

What Does Research Tell Us About the Teaching and Learning of Writing?

Writing Resources Center
UNC Charlotte



Writing Resources Center (WRC)

Locations:

1. 125 Cameron
2. G31 Atkins Library (by Peet's)
3. Center for Graduate Life, Cone 268

Phone: 704-687-1899

E-mail: wrchelp@uncc.edu

Website: wrc.uncc.edu

Appointments:

writing.uncc.edu/writing-resources-center/schedule-appointment



What Does Writing Research Tell Us?

- There is no single, “good” writing.
- Writing practices, including rules and conventions, vary from one discipline to another. Literacy practices are *situated*.
- Transference from one discipline to another is largely a myth [1].

What Does Writing Research Tell Us?

- Genres are historically constructed and evolving as parts of changing social expectations.
- Teachers have tacit knowledge about writing in their disciplines.
- Students benefit from explicit instruction from those experienced in a particular academic genre, which may be unfamiliar to a novice [1].

What Does Writing Research Tell Us?

- When college students fail writing, it is not primarily because they lack linguistic or rhetorical skills, but because they lack understanding of the context in which their writing is to function [1].

What Does Writing Research Tell Us?

- *Process* comes before *product*.
- Writing *practices* are more important than individual papers. In a pedagogical setting, attention to and guidance in writing processes leads to improved products [1].

What Does Writing Research Tell Us?

- Students do not learn the basics of grammar *before* they can write in a particular context.
- Students learn the rules and conventions of your discipline by *practicing* meaningful writing—for a real *purpose* to a real *audience* in a real *form*—repeatedly over time.
- Conventions are not static or universal [1].

What Does Writing Research Tell Us?

- In a pedagogical setting, writing is *meaningful* when it is like the writing professionals do outside of school.
- Meaningful writing accomplishes some goal or objective important to the writer. When writing is meaningful, students find it engaging. When writing is engaging, students learn [1].

What Does Writing Research Tell Us?

- Novice writers in any field cannot produce writing “like a professional” [1].
- Learning to write requires room to make mistakes.
- As students learn unfamiliar genres and composing practices, mistakes are frequently evidence of learning, not ignorance, laziness, or failure [1].

What Does Writing Research Tell Us?

- Form follows function.
- Writing is concerned, first and foremost, not with sentence-level correctness, but with *communicating meaning to a real audience*.
- Over-concern with error too early in the writing process actually hinders development [1].

What Does Writing Research Tell Us?

- Real writers revise multiple times. If you want students to improve, then include revision as a requirement of the assignment.
- Even if you don't intervene in the process, students who revise tend to improve [1].

What Does Writing Research Tell Us?

Students benefit most from three types of feedback:

1. Comments that respond to the development of ideas.
2. Comments that suggest specific ways to make improvements in revision.
3. Comments that *explain* why something is good or bad in their writing [2].

What Does Writing Research Tell Us?

- Rubrics that include only general criteria are ineffective.
- Rather than importing generic criteria that may have little relevance to a unique writing situation, teachers should design criteria with specific assignment contexts in mind [2].

What Does Writing Research Tell Us?

- Peer responses may help students improve writing *if* students are trained to respond effectively through repeated modeling and explicit instructions.
- Students need training in strategies for providing specific, descriptive feedback and in working cooperatively with peers [3].

What Does Writing Research Tell Us?

- Correcting errors for students prompts little or no improvement.
- Students improve by having a small number of repeated errors—patterns—pointed out at one time, then self-correcting and collaborating with peers to revise [3].

What Does Writing Research Tell Us?

- Minimal marking (merely pointing out) is effective, while excessive marking is overwhelming, and even confusing [3].

What Does Writing Research Tell Us?

- Marking errors on one paper may not lead to improvement on the next.
- Students learn by revising one paper before going on to the next [3].

What Does Writing Research Tell Us?

- Writing correctly is very important. Error has serious consequences in the “real world.”
- The question is not *if* sentence-level errors matter, but *when* in the writing process to attend to proofreading & editing: In the final stage.
- *When* certain kinds of feedback are provided matters less than students understanding *why* [3].

What Does Writing Research Tell Us?

- All errors are not created equal.
- Those that interfere with *clear meaning* are more important than, say, a misspelled word, or *affect* when the writer means *effect*.
- Effective feedback *prioritizes* revision suggestions from most important to least [3].

What Does Writing Research Tell Us?

Effective writing assessment distinguishes among the following:

1. “mistakes” (the result of carelessness),
2. “error” (the result of misunderstanding),
3. “stylistic” preferences (*viscous* instead of *thick*, for example) [3].

What Does Writing Research Tell Us?

- Errors are social and local, not universal.
- Errors are what experts in a field agree are errors. Error in one situation may be a preferred convention in another.
- We mark what we expect to find [3].

What Does Writing Research Tell Us?

- Non-native English speakers may always write with an accent.
- Penalizing them for their status as language learners is unjust [2].

What Does Writing Research Tell Us?

- Students must write *frequently* in order to develop.
- Students improve as writers only when they revise repeatedly over time [3].

What Does Writing Research Tell Us?

- “Learning” is a process of gradual internalization of routines and procedures available to the learner from the social and cultural context in which the learning takes place [1].

What Does Writing Research Tell Us?

- If students don't know, we must teach them.
- Telling students that they should have learned “X” in high school or first-year composition does not help them develop [1].

What Does Writing Research Tell Us?

- Assigning writing then marking and grading it is not *teaching* writing.
- Teaching requires explicit instruction, repeated modeling, frequent feedback during the writing process, multiple opportunities for writing in a variety of genres, both formal and informal, and practice over an extended period of time [1].

What Does Writing Research Tell Us?

- Not all evidence of learning shows up in a single semester.
- Writing development occurs slowly over extended time [1].

Writing Resources Center (WRC)

Locations:

1. 125 Cameron
2. G31 Atkins Library (by Peet's)
3. Center for Graduate Life, Cone 268

Phone: 704-687-1899

E-mail: wrchelp@uncc.edu

Website: wrc.uncc.edu

Appointments:

writing.uncc.edu/writing-resources-center/schedule-appointment



Works Cited

[1] M. Carter, C. R. Miller, and A. M. Penrose, (1998, Apr.). Effective composition instruction: What does the research show?. *Center for Communication in Science, Technology, and Management* [Online]. (3), pp. 1-16. Available:

https://writing.uncc.edu/sites/writing.uncc.edu/files/media/docs/Effective_Writing_Instruction_What_Research_Shows.pdf.

[2] D. Martins, (2008, Dec.). Scoring rubrics and the material conditions of our relations with students. *Teaching English in the Two-Year College* [Online]. 36(2), pp. 123-137. Available: https://writing.uncc.edu/sites/writing.uncc.edu/files/media/docs/Martins_Designing_Rubrics.pdf.

[3] R. Barron, (1991, Sept.). What I wish I had known about peer-response groups but didn't. *The English Journal* [Online]. 80(5), pp. 24-34. Available:

https://writing.uncc.edu/sites/writing.uncc.edu/files/media/docs/Barron_Using_Peer_Response_Groups.pdf.