution, sequence—and more. These thought patterns are also patterns that writers use in writing. Because I've trained myself to see the writing potential across the curriculum, I can create any number of writing assignments based on what I stated above about the Roman Empire. With practice, you'll be able to do it too!

Note: Always Be Teaching Writing—and Always Keep Moving Forward

With this philosophy, teachers can create two Roman Empire writing assignments in the moment, teach two writing concepts, and have students write two times—all in the same amount of time that many teachers teach one assignment. Get in the habit of trusting your students to produce things of quality using what you taught them. You don't need to control their every word, and your assignments don't need to be long and complicated. Students learn to write by writing. Are you stopping your students from writing by trying to control everything?

Off the top of my head, at any time of the day, in any subject, I can create five writing assignments that teach five different writing skills. I created this [Definitive List of Writing and Grammar Skills](#) to make the process even easier.

The short version is this: Teach a concept or a technique and have your students write. Now, choose a few best examples and compare and contrast them. This process teaches everyone (including the teacher) the truth about writing—and motivates everyone.

I'm not saying that all of your writing instruction needs to be this way, but if you bring some of this thinking into your writing instruction, you will find that you are teaching more writing concepts and your students are writing more—and soon, you and your students will like what you see. And remember: You are teaching subject content at the same time.

Now, let's look at a few more examples of TWAC Strategy #4 in action. Remember: We have two ways to apply this strategy: 1) Create Assignments, and 2) Use the Reading/Writing Connection and Literary Analysis.

Example 1: Create an Assignment: The class comes across a powerful descriptive passage in a biographical narrative they are reading. The class analyzes it and discovers it uses a metaphor, personification, and sensory details. The class then writes their own descriptive passage using the same literary techniques and a similar structure. In short, the text serves as a model or exemplar, and students learn to write by using the ancient writing-instruction technique of imitation.

Example 2: Use the Reading/Writing Connection and Literary Analysis: The class has just finished reading a famous Civil War letter from a soldier on the battlefield to his wife back home. The teacher leads a discussion examining the three traditional sections of a letter:

- 1) beginning / introduction / greeting
- 2) middle / body
- 3) ending / conclusion / closing

Does the structure of the Civil War letter match what the students have learned about writing a personal or friendly letter? Most likely, in some ways it will, and in some ways it won't. Since it's a *famous letter* that is worth reading, it must contain some kind of significant truth about writing—but real truth, not formulaic or oversimplified truth.

Example 3: Create an Assignment: Many of our TWAC opportunities connect to our time spent reading across the curriculum. But in truth, we can connect them to almost any activity across the curriculum. For example, we can use a science experiment as an opportunity to teach various writing concepts: cause-effect, compare-contrast, process, description, simile, etc. We can even transform a science experiment into an opportunity to create an exciting (somewhat experimental) narrative story.

TWAC Strategy #5: Use the Reading/Writing Connection and Literary Analysis to Teach Writing

Most teachers grasp the importance of the Reading/Writing Connection the first time they hear the term. The fact that we should “Use the Reading/Writing Connection and Literary Analysis to Teach Writing” is a no-brainer. After all, everything we want to teach our students about writing is in front of us in the books we read across the curriculum. Of course, I'm not saying this is *easy*, with the worst-case scenario being that the teacher causes students to lose interest in reading, writing, *and* the content.

Let's think about TWAC Strategy #5 in four ways:

1. Theory: Cognitive Theory and Pedagogy
2. Practical Application
3. Use Writing to Teach Reading
4. Use Reading to Teach Writing

1. Theory: Cognitive Theory and Pedagogy: Teachers can benefit from understanding the theory behind the Reading/Writing Connection. There is much more to the Reading/Writing Connection than the fact that, on the surface, reading and writing appear to be two sides of the same coin. For one thing, reading and writing use many of the same ways of thinking or cognitive strategies, and we can use that fact to teach both reading and writing.

I link to a couple of research-based reports below, and you can indeed find more on the internet. I'm happy to say that the research always seems to support what I have learned over the years, and what I have discovered works.

2. Practical Application: Teachers can follow the research and have great success, or they can follow the research and fail. The research doesn't contain the secret or solve the problem. If it did, every student and every school would be highly successful. We do not lack in research.

