

# **The ABC's of best practices in teaching writing**

**from**

**[You-Can-Teach-Writing.com](http://You-Can-Teach-Writing.com)**

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## **A**ll students

Teach all students, not just those with brains, talent, or motivation.

## **B**asics

Focus on basic course concepts, ideas, and the skills students must perform, not on “nice-to-know” material that students won’t use regularly.

## **C**ompetence

Aim to develop competent writers. Competence is the foundation for good writing; students don’t become good writers until after they are competent writers.

## **D**ifferentiated instruction

All students won’t learn well the way you do. You need different strategies for different students. If you can’t individualize instruction, at least teach each major concept in ways that appeal to several learning modalities.

## **E**xplicit

Give explicit instruction. Vague instruction and hints, however broad, are bad educational practice.

## **F**air

Be fair. Evaluate whether students achieve stated performance levels. Don’t grade on qualities students can’t achieve by consistent effort.

## **G**enre

Teach just one writing genre. Students learn better when they have just one genre to learn than when teachers have graded written assignments in two or more genres.

## **H**igher level learning

Learning beyond recall and recognition can be—and should be—activated and assessed through formal writing assignments.

## **I**nformal writing

Informal writing (write-to-learn activities) won't teach writing, but it helps students learn course content and master skills such as writing in a timed situation.

## **J**ustification

Good writing teachers don't teach lessons or units that don't have a related course objective to justify teaching that material.

## **K**nowledge

Knowledge about writing is not the same as writing skill. The best way to learn to write is by writing for a responsible reader.

## **L**earning

Learning is the point of teaching. No matter how marvelous your presentations are, if students don't learn to write, you've missed the boat.

## **M**echanics

Writing mechanics should always be secondary to writing content. If students have nothing to say, it makes no difference where they put their commas.

## **N**o empty assignments

Use only authentic writing prompts that force students to interact with course content. Ideally, formal assignments should address at least two course objectives.

## **O**utcome-based

An outcome-based (criterion-referenced) course begins with clear goals and then plans how to achieve them. Your outcomes should be attainable by all students if they do their work consistently.

## **P**atterns

Good writing teachers never assume students can identify the key elements in a pattern. They always teach students to recognize the arrangement of basic elements that distinguish a particular pattern.

## **Q**uestions

Poor teachers ask questions. Better teachers encourage students to ask them. Great teachers help students learn how to formulate questions that help them study when the teacher isn't present.

## **R**epetition

Repetition aids learning. Teach one lesson from several perspectives as many times as necessary for all students to learn.

## **S**udents

Good teachers teach all students as individuals, but set their annual goals for the “average” student. Average in this context has little to do with IQ. It means typical of the class in motivation, attendance, homework completion, enthusiasm for the subject, and overall academic preparation.

## **T**eachable

To be teachable, a genre should be reducible to a pattern that’s applicable to many writing situations. A writing genre that has to be adjusted to each new writing situation is a poor teaching tool.

## **U**sage

Teach grammar, punctuation, syntax, and other usage elements as editing aids in the context of writing. Worksheets and exercises that isolate usage from writing do almost nothing to improve students’ English usage in written work.

## **V**ocabulary

Good writing teachers insist students spell and use correctly the words they normally use in speaking. Common, everyday words (such as *its* and *than*) and expressions (such as *dog-eat-dog*) pose more problems for unwary writers than “vocabulary words.”

## **W**riting prompts

Authentic writing prompts are essential tools for teaching writing. Good teachers have an arsenal of formal and informal prompts that provide consistent writing practice at the same time they provide learning opportunities in various other course topics.

## **X**-rated, under 17 not allowed.

College and workplace writing situations rarely demand narrative writing, so it can safely be ignored until students are high school juniors or seniors. Then if you tell them that writing narrative essays is an x-rated activity, they’ll be eager to try it.

## **Y**uletide

All students should meet your standards for competent writing in some of their papers between Christmas and Valentine’s day. All students should be meeting them regularly by year’s end. Most should be doing better than competent writing.

## **Z**eal

Your zeal must convince students that they can learn to write competently.