

BEING A WRITER AND NYS BEST PRACTICES

Why the *Being a Writer*™ Program is the Clear Choice for New York Schools

Investing in Confident, Capable Writers

As you look for district- or school-wide solutions that meaningfully strengthen writing instruction and support students in developing as confident, capable writers, we believe the *Being a Writer* program offers a proven, comprehensive approach that aligns closely with New York State's best practices for K–3 writing instruction.

Our pilot schools have already seen **significant success**, witnessing students grow into more skilled, fluent, and purposeful writers. The *Being a Writer* program achieves this by providing:

- **Explicit, systematic instruction.** Providing educators with clear, research-backed methods that gradually empower students.
- **A comprehensive writing process.** Equipping students to write for diverse purposes and audiences.
- **Daily, meaningful practice.** Ensuring consistent engagement and skill development.
- **Foundational writing skills development.** Seamlessly integrating sentence construction and grammar, strategic spelling, handwriting practice, typing, and word processing.

This document demonstrates how the *Being a Writer* program not only meets NYS standards and practices but also champions an approach that cultivates authentic student voice, critical thinking, and a lifelong love for writing. Choosing *Being a Writer* means investing in a unified, effective, and sustainable pathway to writing excellence for every K–3 student in the district.

The Impact: Proven Success in Pilot Schools

Our current pilot schools using the *Being a Writer* program in Rochester Public Schools have reported:

- **Increased student engagement.** Students are more excited and confident about writing.
- **Observable skill growth.** Educators note significant improvements in students' writing fluency, organization, and convention application.
- **Educator empowerment.** Educators feel well-supported by the program's explicit instruction and clear routines.

Being a Writer is not just a curriculum; it's a comprehensive system that nurtures young writers, aligns perfectly with New York State's vision, and delivers tangible results in the classroom. We are confident it will transform writing instruction in your elementary schools.

Alignment With Instructional Practices and Grade-Level Considerations

The *Being a Writer* program is closely aligned with New York State's instructional considerations, supporting every student in building a strong writing foundation. The charts on the following pages offer a grade-by-grade snapshot of these considerations, along with descriptions of how the program aligns at each grade and how instruction builds across grades.

Teach students to become fluent with handwriting, spelling, sentence construction, typing, and word processing.

Writing fluency is defined as the ability to communicate ideas accurately and quickly with relatively little effort, requiring automatic or effortless handwriting, typing, and spelling skills.

NYS Best Practices: Additional Considerations by Grade Level

Kindergarten

Develop an understanding of basic sentence structure and teach basic principles (including capitalization and punctuation).

Encourage students to write using invented spelling for words that they do not know how to spell.

When utilizing phonics best practices, have students write the letters and words.

Teach students how to hold a writing utensil correctly and form letters fluently and efficiently.

Grade 1

Encourage students to apply taught phonics skills by spelling words accurately when writing.

Develop an understanding of basic sentence structure and teach basic principles (including capitalization, punctuation).

Expose students to keyboards, gaining a general familiarity with letter placement.

Analyze exemplary texts and direct students to emulate characteristics of exemplary texts at the word, sentence, or text level as a catalyst for the students' writing.

Grade 2

Teach students how to edit their writing by modeling correct capitalization, punctuation, and grammar usage.

Ask students to review their spelling to see if it follows taught spelling patterns, and model using a dictionary or other reference tool(s) to correct spelling.

Encourage the use of technology and word processing tools to type and revise text.

Grade 3

Teach students how to edit and revise their writing by modeling correct capitalization, punctuation, spelling, and grammar usage.

Ask students to review their spelling to see if it follows taught spelling patterns, and model using a dictionary or other reference tool(s) to correct spelling.

Encourage the use of technology and word processing tools to type and revise text.

The *Being a Writer* program systematically fosters the development of fluency in handwriting and typing through consistent, meaningful daily writing practice, integrated instruction, and a gradual release of responsibility from educator to student, rather than through isolated, explicit lessons on letter formation or typing skills. Explicit handwriting instruction for grades K–1 is included in the *Being a Reader*TM program, our comprehensive reading curriculum.