The secret that solves the problem is this: Teachers must create effective classroom systems and routines that align with the research and that get results. When you effectively teach writing across the curriculum, you are probably in the top percentile of all those who effectively use the Reading/Writing Connection. By the time you finish reading this eBook, you will have a more practical understanding of how to use the Reading/Writing Connection to teach writing across the curriculum.

3. Use Writing to Teach Reading: The research makes clear that writing and teaching writing improves students' reading. Be sure to download these two reports:

1. [Writing to Read: Evidence for How Writing Can Improve Reading](#)
2. [Writing to Read: A Meta-Analysis of the Impact of Writing and Writing Instruction on Reading](#)

Much of what they put forth in those reports is WAC—writing across the curriculum. If WAC improves reading, TWAC certainly does. When you examine the ideas presented in those reports, you will see that improved reading is a byproduct of TWAC. I wouldn't have delved so deeply into writing and teaching writing if I didn't find that it improved every aspect of my students' learning—including reading. Using writing to help students learn the content in our textbooks always seemed like an efficient, common-sense activity to me.

Here is the problem: The research does not match the curriculums that teachers are required to teach. The research says to teach one way, but the curriculums are fill-in-the-blank and scripted.

Here is the solution: If you genuinely want to use writing to teach reading, you must break from your curriculums—but in a good way. Parkinson's Law states, "Work expands so as to fill the time available

for its completion.” I’ve stated this elsewhere, but I found that Parkinson’s Law applies to the curriculums and the worksheets I am required to use. There came the point in my teaching career where I had to make time for what I believed was right—i.e., writing across the curriculum. And I found that I could make time by teaching my (fill-in-the-blank type) curriculums faster than I had been. I had treated these curriculums as if they were the solution—but according to the research, I am the solution—and you are, too.

Please Note: I am not suggesting that teachers dismiss their curriculum’s value. In fact, I find that most teachers head out on way too many unwise tangents when they stray too far from their curriculums. However, using writing to teach content and reading is not straying. The research says it’s an effective use of time. But, of course, the time must come from somewhere.

4. Use Reading to Teach Writing: I always say the goal of TWAC is two-fold: 1) Teach Writing, and 2) Teach Content. But the research says it’s three-fold: 3) Teach Reading. I see improved reading as an expected and happy byproduct of TWAC. If WAC improves reading, TWAC certainly does.

We have already discussed one way to “Use Reading to Teach Writing.”

- ➔ **TWAC Strategy #1:** Connect the Writing Skills That You Teach Your Students in Explicit Grammar and Writing Instruction to Current Learning Across the Curriculum

With a bit of practice, all teachers are capable of using TWAC Strategy #1. Additionally, teachers can train students to lead the way with TWAC Strategy #1.

Teachers Have Four More Ways to “Use Reading to Teach Writing.”

- a) Teachers can create writing assignments that check reading comprehension or improve reading comprehension.
- b) Teachers can create writing assignments that use the content texts as source materials to write about.
- c) Teachers can create writing assignments that use concepts, strategies, or techniques found in the text to serve as models and teach students to use those concepts, strategies, or techniques.
- d) Teachers can use literary analysis to teach writing.

Teachers learn to teach writing across the curriculum one lesson and one teachable moment at a time. Over time, teachers find what works for them and their students. They develop sets of routines and systems, and they find tools and techniques that keep things simple but also get results.

A Teacher Prepares: Helpful Skills and Materials for Using Reading to Teach Writing

Teachers must prepare themselves for using TWAC Strategy #5. The more teachers know about writing and grammar, the easier it is to use TWAC Strategy #5. Of course, many teachers teach the same grade year after year, so to improve their students' writing, they only need to master one year's worth of grade-level skills and knowledge. That's the bare minimum and an excellent place to begin. In short:

1. Know what you want to teach your students.
2. Know your grade-level state and district requirements and standards.
3. Know what you want your students' independent writing to look like. Start with the end in mind.
4. Know what confuses your students.
5. Know what your students find interesting. Know what you find interesting.
6. Know what you don't know.

Here is a helpful resource for the above and for what follows:

➔ [The Definitive List of Writing and Grammar Skills, Strategies, Concepts, Categories, and Models](#)

This 38-page list is a complete model of the entire world of writing and grammar. It is helpful to see the world of writing and grammar as a whole before mapping out instruction. This prevents one from getting stuck in certain areas or spending too much time in areas that don't improve student writing.

