

10 Things Teachers Can Do to Improve Their Grammar and Writing Instruction

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One

Integrate writing and grammar with other disciplines as much as possible. (*WR** 21-23)

**WR* refers to
Burke, Jim. *Writing Reminders: Tools, Tips,
and Techniques*. Portsmouth, NH:
Heinemann, 2003.



Grammar/Writing Issues in other disciplines

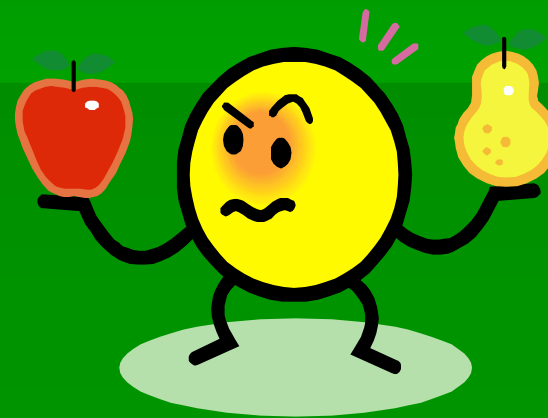
- Only English teachers know how to write (perception)
- Grammar/Usage rules are tough
- Disparities in levels
- Some students need to see value beyond the grade
- Then, there's "The Grade"
- Politics of grammar

Options

- Bring in community members to show the value of writing in their daily lives/jobs.
- Teaming/Interdisciplinary Writing
- Make the writing as “real” as possible

Two

Whenever possible,
provide choices for
students. (*WR 31*)



Choices solve grammar/usage problems

- Advanced – debate (essay) a controversial issue from a text
- Moderate – Character/Theme/Motif study (Essay, poster); summaries
- Moderate/Easy – type of writing
 - Poetry, chart, group writing, read alouds, journals, news articles, webposting

Three

Encourage reflection. (*WR*
167, 191)

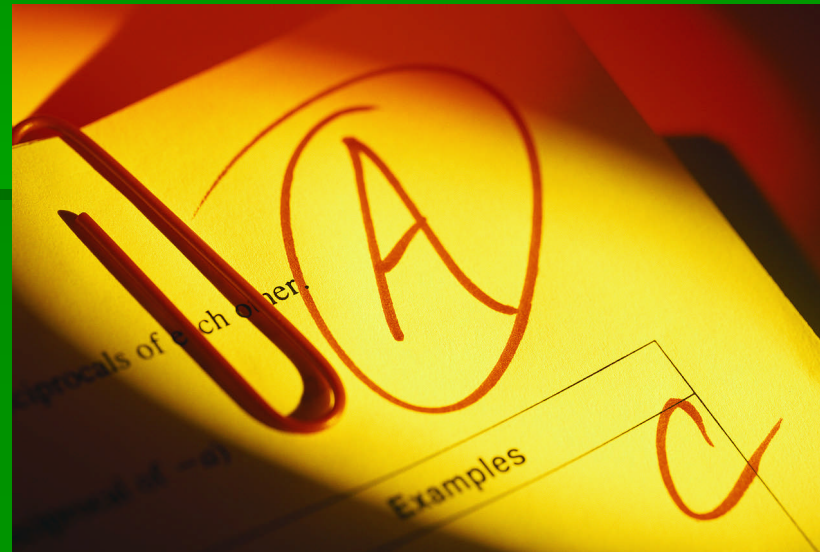


Structure/Accountability

- Isolate individual problems for students to work on (run-on sentences, fragments, cohesion, spelling, etc.). Hold accountable. [I'll be honest. Time is an issue here.]
- Portfolios
 - Cover letter, graded essays/drafts, reflection papers
 - Keep consistent

Four

Be specific with your expectations.



Students will “rise to the occasion,” we hope

- Teacher “issues”
- Rubrics – boatloads in Burke
 - Problems/Benefits
- Guides and models
 - Student samples are great (get permission)
 - Newspapers (local/national)
- Use literature as a grammar/usage guide
- Daily writings

Five

Provide authentic audiences. (*WR 39*)



Audience is a big part

- Middle schoolers want respect; fitting in is a huge issue. Writing, perhaps, can give them some respect.
- Class writings, class publications, class presentations, web postings/designs
- Make it as “real” as possible
 - Force the students (and teachers, to some extent) to take ownership

Six

Provide opportunities for discussion.



