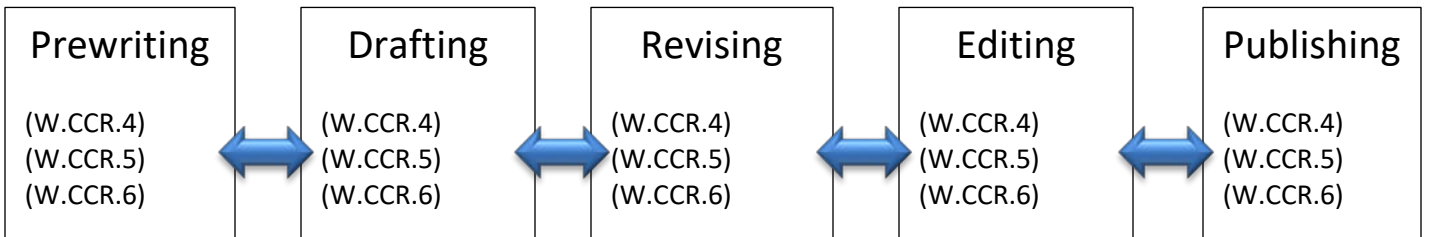# The Writing Process

Teaching students the steps of the writing process was one of the eleven recommendations of the Writing Next report (Graham & Perin, 2007). It is also one of the New Illinois Learning anchor standards (Standard # 5) that specifically mentions phases of the writing process. "Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach" (CCSS, p. 54). Although specific phases or steps to the process are mentioned, the standards do not suggest that the process is cyclical. There are multiple ways that writers can approach a similar task; writers' approaches may also vary from task to task. The primary role of teachers is not to teach *a* writing process lockstep, but to expose students to a variety of techniques for planning, drafting, editing, revising, and completing their work.

> "To say that writing is a process is decidedly not to say that it should -- or can -- be turned into a formulaic set of steps. Experienced writers shift between different operations according to tasks and circumstances."
> (NCTE Beliefs About Teaching Writing)

Phases of the Writing Process

Prewriting	Drafting	Revising	Editing	Publishing
(W.CCR.4)	(W.CCR.4)	(W.CCR.4)	(W.CCR.4)	(W.CCR.4)
(W.CCR.5)	(W.CCR.5)	(W.CCR.5)	(W.CCR.5)	(W.CCR.5)
(W.CCR.6)	(W.CCR.6)	(W.CCR.6)	(W.CCR.6)	(W.CCR.6)

During the writing process, the writer moves fluidly back and forth between the tasks and phases that contribute to creating the final written product.

Teachers should consider the following steps in guiding students through process writing.
1. Teach the students that there are different phases that writers go through and revisit in the writing process.
2. Explicitly teach writing strategies that are used at each phase of the writing process.
3. Increase how much students write – the more they write the better they get at writing. (Sedita, 2012)

Writing anchor standard #10 is directly aligned with the third finding: "Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.

Collaborative Conversations throughout the Writing Process

Collaborative writing requires metacognitive conversations about writing by asking students to give their own voice to and to listen to others' ways of approaching the writing process.
Incorporating collaborative writing in the classroom teaches students the process, the activity, the skills, of writing. Collaborative writing teaches students invaluable social skills such as productive conflict resolution, problem solving, and the confidence to argue for their ideas.
"One argument for the use of collaborative writing in our classroom is that 'collaboration is an important skill to learn in preparation for working with others in schools and in the workplace" (Beach, 2009).

Phase 1: Pre-writing

The key to a great paper is the planning. Pre-writing is the "getting ready to write" stage in the writing process.

- Pre-writing, or planning out what is going to be written, is an essential step in the writing process and should account for 70 percent of the writing time (Murray, 1982).
- Research indicates that skilled writers spend significantly more time organizing and planning what they are going to write (Hillocks, 1986).
- Most students, however, spend on average only about 3 minutes to prepare for their writing (National Center for Educational Statistics, 1996). Students spend little time thinking and planning how to express their thoughts before writing them down and therefore are not accessing information and ideas that could possibly enhance their writing.
- Planning activities, sometimes also called prewriting, undertaken in the process-oriented classroom are used to help students generate ideas for writing. These can include paper activities (e.g., making lists, creating graphic organizers, and jotting down notes) and cognitive abilities (e.g., deciding who the audience is and the purpose for writing).

