Strategies for Teaching Writing

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Rationale and Planning

SECTION 1

Why Teach Writing?

Students exclaim, "Writing is hard!" And a teacher replies, "Yes, but it can be fun."

Teachers cry, "Teaching writing is hard!" And we, the authors of this action tool, respond, "Yes, but it is rewarding."

Simply stated, writing is not easy. But that doesn't mean it can't be fun, rewarding, enlightening, reflective, and thought provoking.

Writing is the vehicle for communication and a skill mandated in all aspects of life. Parents write notes for their children. Doctors write prescriptions. Automotive technicians write work orders. Politicians write speeches. Grandparents write letters. Friends write e-mails. Writing as communication is a daily activity. No matter their age, students recognize the need to communicate in writing. As teachers, we are faced with the task of helping students view writing as essential to learning.

In addition to promoting the need for good communication skills, teaching writing provides opportunities for students to develop clear thinking skills. When students are granted time to write and process their thoughts, they develop a way to analyze their thinking. Through writing, they discover the channels of logic and the pitfalls of fallacies. They begin to rely on cognitive reasoning instead of impromptu thought. In turn, writing makes students responsible for their learning; they cannot sit passively in the classroom. They must engage.

The most powerful argument for teaching writing is that we are members of the human race, and as such, we've always had the innate desire to communicate in writing. Prehistoric cave dwellers sketched on stone walls to express their accomplishments. Egyptian priests used hieroglyphs to record their history. Moses delivered the Ten Commandments on stone tablets to the Israelites. King John signed the Magna Carta at the hands of feudal lords. Thomas Jefferson

> "When the student is ready, the teacher will appear."
> —Chinese proverb

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penned the Declaration of Independence for a new nation.

Written communication is no less important in the classroom. Depicting historical reasons for writing and demonstrating how to write promotes the belief that teachers are models of active writers. Students more readily accept risks when teachers visually communicate their abilities to take risks. Together students and teachers share an emotional commonality that leads to building relationships. With a strong teacher-student connection, students welcome the opportunity to express their thoughts, feelings, and reasoning in writing.

> "I never know what I think about something until I read what I've written on it."
> —William Faulkner

Writing is a developmental process that each student can successfully experience at different levels when it's approached systematically. Based on this premise, this action tool presents the five stages of writing—prewriting, writing, revising, editing, and publishing—in a manner that allows writing to be taught as a process.

So Why This Action Tool?

Strategies for Teaching Writing: An ASCD Action Tool makes writing in the classroom manageable for both the teacher and the students. A blank sheet of paper can often pull students down into confusion, and many refrain from writing because they feel unable to make the leap from prewriting to publishing. Together, teachers and students must approach writing as conquerable.

The goal of this action tool is to break the current emphasis on merely assigning a paper and expecting students to jump into the writing and, instead, provide them stepping-stones to cross that river of uncertainty and fear without getting swept away by confusion and despair. These tools offer activities that can be directly applied to students' writing, providing them with skills they can use over and over again.

As writers, we understand the philosophy behind the teaching of writing but recognize the need to go beyond philosophy to direct instruction and materials to teach writing in the classroom. Therefore, we do not provide simple gimmicks; writing is not simple. We do, however, provide activities that, when strung together and connected, lead to success. Our suggestion is to use this action tool as a whole curriculum and break it into individual teaching activities. Teachers have the opportunity and responsibility to identify activities that work for their students and to walk the students through each stage of the process, building on each activity until the students produce a final, publishable paper. Teachers have the responsibility to teach the strategies and then empower students to find the process that works for them as learners.

Writing does not have to be fearsome. It is a natural part of life that is not a choice but an expectation. This tool provides the means for teachers to teach writing and provides a path for students to follow as they progress from where they are as writers to where they need to be for academic and real-life survival. It lays the course for students to become proficient and advanced writers. It allows them to sit with a final copy in their hand, reflect on their journey, and smile at their accomplishments.

> "If you want to become a good writer, you need to do three things. Read a lot, listen well and deeply, and write a lot. And don't think too much. Just enter the heat of words and sounds and colored sensations and keep your pen moving across the page."
> —Natalie Goldberg

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SECTION 4

Using the Writing Process Chart

The Writing Process Chart provides the foundation for *Strategies for Teaching Writing:* An ASCD Action Tool. This chart has been successfully implemented in grades 5–12 classrooms, presented at middle school and high school teacher workshops, and modeled for preservice teachers. It has aided students in rural and urban communities; students in special education, general education, and gifted classrooms; English language learners; and those in one-on-one tutoring.

