

## Teacher Survey Reveals High Impact Writing Instructional Practices

“I think the biggest thing that drives me is knowing that writing is a skill that is necessary for all fields of study. If you cannot accurately express your ideas, no one will hear.”

This quote from a Tennessee writing teacher reflects the view of many highly effective writing teachers across our state. Last year’s writing assessment raised the bar of expectations for both students and teachers. Students required great stamina and attention to detail to read multiple passages and utilize evidence from them to write a convincing, focused set of essays. Likewise, the work of writing teachers took on a more urgent significance, pulling the entire writing process into a more central place in classrooms across college level work.

This past fall the Division of Curriculum and Instruction reached out to those teachers whose students performed at the highest levels across Tennessee last February. Our survey asked them to reflect on what key practices impacted student writing the most and what advice they would give to other teachers seeking to hone their craft of writing instruction in their own classrooms.

In identifying high impact teachers for the survey, the research team averaged scores of students by teachers across the state and dropped teachers with less than ten students. Next, eligible high impact teachers were put into four categories based on their students’ percentage of qualifying for free or reduced price lunch (0-24%, 25-49%, 50-74%, and 75-100%). An equal number of teachers was selected from each category to ensure an equal representation. 2000 teachers were emailed and approximately 250 teachers completed the survey.

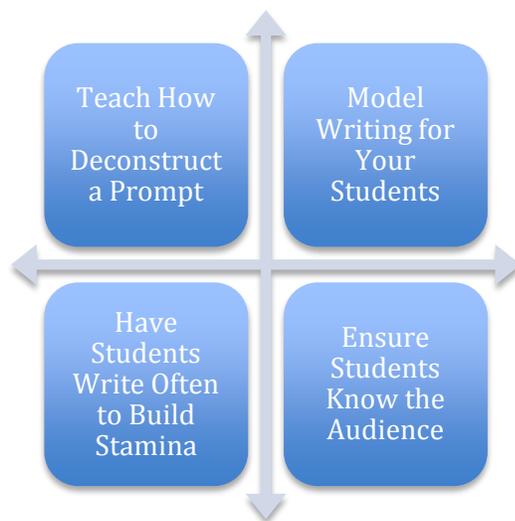
The findings reflect a focus on deliberate instruction around multiple modes of writing, keen attention to deconstructing complex passages and prompts, and encouraging multiple loops of feedback, editing, and revising.

**Graphic showing Highly Effective Teacher Writing Instruction practices:**

Students in my classroom:	Very Rarely	Rarely	Occasionally	Frequently	Very Frequently
<b>Write in response to text</b>	0%	2%	9%	37%	51%
<b>Write timed essays or papers</b>	5%	14%	46%	23%	13%
<b>Plan or draft a piece of writing</b>	2%	2%	16%	52%	28%
<b>Revise previous writing</b>	3%	4%	33%	37%	22%
<b>Work on writing with someone</b>	6%	12%	45%	21%	15%
<b>Engage in close reading a text</b>	2%	0%	22%	43%	46%
<b>Write about something besides a text</b>	1%	2%	17%	39%	41%

**How did highly effective writing teachers approach the preparation of student writers?**

**High Impact Instructional Practices:**



When approaching the writing process, teachers incorporated several key practices:

- “A lot of my colleagues pushed their students hard to know the ins and outs of a 5-paragraph essay. I understand that. But I pushed for them to write for an audience in mind, more than to write for a particular assessment.”

- “On demand writing has been key.”
- “A lot of prompt decomposition work with students so that they know what the prompt is asking for in their writing.”
- “I model writing for my students.”
- “Citing textual evidence is now critical to all of my student writing workshops.”

In fact, teachers specified that effective techniques also included student practice of planning for ten minutes and then writing for thirty minutes. Repetitive writing focused on revisions following feedback also helped produce stronger student writers.

### **What did highly effective writing teachers think were the main reasons their students performed well on the writing assessment?**

The most often mentioned reason cited by teachers for increased student proficiency in writing: practice. Truly, carving time out in the instructional process for the practice of writing in varying situations and varying lengths yields great dividends. Teachers suggested a number of ways to find this time:

- “My students write every single day for 30 minutes and then again when they do reading exercises; writing fluency is just as important as reading fluency.”
- “Out of class writing assignments are based on design of the writing assessment (informational texts) and that synthesis has been key.”
- “I’ve built a joy for writing with my students instead of telling them what to write all the time.”
- “Practicing writing informs my planning of lessons.”
- “Writing across subject areas (science and social studies) has been key.”

These teachers also reported an increased student ownership of their own writing the more they wrote and noticed that writing mechanics increased with practice.

### **What advice do highly effective teachers give to teachers who are struggling with supporting their students’ growth as writers?**

The teaching of writing is a process that requires long-term commitment and perseverance. This perseverance must also be transferred to students who have to learn that effective writing evolves. Most of all, they recommend that teachers do not give up on the process:

- “Don’t give up and don’t be intimidated. Use peer feedback and student group work. Be engaged in helping your students get better.”
- “Writing demonstrates comprehension more than any worksheet.”
- “Look at exemplar essays from TNCore to see what is expected.”

- “Writing does not have to be a long assignment; even short opportunities for practice can be effective when used meaningful.”
- “I would say that the biggest piece of advice is to take it slow and chunk the assignments. In order to get better at writing, teachers think you need to have them write a lot. That’s not the case. You need to build up to the long pieces.”

Some of the best learning we can do as teachers is from one another. Seek out those teachers whose classroom practices engage students and impact student achievement over time. From these highly effective writing teachers, we can learn a great deal about helping students grow as writers.

#### **Key Actions for Teachers Revealed in the Study**

- **Teacher-created assessments** are crucial. Encourage the use of the Non-Summative Literacy Toolkit on TNCore as a model.
- Teachers need to utilize **high quality practice tasks** because they reflect the rigor of TNReady tasks and support critical thinking.
- Teachers need to provide students with opportunities to **write on demand** to build stamina and for multiple purposes/audiences.
- Teachers need to be given structured opportunities for **sharing high impact strategies** and materials.

#### **Key Behaviors for Students Revealed in the Study**

- Students should be writing in response to **grade level texts** across subjects.
- Students should write in a **timed setting** as often as possible.
- Students should regularly **organize, plan, and outline** for before writing a draft.
- Students should **revise a previous piece of writing** after receiving specific, purposeful feedback from at least one other person.