

 **AUDIO**  
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## Strategies for Using the Writing Process

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February 2012

**Topic** TEACHING ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENTS TO BE EFFECTIVE WRITERS

**Practice** WRITING PROCESS

- Highlights**
- » It is important to teach students evaluation questions to ask themselves about the particular type of writing they are doing.
  - » Peer interaction plays an important role in the classroom because peers can help each other evaluate and revise their writing.
  - » The goal is to teach students to use self-regulated strategies independently.
  - » Teachers should gradually release students to use strategies on their own by modeling the strategies and then supporting students as they practice using the strategies themselves.

### About the Interviewee

Charles A. MacArthur is a professor of special education and literacy in the School of Education at the University of Delaware. A former special education teacher, he teaches courses on literacy problems, writing instruction, and educational research. His major research interests include writing development and instruction for struggling writers, development of self-regulated strategies, adult literacy, and applications of technology to support reading and writing. He is currently principal investigator of a research project developing a writing curriculum for developmental writing courses in community

colleges, and co-principal investigator of a study of writing instruction in first grade. Major funded research projects have focused on decoding instruction in adult education, development of a writing curriculum for students with learning disabilities, writing strategy instruction, development of multimedia tools to support reading and writing, speech recognition as a writing accommodation, and project-based learning in social studies in inclusive classrooms. Dr. MacArthur served as co-editor of *The Journal of Special Education* for five years and serves on the editorial boards of several other journals. He has published over 100 articles and book chapters and edited several books, including the *Handbook of Writing Research* and *Best Practices in Writing Instruction*.

## Full Transcript





**00:04** Hello, this is Charles MacArthur. I'm a professor at the University of Delaware, and I was a member of the panel that developed the Practice Guide *Teaching Elementary School Students to Be Effective Writers*.


**00:16** The writing process is an important part of what students are learning. Students need to learn that before they write anything of any length, they need to spend some time planning what they have to say, thinking about the content they have to say, thinking about the purposes that they're writing for and the audience or the people who are going to read what they write, and then using that information to help them plan out how they're going to organize their information and what they're going to include in their paper. And then, they'll write it, they'll draft what they have to say. In most cases they need to do some evaluation and revision.


**00:53** We want students to focus first on content. What did they have to say? Was there more information that they need to provide? Does it need to be organized in a different way? Is it communicating its message to the intended audience? And once the content and organization are more or less in place, then students can turn their


attention finally to editing. And then some of the pieces they write should be published, which means that they should go on for somebody to read other than the teacher.


 **01:22** And so in order to revise and learn to revise, the teachers have to give them appropriate motivation to understand why revising is important and why it's important to evaluate their writing. And they also have to teach them how to go about doing that. One of the key things is: What are the evaluation criteria? What kinds of questions should I be asking myself as I read my work, or somebody else's work, to help me to make it better? And one source of those evaluation questions is the parts of that kind of writing. So, for example, if you had worked with your students to write a persuasive essay that had a clear statement of their opinion and then some reasons, with some support and then a conclusion, when they go to evaluate it, you have them ask themselves questions related to those parts. For example: Did I say what I believed clearly so that everybody could understand it? Or, let's find my first reason. Is that reason connected to my belief? Does it support my belief? Is it convincing? Will the people that I'm writing to, will they buy that reason?


 **02:33** You have to give students practice in applying these evaluation criteria before you can expect them to evaluate their own work. And once they have some ability to do that, then you can put them together in pairs or in small groups and ask them to help each other to improve their revising.


 **02:50** Peer interaction plays an important role in the writing classroom in many ways. One of the important ways is that peers are the students' first and most realistic audience. In addition, peers can learn to be very helpful to each other in evaluating and revising their writing. If you want to make peer interaction work for peer revising, you need to provide students with enough instruction in how to evaluate their writing so that they can help each other.

 **03:22** A typical peer review session begins with pairs of students. They get together, and they work reciprocally with each other. When you're preparing students for peer editing, it's important to take enough time to teach students how to evaluate their writing. You begin with a set of evaluation questions. The questions will depend on what kind of writing students are doing. You might have general questions that would apply to any kind of writing, For example: Is there anything that isn't clear? Where could I add more information to make it more interesting? Or you might have questions that apply to a particular type of writing. For example, if students had been writing stories, you might have them ask: Are the characters described in an interesting way? Is the problem presented so that it's clear and the way that it's solved is clear? So you ask these evaluation questions, and you need to give students practice applying them to writing samples.


 **04:21** The goal of education is for students to be able to do things on their own after they leave your class. So one way to look at this is to think about it as self-regulation. We want students to be able to write well in your class, but we also want them to take what they learn and use it somewhere else, and that requires self-regulation.

 **04:40** Learning to teach self-regulated strategies to children for writing can be challenging for teachers. The first key element is making sure that you talk about the purpose of the writing and the purpose of the strategy so that students have a pretty good understanding of what kind of writing it is that they're going to be doing.

 **04:59** The second thing that teachers need to learn is about modeling—thinkaloud modeling. So the key element is for the teacher to demonstrate how to carry out the strategy while thinking aloud so that students can see the thought processes that are involved in it.

 **05:17** Next, after modeling, teachers need then to learn how to support students as they engage in trying out the strategy themselves. The challenge there for teachers is to sensitively assess what students

can do on their own and how much help they need, because this is a gradual-release-of-responsibility model.

 **05:39** And then finally, you have to learn how to provide that self-regulation support. Get out of the way, and let them do it on their own. So we want to move to that independent stage and have students reflect on what they've learned.

This project has been funded at least in part with Federal funds from the U.S. Department of Education under contract number ED-PEP-11-C-0068. The content of this publication does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the U.S. Department of Education nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Government.