Now that you see *the whole*, here are seven categories that teachers may want to become familiar with and consider. Teachers may wish to develop knowledge and collect various resources that can help them in each of these seven categories:

- a) **Genre:** Teachers may want to develop a solid understanding (and create a list) of the characteristics of various genres.
- b) **Literary Techniques:** Teachers may want to develop a solid understanding (and create a list) of writing skills, concepts, strategies, and techniques they want to teach.
- c) **Organization:** Teachers may want to acquire a collection of graphic organizers and patterns of organization.
- d) **Outlining:** Teachers may want to understand several different ways of creating outlines and outlining texts.
- e) **Review, Summarize, and Check for Understanding:** Teachers may want to amass a collection of common and creative ways to review, summarize, and check for understanding. This is a significant topic that is worthy of an eBook. These activities often fall into the category of

prewriting more than writing. In other words, when we finish an in-depth check for understanding, our students will be ready to write—and they will have learned much subject content in the process.

- f) **Comprehension Questions:** Teachers may want to develop an ability to analyze the comprehension questions found at the end of a chapter and determine the types of writing and the writing skills that they elicit.
- g) **Grammar and Sentence Structure:** I'll be honest—teaching grammar and sentence structure across the curriculum can require too much teacher talk. Many teachers are better off using “TWAC Strategy #1: Connect the Writing Skills That You Teach Your Students in Explicit Grammar and Writing Instruction to Current Learning Across the Curriculum” instead of teaching *new* grammar and sentence structure concepts *in the moment*.

On the other hand, teaching moments often present themselves, and teachers want to take advantage of them. For this reason, teachers may wish to develop a deeper and more thorough understanding of grammar and sentence structure. Teachers want to become clear about their grammar and sentence structure goals:

1. Do you want to improve students' knowledge and understanding of grammar? VS.
2. Do you want to improve how students write sentences in their independent writing?

Even simple sentences may use concepts many students and teachers will never learn or understand. Read the following two sentences. Grammatically speaking, they have little in common.

1. *Furthermore, the tired boy reading the book fell asleep.*
2. *Indeed, the boy who is reading the book is tired.*

Let's examine those two sentences:

1. What is the grammatical difference between “furthermore” and “indeed”? Answer: “Furthermore” is a conjunctive adverb or conjunct. “Indeed” is a sentence adverb or disjunct.
2. What type of word is “fell” and “asleep”? Would our answers differ if we used the words “passed out” or “dozed off”? Answer: “fell” and “asleep” = verb + adverb, but both “passed out” and “dozed off” are phrasal verbs.
3. What is the difference between “reading the book” in the first sentence and “reading the book” in the second sentence?

- a. Answer Sentence #1: “reading the book” = verbal phrase—i.e., adjectival present-participle phrase that modifies “boy.”
 - b. Answer Sentence #2: “is reading” = main verb in a WHO adjective clause that modifies “boy” and “the book” = determiner + direct object.
4. How is the first “tired” the same and different from the second “tired”?
- a. Answer Sentence #1: attributive adjective.
 - b. Answer Sentence #2: predicate adjective and subject complement.
5. Can you identify everything that is an adjective or functions as an adjective?
- a. Answer Sentence #1: “tired” = attributive adjective and “reading the book” = verbal phrase—i.e., adjectival present-participle phrase.
 - b. Answer Sentence #2: “who is reading the book” = adjective clause and “tired” = predicate adjective and subject complement.

How did you do? For much of my career, I didn’t know much about grammar beyond what the grammar books I was using in the classroom told me. Later in the day, my students would point out examples that didn’t match what we had learned, and I didn’t know what to say.

Your students will say, “I get it! I can’t even read what I was writing before!”

[Pattern Based Writing: Quick & Easy Essay](#)

Lucky for me, how you teach writing is more important than what you teach about writing. In contrast to so many teachers, I had learned how to run a writing classroom and create a Classroom Full of Writers, and I got *excellent results*. In short, I needed to use TWAC #1 more than TWAC #6. I tried not to get bogged down addressing things that I didn’t understand and that students didn’t need to know. I focused on age-appropriate, academic, standards-based skills and knowledge.