The Writing Process Chart offers a graphic that synthesizes the recursive nature and interconnectedness of each stage of the writing process. The double-edged arrows between boxes not only visually promote a process for writing but also provide a sense of ownership for the writer. On the basis of the particular need for a piece of writing, the writer decides if it is time to progress to the next stage or to continue with other strategies within that stage. The writer may even decide to return to a previous stage. These are the choices that experienced writers make each time they write. Students need to be taught that they, too, have these options.

But first, teachers need to guide students and can use the Writing Process Chart page to begin this guidance. While the writing process is being taught, students fill in the boxes as directed by the teacher. If students fill each box as the teacher introduces the stage or strategy, students have time to internalize the effect of that stage or strategy on the writing. The Writing Process Chart model page provides teachers with a reference.

Completion of the Writing Process Chart page is an ongoing activity throughout the course of the curriculum. For example, not all prewriting strategies need to be introduced before moving to the writing stage. As the teacher, select strategies as you guide students through processing a particular paper. Then for the next paper, introduce additional strategies or new tools for already-taught strategies.

The downward branches of the Writing Process Chart are developed with tools built on one another.

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Teachers can diagnosis the skills of different classes and individuals to determine students' needs then choose the appropriate tools to meet those needs. The tools offer strategies that allow teachers to guide students through modeling, practice, application, and assessment.

For students to be process writers, they need to take control of their own writing. Through teaching models and guidance, all strategies can be taught within the context of processing various papers.

This extended use of the Writing Process Chart allows students to experience each strategy and understand its nonlinear placement within each stage. With teacher guidance and personal experience, students will eventually employ their own systematic direction in writing a processed paper. Their comprehension and application of the Writing Process Chart allow them to emulate experienced writers and make conscious choices regarding their own writing.

AUTHORS' NOTE

When new students transfer into a classroom, the Writing Process Chart makes it easy to update the students on what has been covered and assess which strategies the students have already applied in their writing.

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Writing Process Tools

Moving from Ideas to Sentences and Paragraphs

Prewriting provides traditional strategies to implement when training teachers to teach writing. Strategies such as brainstorming, cueing, and clustering have accepted definitions and can be explained repeatedly in the same way to different audiences in different situations.

Unlike prewriting, writing has usually been the stage of the process in which a teacher peers into the eager faces of the students and instructs them to write the first draft. At this point several students immediately begin recording their thoughts, some look back at their prewriting or produce more prewriting, some fidget or distract, and some just lay the pen down and say, "I can't."

In desperation, teachers can start to wonder where they have gone wrong; however, this student behavior can be attributed to several circumstances. Students may be resistant because of some negative past experiences. Sometimes they have become so dependent on having a teacher tell them exactly what to write or offer story starters that they freeze when given ownership. And sometimes students are just afraid of failure; they know that filling in the blanks on a worksheet requires less risk.

So what can be done? When a teacher addresses a new class (especially if some inhibitions for writing are evident), she needs to make sure students understand that writing is not an overwhelming task of which only a few can succeed. The tools that follow can be implemented with different curriculums for many different purposes. The focus is on the students' abilities to place pen to paper and communicate.

In the writing stage of the process, the student writes without censorship. This is the time to record the ideas discovered during prewriting. The writing stage differs from the prewriting stage in that the piece now begins to take a narrative form.

Assessment: Still a Piece of the Process at the Writing Stage

At this stage the goal is to keep the excitement for writing growing. Students must enjoy watching the paper take shape and develop. Yes, writing does get more difficult, and restrictions and expectations begin to emerge, but still there is no absolute right way to write. Every student can find success at writing. Even if a student needs to be challenged to write more, what is already on paper is acceptable. Because revision and editing are still to come, students can take comfort knowing that the first draft does not have to be perfect and is by no means *done*. In fact, once students accept that the paper has really just begun at this stage, the threats and fears associated with writing begin to dissipate.

Positive signs that students are writing

- Students get faster with each exposure to writing, thus allowing them to develop noncensored ideas.
- Students return to the narrative with more detail and clarity.
- Writer's block is overcome and ideas begin to flow from the pen.

