

Time for Daily Writing

Time fragmentation is built into the modern school schedule. No sooner do children become absorbed in one thing when we ring a bell, ask them to put things away, and move them on to something else. Is it any wonder that children are frustrated, lose their focus and engagement with school work?

Time fragmentation is also a major creativity killer. For the successful functioning of a writing workshop we must provide consistent and uninterrupted blocks of time. If we can do that, and help children select their own topics — raising the chance for high level engagement with the subject — we will minimize disruptive behavior and enhance learning.

Finding such time blocks represents the biggest challenge to all writing teachers. In classrooms where teachers have established a writing community, the challenge becomes one of finding more time for writing in response to the writers' demand. They can't get their kids to stop writing! If writing is high on your priority list, you will find time in each day. Here are a variety of ways to successfully employ a consistent writing time.

WW What Works

1. Use the same 25-50 minutes a day, five days a week. A Daily Writing Workshop provides opportunities to integrate all the language arts skills — speaking, listening, writing, and reading. Literature can provide models for writing skill lessons in the narrative and expository genres. A typical daily writing workshop is comprised of three components; starting, an independent writing, and a sharing. In the primary grades, the writing workshop can take 30 minutes of a two and a half hour language arts morning block.
2. Use the same 25-50 minutes a day, four times a week, in the same time slot as a once-a-week special such as art, music, computer lab, chorus, or physical education.
3. Use concentrated blocks of time. Conduct writing workshops in two-hour daily sessions for a two- or three-week period in each quarter. This is a less desirable means of fitting writing workshop into a schedule, but it may be a place to start.
4. Implement a center-oriented approach with daily independent work in centers for 45-60 minutes. This might consist of one writing group with the teacher for a lesson or conference, and the other groups working at writing, listening, illustrating and publishing, and reading centers. The writing groups with the teacher should rotate on a daily basis.

Daily Writing Workshop

Starting Component: 5- 25 minutes

Mini-lesson, modeled writing, read aloud to illustrate target skill, choral reading, reminder of target skill, a class discussion about writing. If the starting activity is brief, the sharing component can be extended, and vice versa.

Writing Component: 20 - 25 minutes

During the writing session, students are actively writing, with or without your guidance.

Students are:

Writing a practice piece,
Prewriting,
Working on a new piece,
Working on an ongoing piece,
Peer conferencing,
Revising,
Working with you,
Working in a writing center.

You are:

Roaming to encourage, guide, help
Conferencing with individuals.
Conducting a group lesson or
conference

Sharing Component: 5 -15 minutes

Author's Chair: 1-4 students present writing to class audience;
Peer conferences; Each writer shares with one other writer before putting writing away (every day in primary grades).

5. Steal time from formal spelling work by integrating spelling training with writing. For instance, students might take the time formerly set aside for writing spelling words in sentences to select several of the words that illustrate the spelling rule in the current lesson and incorporate them into their current manuscripts. Revise your spelling program to focus on teaching strategies for recognizing and correcting misspelled words. (See Chapter VII, Editing, Spelling.)
6. Replace handwriting practice time with writing and computer workshops. For a really radical approach, drop cursive writing instruction entirely. The computerized future is based on typed print. Think how little environmental text is written in cursive. All important forms — tax, job and licence applications, postal—say “Print or Type.” The only persons today who see and read cursive writing work for the U. S. Postal service. For other than signature, it is probably an archaic skill.