

ADMIN GUIDE

Make Writing Practice a District Priority



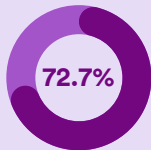
Read more



Students need writing practice in **all subjects**, not just ELA.

72.7% of employers rank strong written communication skills as the third most important qualification on a candidate's resume, following problem-solving skills and teamwork.

[Source: NACE Job Outlook 2024 \(2023\).](#)



Think about how often you use writing in your everyday life. Second to speaking, writing is the most frequent way we communicate with friends, family, and co-workers. Beyond that, it's also a way to make sense of the world and information around us—by taking notes, writing summaries, or putting our thoughts down in a document.

As students enter higher education, careers, and adult lives, many will spend time writing for work, for pleasure, and to understand complex ideas. **Yet the writing instruction they get in school often lacks the content area writing skills they need to complete these tasks effectively.**

Sometimes argumentative and explanatory ELA writing lessons may spend more time teaching or reteaching students *how* to write—meaning with a heavy focus on grammar, spelling, mechanics, and formatting—rather than when, how, and why they should use subject-specific writing tactics in the real world.

Moreover, argumentative and explanatory ELA writing instruction often exists in a vacuum. The focus is on completing the writing assignment to grade it on form, style, and grammatical correctness, not to use writing to deepen students' knowledge and understanding of discipline-specific concepts or topics.

The logical solution to this problem is to provide more opportunities for intentional writing practice in all subjects. **Unfortunately, many teachers in subjects other than ELA—particularly middle and high school teachers—don't feel equipped to help students develop their writing skills.**

This is often because they think writing is solely about teaching students how to write.

It's more than that. Writing practice also helps develop the critical-thinking skills necessary to identify gaps in understanding, help structure our thoughts, and, ultimately, deepen our learning. By practicing content area writing in all subjects, students sharpen



these skills, which they can use in any career they choose and in their personal lives.

The first step toward this initiative is asking how you can get teachers in all subject areas to incorporate more meaningful writing practice into their instruction. **As an administrator, you must build a shared understanding of the “why and how” behind content area writing initiatives to get buy-in from potentially reluctant teachers.**



To help you prepare for these conversations at your school or district, we're sharing more details on helpful frameworks, examples of what writing activities and support may look like in different subjects, and practical tips to help your teachers implement writing practice in their classrooms, no matter what subject they teach.

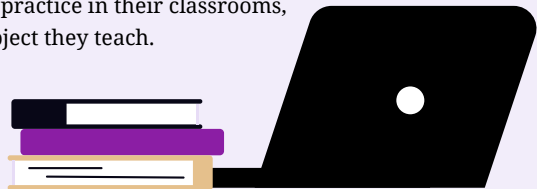


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Why does practicing writing in **all subjects** matter?

Writing helps students learn critical thinking. **Writing flexes the analysis, evaluation, and creation muscles more than memorizing facts.** Content knowledge is important in information-rich subjects, but learning is more than just collecting information. It's what students do with that information that matters.

Benefits of practicing writing in all subject areas:

Increase student engagement



Writing is a hands-on activity learned best by doing, practicing, and immersing yourself in the topic. Students can't just listen passively or memorize facts to do it well. They also can't use test-taking strategies to "hack" an assessment. Instead, they have to truly engage with the topic and available resources.

Boost writing scores



According to NAEP, **only a quarter of 8th and 12th graders** are proficient in writing. ACT scores back up this data, with **only 35% of students who**

take the optional writing component showing proficiency. These scores are on a downward trend, yet the amount of writing students must do on standardized tests in every subject is steady or increasing. We can start turning these scores around with more targeted, intentional writing practice.



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Build skills




Critical thinking is an essential life skill for everyone, but it's especially important for students who want to enter the fields of science, engineering, technology, and math (STEM) when they graduate. **Writing in all**

subjects helps build and sharpen critical thinking, analysis, and synthesis skills, which are then transferable to other activities and subjects.

