

WA State Literacy Framework K-6 The Integral Role of Writing in Literacy Development

This document is a section from the [Washington State Literacy Framework K-6](#). Refer to the main source for more information. If you have policy questions related to the WA State Literacy Framework K-6, please contact ELA@k12.wa.us.

Why Writing Matters

Writing yields immediate benefits in the experiences of young learners, enriching their lives now while setting the stage for future success. Writing sparks children's creativity, helping them develop and reflect on their experiences and ideas. It allows them to express their feelings, aspirations, and imagination. Through writing, children find ways to participate in and strengthen their communities. Children build social bonds with messages of celebration, adventure, and invitation. Teaching all children to write acknowledges that everyone has a voice that deserves to be developed and heard. Washington state recognizes the following aims of writing and their benefits for young writers:

- **Sense-making:** Students write to understand self, others, and the world (including comprehension of ideas and texts).
- **Expression:** Students write to voice experiences, observations, ideas, and creativity.
- **Communication:** Students write to convey experiences, observations, and ideas to others.
- **Community-building:** Students write to build relationships and strengthen communities.

Foundations for Writing Development

Before they form their first letters or set foot in classrooms, children grasp markers or crayons and make marks that have meaning. They leave their marks on any surface within reach—paper, counters, walls, sidewalks. Even before these marks are recognizable to others, children will proclaim their words, assigned to the markings they have made. While drawings have their own value apart from writing, together drawing and writing spring from the same source: children's impulse to visually represent experiences and ideas.

Teachers continue to build on this foundation when they encourage drawing and other forms of visual representation even after children learn to write, pointing out how both artists and writers use techniques to represent things like the passage of time, perspective, or mood. Young writers progress through predictable stages as they learn to express themselves through written language. Understanding these stages helps educators provide developmentally appropriate instruction, feedback, and support. While children may



move through stages at different rates, the stages themselves reflect a common trajectory observed across diverse learners (Gerde et al., 2012; Sulzby, 1986; Clay, 1991).

Pre-Literate Stage

Children in the pre-literate stage experiment with marks, scribbles, or drawing to represent meaning. They may not yet understand the alphabetic principle but often assign meaning to their marks. This stage is characterized by:

- Scribbles or random letter-like forms.
- Directionality may not be established.
- Writing may resemble drawing.
- Oral storytelling may accompany writing.

Instructional focus: Oral language development, exposure to print, modeling writing behaviors, fine motor skill support.

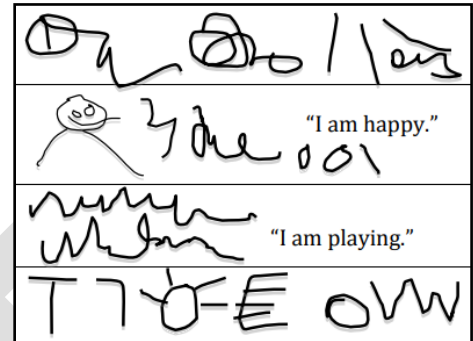


Figure 1 Pre-literate sample, West Hartford Public Schools

Emergent Stage

Emergent writers begin to understand that print carries meaning, and that letters represent sounds. Their writing begins to show early letter-sound connections, often using initial sounds to represent whole words.

- Use of letters (often uppercase) in strings of letters.
- Partial phonetic spelling, attempts beginning sound-letter partners.
- Attempts at name writing and labeling pictures.
- Copy words found in their environment.
- Increased control of writing tools and left-to-right orientation.

Instructional focus: Phonological awareness, letter-sound relationships, shared and interactive writing, environmental print.

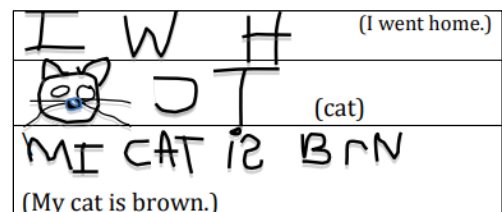


Figure 2 Emergent Stage sample, West Hartford Public Schools

Transitional Stage

Transitional writers begin to apply more conventional spelling and show greater control of sentence structure. They write across several lines and use more consistent spacing, punctuation, and basic grammar.