Here is a running theme on the *English Language & Usage Stack Exchange*: ***Everything your elementary and middle school teacher told you about grammar is wrong***. But these people don’t understand that elementary and middle school teachers need to keep things simple and concrete. We often need to instill rules that are not true for all types of writing. If we didn’t, it would be

mayhem and mass confusion. However, teachers should get in the habit of saying, “This is what I require,” instead of teaching false rules.

When you are planning how to teach grammar and sentence structure across the curriculum, here are a few questions you may wish to consider:

1. Can you identify every single word in a text as a specific part of speech?
2. Can you identify and name every single phrase in a text?
3. Can you identify and name every single clause in a text?
4. Can you identify and explain what modifies what in a sentence and how?
5. Can you correctly identify and name all of those strange little things in sentences? (e.g., omitted words, sentence adverbs, all types of complements, direct address, parentheticals, discourse markers, polysyndeton, asyndeton, etc.)
6. Can you appropriately answer students’ grammar questions about sentences that confuse them in the books that they read? Even the sentences that don’t follow the same rules of grammar (possibly oversimplified or incorrect rules) that you have taught your students?
7. Do you understand [what the research says about grammar and improving student writing](#)? Do you know how to overcome the flaws of traditional grammar and traditional grammar instruction? In short, can you improve your students’ writing (in the time you have) by teaching grammar and sentence structure?

Note: One day, I hope to offer a grammar and sentence structure solution.

That’s a nice list of things to do! Truthfully, teachers only need a handful of goals and techniques to begin teaching writing across the curriculum. And with four handfuls of goals and techniques, teachers can be immensely productive and successful in teaching writing across the curriculum. Of course, it always behooves teachers to have more knowledge about a subject and a deeper understanding of the material than what we are teaching.

Start small—and keep at it. Soon, you will be the best writing teacher (and reading teacher) at your school, and in the process, you will become a better writer (and reader). To a large degree, teaching reading *is* teaching writing. However, teachers must make the connections between reading and writing clear and explicit. They also need to be able to turn those connections into “HOW TO” writing instruction. Simply reading or analyzing a text does not bring about substantial writing growth. Students must apply new knowledge in practice, and teachers must hold students accountable across the curriculum.

Always remember this: All of the writing strategies and techniques we want to teach our students are right in front of us in the books we read. Naturally, the more we know about writing, the easier it is for us to make use of all of this text.

Final Note: Teachers tend to appreciate and make use of the belletristic literary aspects of a text (simile, metaphor, analogy, parallel structure, repetition, word choice, etc.), but we shouldn't forget the practical stuff (sentence structure, sentence variety, transitions, organizational structure, conjunctions, punctuation, semicolons, hyphens, bullet points, etc.). In short, texts don't need to be belletristic ceremonial discourse or purple prose to teach students essential writing skills. Students can learn more about excellent academic writing from a well-written textbook than from most great works of literature.

TWAC Strategy #6: Use the Subject Content / Writing Connection to Teach Writing

The famous Renaissance sculptor Michelangelo (1475-1564) observed, "Every block of stone has a statue inside it, and it is the task of the sculptor to discover it." Well, a school subject is like that, too. Each subject contains logical patterns of thought that the content-learner and the writer only need to discover. As we discover the logical patterns of thought that exist within our school subjects, we also learn the content.

Ancient humans who knew nothing of rhetoric or grammar still communicated using much of what we teach today. They discussed problems and solutions, causes and effects, persuaded others, put forth reasons, etc. They could do this without knowledge of rhetoric because these thought patterns and concepts already existed in the topics and subjects they discussed.

The point is that teachers should be able to look at a subject or topic and see what already exists inside it. Take a look at the three school subjects listed below. You'll notice that I've listed a few (of the many possible) writing words that are inherently a part of the subject:

- ➔ Science = Cause. Effect. Process. Sequence.
- ➔ History = Narrative. Sequence. Time.
- ➔ Physical Education = How-To. Process. Sequence.

Every school subject and topic already contain many or most existing writing (not grammar) concepts. To teach writing across the curriculum, teachers must bring all of this to the surface for students to see. But this is not just about teaching writing—it is also about teaching the content. When students truly understand a subject or topic, it is never just a collection of facts.