Being a Writer Alignment: At a Glance Across Grades K–3

- While the *Being a Writer* program does not directly teach handwriting or typing, **students practice these skills and develop fluency** through daily, authentic writing experiences. Students in grades K–2 use pencil and paper to draft and then publish their writing, providing younger students with the ability to draw and write freely to communicate their thoughts. In grade 3, students handwrite drafts in their writing notebooks, then transfer a draft for publication to a word processor.
- **Strategic spelling instruction** is woven into lessons to help students apply phonics knowledge to encode words as they write. **High-frequency word instruction** is also included in kindergarten and grade 1.
- The program explicitly integrates **grammar skills and conventions** into the writing process, providing authentic opportunities for students to apply what they learn. Additional support and practice are available in the *Student Writing Handbook* (grades 1–3) and on the Learning Portal (grades 2–3).
- Instruction in **grammar, usage, punctuation, and capitalization** is explicit and systematic, beginning at the end of Unit 1. These skills are reinforced through educator modeling, class discussions, writing conferences, and during the revision and proofreading phases.
- Technology extensions for grades K–2 offer suggestions for publishing writing digitally. Beginning in grade 3, the use of **digital tools is embedded** in the writing process, teaching students to revise and proofread using **word processors** and conduct online research.

Key Differences for K–2: Developing Handwriting Fluency Through Daily Practice

The *Being a Writer* program ensures students develop handwriting fluency through ample, integrated practice within authentic writing contexts.

- **Daily writing opportunities.** The program dedicates **daily periods of writing**, typically 20–25 minutes for K–2 students, ensuring consistent practice. This aligns with research emphasizing that increased time spent writing enhances text quality.
- **Modeled and shared writing.** In grades K–1, **shared writing** and **whole-class guided writing practice** are foundational strategies. Educators model writing aloud, demonstrating basic mechanics such as **capitalizing the first letter of a sentence and names**, and using **periods and exclamation points**. Students then practice these skills, often by drawing and telling their stories, and practicing writing letters, words, and simple sentences.
- **Hands-on practice tools.** K–1 classroom packages include **wipe-off boards and dry-erase markers**, which students use during Guided Writing Practice to follow along as educators model writing letters, words, and sentences. This provides direct, repetitive practice for handwriting.

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- **Strategic spelling instruction.** Throughout grades K–2, **strategic spelling instruction** is woven into lessons. This helps students apply phonics and decoding skills to encode words, meaning they are continually practicing the physical act of forming letters to create words, which contributes to handwriting fluency.
- **Focus on meaning.** The ultimate goal is for handwriting and spelling to become **automatic and fluent**, allowing students to focus their cognitive effort on conveying meaning through their writing, rather than the mechanics of forming letters.

Key Differences for Grade 3: Developing Typing and Word Processing Fluency

In grade 3, students transition towards digital literacy, and the *Being a Writer* program incorporates the development of typing and word processing fluency through practical application within the writing process.

- **Integrated digital tools.** The program explicitly embeds the **use of digital tools** into the writing process. This is a key element of the curriculum, recognized as improving the overall quantity and quality of student writing.
- **Transferring drafts for digital publication.** After drafting in their writing notebooks, grade 3 students are introduced to the formal writing process in Unit 2, where they learn to **select a draft, then develop, revise, proofread, and publish it digitally**. This crucial step of transferring a handwritten draft to a word processor provides significant and purposeful typing practice.
- **Explicit instruction in digital tool usage.** While not a typing tutorial, lessons **explicitly teach students how to revise and proofread using word processors**. For example, educators **model using features like the "undo" tool and "cut" and "paste" functions** within a word processor. This direct instruction focuses on *how to use* the word processor's functions to enhance their writing, which in turn reinforces typing skills.
- **Authentic digital tasks.** Grade 3 students work in pairs to **research and write informational reports about animals**, involving tasks like **reading web pages to gather information**. This authentic use of digital sources and the subsequent digital drafting and publishing of reports naturally requires and develops typing and word processing skills within a meaningful context.
- **Gradual release of responsibility.** The program applies a gradual release model to the entire writing process. Initially, educators model the use of digital tools and guide students, but over time, students are expected to independently apply these skills as they move through the stages of drafting, revising, proofreading, and publishing their work digitally. This continuous, purposeful engagement with digital tools facilitates the development of fluency.

Teach students to use the writing process for a variety of purposes.

The writing process is a recursive, multi-step journey that moves a writer from initial ideas to a final polished piece. It consists of key stages—prewriting, drafting, revising, and editing—that writers can revisit as needed to strengthen their work.

NYS Best Practices: Additional Instructional Considerations by Grade Level

Kindergarten

Model strategies for each component of the writing process.

Use oral language skills to support written language skills.

Encourage students to share their writing and ideas using an “Author’s Chair.”

Grade 1

Teach and encourage the use of strategies for each component of the writing process such as picking ideas, organizing notes, writing and saying more, outlining, and imitation.