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- Students and teacher focus on the development of ideas.
- Students can identify the audience and purpose of their papers and write with an appropriate style and voice.
- Students take an active part as they share orally in class, in groups, and in teacher and student conferences.
- Students get excited about their topic and return to their draft with positive, productive attitudes.
- Students can explain the rationale for choosing a title and explain the relationship to its use in the text.

Assessment Strategies

- Students' writing should not be assessed on revision or editing skills; however, teachers and peers provide students with immediate feedback.
- A growth chart documents student accomplishments.
- The teacher responds through written comments to encourage a desire to continue.
- The teacher assesses understanding of the activities completed independently by the students.
- The teacher checks to see that prewriting ideas are incorporated in the writing.
- The teacher provides points for meeting the specific expectations for this stage.

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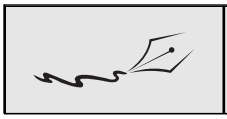

WRITING TOOL

PAIR SHARE

- ☑ 1. Connect ideas from prewriting
- ☑ 2. Extend prewriting ideas
- ☐ 3. Develop focus
- ☐ 4. Determine appropriate audience
- ☐ 5. Determine appropriate purpose
- ☐ 6. Generate titles

Grade: 5–12 **Time: 5–7 minutes**

Focus → Draft → **Share** → Titles

GOAL

☛ There are few, if any, instances in which writing does not have an audience. Even journals and diaries have an audience. Writers write to be read; thus, writing typically comes to life when it is shared. Students of writing can develop their voices if they share before the completion of the writing.

For this tool, students orally summarize the content of their drafts. When students tell about their papers or read selections, they become excited. When this excitement is channeled, it becomes the force behind and the voice in the writing.

ACTIVITY

☛ It can be difficult for students to focus on a piece of writing for an extended period of time. When you notice a need for inspiration, the class can participate in a pair share activity.

☛ Have students turn to a partner, and instruct one of the partners (the tallest, the shortest, or the one with the brightest colored shirt) to talk for two minutes about her paper while the other listens. At the end of the allotted time, the partners switch roles.

MATERIALS

☛ students' current work in progress

TIPS AND VARIATIONS

☛ Limiting time channels students' excitement into the discussion of the writing instead of off-task conversation.

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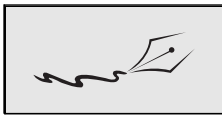

WRITING TOOL

GREAT BEGINNINGS WITH READERS' RESPONSES

- ☑ 1. Connect ideas from prewriting
- ☑ 2. Extend prewriting ideas
- ☐ 3. Develop focus
- ☐ 4. Determine appropriate audience
- ☐ 5. Determine appropriate purpose
- ☐ 6. Generate titles

Grade: 5–9 **Time: 45 minutes**

Focus → Draft → **Share** → Titles

GOAL

☛ Students receive feedback before the writing has progressed too far.

ACTIVITY

☛ Have students share the introduction to their papers in groups of three or four, then instruct the group members to explain how they think the paper will progress. As each writer takes a turn sharing, ideas are gathered that may be incorporated into their papers.

MATERIALS

☛ Great Beginnings with Readers' Responses Tool

☛ students' current work in progress

TIPS AND VARIATIONS

☛ The writer should not offer input but may take notes if something sparks her interest.

☛ When the papers are finished, the students may get back into groups and share the completed story.

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GREAT BEGINNINGS WITH READERS' RESPONSES TOOL

Directions:

- The writer reads the lead of his paper to a group of three or four.
- After the oral reading, each group member comments and predicts future events for the writing. Each writer receives ideas from peers.
- The writer records notes from each speaker.
- By identifying each speaker, the writer can later return with specific questions.

Title of Writing_____

Notes from _____

Notes from _____

Notes from _____

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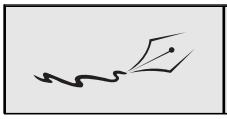

WRITING TOOL

READERS' STORY MAP

- ☑ 1. Connect ideas from prewriting
- ☑ 2. Extend prewriting ideas
- ☐ 3. Develop focus
- ☐ 4. Determine appropriate audience
- ☐ 5. Determine appropriate purpose
- ☐ 6. Generate titles

Grade: 5–12 **Time: 20 minutes**

Focus → Draft → **Share** → Titles

GOAL

☛ Students receive plot development feedback.

