

Combating the Writing

A selection of the latest products to assist educators in teaching their students how to write

Often referred as “the neglected R”, writing is now being singled out as the skill most lacking in today’s schools, and the lack of writing skills has been cited as the major contributing factor to the widening of the achievement gap. The ability to compose essays and stories requires constant practice over many years — a requirement that many of our schools cannot meet due to overcrowding and under funding. In recognition of this problem, publishers are offering products to assist in the acquisition of writing skills.

Here is a selection of these products:

International Reading Association Beginning Writing, K-3

Forty proven mini lessons that go beyond the conventions of writing to focus on explicit instruction that teaches students how to generate and organize ideas before writing; learn to turn prewriting ideas into connected text; develop writing style; increasingly use conventional spelling and grammar; and revise their writing. Helpful tools include charts to help decide which lessons suit your students’ needs, notes sections to record what works and what doesn’t, and reproducible materials to aid in student learning.

Helping Children Become Readers through Writing: A Guide to Writing Workshop in Kindergarten

This is an accessible resource that delivers the current research and best classroom practices for improving reading and writing through a workshop approach. Chapters are rich with student writing samples and offer a daily kindergarten schedule, outlines and lesson plans, mini lessons, and assessment tools. You can supplement your instruction with the tools in the appendixes, including phonemic awareness activities, recommended booklists, word lists, sample letters, and reproducible forms.

Curriculum Associates

WRITE! Foundations and Models for Proficiency is a writing program for grades 1-8 which combines rubric-based instruction, writing models and prompts, graphic organizers, selected-response test-prep questions, and GUM (grammar, usage, and mechanics) skills.

The Part I Foundations lessons build the GUM skills necessary for good writing. The teacher introduces the students to a skill, and students complete three increasingly difficult activities to apply their new

knowledge. Mastery of these skills eliminates common GUM errors that impact students’ test scores.

Part II Models different writing forms — summaries, descriptions, narratives, essays, opinions, and research reports. For each, four prompt-driven samples are modeled with scores ranging from lowest to highest. By studying rubric-scored models, students learn what elements are necessary to produce an effective writing piece. Working in pairs, students use graphic organizers and writing tips, revise and edit, use Foundations lessons for reference, and create their own writing pieces. Practice with on-demand writing helps students prepare for test-taking.

The series includes student books, teacher guides, and optional transparencies, and consumable student response books.

Curriculum Associates offers three online resources to support teachers’ efforts at www.CurriculumAssociates.com. The free resources include: The WRITE! Place with interactive activities, printable graphic organizers, and other value-adds; The CA101® e-training module for WRITE!; and the Topics in Education Professional Development course: Teaching the Six Traits of Writing.

Educational Testing Service

The CriterionSM Online Writing Evaluation service is a web-based application that provides faculty with reliable evaluations of their students’ writing abilities. Students draft and submit essays and receive immediate feedback in the form of a holistic score and annotated feedback in five categories: Grammar, Usage, Mechanics, Style, and Organization and Development. The Criterion service supports two- and four-year institutions with proof of students’ writing capabilities and motivates students to improve their writing skills.

ETA/Cuisenaire

Step-Beyond Comprehension is a supplemental resource that teaches your students to read using four levels of comprehension skills and then “step beyond” to develop their writing, editing, and fluency skills.

Students achieve a better understanding of what they read as they read text using literal, inferential, creative, and critical comprehension; write their own text to model the structure and style of a featured genre; publish their writing after editing, revising, and using references; and perform their final written text for an audience

The program contains student books with 15 six-page units; Teacher’s Guide; Martin’s Junior Writers Guide; and Writing Prompt Picture Cards.

Crisis



Knowledge Adventure

Kid Works Deluxe is the updated and enhanced version of *Kid Works*, a creative writing and reading software program and all-in-one publishing tool. The program combines a word processor and paint program that allow elementary school students to create media-rich stories.

Students can write stories from scratch and illustrate them in the painting module, which has been updated with 54 new textures and gives users the ability to import jpeg files, as well as their own photos. *Kid Works Deluxe* also offers new cross-curricular, ready-made projects featuring math, science, social studies, and more.

Updated text-to-speech technology enables students to more clearly hear their stories read aloud by the computer, thereby strengthening reading skills. *Kid Works Deluxe* also contains a recording feature which allows students to record their stories in their own voices. This is a valuable tool that allows students ownership of their stories, increasing learning potential.

Additionally, *Kid Works Deluxe* fosters a school-to-home connection by providing a way for finished stories to be easily printed or emailed to play on home computers that do not have *Kid Works Deluxe* installed. For ELL students, they can write their stories in English, then narrate them in Spanish and email the digital files home to share with family members.

RxNet Writer

Developed by Language Magazine's features editor, Professor Steven Donahue, RxNet Writer is a web-based, prompt driven artificial intelligence writing technology that provides immediate scoring and detailed feedback of student writing. Feedback provided by RxNet Writer enables the teacher to modify instructional strategies more effectively to improve student writing skills. This scoring system allows teachers to guide students through the writing process many more times in a school year than would ever be possible without the instantaneous, detailed feedback that RxNet Writer provides to students, teachers, and district administrators. RxNet Writer contains writing prompts that align to state content standards and coordinate with topics in the text series.

In California, students write essays and submit them via the Internet for instant assessment on a standard four-point rubric just as on the actual California Standards Test writing assessment. This eliminates time between submissions and assessment, enabling teachers to provide just-in-time instruction for students. With the quick turnaround time between submission and evaluation, students spend more class time in metacognitive processes to improve their writing. Students can reflect upon their own essay based upon focused instruction and specific feedback from RxNet Writer, which includes constructive comments, diagnostic information, usage, and mechanics. **X**