

# California Writing Project

## Why Writing Matters

Because writing matters for success in the school and university, in the community and the workplace, the California Writing Project has a central mission—to improve student writing and learning by improving the teaching of writing.

### Writing matters in the school and university.

❑ Writing is essential to learning in every academic subject.

- Emphasizing writing improvement and writing to improve learning in all subject areas was key to the success of the 90/90/90 case study schools—schools with high achievement, high minority enrollment, and high poverty levels.

*D. Reeves, Accountability in Action: A Blueprint for Learning*

- “Schools that harness writing as an essential tool for learning know the benefits of giving students the skills and confidence to be better writers.”

*Because Writing Matters: Improving Student Writing in Our Schools*

❑ Writing is the principal tool available to us for clarifying and refining our thoughts.

- “Writing, properly understood, is thought on paper.... The reward of disciplined writing is a mind prepared to think.”

*The Neglected “R”: The Need for a Writing Revolution*

❑ Writing is a way of engaging the imagination as an ally in learning.

- “Because writing can support a high level of learning in all core subjects, it matters in any classroom where inquiry, knowledge, and expression are valued and recognized by students and teachers.”

*Because Writing Matters: Improving Student Writing in Our Schools*

❑ Writing enhances proficiency in reading. Writing analytically about one’s reading enhances comprehension, application, and critical thought.

- “Writing helps students become better readers and thinkers. It can help students reflect critically about the information and ideas they must understand and make use of both in academia and in the world outside its doors.”

*Because Writing Matters: Improving Student Writing in Our Schools*

- “83% of college faculty say that the lack of analytical reading skills contributes to a students’ lack of success in a course.” Faculty also say that “only about 1/3 of entering college students are sufficiently prepared for the two most frequently assigned writing tasks: analyzing information or arguments and synthesizing information from several sources.”

*Academic Literacy: A Statement of Competencies  
Expected of Students Entering California’s Public Colleges and Universities*

## Writing matters in the school and university.

- ❑ When English learners are invited to engage in high-level analytical writing, they demonstrate dramatic growth in critical thinking and extended discourse.
  - In studying the growth in literacy of English learners, writing has been shown to be a tool for slowing things down with students, so they can examine the language. “Written language makes language available for students in a way oral language doesn’t.” Having language available in print makes it easier for EL students to examine language. When students write, “that examination is made even more concrete” than when they read.

P. David Pearson in *Because Writing Matters: Improving Student Writing in Our Schools*

- “We must be careful not to confuse the limitations of language with the limitations of cognition.... As primary goals for the academic writing curriculum,” English learners, “like their native-speaking counterparts, need to be taught to read critically and to incorporate information from secondary sources in their writing, i.e., to paraphrase, summarize, and quote effectively from background texts. Further, a focus on helping” English learners “to develop critical or analytical thinking abilities should be a top priority.”

D. Brinton, L. Sasser, B. Winingham in *Teaching Analytical Writing*

- ❑ Writing is the principal instrument for documenting academic competence.
  - Whether by course exam, essay, senior project, portfolio of work, entrance or placement exam, writing is the primary way students demonstrate what they have learned and often what they are capable of learning.
  - “Faculty judge students’ ability to express their thinking clearly, accurately, and compellingly through their writing. College faculty look for evidence in papers that students are stretching their minds, representing others’ ideas responsibly, and exploring ideas.”

*Academic Literacy: A Statement of Competencies Expected of Students Entering California’s Public Colleges and Universities*

- ❑ Writing is the principal gatekeeper skill for entrance into college.
  - According to university research studies, proficiency in writing is statistically the best single predictor of academic success in the first year of college.

## Writing matters in the workplace.

- ❑ Writing is a threshold skill for employment and advancement in the workplace.
  - Surveys of leading corporations show that 80% or more of salaried employees (as opposed to hourly employees) have some responsibilities for writing.
  - According to most corporate leaders, employees who are skilled in writing are the most likely to be promoted and the least likely to be outsourced or eliminated.
  - “More than 90 percent of mid-career professionals recently cited the ‘need to write effectively’ as a skill ‘of great importance’ in their day-to-day work.”
  - Highly successful leaders in every business and profession believe that their skill in writing contributed significantly to their success.

*Writing: A Ticket to Work...or a Ticket Out, A Survey of Business Leaders*

## Writing matters in the community and for our nation and world.

- ❑ “Writing is a gateway to students’ emerging role in our nation’s future as participants and decision makers in a democratic society.”

*Because Writing Matters: Improving Student Writing in Our Schools*

- ❑ Writing is the most powerful tool available to human beings for examining, reflecting on, and finding meaning in their own history and experience.
- ❑ Writing is an essential tool for recording and preserving human history and scientific knowledge.
- ❑ “From poetry to letters to stories to laws, we must learn to write in order to participate in the range of experiences available to us as human beings. In a very real way, neither our democracy nor our personal freedoms will survive unless we as citizens take the time needed to learn how to write.”

*Bob Kerrey, former Senator and leader of the five-year Writing Challenge to the Nation*

- ❑ “For students of color, the ability to write offers not only a chance for a better life, but a voice, and a way of expressing identity. Writing can enable those students, who are often marginalized by society, to move from the periphery to the center of society. Those who are able to write can contribute their ideas to the public discourse.... In a culture as diverse as ours, it is crucial that all groups and all strata of society be able to articulate their perspectives.”

*Ronald A. Williams, “A Skill Essential to Progress: Writing, Race, and Education, A Community College Perspective”*

### Current Research in the Teaching of Writing:

- Improving writing is crucial to learning in all subject areas, not just English.
- Reading and writing are reinforcing literacy skills and need to be taught together.
- Learning to write requires frequent, supportive practice.
- Students have diverse abilities and instructional needs, and so teachers must use multiple strategies to improve students' writing.
- Effective writing instruction pays attention to both the product and processes of writing.
- Writing should be taught in school much as it is practiced by professional writers: that is, students should write for authentic purposes to real audiences.
- Students face ongoing challenges in their writing development and need practice with diverse writing tasks to improve.
- Simply assigning more writing is not enough; teachers must teach students such skills as how to organize thoughts, develop ideas, and revise for clarity.
- An effective writing assignment does more than ask students to report what they have read or experienced. It engages students in such processes as problem solving, reflecting, analyzing, and imagining so that they can think critically about what they have read or experienced.
- Schools cannot improve writing without teachers and administrators who value, understand, and practice writing themselves.
- Teachers and schools need to develop common expectations for good writing across grade levels and subject areas.
- Schools and districts need to develop fair and authentic writing assessments that are aligned with high standards and reflect student progress beyond single-test evaluations.
- Effective school-wide writing programs involve the entire faculty and are developed across the curriculum.
- Schools and districts need to offer professional development opportunities in teaching writing to all faculty.

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