ACTIVITY

☛ When students have drafted a story, they can receive constructive feedback when peers respond by creating a story map based on the development of the story.

MATERIALS

☛ Story Map Tool

☛ students' current work in progress

TIPS AND VARIATIONS

☛ The Story Map Tool allows the reader to know how to effectively respond, thus giving the writer useful feedback. This could be a valuable tool to use before a peer conference.

☛ Depending on the needs of your class, students could also use the Blank Plot Line Tool (p. 83) or the Story Map 2 Tool (p. 89).

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STORY MAP TOOL

Name _____ Date _____

Directions: Read a peer's paper. Complete the story map on the basis of what you read. Do not write information you assume or that has been shared in conversation.

When this is returned to the writer, it will provide information to direct the next part of his writing.

Title: _____

1. **Exposition**_____

   Main Character: _____

   Other Characters: _____ _____

   _____ _____

   Setting: Time_____ Place _____

2. **Complication**_____

3. **Rising Action** _____ _____

   _____ _____

4. **Climax**_____

5. **Falling Action** _____ _____

6. **Resolution**_____

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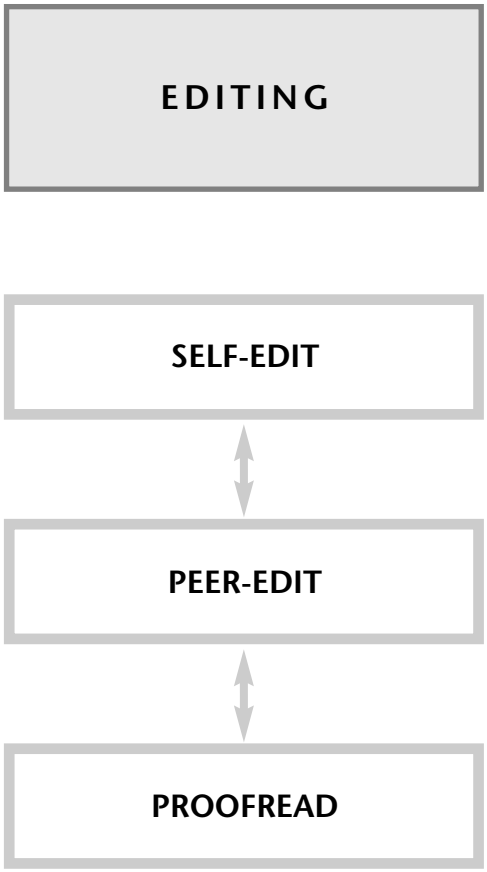
Editing



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Preparing the Final Draft

The majority of students have had a great deal of practice in usage and mechanics activities. However, these may have been learned in isolation from their writing. The key to editing is transferring this knowledge to application. Because of grade school classroom experiences, some students intuitively use Standard English skills. Others, though, have struggled because they never learned to transfer these skills to their writing. The tools in this section strengthen this application and remind the writer that editing is part of the process and not an isolated task.

As previously mentioned, editing involves making corrections. Prior to this stage, it is too early to *instructively* correct mistakes, though many students do so intuitively. Many times throughout earlier stages, students ask, "How do I spell _____?" or "What is wrong with this sentence?" Individually, teachers can address these questions, but they need to do so quickly so they do not stifle ideas; this is not the time for a spelling or a grammar lesson.

Additionally, students do not listen when a teacher states, "Don't worry about it now. We will take care of that when we get to the editing stage." It is better for students to receive a quick response than to sit and ponder at the expense of losing creative thought. So what should a teacher do upon entering this stage? Continue modeling.

At this time, students have a revised draft that *contextually* provides organized and clear communication, but is it ready for the intended audience? Editing ensures that a publishable writing will leave no questions for the readers to wonder about as they read the finished piece. The writer is responsible for providing the reader with and effectively communicated reading experience.

The tools that follow apply strategies that assist students with effective communication by helping them find and fix errors at this stage. Students cannot always find their own errors, so peer editing is heavily emphasized. Also, numerous activities provide ideas about how to instruct a class so that editing becomes relevant and manageable.