- Use of phonetics and some conventional spelling.
- Writing includes beginning, middle, and end sounds.



- Use of high-frequency words and sentence patterns. *Figure 3 Transitional Stage sample, West Hartford Public Schools*
- Increased independence in composing short texts. *West Hartford Public Schools*

Instructional focus: Word study, sentence fluency, genre awareness, revising and editing strategies.

Fluent Stage

Fluent writers demonstrate increasing control of the writing process. They write for a variety of purposes and audiences, organize ideas clearly, and apply spelling, grammar, and punctuation more consistently.

- Use of extended texts with multiple sentences or paragraphs.
- Voice, structure, and vocabulary begin to reflect audience and purpose.
- Growing awareness of genre and author’s craft.
- Ability to plan, revise, and edit with support.

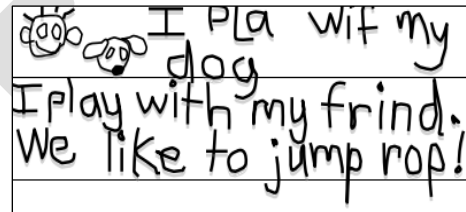


Figure 4 Fluent stage sample, West Hartford Public Schools

Instructional focus: Craft, organization, elaboration, genre conventions, and self-assessment strategies.

Young Writers Learn by Emulating Mentor Texts

Young children naturally observe how others use reading and writing in everyday life. Without formal instruction, they begin to imitate what they see, mimicking the purposes, products, and behaviors of readers and writers.

- A child who sees an adult reading a magazine might pretend to read one too, turning pages and holding it the same way.
- A child who watches a parent write a grocery list may start making their own list, even if it is just scribbles.
- A child who sees an older sibling writing a story or letter might try to write one as well, mimicking the structure, phrases, or even the handwriting style.

These early writing behaviors show how children approximate the visual features and purposes of real-world writing. They are learning through imitation; trying out what writing looks and feels like.

What Writers Do

Writing is a creative and generative act. To become strong writers, children need opportunities to make choices and guidance to grow. Writers of all ages engage in core writing practices, moving along a continuum of support and sophistication. As students develop, these practices become more intentional and flexible. These core ideas anchor the WA State ELA Writing Standards (2026) which are grounded in this shared understanding of writing. Aligning

instruction to these standards helps students develop writing skills that matter, both in school and in life.

Writers Make Decisions Based on Purpose, Audience, and Context

To grow as writers, students need chances to write for real reasons and real audiences. They also need guidance to help them think about the situation they are writing in. This includes the purpose of their writing, who will read it, what form it will take, and how it will be shared. Writers think about several things when they make decisions about what and how to write:

- **Context:** When and where is the writing happening? What is going on in the world, classroom, or community that might shape what the writer wants to say?
- **Writer:** Who is doing the writing? What is their goal? What do they care about or want to express?
- **Message:** What is the writer trying to communicate? What is the main idea or feeling they want to get across?
- **Medium:** How is the message shared? This includes:
- **Material:** The tools or modes used (words, images, visuals, etc.).
- **Genre:** The type of writing (a poem, a story, a letter, an essay).
- **Platform:** The format or place where the writing appears (on paper, in a text message, in a slideshow).
- **Audience:** Who will read or hear the message? What does the writer want the audience to think, feel, or do? What might the audience already know?

How Teachers Can Help

Teachers can support students by:

- Giving students authentic purposes and audiences for writing.
- Talking about the elements above as part of the writing process.
- Encouraging students to make choices and explain or reflect on them.
- Showing mentor texts where writers make different choices based on who they are writing for and why.

Writers Use and Adapt Genres to Meet Their Purpose

What is a Genre? Genre refers to *a category or type of text that follows conventions, features, and purposes*. In literacy and education, teaching about genre helps students understand how texts are structured and why authors make specific choices. Genres are types of writing that follow familiar patterns, like stories, letters, lists, speeches, comics, or opinion pieces. These patterns help both writers and readers know what to expect. Writers use, adapt, combine, and even transform genres to meet their needs. This kind of flexibility is what helps writing stay creative, relevant, and powerful. Genres grow out of shared experiences, values, and ways of communicating.