Teach students to use varied strategies that help them meet their writing goals.

Teach the conventions and concepts of sentences and instruct on how to use a variety of sentence structures in writing—beginning with a series of simple sentences to more complex and varied sentences.

Grade 2

Teach strategies for each component of the writing process, encouraging flexibility in the use of strategies to help meet writing goals (write or say more, use transition words, and write strong topic sentences).

Teach students to imitate an author’s craft to emulate the features of strong writing.

Teach students how to brainstorm ideas, organize notes and ideas into a clear sequence or structure

Help students understand the different purposes of writing (e.g., to describe, narrate, inform, persuade, analyze).

Design writing activities that expand students’ concept of audience (e.g., write a persuasive letter to a local politician, write a story for a kindergarten student).

Engage students in self-evaluation, self-monitoring, peer sharing, and peer review for feedback.

Grade 3

Teach strategies for each component of the writing process, encouraging flexibility in the use of strategies to help meet writing goals (write or say more, use transition words, and write strong topic sentences).

Teach students to imitate an author’s craft to emulate the features of strong writing.

Teach students how to brainstorm ideas, organize notes and ideas into a clear sequence or structure.

Instruct students on how to construct a main idea and provide supporting details.

Help students understand the different purposes of writing (e.g., to describe, narrate, inform, persuade, analyze) and provide activities to expand students’ concept of audience.

Engage students in self-evaluation, self-monitoring, peer sharing, and peer review for feedback.

The *Being a Writer* program immerses students in the full writing process, enabling them to write in multiple genres for various purposes and audiences, including personal narrative, fictional narrative, expository nonfiction, opinion writing, and poetry. Students engage with mentor texts to understand each genre's structure and elements and participate in grade-level appropriate activities that support their writing development in these genres.

Being a Writer Alignment: At a Glance Across Grades K–3

- The *Being a Writer* program immerses students in the **complete writing process**, from idea generation to publication, with increasing sophistication across the grade levels.
- Students are given **daily time to write on topics they choose and care about**, tapping into their intrinsic motivation.
- Students write for **multiple purposes and audiences** across a range of **genres**, including personal narrative, fictional narrative, expository nonfiction, opinion writing, poetry, and letter writing (grade 2).
- **Grammar and conventions instruction** is integrated into the writing process at the **point of need**, ensuring that students learn skills in an authentic context and are prepared to transfer the skills they're learning to their own writing.
- Students are encouraged to **share their writing with peers and audiences** to build understanding of **authentic purpose in writing**.

Key Differences for Grades K–1

Early writing development is built on a **foundation of oral language, drawing, and phonics instruction**. In kindergarten and grade 1, students have **many opportunities to draw and tell their stories**. They also **verbally rehearse the words they will write** before putting them on paper.

- **Educators model strategies** for each part of the writing process through think-alouds, shared writing, and the use of **mentor texts**. Educators may generate their own stories or use writing models provided in the *Teacher's Manual*.
- **Students generate ideas** by drawing and telling their stories as a foundation for writing, then **tell more** to add detail and structure.
- **Students share their writing** with peers through routines such as "**Author's Chair**" and daily "**Sharing and Reflecting**," which help them develop listening skills and learn to show appreciation for another person's writing.
- Students are introduced to **basic grammar and conventions** by using **strategic spelling, capital letters, and punctuation** through modeling, Shared Writing, and Guided Writing Practice.
- In grade 1, students receive **explicit instruction in grammar and conventions** beginning at the end of Unit 1, which includes analyzing **mentor sentences** and practicing both **simple and more complex sentence structures**.
- Students at both grade levels participate in **collaborative writing projects** such as **class books**, which help them learn how ideas can be **organized into a clear sequence**.

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Key Differences for Grades 2 and 3 *(continued)*

In **grade 2**, students are **formally introduced** to the **complete writing process**, apply it across **multiple genres**, and begin using **strategies flexibly** while developing independence in revising and self-monitoring. In **grade 3**, students deepen their writing practice by using **digital tools** and **research**, expanding their **grammar** and **conventions knowledge**, and writing for increasingly **sophisticated purposes** and **audiences**.

- Students engage in **recursive cycles** of drafting, revising, editing, and publishing across a variety of **genres**.
- Students are encouraged to apply **strategies flexibly** to meet specific writing goals, such as using **transition words**, writing **strong topic sentences**, or **expanding their ideas**.
- Instruction emphasizes **writing for different purposes**, including to narrate, inform, persuade, and describe, while also considering the **audience**.
- Students use **checklists** to revise and proofread their work and provide **constructive feedback** to classmates through **peer** and **self-evaluation**.
- Instruction in **grammar** and **conventions** is embedded in the writing process, and students learn to apply skills such as using **adjectives, adverbs, compound sentences**, and **complex sentences** in their own writing.