Assessment: One More Time

The editing stage has right and wrong answers, and students must be aware that only the right answers are acceptable. When grading students' work in this stage, the more evidence you give to show that errors are not acceptable, the more students will respond with intense, serious editing. It seems to do little good to red mark students' final drafts; this is the stage in which teachers can pull out the red pen and do what they are notorious for (in a loving, supportive, educating manner).

Positive signs that students are editing

- Students apply editing symbols appropriately.
- Drafts have empty spaces filled with editing marks.
- Drafts have possible misspelled words circled.
- Students change sentence errors in drafts to complete, accurate sentences.
- Drafts effectively use conjunctions as sentence starters.
- Final drafts are error-free.

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Assessment strategies

- Student-teacher conferences provide editing suggestions and corrections are explained so they can be applied to future writings.
- The teacher responds through written comments.
- Reader responses and writer application of responses are evident in the writing.

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EDITING TOOL

SPACE

- ☐ 1. Correct spelling
- ☐ 2. Apply appropriate punctuation
- ☐ 3. Check accurate sentence development
- ☐ 4. Develop precise paragraphs
- ☑ 5. Arrange functional format

Grade: 5–8 **Time: Ongoing**

Self-Edit → Peer-Edit → Proofread

GOAL

☛ Rough drafts that are filled top to bottom and to the edge on each side make inserting editing marks difficult. In this tool, students will arrange the format of their rough draft to make it functional for editing.

ACTIVITY

☛ Encourage students to write on the front side of the paper; leave broad margins at the top, bottom, and sides of the paper; and skip lines. The empty space can be filled with editing suggestions and corrections.

TIPS AND VARIATIONS

☛ You should be in tune to the writing style and needs of the each individual student: many may benefit from this space because it invites editing; others may rebel at this technique because it stifles the flow of words. As with all writing strategies, have students attempt and experiment, but in future writings, allow students to choose the strategies that work best for them.

☛ Because writing is recursive, many strategies offered at one stage can be applied to others. When revising, space around the writing leaves students room to accept changes.

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Resources

MODELING ACTIVITY

As Easy as Baking Cookies

Most students, as well as most people, learn by using analogies. Comparison strengthens understanding and, thus, application occurs. The process of baking cookies and the process of writing form a natural analogy and one that can be easily demonstrated in a classroom.

Most students are familiar with baking cookies—or at least eating them—so this modeling strengthens students' understanding of the importance of the writing process. Similarities exist in the process of following a recipe for cookies with that of moving through the stages of writing. Each should lead to a palatable outcome, one that can be savored, enjoyed, and celebrated.

The modeling activity that follows can be presented in different ways to meet the developmental needs of students. You may elect to orally share the analogy, pantomime the gestures of baking, or present the analogy as one activity to introduce the writing process. However, we suggest that you assign a writing topic and then model each stage of baking to introduce or review the stage of writing as students use a work-in-progress. This extended analogy will strengthen the students' understanding of how and why process is important to writing.

Prewriting: Check the Cupboards and Gather Ingredients

Before students enter the classroom, arrange the ingredients and baking supplies (see following list) on a table. As these are not typical classroom supplies, students' interest will be engaged as they try to make the connection to a language arts activity.

- flour
- sugar
- brown sugar
- vanilla
- baking soda
- chocolate chips
- nuts
- egg carton
- mixing bowl
- large spoon
- measuring cup
- measuring spoons
- timer
- spatula
- cookie sheet
- cooling rack
- apron
- chef's hat
- hot pads

In front of your captive audience, put on the apron and chef's hat. Explain the importance of process—how products do not miraculously appear but emerge only after a concentrated effort. A baker would not begin making cookies without first checking the cupboards for the necessary ingredients. Likewise, a writer gathers thoughts and ideas before writing a paper.

AUTHORS' NOTE

Many bakery shops where chef's hats are part of the required uniform will freely, or for a nominal fee, donate a chef's hat to a teacher.

Explain how each item in the list can be used in the beginning stage of baking cookies. For the writer, a list of items would be the ideas gathered from prewriting. Explain how a baker checks the cupboard to make sure that all the necessary ingredients are present before mixing the ingredients. Similarly, a writer's cupboard holds a variety of prewriting activities; each cupboard is shelved with proven and favorite strategies that will lead to a successful writing.

