

How to Demystify the Writing Process

Published in ASCD Express October 2020

I've always loved to write. When I was 5 years old, I would use my stuffed animals and dolls to staff my pretend magazine. I would take my mom's old periodicals, cut them up, and recreate my own unique booklet. Once I reached high school, I was one of those students who never groaned when writing was assigned.

With my own students, it took me the bulk of my teaching career (so far) to figure out how to get every student motivated to take on the writing *process*. I've found that frontloading these five steps sets all students up for engagement and success with writing assignments.

Step 1: Anchor Charts

For this project, the teacher needs to have an [engaging and modern topic](#) that the entire class will work on together. Students can identify topics of interest and vote on a class choice. Make sure the topic is open-ended and has a lot of room for differing opinions. Once you or your class has established a topic for discussion, ask students to complete a quick [anticipation guide](#) to identify their opinions, background knowledge, and questions about the topic. With their completed guides, students begin discussing the topic while you capture their ideas on the board for the whole class to see. Use these ideas to model [how to make an anchor chart](#) that ties into the topic. In small groups, students will create their own anchor charts as part of the prewriting stage of writing.

Step 2: Group Discussions

Take each anchor chart from each group and give them to different groups. Have each group provide feedback on the anchor chart they reviewed and capture the range of different and similar perspectives on the topic. As the facilitator, the teacher keeps the discussion flowing, stopping occasionally to highlight points of convergence and divergence. You can use this [discussion rubric from the Texas Education Agency](#) to set discussion expectations, or use a "turn, talk, journal" framework for the discussion. These group discussions constitute the drafting stage of writing.

Step 3: Research and Organization

Go back to whole-class discussion (but have each group sitting together with their work) and revisit the main topic of discussion on the board. From here, ask each group to revisit their notes and decide as a group on three subtopics (important points that support their main topic) to discuss and research further. Come back as a whole group and begin making a web of three subtopics as an example from one group. From here, ask the class how they can research to find experts to support their arguments, emphasizing how drawing on expert voices adds credibility. Once students have found some credible sources to support their arguments, ask them to imagine giving a speech on this topic; how would they begin their speech?

Often, I will show students the main topic (one word) and the three subtopics (one- to three-word phrases) and ask students to work as a group to make one sentence with the main word and the three subtopics. This is a draft thesis statement. For students who struggle with writing, I make a thesis statement template and have them fill in key words. They can also use online [thesis generators](#) or [graphic organizers](#) to collect the general outline of their writing.

Once students have a thesis, I ask them to think about how they will present each subtopic and how they want their audience to feel at the end of reading or hearing their piece. We discuss how this audience feeling ties into the author's purpose. This approach continues the drafting phase and begins the revision/rewrite phase.

Step 4: Checklist

It's typically around the middle of step three to step four that someone figures out that the class is working through the writing process. That's OK. The teacher can then let them know they have fully worked through a writing process without actually writing the paper. This is a good time to give students a checklist of writing an essay to allow students to see all they have accomplished, then discuss how quickly they can turn the work they have done into a paper. If teachers have done this project before, they can have a model paper to share that shows how the information gets placed into a paragraph format to create the essay. Teachers [can find](#) or create their own checklist based on how they teach the project. Educators may want shortened checklists for each step or one full checklist depending on student needs.

Step 5: Publishing

At this point, students have not written a perfect essay, but they have definitely worked through the writing process steps. When educators do this project at the beginning of each school year, they are scaffolding and helping the students work through the process step by step. When students go to write their first essays, they have worked through all parts of the writing process and are more comfortable. Check out these suggestions from www.tellingroom.org and www.cultofpedagogy.com for great places for your students to publish their work.

Writing is a process, and there is no quick way around it. High school students who have hated writing assignments for close to a decade will be unmotivated to write academic essays. We know they will have to do this for state tests. By frontloading these five steps of the writing process early in the school year, students will become more comfortable and embrace writing challenges as the school year progresses.

Jodi Rath is in her 24th year in education. She currently owns her business MYS ED LLC at www.jodirath.com. She has several educational articles published and is currently contracted to write a book for K-12 educators on teaching writing with a University Press. Currently, Jodi works with Ashland University as an online adjunct of eight courses working with Ohio teachers. Jodi is involved in YA projects and screenwriting as well. Lastly, Jodi is currently working on writing a culinary cozy mystery series, where she has completed the first eleven books in the series.

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