The planning phase of the writing process is when students brainstorm, research, gather and outline ideas, often using diagrams or graphic organizers for mapping out their thoughts, plans and a structure. This step also involves considering audience and purpose for writing. The following are some prewriting instructional tools and ideas:

1. **Free Write**
   Student should write non-stop, for 5-10 minutes, to discover possible writing ideas. They can begin with a particular idea in mind or not, writing freely and rapidly. They might free write in response to music, ideas, experiences, photographs, advertisements, or art work. Afterwards, they should underline ideas that might serve as starting points for an assignment.

2. **Graphic Organizers**
   Students may use organizers for different types of writing. It is important to emphasize that students only write a minimal number of words to create a graphic organizer. Organizers are not drafts.

3. **Read**
   Students read to gain ideas, inspiration, and experiences for writing. They should keep a Writer's Notebook to record ideas from favorite pieces of literature as an effective springboard for writing. Good writers are good readers.

4. **Storyboards**
   Sometimes students do well to draw a sequential outline of their story or essay. They should be reminded to attend to illustrated details that can elicit elaboration for the written story. Drawing can be a great catalyst for a reluctant writer.

5. **Brainstorm**
   Students can develop lists of potential topics and ideas for supporting topics through brainstorming.

6. **Talking**

   Talking is the most important prewriting activity for all writers. Have students turn and talk to a partner, conference with a peer, or conduct an interview. Talking with other classmates and adults helps students gather additional views about a topic.

7. **Drawing**

   Drawing is a way some students may need to use to develop ideas for their writing. Having students draw first will give them many ideas and enrich the details.

8. **Quick Writes**

   A quick write allows students to write whatever they want very quickly for 5 -10 minutes. Quick writes do not need to be well organized or elaborate. All ideas can be written down and after students can decide which ideas can be expanded upon in their writing.

9. **Conducting Research**

   Finding out as much as possible about a topic is important for producing a fully elaborated, polished piece of writing.

10. **Outlining**

    Outlining is a type of graphic organizer that gives students a visual aid for organization.

11. **Asking Rhetorical Questions**

    Asking rhetorical questions such as the following to help guide and refine the topic may assist students when planning.
    - Who is the audience for your writing?
    - Do you think your audience is interested in the topic? Why or why not?
    - Why should your audience be interested in this topic?
    - What does your audience already know about this topic?
    - What does your audience need to know about this topic?
    - What experiences has your audience had that would influence them on this topic?
    - What do you hope the audience will gain from your text?
      (Retrieved from https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/587/01/)

Phase 2: Drafting

The emphasis for this phase is content, not mechanics. Drafts are "rehearsals" for the final piece and not all portions of a draft will be published. This phase allows students to revisit their goals and plans for writing as well as to take into account new ideas and thoughts and incorporate them into their writing.

- Some students may need a structure to follow to support their writing. Students who can successfully write without using structures (such as a graphic organizer, "hamburger" strategy, etc.) should never be required to conform to a standardized structure. Forcing a student to use a strict format *could* stifle voice and creativity.
- **All** students benefit from teaches modeling phases of the writing process as well as components of a paper such as an introduction and conclusion. When modeling, the teacher should think aloud as a piece of writing is composed. Showing different ways of drafting a paper would be beneficial so students know that multiple ways a paper can be developed.
- During this phase, it is imperative that teachers find opportunities to confer with students individually as they write.

The process of drafting a piece of writing begins with an analysis of the prewriting. Drafting involves narrowing the focus of the topic and perhaps identifying a purpose for the piece. Once the specific topic has been chosen, a purpose for writing should be identified. Any information that is unrelated to the topic and its purpose should be eliminated.