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As a baker gathers the ingredients, she must determine if the quantity of each item is enough for the recipe. Writers usually do several prewriting activities to ensure they have enough information before they write the first draft. As the teacher, pantomime a baker checking the cupboard, determining the quantity of each ingredient, and commenting on the purpose of process. This analogy stresses preparation; it demonstrates why a baker would not just jump into mixing ingredients, but instead would gather all the ingredients and check quantities before mixing. Too often, students do not see a need for prewriting; this analogy allows them to visualize its importance.

Writing: Add Ingredients and Mix into Dough

With apron tied and chef's hat atop your head, continue demonstrating the analogy of baking cookies. Ask for a volunteer. Students love to take an active role. After putting on the extra apron, the student volunteer will add the following ingredients to a mixing bowl: flour, brown sugar, an egg, and a drop of vanilla. The exact measurements are not necessary in this demonstration; just be sure to use enough ingredients to make dough for students to see. The student volunteer needs to be careful *not* to mix these ingredients together. As the student walks around the room showing the rest of the class the ingredients, comment on how the ingredients can be seen separately within the bowl. (The colors of the added ingredients assist in this observation.)

When the student volunteer returns to the front of the room, instruct him to mix the ingredients. (Water may be added if necessary to create the dough.) While the student volunteer mixes, continue with the analogy of how separate prewriting ideas can be added and joined together to create the beginnings of a written piece. Without the baking ingredients, the dough cannot be made; without the prewriting ideas, the rough draft cannot be created.

Have the student volunteer walk around the room showing the mixed dough, and explain that the same ingredients are in the bowl as before, but by mixing them together, the ingredients collectively reshape themselves. This is the same as blending the different prewriting ideas to form a rough draft.

Strengthen the analogy by asking the students if the dough is a cookie. Although it can be eaten, it is not a cookie. Likewise, a rough draft can be shared, but it is not a finished piece of writing. Again, the importance of process is visually demonstrated.

Revising: Bake, Add Nuts, and Bake Another Batch

As the analogy strengthens, students look forward to these demonstrations. Ask students what happens to the cookie dough while it's in the oven. Eventually, the word *change* should resonate in the discussion. Inform them this is just one of several changes that will eventually happen.

Continue discussing the process of baking cookies. The cookies must be removed from the hot oven and transferred from the cookie sheet to the cooling rack. Once cooled, a cookie must be sampled to determine what to add. Does it need more flour? Sugar? Could nuts, chocolate chips, or little candies be added to create a more flavorful experience for the eater? Inform students that each of these additions, or combination of additions, creates a change in the original dough. Each change is made to more closely respond to the taste of those who will eat the cookies.

Conclude with bringing the analogy back to revising a paper. With each change in the writing, students are showing an awareness of the audience and the purpose of that writing. Their changes make

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the communication more logical and clearer for the reader. Many times, students do not differentiate between revising and editing; from this analogy, revision becomes a process of *change,* not one of *correction*.

Editing: Decorate

For the last time, put on the apron and chef's hat and set out frosting containers and decorative toppings. Ask the students if they would decorate the cookie before it is baked. Listen to their responses and make links to why a writer would not edit before a draft is complete.

Next, discuss with students the need to present the cookies in an appealing manner. Stress that the cookies now are ready to eat, but the decorating enhances the look and creates a desire to devour the final product. Consequently, these are the same choices a writer makes prior to publishing. The writer's goal is to publish a final draft that not only looks appealing but also is intellectually consumed by the intended audience.

AUTHORS' NOTE

The analogy strengthens if sugar cookies are available for students to frost and add decorative toppings to before enjoying with a glass of milk. Students can share their latest published writing while sharing the treats and are ready to journey on the writing process again.

Publishing: Pour the Milk and Enjoy

The apron and hat are no longer needed; they have served their function but must not be forgotten. Drape the apron across the table and place the chef's hat on top of it, next to the prepared cookies waiting to be eaten so that they remain visible and ready for the next time cookies need to be made.

The baker takes pride in the accomplishments laid on the table and already imagines the type of cookies to bake next time she enters the kitchen. Similarly, the writer celebrates his accomplishment. He has a need to share with readers. A baker does not bake cookies and then hoard them; instead she shares with others and welcomes the connection she has created between herself and the cookie eaters.

Often teachers overlook this stage of the writing process. Writing creates a bond between the writer and the readers. Finishing a paper needs more than submission to a teacher for a grade. Finishing a paper provides a venue for communication with many readers and a reason for celebration.

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