Gain disciplinary knowledge



When students practice writing in different subjects, they **learn more about the nuances of that content area**. For example, students must learn discipline-specific vocabulary and ideas to communicate effectively in science class.



The screenshot displays the Newsela Writing platform interface. The main content area shows a lesson titled "Civics and Engaged Citizenship" with a subtopic "Foundations of Government". The text includes a quote from Thomas Jefferson: "The term 'social contract' is the belief that a government should be based on the consent of the governed. The social contract is the idea that a government should be based on the consent of the governed. The social contract is the idea that a government should be based on the consent of the governed." The interface also features a "Rubric Meters" sidebar on the right, which includes sections for "Organization", "Reasoning & Support", "Addresses the Prompt & Development", and "Comprehension of Ideas". A "Check my progress" button is visible at the top of the sidebar. The bottom of the interface shows a "Newsela Writing" logo and a "Newsela Writing Spotlight" section.

Newsela Writing supports teachers in creating customized writing tasks. Pair them with Newsela content to help students develop essential writing skills in any class.



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What's **missing** from traditional content area writing instruction?

Even if we know that giving students writing practice in all subject areas is important, implementing it can be difficult. **Many middle school and secondary teachers outside of ELA don't receive the training to effectively support students to build and grow their writing skills.**

The lack of knowledge and preparation can lead to misconceptions about cross-curricular writing practice, some of which [literacy expert Natalie Wexler](#) has addressed.



Misconceptions about writing:



Students can learn to write independently with “good” example texts.



There's a saying in writing instruction that good readers make good writers. While it's true that reading well-crafted compelling texts in any genre can help students become better writers, but it shouldn't be the only instruction they receive. **By relying on example texts to “show” students how to write in different subjects, they miss the link between why a text is compelling and how it got that way.**

In ELA, teachers spotlight formatting and mechanics, such as sentence structure and spelling. Yet these skills don't teach students how or when to use different writing strategies. They need that additional guidance to learn how to make an argument, research, and share cohesive ideas—all key skills of successful integrated writing.

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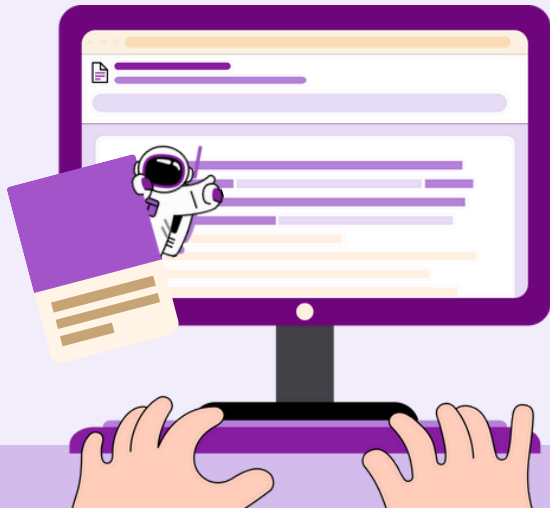
Writing practice can happen independently of a lesson.



Writing practice is most effective when connected to specific topics and content. Spelling, grammar, and mechanics skills are transferable to any piece of writing, but learning how and when to use different writing strategies is more nuanced. For example, elementary students may start writing instruction with lessons divorced from specific content.

They may write a persuasive paragraph about why they should be allowed to get a puppy. This type of lesson might introduce them to what persuasive writing is but not necessarily how to apply persuasive writing strategies and tactics to another assignment, like an argumentative essay about choosing sides in a pro/con debate for social studies.

The best way to teach students skills like audience identification and quality research is to **pair them with a specific content topic related to an in-class lesson** so teachers can model how to use persuasive, argumentative, or other writing tactics to craft a compelling text.

