

Struggling Writers (K-8): Recommendations for Teachers

In general, to best support writing development classrooms should have **four basic components**:

1. Writing assignments should be **meaningful** and authentic, promoting personal reflection and discovery.
2. A predictable and **stable routine** of writing practice that allows students to go at their own pace.
3. **Lessons** to help students master structural elements, writing skills, and planning strategies.
4. Use of common terms to **provide feedback** and expectations.

More specific recommendations follow:

1. Provide procedural supports. This can include personal conferences about students' writing, checklists for editing and revising, planning forms and charts, and computer programs to assist in transcriptions.

2. Emphasize not only teacher-student collaboration, but also peer collaboration. Develop a community in which all students are viewed as writers, and in which risk-taking and personal ownership of writing are encouraged. Have students share their writing and ideas with a partner or group. **Encourage peer feedback** and have peers mark the specific confusing and interesting parts of another's work and explain why. Have writers defend any parts they do not want to change (promotes ownership).

3. Integrate writing within other content areas such as math or science. For example, emphasize common themes across subjects and have students keep journals/notebooks for each separate subject.

4. Have guest authors come in to speak to students about their own experiences, successes, and struggles with writing. This will help students view writing as an art or craft, and will provide a potential role model.

5. Have a publishing commemoration that celebrates student writing. In order to help make writing enjoyable and rewarding, create a class anthology of stories and poems, a class or school newsletter, a public reading in the school, or use of pen pals.

6. Use a writing notebook. Students should use this to write down ideas and inspirations for writing, using planning strategies, doing drafts, and logging writing activities and instructions. Also, encourage the use of a **personal journal** for outside classroom writing.

7. Have students use a visual display of check-in status in order to maintain individual progress in writing. For example, have students keep a cube on their desks with the sides labeled with the five stages of writing (plan, draft, revise, edit, publish) and the sixth side labeled "help," for when teacher assistance is needed.

8. Provide regular communication about specific writing qualities/traits such as voice, organization, word choice, and sentence fluency. **Use a scoring rubric** for each of these traits; use genre-specific rubrics when teaching different genres. Help students develop a strong example of each trait by reading different excerpts. **Use writing portfolios** to both provide feedback on trait use in writing and to have students establish individual writing goals.

9. Provide extra handwriting and spelling instruction to help struggling writers who may be focusing too much of their mental energy on these areas instead of writing. This especially helps improve sentence construction and content generation.

10. Focus extra class time on the planning stage of writing to help increase students' knowledge, skill, and motivation. **Use a "Planning Think Sheet"** which specifies the audience, reasons for writing, and personal knowledge about the topic, as well as encouraging thought about how to organize and group ideas.

11. Use a recursive approach to teaching writing stages, encouraging students to revisit stages when necessary throughout the writing process.

12. Use cognitive strategy instruction before having students engage in actual writing. This includes brainstorming, organization of their ideas, use of comprehension strategies for gathering information, and use of monitoring strategies to create clear, connected thoughts between the information and ideas they will write about.

13. Create a literate classroom environment in which reading and writing material are readily available, and students' work is proudly displayed.

14. Maintain a positive attitude about writing. Provide guided practice, and overtly model the writing process to help motivate struggling writers.

15. Provide temporary supports such as word banks, planning sheets, and "pictionaries".

16. Adjust the amount of instruction in the skills areas of meaning, process, and form to a struggling student's individual needs.

17. Use Self-Regulated Strategy Development (SRSD) to supplement extended and explicit instruction in the planning and revising of stages of writing. The teacher should first model both of these strategies and provide students with the necessary supports until they can perform the strategies by themselves. This involves direct teacher help, peer support, or simple strategy reminders. Help students learn background knowledge on the strategies, develop an understanding of how the strategies improve their writing, and discover how and where to apply these strategies. Support their learning through **goal-setting, self-instruction, self-monitoring, and self-evaluations.** Support effort.

18. Address students' nonacademic barriers to writing such as low motivation or maladaptive beliefs about their successes and failures. Encourage students to attribute their successes to their effort and use of specific writing strategies. Encourage positive self-statement such as “good writing takes hard work”.

19. Have struggling writers spend extra time in the revision and editing process. The **C-D-O strategy** has students compare the differences between what they wrote and what they meant to say, diagnose the reason for the discrepancy, and operate by fixing the problem and then evaluating how successful the change was. Have the students follow these three steps in three cycles: the first cycle has them work sentence by sentence, the second examines, each paragraph, and the third focuses on the whole text.

20. Use the SEARCH revising strategy, in which a student is required to establish writing goals before actually writing. Once finished writing, the student first checks to be sure that goals were met, and then works with a peer to edit the paper.

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