We tend to think of writing as a one-step process:

Step 1: Person 1 → Communicates Content Knowledge To → Person 2

The reality is that writing is a two-step process:

Step 1: Content Knowledge Enters → Person 1 (i.e., students learn)

Step 2: Person 1 → Communicates That Content Knowledge To → Person 2

Writing is a process of *knowledge in* and *knowledge out*. So, when teachers teach a subject, they should look at it from a writing perspective and see what already exists inside of the subject. Did you know that almost every comprehension question in almost every textbook elicits a specific type of writing, writing skill, or writing concept? Of course they do! Why is it so? Because that's what's inside the subject! It's like how when you squeeze an orange—orange juice comes out. Why? Because that's what's inside.

It's easy to see the big writing concepts (pro-con, reasons, claims and proof, compare-contrast, etc.) on the surface of most topics. However, all or most of the LFR™ (Literary Techniques, Figurative Language, and Rhetorical Devices) also exist in the subject matter we teach students.

To illustrate this point, I challenged myself to come up with a metaphor related to a randomly selected topic—"The Ocean." Without any effort at all, I came up with this:

- ➔ **The Ocean:** The ocean is the heartbeat of planet Earth. Evaporation, tides, and currents all contribute to pumping warm and cold energy all over the globe.

Instead of doing an ineffective fill-in-the-blanks isolated skill drill on metaphors, why not explain what a metaphor is and have everyone in the class write one using the topic they have just studied—and then share a few of them? When teachers develop the habit of including this kind of instruction, it's an effective use of time and a win/win exercise for teaching both content and writing.

Can you see that we can teach writing in a way that also helps students understand the subject content? Likewise, we can teach the subject content in a way that helps students realize that writing is simply a way to tell others about what already exists in the subject content.

A Change of Mindset and Approach: The Subject Content / Writing Connection

Once again, I direct you to this valuable teaching-writing resource. It's an excellent beginning in mapping out what you want to teach your students about writing and grammar.

- ➔ [The Definitive List of Writing and Grammar Skills, Strategies, Concepts, Categories, and Models](#)

How do we teach writing across the curriculum? Most teachers jump straight to the reading/writing connection (TWAC Strategy #5). We can also cut out the middleman and consider the subject content first (TWAC Strategy #6). This is how Michelangelo would have done it! Let's look at our subject content the way Michelangelo looked at a block of stone and then ask a few questions:

1. **Subject Content:** What do I want to teach my students about the subject? What do I want my students to understand about the subject? *Note:* Don't approach the subject as a list of facts. Think about the concepts and the relationships between the facts: e.g., What facts relate to cause-and-effect in the Revolutionary War?
2. **Writing:** What do I want to teach my students about writing?

The answers to these questions should have plenty of words that overlap, and you use that overlap to teach writing across the curriculum. *Ex.* I want to teach cause-and-effect in the Revolutionary War, and I want to teach cause-and-effect in writing.

Here is another simple technique that will help you get started. It's an easy first step. Examine the comprehension questions at the end of the chapters in your textbooks. What types of writing and writing skills do they elicit? Most of the questions will elicit specific types of writing that use specific writing skills. If you can't easily see them, you should spend some time with [The Definitive List of Writing and Grammar Skills, Strategies, Concepts, Categories, and Models](#).

TWAC Strategy #7: Foster Student Ownership of Writing: Rethink the Red Pen

Writer's Workshop, the Writing Process, and the Six Traits of Writing all help teachers foster student ownership of writing. Fostering student ownership of writing is extremely important to understand when using this TWAC strategy:

- ➔ TWAC Strategy #9: Use Rubrics, Checklists, and Assessment Sheets (RCAs) to Teach Writing Across the Curriculum

Let me ask you a question: Who takes most of the responsibility in your classroom for creating writing success? We have three possible answers to that question: 1) the teacher, 2) the students, or 3) no one.

Even if teachers use a writing curriculum—often, especially if they use a writing curriculum—someone takes great responsibility for creating writing success. Once again, I do not mean success on

a single writing assignment or lesson. I mean independent writing success—the kind of writing that students do on state writing assessments and in daily writing across the curriculum.

Modern research on teaching writing says teachers should transfer responsibility to the students over time. Put simply, students must own their writing, and teachers must foster that student ownership of writing. Personally, I don't want to be the owner or editor of my students' writing. I don't want to be the teacher in this kind of writing classroom:

Teacher: I just checked your paper and found seven errors. I marked them so that you can fix them. What do you have to say about that?

Student: Thanks!

Teacher: Umm... You're... welcome.