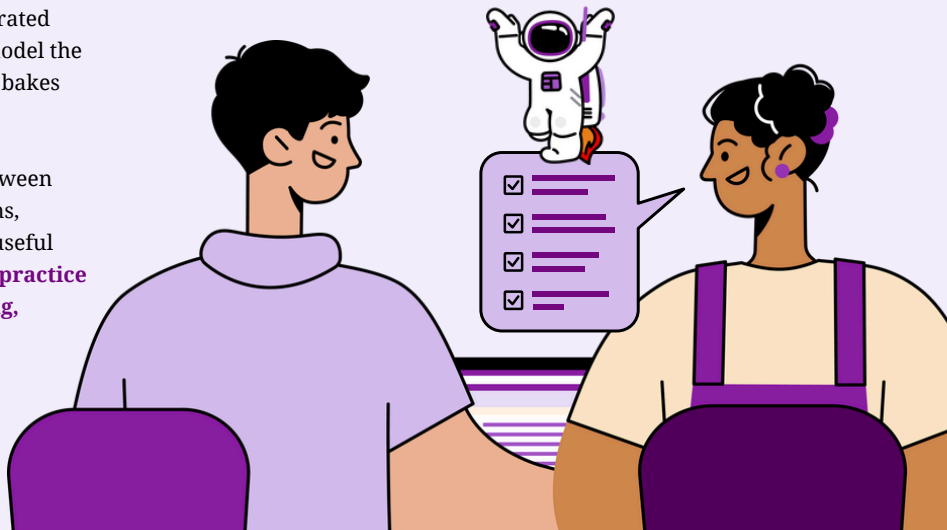


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What does it mean for writing practice to be **integrated**?

According to the [Michigan Department of Education](#), integrated writing helps “initiate discussion, reinforce content, and model the method of inquiry common to the field.” In other words, it bakes writing practice into subject-specific lessons.

Integrated writing helps students make the connection between more abstract examples of “good” writing and the questions, strategies, formats, and tactics used to craft a compelling, useful text for a subject-specific audience. It **promotes repeated practice across disciplines to reinforce learning, critical thinking, and communication.**



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Three spheres of writing practice:



Writing to learn (WTL)

- **Low-stakes** assignments
- Encourage students to **think through key concepts and ideas** to check understanding.
- **Graded on students' comprehension** of the topic, not structural or grammatical correctness.
- **WTL example:** [Summaries](#)

Writing to engage (WTE)

- Blend **WTL and WID goals**.
- Help students **think critically** about a topic.
- **Evaluate students' knowledge** of the topic and **understanding of subject-specific formatting** and vocabulary.
- **WTE examples:** Comparisons, critiques, and reflections

Writing in the Disciplines (WID)

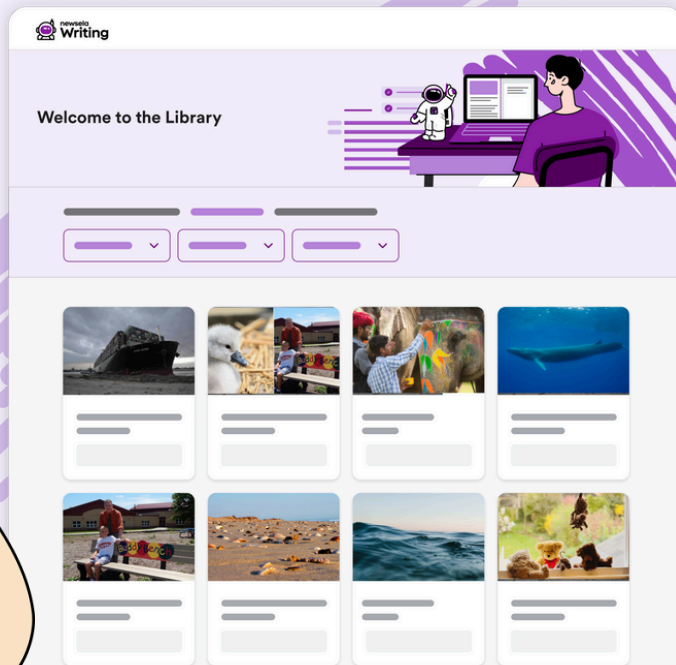
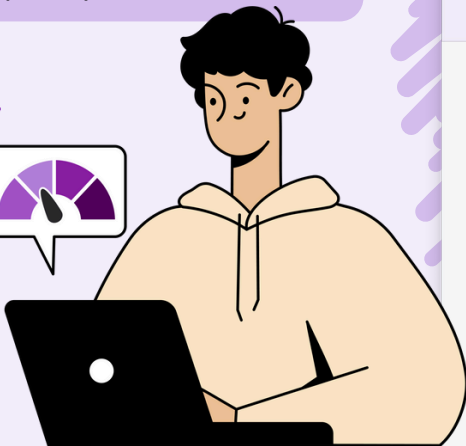
- **Higher-stakes**, lengthier assignments
- Help students **practice writing formatting, fluency, vocabulary, and conventions** for different subjects or disciplines.
- Introduce students to **real-world writing expectations in a discipline**.
- **Graded on ideas and analysis**, formatting, spelling, grammar, and mechanics.
- **WID example:** Primary source analysis