For example:

- A thank-you card, a social media post, and a fairy tale each follow different patterns.

- Each one has a structure, tone, and purpose that makes it recognizable.
- These patterns help writers know how to begin and help readers understand how to read them.

What This Means for Young Writers

Students do not need to know a genre's label to use it well. What matters most is recognizing how a genre works and using it with intention. Even young students can play with genre.

- Use a familiar structure (like a story) to tell their own experiences.
- Mix formats (like combining drawing with text in a comic).
- Imitate the styles and voices they see in the world around them.
- Invent new forms to match their ideas and reach an audience.

How Teachers Can Help

Teachers support students by:

- Introducing a wide variety of genres, not just academic forms.
- Using mentor texts to help students notice patterns in structure, voice, and features.
- Encouraging students to experiment with genres, rather than just memorize names.
- Helping students choose, adapt, or remix genres to meet their goals and audiences.

Writers Use the Writing Process Flexibility

Writers do not all write the same way. They use a variety of writing strategies and often repeat steps or move back and forth between them in a nonlinear way. This is called a flexible and recursive writing process.

Writers adjust their process based on the task, the audience, the genre, and their own habits. There is no one "right" way to write, but most writers use some combination of the following stages to move from idea to final piece. Explicit instruction in the writing process includes instructional strategies such as write-alouds, providing multiple process strategies for students to try, choose, and reflect on, and designating time and resources for each component of the process during a writing project. Writing can become complex, so the components of the writing process help structure writers' questions, considerations, and activities.

The Writing Process

1. **Planning and Generating Ideas:** Considering purposes and audiences, brainstorming, and discussing ideas, gathering, and organizing material, choosing genres, reflecting on mentor texts, planning steps, and allotting time.
2. **Drafting:** Writing initial versions, focusing on getting ideas down without concern for perfection.
3. **Gathering and Evaluating Feedback:** Sharing drafts with others to see how readers understand them, evaluating whether feedback helps writers accomplish their purposes.
4. **Revision:** Strengthening the draft by expanding ideas, adding details, changing structure, trying different wording, or reworking the tone or voice. Writers may add, cut, move, or completely rethink sections to better communicate their message.
5. **Editing:** Focusing on conventions such as grammar, spelling, mechanics, and making

visual features consistent (e.g., headings or lists).

6. **Publishing:** Sharing writing by distributing copies, or by reading, performing, or otherwise presenting them to an audience. Writers can share in person, through printed copies, or through digital platforms.

Writers Read to Learn How Writing Works

Writers do not just read for information or enjoyment. They read to learn how texts are built, how language influences readers, and how writers make decisions. This kind of reading, called rhetorical and critical reading, helps even very young students grow as writers. Students are reading to fuel their own ideas, learn new techniques, and shape writing that reflects their voices, perspectives, and goals. When students read like writers, they ask questions such as:

- What choices did the author make, and why?
- How does the structure or genre shape the message?
- What effect does this language have on me as a reader?
- What can I borrow or adapt in my own writing?

How Teachers Can Help

Teachers can support students in reading as writers by:

- Using mentor texts to highlight craft, structure, and voice.
- Asking students to analyze writing choices, not just summarize content.
- Encouraging students to read texts with curiosity and confidence.
- Giving students real writing purposes so they can draw from what they have read.
- Reinforcing that students are writers, too, and texts are tools to help them grow.

Example Protocol: Notice–Wonder–Choose Protocol

This protocol builds genre knowledge organically through inquiry, giving students the tools and confidence to make intentional writing choices. No matter a student's age or grade level, teachers can support genre awareness using a simple, flexible approach: the Notice–Wonder–Choose protocol. This process helps students explore how texts work and how they can use those features in their own writing.

Notice-Wonder-Choose Protocol for Mentor Texts

Notice

- What do you notice about what is on this page—or what is not on this page?
- How does what is on this page look different from other pages?
- How does this look the same or different from what we read yesterday/previously/earlier?
- Where is everything located on this page?

Wonder

- What do the things we noticed do for the reader—make the reader do, think, or pay attention to?

- How would the reader understand differently if the things we noticed were different?