Grade 2 Additional Differences

Students:

- Are introduced to **letter writing** as an additional **genre of study**.
- Learn to **brainstorm** and **organize ideas**, select topics, and draft pieces that follow a **logical sequence**.
- Use **proofreading checklists** to **self-monitor** and **revise** their writing more independently.

Grade 3 Additional Differences

Students:

- Expand their writing practice by using **digital tools** and conducting **research projects** that include choosing topics, evaluating sources, taking notes, and organizing information.
- Use **quick-writes** to generate ideas and build **writing fluency**.
- Receive **explicit grammar instruction**, which includes **plural nouns, complex sentences, and subordinating conjunctions**.
- Learn to identify **main ideas** and use **supporting details** to strengthen their writing. Graphic organizers in their *Student Writing Handbook* provide additional support with organizing information.
- Collaborate to co-publish **informational reports**, which deepen their understanding of **authentic purposes and audiences**.

Incorporate daily opportunities for students to practice writing in meaningful contexts.

A successful writing program, as supported by research, provides time for students to write every day.

View Sample Being a Writer Lessons by Grade Level

[Grade K Sample Lesson](#)

[Grade 1 Sample Lesson](#)

[Grade 2 Sample Lesson](#)

[Grade 3 Sample Lesson](#)

The *Being a Writer* program emphasizes that students need to write a lot to develop into strong writers and critical thinkers. Each daily lesson includes dedicated "Writing Time" for sustained independent writing on topics students choose and care about, fostering consistent skill development and deeper engagement with texts. Extension Activities offer additional opportunities for writing that can expand on lesson ideas or introduce new related topics.

Being a Writer Alignment: At a Glance Across Grades K–3

- Writing instruction in grades 1–3 is structured for **five days a week, 40 minutes per day**. Kindergarten includes 3 days of structured lessons with suggestions for the remaining two "Open Days" and "Writing Across the Week."
- **Reading–writing connection activities** in *Being a Writer* provide students with opportunities to think more deeply about what they are reading through writing. These activities occur in each unit of the program, providing students with opportunities to write opinions about and make connections to texts they listen to and discuss. These experiences with responding to literature help prepare students for more formal writing about texts in later grades.

Writing instruction aligns with writing standards and curriculum goals.

Aligning instruction to state standards ensures that all students receive equitable, high-quality learning experiences and that teaching is focused on the knowledge and skills students need to succeed at each grade level.

The *Being a Writer* program addresses standards for writing, speaking and listening, and language. Educators can access the standards [Correlation Tool](#) to review aligned standards for each grade level and unit. The *Implementation Handbook* provides further explanation of the program's alignment with standards ([Being a Writer Grade K Implementation Handbook, pp. 13–14](#)).

Additionally, the *Being a Writer* instruction is designed to support students' writing development in each genre across the year and grade levels. View these charts to see how instruction builds:

[Development across the Grades: Fiction](#); [Development across the Grades: Nonfiction](#); [Development Across the Grades: Opinion](#)

Additional Overarching Instructional Considerations for Grades K–3

Teach writing skills explicitly, using clear, direct language and modeling each skill or strategy. Gradually release writing responsibility from the educator to the student.

The *Being a Writer* program provides **explicit, systematic instruction** in writing skills and strategies through **daily lessons with a predictable structure: Getting Ready to Write, Writing Time, and Sharing and Reflecting**. The **predictable lesson structure** helps reduce students' cognitive load, allowing them to focus effectively on new content while also ensuring a **gradual release of responsibility**, moving from educator modeling and support to student independence. The educative program design supports educators in facilitating this approach.

- **Getting Ready to Write – I do.** During this section, the educator provides the most direct instruction. Students engage in activities such as reading aloud and discussing mentor texts, brainstorming, participating in shared or modeled writing, and in grade 3, practicing “quick writes.” Grammar skills and conventions are taught in context using model sentences.
- **Getting Ready to Write – We do.** Students gather and sit with partners to discuss ideas, practice social skills, and problem-solve around collaboration. They participate in **cooperative structures** such as “Turn to Your Partner” and “Heads Together” to orally rehearse their stories before writing. They also learn how to ask for, give, and receive helpful feedback through peer and teacher conferring.
- **Writing Time – You do.** During this period of sustained independent writing, educators may write alongside students, observe and provide support, or confer with individuals and pairs to give targeted feedback.
- **Sharing and Reflecting.** In this closing section, students share and reflect on their writing and their social interactions. They practice listening and expressing appreciation for peers’ writing, discuss what is working well in partnerships, and strategize about resolving challenges. Students also regularly share polished pieces through the Author’s Chair, reinforcing audience, purpose, and accountability.