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Newsela Writing Spotlight



Engaging, real-world prompts from [Newsela Writing's library](#) help spark student interest and deepen engagement. Automated feedback with glows and grows supports students to revise their work independently.



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How does **subject-specific** writing practice work?

Students typically need explicit instruction in metacognitive strategies to maximize the value of their writing tasks. Simply assigning a large number of writing tasks won't provide reliable data on students' writing progress or lead to increased learning.

What does work is **using writing activities to help students build their knowledge of the topic**, examine prior knowledge, draw connections among sources and topics, and discover new ideas.



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What does writing practice look like in different subjects?



Writing in ELA

In ELA, students explore all different types of creative and disciplinary writing. These lessons often help students practice skills they learn during writing instruction. Activities may include **research papers**, **short stories**, **poems**, or **literary analyses**.



Writing in Social Studies

In social studies, writing practice should focus on text-based writing that uses primary and secondary sources to help demonstrate their understanding of historical concepts. Activities could include writing a **biographical sketch** of a historical figure, writing an **argumentative speech** that takes one side of a key issue, or using a **graphic organizer** to collect and organize information during class discussions.



Writing in Science

In science, writing practice helps students connect core ideas and concepts across scientific disciplines and understand the types of writing that happen in science careers. Activities could include defining and using **key terms**, writing **lab reports** for in-class experiments, or keeping a **log book** that pairs with a science fair project.



Writing in Math

In math, writing practice helps students better understand how abstract mathematical concepts apply to real-world situations. Activities could include completing written **proofs**, sharing a written **data analysis from a chart or graph**, or writing a **word problem to pair with an equation**.



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Newsela Writing Spotlight



Newsela Writing offers short- and long-form writing prompts and activities that allow students to make a claim and support it with evidence.



New Assignment

B i U A L F T | E P M S +



STEP 1

Select assignment length

Short Answer

=====

Long Form

=====



STEP 2

Select a type of writing

Literary Analysis

=====

Argumentative

=====

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How to set **all teachers** up for writing success

The concepts outlined in this guide can be a good starting point for introducing or revamping your cross-curricular writing plans at the grade, school, or district level. But a writing framework isn't necessarily a plug-and-play option to set and forget.

It takes analysis, trial and error, and fine-tuning to make your “writing across the curriculum” approach work most efficiently for your teachers and students. With the right care and attention, you can use it to check off all your writing priorities.



District priorities for writing instruction:



Provide support

Your teachers, especially those outside of ELA, may have concerns about implementing cross-curricular writing frameworks. Many haven't received the training to effectively support writing practice in their classrooms, even if they want to. **Hold PD focused on literacy and writing throughout the year** to teach your teachers how to implement writing practice plans and use the right tools to get results.