Who wouldn't like to have a personal editor? I'll admit—I respect the Red Pen teachers who get results. However, I can think of at least a couple of Red Pen teachers who teach to the top of the class and all but ignore the poorest writers. I know this because when I ask about the examples of poor writing in the class, these teachers throw up their hands with an exasperated look. I get the picture. They don't know what to do or say with these poor writers that will make them write better. Their bag of Red-Pen tricks just annoys or offends these poor-writing rebels, and it becomes a battle of wills for which there is no winner.

Modern research doesn't encourage this kind of Red-Pen writing instruction, but certain teachers have the knowledge and the experience to make it work, and they put in the time—lots of time—to make it work. Truthfully, when I began teaching writing, I didn't have the writing knowledge to make it work. I could fix glaring errors in the concrete concepts I had already taught my students, but I didn't have the writing knowledge required to do much more.

Teachers who choose the RED PEN and GRADES as their two most powerful tools in teaching writing face several problems:

1. Some stubborn students become resistant and defensive. They think their writing is just fine or even excellent. To paraphrase Dale Carnegie: Students convinced against their will are of the same opinion still.
2. It creates excessive work for the teacher. The teacher “owns” the writing *and* the writing process. The teacher is the teacher, the evaluator, the overseer, the editor, the compliance officer, and the determiner of all things good and bad.
3. Teachers may reach a point where they don't know what is wrong with the writing or what could make the piece of writing better. They sense that it could be better or that it should be

better, but they don't know how or why. Unfortunately, many teachers end up providing feedback that is not helpful and sometimes not even true.

4. It slows the writing classroom down to a crawl. Writing becomes a rigid, dogmatic activity, and since the teacher needs to be in control, students don't write enough. When students write, they cautiously try to write the way the teacher wants them to—second-guessing each word and sentence. No wonder students hate to write! And those who can't please the teacher give up in mind and spirit.

TWAC Strategy #8: Work to Create a Classroom Full of Writers

Creating a Classroom Full of Writers is more of a goal than a strategy. But in a sense, creating a goal that creates a mindset that creates success is a strategy. While the RED PEN and GRADES have their place in teaching writing, they also have their drawbacks as teaching-writing tools. The national teaching-writing problem will be solved if every teacher becomes skilled at creating a classroom full of writers. It will not be solved if teachers believe that the RED PEN and GRADES are how we teach writing.

My three main tools for creating a Classroom Full of Writers are listed below. To be clear, there is more to running a writing classroom than this. It takes many routines and systems. But these three systems take the responsibility off me and place it where it belongs—on my students.

1. **The Timed Writing System: An Apples-to-Apples Monitoring and Evaluation System**
2. **TWAC Strategy #9:** Use Rubrics, Checklists, and Assessment Sheets (RCAs) to Teach Writing Across the Curriculum [Read the free eBook on this critical strategy!](#)
3. **At Least One Other Person:** This will not sound like rocket science, but it works. In fact, I don't know what I would do without it. Put simply, I consistently have students read pieces of writing and daily schoolwork to at least one other person. It's fast and effective, and it breaks up the day.

I teach concrete concepts, but I don't expect students to apply the techniques and strategies rigidly or dogmatically. We are too busy writing and analyzing our writing to think this way.

When students read their writing to one other person, they constantly decide for themselves, "Is this writing good or bad? Is it effective or not effective? Does it work or not work? Do I like it or not? Do I understand what I said or what this other student said?"

I'm happy to say that the truth is always revealed: Students find that the concrete concepts I teach them about writing make their writing better. Students see that the best writers use concrete strategies and techniques, so they all pay attention to the next writing lesson.

I could theorize about this more, but I will only say this: Reading one's writing to at least one other person is the epitome of [Maximum Writing Activity for Maximum Students](#), and it is constant publishing, both of which help create a Classroom Full of Writers.

What would replace these three systems if I were to remove them from teaching writing? Answer: A bunch of teacher talk and the Red Pen.

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Creating a Classroom Full of Writers: The Tipping Point

In teaching writing, it pays to be tenacious. But I believe in a different kind of *tenaciousness* than that of the Red-Pen writing teacher. Ultimately, I hope my tenaciousness creates students who take genuine pride of ownership in their writing. Furthermore, I want my students to be highly focused on and self-aware of their writing. I want my students to know that their writing is not perfect (as if there is such a thing) and that it can always be better or just plain different. Therefore, we must examine our writing with both a critical and open mind.