In the drafting phase a student should

- construct an introduction. The purpose of the introduction is not only to state the topic of the piece, but it should also draw the reader in to the piece of writing. For young children, the introduction may be one sentence stating the topic.   Advanced writers will create an introductory paragraph that identifies the topic, sets the purpose for the writing, and suggests how the topic will be developed throughout the piece.
- focus should be on logical connections between topics. Younger students compose the body of a piece of writing by including detail sentences related to the topic sentence. Advanced writers can organize writing into paragraphs.
- refer back to the prewriting to keep the writing on track and ensure that the piece of writing maintains its focus.
- compose a conclusion. The purpose of a conclusion is to wrap up the piece of writing by connecting all of the related thoughts and ideas. The best conclusions are creative, engaging, and leave few questions unanswered in the mind of the reader.

Phase 3: Revising
Revision is NOT editing.

The revising stage is where students review, modify, and reorganize their work by rearranging, adding, or deleting content, and by making the tone, style and content appropriate for the intended audience. The goal of this stage of the writing process is to improve the draft. A reader who is unfamiliar with the document can help the writer identify which parts are working and which parts are still unclear.

Revising activities can include the student's rewriting of his or her own text as well as writing workshops in which students' writing is read and responded to by peers. Many teachers emphasize that revision is still primarily a generative stage in which the focus is to keep crafting, augmenting, and clarifying writing, both at the organizational and sentence level. Peers are instructed to provide feedback to the writer that will help create a more successful paper. (Sipe, p. 4). Another easy and effective activity for students is to reread their pieces aloud to themselves, a partner, or for young children, even a stuffed animal.

Revising for Audience
- Are the details in the writing too general or too specific?
- Are the ideas in a logical order?
- Do the transitions used help the reader follow the ideas?
- Are the sentences clear and specific?
- Is the tone and style appropriate to the audience?

Revising for Purpose
- Is the purpose of the writing clearly stated?
- Is the purpose maintained throughout the writing?
- Does all of the supporting information connect to the purpose?

Revising for Form
- Is the established form followed throughout the writing?
- Are ideas separated by paragraphs with clear topic sentences?
- Are the points balanced?

Revising Tips:
- Students can write only on the front of the paper, skipping lines as they go. This can help give them the space to revise more easily.
- On the computer, students can use cutting, pasting and deleting to revise.
- Having students talk to one another is a great way for students to revise their work.
  Go over some important ground rules with:
  - Be polite and honest.
  - Listen to the entire piece before commenting on any section.
  - Give praise for what works in a specific section.
  - Give comments on the big issues: Is the draft interesting? Is it organized? Is the main point clearly understood?
  - Be specific in suggestions for revision.
  - Ask questions, which may allow the writer ideas about what they may need to add to the piece.

Phase 4: Editing

Revising (phase 3) focuses mainly on making the content clear for the reader. At the editing phase, writers proofread and correct errors in spelling, grammar and mechanics, and edits to improve style and clarity. Editing focuses on making sure the writing meets the conventions of standard English. This is all done in preparation for publication. Editing can be done by the individual writer or with the help of peers or the teacher. (Graves, 1983)

Teachers are encouraged to offer mini-lessons to students to target specific editing skills. Some editing areas that support small or whole group instruction are:

- o Capitalization
- o Punctuation
- o Verb/Noun Tense
- o Spelling
- o Main Idea
- o Quotations
- o Organization
- o Sentence Fluency
- o Word Choice
- o Commas
- o Paragraphing

Check grade level language standards for specific topics.

Did you know?
- o Using mentor texts to model specific conventions supports student application.
- o Creating authentic tasks requiring use of grade level grammar and convention skills supports mastery of those grade level standards.
- o Research found that studying model writings or presenting students with good pieces of writing was significantly more effective in improving the quality of writing than was studying grammar (Hillocks, 1983).
- o Sentence combining strategies and direct teaching of how to achieve more complex syntactic structures enhances the writing quality and sophistication (Hillocks, 1987).

Phase 5: Publishing

Students who take a piece of writing through all of the phases of the writing process are authors. If a student has written something, it must be intended for someone to read it.

Publication can take many forms, such as posting in class or the school, submitting for formal publication to a newspaper or magazine, writing for a wikki or blog, reading out loud, and performing.