Set goals

Set specific, actionable goals to help integrate cross-curricular writing in every classroom. These **goals give teachers something to work toward with their PD** and introduce ways to self-evaluate what's going well, where they can improve, and where they need more training and guidance.

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Speak the same language

Students learn unique vocabulary and themes in ELA, science, social studies, and other subjects. However, writing—especially nonfiction—has a universal language that applies to all of them. When all your teachers use the same language to talk about writing in their classes—for example, choosing to use terms like claim or main idea across subjects—it **helps students become familiar with the process and build transferable skills** where possible.



Focus on collaboration

All cross-curricular initiatives require collaboration to make them work. Your team members must support each other to make writing across the curriculum successful at your school or district. **Ask ELA teachers to mentor those in other subjects** to help them build support strategies for evaluating students' writing. Plus, make writing and goal tracking a topic at your PLC meetings to plan cross-curricular projects and discuss, evaluate, and adjust implementation methods.



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PARCC rubric

Feedback Item	Score Point 4	Score Point 3	Score Point 2	Score Point 1
Reasoning & Support	Uses clear reasoning supported by relevant text-based evidence in the development of the claim or topic.	Uses mostly clear reasoning supported by relevant text-based evidence in the development of the claim or topic.	Uses some reasoning and text-based evidence in the development of the claim or topic.	Uses little or no reasoning and text-based evidence in the development of the claim or topic.

Organization

	Is effectively organized with clear and coherent writing.	Is organized with mostly clear and coherent writing.	Demonstrates some organization with somewhat coherent writing.	
Addresses the Prompt and Development	Addresses the prompt and provides effective and comprehensive development of the claim or topic that is consistently appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.	Addresses the prompt and provides mostly effective development of the claim or topic that is mostly appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.	Addresses the prompt and provides some development of the claim or topic that is somewhat appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.	Does not address the prompt and provides little or no development of the claim or topic.
Comprehension of Ideas	Demonstrates full comprehension of ideas stated explicitly and inferentially by providing a minimally accurate analysis.	Demonstrates basic comprehension of ideas stated explicitly and inferentially by providing a generally accurate analysis.	Demonstrates limited comprehension of ideas stated explicitly and inferentially by providing a minimally accurate analysis.	Does not demonstrate comprehension of ideas stated explicitly and inferentially.

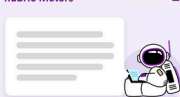


Newsela Writing Spotlight



Newsela Writing's rubric-aligned feedback lets you pair your assignments with commonly used writing rubrics, allowing for better alignment and standardization across subjects.

Rubric Meters



Reasoning & Support



Organization



Addresses the Prompt



Comprehension of Ideas



Organization

Check progress

Your Glows

The essay has a clear introduction, body, and conclusion. The ideas are presented in a logical order...

Let's Grow

The essay could be improved by providing more structure within the paragraph. The student should focus on a specific example...

MORE RESOURCES:

I need more help

To improve the structure, you can use sentences to separate different ideas or points. You should also explain each idea with more details or examples. Lastly, it would be helpful to have a conclusion that summarizes the main

Nurture **confident** writers.

Newsela Writing is your writing assistant that helps students in grades 3-12 become confident writers. It gives immediate, rubric-aligned feedback and provides a continuous feedback loop that saves teachers time and increases student writing frequency and quality.

Ready to drive meaningful student outcomes in your classroom, school, or district? [Get in touch](#) or [sign up for Newsela Lite](#) today and start your free trial of Newsela's premium product suite, including access to Newsela Writing!



Newsela Writing is research-backed! It meets ESSA Tier 4 requirements for evidence.

To learn more about Newsela Writing, scan this QR code or visit <https://newsela.com/about/products/writing/>



"I am blown away with the quality of the specific feedback [from Newsela Writing]. Most AI-like programs write for students, but Newsela Writing offers advice and suggestions just like a teacher would do without rewriting it for them."

Kimberly Guley

7th Grade ELA Teacher, Millbrook Middle School