Writing and Linguistically Diverse Learners

Encourage oral storytelling and shared writing using culturally relevant texts to bridge home language and literacy development.

Value student voice by providing choice in writing topics, celebrating diverse experiences, and prioritizing expression over correctness while guiding students toward writing conventions.

To ensure equitable access to high-quality instruction, writing programs must provide intentional, research-based support for multilingual learners, recognizing their home languages and cultural backgrounds as assets while fostering the English proficiency needed to become confident, capable writers.

The *Being a Writer* program is designed to comprehensively support linguistically diverse learners by integrating evidence-based practices that foster both academic and social development. Its pedagogical approach inherently creates an inclusive and nurturing classroom environment that addresses the unique needs of multilingual learners.

Being a Writer Alignment: At a Glance Across Grades K–3

Develop Oral Language Skills Alongside Literacy

- The *Being a Writer* program recognizes that **early writing builds upon a strong foundation of oral language** and aims to develop oral language skills concurrently with English decoding skills.
- Students, particularly in kindergarten and grade 1, have **frequent opportunities to tell stories orally**.
- The program encourages students to **verbally rehearse their writing ideas** with an educator or partner before writing, which helps them organize thoughts and clarify writing tasks.

Facilitate Shared Writing Experiences

- **Shared writing is a key instructional practice** where educators guide students in co-creating stories by eliciting their ideas and modeling explicit thinking aloud about generating ideas, adding details, and applying writing skills and conventions. This practice is central to the "Getting Ready to Write" section of daily lessons.
- Shared writing activities can be adapted for **interactive writing**, allowing students to physically contribute to the written text.

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Utilize Culturally Relevant Texts and Home Language Resources *(continued)*

- The curriculum actively **supports drawing on students' diverse experiences, prior knowledge, and linguistic backgrounds** in instruction.
- **Mentor texts are purposefully chosen to reflect a wide range of backgrounds, cultures, and perspectives**, helping students see themselves represented and fostering a sense of belonging, which can reduce barriers to learning. View the complete list of texts and digital media used in the program here: [Being a Writer Mentor Texts and Digital Media](#)
- **Pre-teaching support activities** build background knowledge for texts or concepts, often incorporating opportunities for students to connect to and share their experiences and knowledge, including those from their **home languages**.
- **EL Notes and targeted supports** within lessons specifically encourage the use of **home languages** as a resource and can point out syntactical differences between English and other languages.
- Students are encouraged to **brainstorm, plan, or draft in their home languages** and to discuss their work with **home-language partners**.
- **Family Letters** are provided in both English and Spanish, offering suggestions for activities that connect to unit topics and genres, and inviting families to share aspects of their culture or experiences.

Value Student Voice and Provide Choice

- Being a Writer cultivates **intrinsic motivation** by offering students **choice in writing topics** and providing consistent **opportunities to share their writing** with various audiences. Students can **self-select their writing topics** or choose from a menu of options.
- The program aims to create a classroom community where students feel **empowered to express their voices** and are **supported in taking creative risks**.
- **Open-ended questions** and **sufficient wait-time** are utilized to encourage all students to participate and express their ideas, fostering a respectful environment for diverse responses. Facilitative questions and discussion prompts further deepen conversations.
- **Random pairing** promotes equity by ensuring all students have opportunities to interact with and learn from a variety of peers throughout the year.

Prioritize Expression and Support Developmental Stages

- For emergent writers (kindergarten and grade 1), the program initially **encourages "best attempts" at spelling and continuous writing**. This approach understands that motivation to learn formal conventions develops from the desire to clearly communicate ideas in published works.
- Students' initial writing may include scribbles, drawings, random letter strings, and invented spelling, with the goal of fostering authentic text generation.

Guide Towards Writing Conventions and Skill Development

- **Explicit educator modeling** is a fundamental support, demonstrating sentence construction and how to integrate various writing elements and conventions. This is part of a **gradual release of responsibility** framework.
- **Instructional scaffolds** are embedded throughout, including predictable lesson structures, explicit teaching of classroom procedures and routines, previewing texts, prompts, and building background knowledge and academic vocabulary, to create an equitable learning environment.

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