Naturally, not all of this happens overnight. I find that teaching writing is a bit of a battle early in the school year. A great deal of weight and responsibility falls on me. Students are resistant because they don't know how to look at and analyze their writing as I want them to. But then the point comes where everything changes. The class becomes a classroom full of writers.

All nine of these TWAC Strategies aim to help teachers create a classroom full of writers. But it takes more than nine strategies. Here are a few more things teachers need to do or need to acquire to create a classroom full of writers:

1. **A Collection of Systems and Routines:** Teachers must develop effective systems and routines. Of course, this takes time and effort, but every journey begins with a single step

forward. Unfortunately, many effective systems and routines don't work at first, but with time and practice, they become effective tools. What's your plan for each time your students pick up a pencil? When it comes to teaching writing, more than any other subject, developing systems and routines is a wise investment of time and energy. The alternative is for the teacher to review every piece of paper with a red pen.

2. **A Strong, Sound, and Specific Belief Structure about Writing and Teaching Writing:** I'm not a fan of Writer's Workshop rhetoric, but I must admit that I use a goal-oriented version of a Writer's Workshop mindset. I certainly have a TWAC mindset, and I believe in and want to see objective results. Ultimately, this belief structure forces students to examine, understand, and improve their writing and writing process. I don't want to own their writing, and I don't want to be their editor. If a teacher wants to stay in control with a red pen and grades, it's unlikely that they will create a classroom full of writers. That's not to say that they can't get excellent results. Check out [My Nine-Sentence Blueprint for Teaching Writing](#).
3. **A Persistent Tenacity:** Winston Churchill was right: "Never, ever give up." To break through to writing success and create a classroom full of writers, we must not give up.

A Classroom Full of Writers: Signs and Goals

On the first day of school, teachers begin training students on their classroom systems, routines, and expectations. Training students on the physical routines and systems of writing is relatively easy. In other words, it is relatively easy to train students to go through the motions. However, it's a little more challenging to get students to buy into and fully grasp the mental rigor that a true application of the writing process requires.

However, students develop this interest, desire, and mental rigor one by one. It's a change that I can see with my eyes. Eventually, the class reaches a tipping point where teaching writing becomes a process of teaching interested writers, which is much easier and more fun. Here are some of the signs that things have changed:

1. Students care about their writing as much as the teacher does. Students understand that improvement is a process of persistent, consistent, and determined effort.
2. Students understand that writing is a collection of concrete skills and strategies, but applying those skills and strategies requires judgment. Students think about and consider their writing choices, and they think about and consider what works and what doesn't work.

3. Students admire other students' successful writing attempts, and those successes inspire and motivate them to improve their writing. Students wonder what makes another student's writing so effective and try to match or top that quality.
4. The teacher is serious about creating writing success, and the students know it. Students see that it feels good to write well, as it is a true and tangible personal achievement. Even the most stubborn, reluctant, and resistant student writers see that it's not worth going against the grain of the entire class. They, too, begin to display interest and put forth the effort.
5. Students view every piece of daily writing across the curriculum (short answers, whole compositions, book reports, science experiment forms, etc.) as real writing. Students know that their writing on every single piece of paper matters, and they don't practice careless writing.
6. Teachers use systems that create "Maximum Activity for Maximum Students." Example: Instead of one student reading a long essay in front of the class, each student may read a short answer to another student—and then to another. Instead of constant teacher talk and explanation, the class consists of constant comparison and analysis. Students routinely read aloud or examine pieces of their own daily writing across the curriculum.
7. The goal of the class is not to create a single piece of effective writing. Instead, the goal is to write well consistently across the curriculum. Furthermore, students are encouraged to experiment with writing by using their newly learned writing techniques and strategies. Sometimes, these new skills create success, and sometimes, they cause new problems. That's part of learning to write.
8. Students read like writers. When students read, they understand that they have a collection of writing skills and techniques in front of them from which they can learn.

TWAC Strategy #9: Use Rubrics, Checklists, and Assessment Sheets (RCAs) to Teach Writing Across the Curriculum

[Read the free eBook on this critical strategy!](#)

[Pattern Based Writing: Quick & Easy Essay](#)
Put simply, it works.