

Carnegie Corporation of New York commissioned a report called "Writing Next: Effective strategies to improve writing of adolescents in middle and high schools" (2007). The report summarizes the results of a large-scale meta-analysis of research into the effects of specific types of writing instruction on adolescents' writing proficiency. The following excerpt describes the 11 key elements of effective adolescent writing instruction.

### The 11 Key Elements of Effective Adolescent Writing Instruction

#### 1. Writing Strategies

Teaching adolescents strategies for planning, revising, and editing their compositions has shown a dramatic effect on the quality of students' writing. Strategy instruction involves explicitly and systematically teaching steps necessary for planning, revising, and/or editing text (Graham, 2006). The ultimate goal is to teach students to use these strategies independently.

#### 2. Summarization

Writing instruction often involves explicitly and systematically teaching students how to summarize texts. The summarization approaches studied ranged from explicitly teaching summarization strategies to enhancing summarization by progressively "fading" models of a good summary. ... Overall, teaching adolescents to summarize text had a consistent, strong, positive effect on their ability to write good summaries.

#### 3. Collaborative Writing

Collaborative writing involves developing instructional arrangements whereby adolescents work together to plan, draft, revise, and edit their compositions. It shows a strong impact on improving the quality of students' writing.

#### 4. Word Processing

The use of word-processing equipment can be particularly helpful for low-achieving writers. In this type of instruction, students might work collaboratively on writing assignments using personal laptop computers, or they might learn to word-process a composition under teacher guidance.

#### 5. Specific Product Goals

Setting product goals involves assigning students specific, reachable goals for the writing they are to complete. It includes identifying the purpose of the assignment (e.g., to persuade) as well as characteristics of the final product.

#### 6. Sentence Combining

Teaching adolescents how to write increasingly complex sentences in this way enhances the quality of their writing. Studies establishing the effectiveness of sentence combining primarily compared it with more traditional grammar instruction.

#### A Note About Grammar Instruction

Grammar instruction in the studies reviewed in this report involved the explicit and systematic teaching of the parts of speech and structure of sentence; i.e. a traditional teaching of grammar as an independent activity. The meta-analysis found a negative effect for this type of traditional grammar instruction for students across the full range of ability, indicating that traditional grammar instruction is unlikely to improve the quality of students' writing. However, other instructional methods, such as sentence combining, provide an effective alternative to traditional grammar instruction, as this approach improves students' writing quality while at the same time enhancing syntactic skills.

#### 7. Pre-writing

Pre-writing engages students in activities designed to help them generate or organize ideas for their composition. Engaging adolescents in such activities before they write a first draft improves the quality of their writing. Pre-writing activities include gathering possible information for a paper through reading or developing a visual representation of their ideas before sitting down to write.

#### 8. Inquiry Activities

Involving adolescents in writing activities designed to sharpen their inquiry skills improves the quality of their writing. Effective inquiry activities in writing are characterized by a clearly specified goal (e.g., describe the actions of people), analysis of concrete and immediate data (observe one or more peers during specific activities), use of specific strategies to conduct the analysis (retrospectively ask the person being observed the reason for a particular action), and applying what was learned (assign the writing of a story incorporating insights from the inquiry process).

#### 9. Process Writing Approach

The process writing approach involves a number of interwoven activities, including creating extended opportunities for writing; emphasizing writing for real audiences; encouraging cycles of planning, translating, and reviewing; stressing personal responsibility and ownership of writing projects; facilitating high levels of student interactions; developing supportive writing environments; encouraging self-reflection and evaluation; and offering personalized individual assistance, brief instructional lessons to meet students' individual needs, and, in some instances, more extended and systematic instruction.

#### 10. Study of Models

The study of models provides adolescents with good models for each type of writing that is the focus of instruction. Students are encouraged to analyze these examples and to emulate the critical elements, patterns, and forms embodied in the models in their own writing.

#### 11. Writing for Content Area Learning

Writing has been shown to be an effective tool for enhancing students' learning of content material.

Excerpted from Graham, S., & Perin, D. (2007). *Writing next: Effective strategies to improve writing of adolescents in middle and high school – A report to Carnegie Corporation of New York*. Washington, DC: Alliance for Excellent Education. For more information on adolescent literacy, see [www.carnegie.org/literacy](http://www.carnegie.org/literacy).