Self-assessment is often one of the most valuable parts in this phase. There is potential for learning when writers revisit their finished work with a constructive self-critical eye.

Publishing is the pivotal event that marks the move from "writer" to "author" which helps students to value the writing process in the way that we want them to and encourage them to seek opportunities for writing the way that real authors do.

When students publish work for a wider audience than their teacher, they will spend more time on the end product. Having students create real-world books, graphic novels, comic books, class books, items for a newspaper or newsletter, or even a bulletin board are some ways to help students improve their writing and editing skills.

There are a number of digital tools for publishing student work that can be used in and out of the classroom for any subject.

- **Blurb:** Tools to publish books for free. http://www.blurb.com/

- **Calameo:** Site to support magazine like publications—free version for basic use:

  https://en.calameo.com/

- **Flipsnack:** Create, share and embed online magazines, transforming your PDFs into online flipping

  books. Free basic version available. https://www.flipsnack.com/

- **Prezi**: Web based tool for creating presentations and publishing student writing.

  http://prezi.com/prezi-for-education/

- **StoryKit:** Electronic Storybook: https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/storykit/id329374595?mt=8

- **Storybird:** Online tool that lets users create stories using the art provided by the website.

  www.storybird.com

- **The Write Kids**: Online Writing Magazine: http://writekids.tripod.com/

- **Tikatok:** A digital classroom publishing studio for students to write and illustrate their own digital

  and printed books. Costs may be associated with certain versions. https://tikatok.com/

- **WoBook:** Tool to publish an interactive, 3D book. www.wobook.com

- **WritingFix** Publishing Resources: http://writingfix.com/process/publish.htm

- **WritingFix** Publish student writing at Writing Fix:

  http://writingfix.com/About_us/Publish_Students.htm

- **Google Classroom:** The add ons can be used to seamlessly support student writing

Strategy Instruction in the Writing Process

Further investigation of the process approach has led teachers and researchers to discover that identifying the stages of writing is only a first step toward students becoming proficient writers: students benefit greatly from learning and practicing skills that help them manage these stages. A pedagogy called strategy instruction dovetails nicely with the process approach to writing because it focuses on giving students knowledge of and practice in specific methods of completing writing tasks, with the goal of using them independently. Strategies-based instruction identifies, through research, what effective learners do and then seeks to teach those skills. Researchers know that effective classroom approaches combine task-specific strategies, such as creating a graphic organizer to plan writing, with awareness (metacognitive) strategies, such as identifying which features of ones' draft are successful and why (Luke, 2006; Guzel-Ozmen, 2009; Jacob, 2004).

In strategy instruction, teachers at first explicitly teach and model the strategy introduced; then learning is scaffolded until students master the technique on their own (Graham & Harris, 2007). The strategies are specifically applied to an identified part of the writing process. "Whether generic or highly focused, explicitly teaching adolescents strategies for planning, revising, and/or editing has a strong impact on the quality of their writing" (Graham & Perin, 2007b, p. 15).

More Research About the Writing Process

- Based on research, writing instruction has moved from focusing on spelling, grammar, and other writing conventions, to a holistic view emphasizing writing as a recursive process.

- Research shows a direct correlation between instruction based on writing process techniques and students' writing proficiency level.

- Teaching students to use one or two stages of the writing process enhances their writing abilities significantly.

- Findings provide a compelling rationale for using the writing process as a method of instruction in the classroom. (Based upon research by Graves, 1983, 1991; Tompkins and Hoskisson, 1995; and Poindexter and Oliver, 1999)

- Modeled Writing is an effective instructional practice that provides a foundation for understanding the complexities of writing. Research contrasts the effectiveness of telling students how to write versus modeling for them. High levels of telling are negatively related to writing growth whereas high levels of modeling are positively related, especially for children in high-poverty classrooms.
(Taylor, Pearson, Peterson, & Rodriguez, 2003)

Keep in Mind….

Writing instruction must also take into account that a good deal of workplace writing and other writing takes place in collaborative situations. Writers must learn to work effectively with one another.   -   [NCTE Beliefs About Teaching Writing,](#) May 2004

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