



Key Writing Terms for Parents/Guardians

One of the challenges of launching a writing initiative is addressing the potential concerns of parents/guardians and other community members who may not understand the goals and processes involved. The terms defined here are among those that often need explanation. They can be incorporated into a powerpoint presentation or into a letter of explanation.

Processes of Writing: While some writing is done at one sitting, most writing involves multiple processes that occur over time. These processes include the following:

Brainstorming: writing down or discussing ideas about a reading, writing topic, or problem to solve as they come to mind, often without judging their quality at this stage. This process can jump-start thinking, generate ideas, and help student writers make plans. Brainstorming techniques include freewriting, journaling, listing, asking questions, annotating, clustering, and talking/listening.

Drafting: A part of the writing process where writers commit words and thoughts to the page or screen. Writers often produce multiple drafts as they develop and refine their ideas.

Revising: rethinking or reconceptualizing in writing; looking at the entire selection anew. Revision is rarely a one-step process, but requires attention to global matters such as the paper's focus, organization, content, and overall strategy.

Editing: paying close attention to and altering sentence structure, the shape of paragraphs, word choice, spelling, punctuation, usage, and mechanics.

Proofreading: a slow and careful reading in search of typos, faults in sentence structure, and other obvious mistakes; usually one of the final steps in writing.

Peer Review: sometimes called writing workshop or response group, this activity gives students an opportunity to get feedback on ideas or drafts of their writing. It can be used with any of the processes of writing, and whenever it is employed, it provides students with a better sense of how readers might respond to their writing.

Grammar in Context: addressing issues or usage or grammar in actual student writing rather than in unconnected exercises or worksheets. It is important to help students see the importance of following conventions in their writing, but research shows that doing worksheets does little to help students improve the quality of their writing. However, when students address problems of usage or grammar in their own writing, they typically improve.

Content-Area Writing: writing across school subjects. While all disciplines or subjects value good writing, each has its own vocabulary and conventions. Students need to learn to write for audiences in multiple disciplines and to become comfortable in the genres or types of writing



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common in various fields so that they can write, for example, effective lab reports and book reviews with equal ease.

Informal Writing: low stakes writing tasks and impromptu writing. Often this writing is simply recorded but not graded or given detailed evaluation since its purpose is to foster learning and/or generate further writing.

Formal Writing: high stakes writing tasks that are often composed over time, revised and edited multiple times, and graded. Expectations for development of ideas and attention to conventions of writing are much higher for formal as opposed to informal writing.

Higher Order Concerns: often called HOCs, these are the conceptual dimensions of writing such as ideas and content, focus, organization, originality, and overall strategy. Evaluation of writing gives more value to these issues than to features called lower order concerns or LOCs.

Lower Order Concerns: refers to surface features such as word choice, sentence structure, spelling, punctuation, and usage. While these features matter, they are of lesser importance than those of higher order concerns or HOCs.

Formative Evaluation: assessment designed to foster learning during the process of writing. Formative evaluation can be provided by teachers, peers, or other audiences, but the goal in every case is to give students ideas about how they can improve their writing.

Summative Evaluation: assessment that produces a grade or score indicating the quality of a final product. Summative evaluations can give students an indication of how their writing compares to that of others, but it provides fewer opportunities for learning than formative evaluation.

New-Media Writing: using technology to compose in print, visual, and audio modes of communication. Students frequently need to learn how to work with new technologies as they develop skills in new-media writing.