Choose

- What did we notice that I want to try in my own writing—and why?
- What did we notice that I do not want to try in my writing—and why?
- What did we notice that I want to change or adapt in my own writing—and why?

Scaffolding Writing Instruction for All Learners

Core Writing Practices

Structured literacy includes writing strategies that are effective for all students, while providing essential support for MLs and students with disabilities. These are strong Tier 1 practices that should be part of every classroom:

- **Explicit instruction** in grammar, sentence structure, and writing conventions helps all students understand how written language works.
- **Multisensory supports** such as visuals, oral rehearsal, manipulatives, and graphic organizers give students more than one way to access writing tasks.
- **Scaffolded writing instructions** to break the process into clear steps like planning, drafting, revising, and editing. This builds confidence and independence.
- **Opportunities for guided practice** and frequent feedback help students refine their writing and develop as communicators.
- **Consistent routines** and structures for writing make expectations clear and reduce cognitive load for all learners.

These practices are especially helpful for students who benefit from structured, direct instruction, but they also strengthen instruction for every writer in the classroom. Effective writing instruction meets students where they are. In any classroom, students bring a range of skills, experiences, and learning needs. Some students benefit from structured support to build confidence and fluency, while others thrive with opportunities for extension and enrichment. Strong writing instructions include both.

Writing Support with Multilingual Learners (MLs)

Multilingual students bring valuable linguistic and cultural resources to the classroom. Writing instruction for MLs should build on these strengths while providing clear, supportive pathways into English writing. *Translanguaging* is when students use all their languages together to learn, think, and communicate. This approach values students' full linguistic abilities and supports deeper learning by allowing them to draw on all their language knowledge.

Example:

A bilingual student reads a science article in English, discusses it with a classmate in Spanish to better understand it, then writes their summary in English. During writing, they might jot notes or think aloud in Spanish to organize their thoughts. Effective strategies include:

- Using sentence frames and graphic organizers to support structure and organization.

- Encouraging students to draw on home languages as a bridge to English writing development.
- Offering explicit instruction in academic vocabulary, sentence patterns, and grammar.
- Providing visuals and models to clarify genre features and writing expectations.
- Creating opportunities to write for authentic purposes and audiences, including bilingual or translanguaged writing when possible.

Developing Writers and Students with Disabilities

Some students may need targeted supports to generate ideas, organize their thoughts, or express themselves in writing. Writing instruction for developing writers and students with disabilities can include:

- Offering speech-to-text tools, dictation software, or alternative formats for drafting.
- Teaching sentence, paragraph, and essay structure explicitly and repeatedly.
- Breaking down writing tasks into manageable steps with clear expectations.
- Providing mentor texts, model writing, and guided practice for each stage of the process.
- Creating a classroom environment where effort and growth, not perfection, are the focus reducing anxiety and encouraging growth.

Evidence-Based Practices for Teaching Writing (K–6)

- **Think-Alouds:** Teachers model their thinking while reading, noticing writer’s craft, genre features, language use, and the effect on readers.
- **Write-Alouds:** Teachers compose in front of students, narrating their writing decisions as they use, adapt, or combine genres to meet a purpose.
- **Read-Alouds:** Teachers highlight genre conventions, author moves, and writing techniques to help students notice how texts are built.
- **Literature Circles (text circles):** Students engage in discussions about texts they choose, exploring writer’s craft and gaining inspiration for their own writing.
- **Genre Sets:** Teachers provide text sets within the same genre to help students notice common structures and the creative range possible within a single genre.
- **Writing Models:** Teachers use examples of effective writing to show a range of writer moves, emphasizing that there is no single correct way to write.
- **Reader’s/Writer’s Notebooks:** Students use notebooks to respond to texts, practice quick-writes, explore genre features, track ideas, and experiment with writing techniques.
- **Quick-Writes:** Short bursts of writing give students low-stakes opportunities to try out new moves, respond to mentor texts, or generate ideas.
- **Reader’s/Writer’s Workshop:** A classroom structure that supports independent and guided practice in reading, writing, and applying genre and craft.
- **Shared Learning:** A collaborative approach where students explore multiple genres and media, make personal connections, learn from peers, and link reading and writing to their interests and future goals.