Discussion . . .this one can be tough

- Timely-meaningful feedback
 - Burke has many good ideas to get out of the paperload issue, or at least give you the impression you are getting out of it.
- Student checklists
- Open essay discussion
- Essay combination
- Online reads/webboards

Seven

Encourage revision.



Revision is pretty much the whole thing . . .

- Preparation – go through the writing process stuff
- Make them aware of previous grammar/usage problems (document on the revised copy)
- Give them specific items to look for; don't just say revise
 - Find ten “boring” words; make them more “enlightening”
 - Simple cohesion check
 - “To be” verb search
 - “The comma check”
- Use the computer to your advantage (*WR 51*)

Heaney's "The Schoolbag" *makes* comparisons between life and a bag *used* for school. In the first stanza, Heaney *talks* about how his teacher, John Hewitt, *was* "nel mezzo del cammin," in the middle of his life, when he *was* a schoolboy. In the second verse Heaney *makes* reference to the Italian *used* in the first *by saying* "in the middle of the road to school" *were* daisies and dandelions. The comparisons with life and the mind *are* most evident in the third verse of the poem. It *says* that the school was "unemptiable." This *could be saying* it was unemptiable because there *was* nothing in it, or that knowledge *can never be* lost. It then *says* to take the bag for a "word hoard" (to *put* papers in, or to *keep* knowledge and memories in your mind) and a hansom, which *is* a good luck token. The last two lines *tell* the reader to take the schoolbag as you *leave* your parents.

In "The Schoolbag" **Seamus Heaney compares** his schoolbag to life. In the first stanza, Heaney **remembers** his teacher, John Hewitt, **who** was "nel mezzo del cammin," (in the middle of his life), when **Heaney** was a schoolboy. In the second **stanza** Heaney **alludes to the earlier Dante quotation**, saying "in the middle of the road to school" **he found** daisies and dandelions. The comparisons with life and the mind **grow more poignant** in the third **stanza** of the poem **where Heaney describes** the school as "unemptiable." **Here Heaney implies that his young mind contained** nothing, **and what it gained from teachers such as Hewitt** could never be lost. **Finally Heaney urges the reader (and Hewitt?) to** take the bag for a "word hoard" (to **store** papers, to keep knowledge and memories in your mind) and a hansom, **or** good luck token. **In the last two lines Heaney suggests that the schoolbag holds all he will need—if we have learned our lessons well—as we leave our parents to walk our own "cammin."**

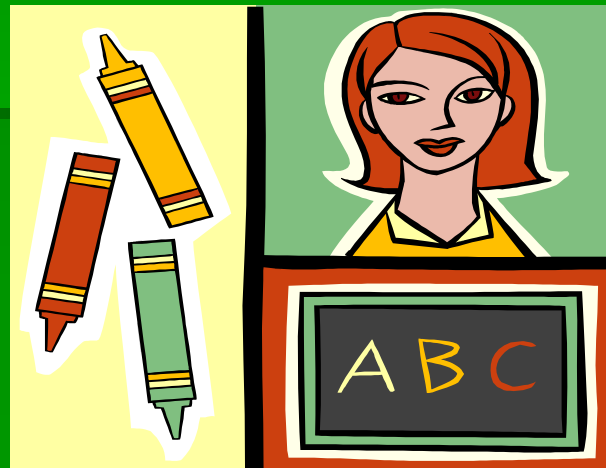
Burke, Jim. *Writing Reminders: Tools, Tips, and Techniques*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2003. 51.

Revision continued

- Grade multiple drafts
- Peer revision; group writing
- Student-centered revision

Eight

Use mini-lessons to make direct instruction useful.



Mini-lessons

- Prioritize grammar/usage concepts for each grade/class. Note: Review at the end of the year.
- See grammar/usage mastery as a process (a long process)
- Daily oral language, or the like
- Use the computer
- Set up a library of material; handouts
- Use “real-life” examples
- Keep a teacher’s journal to drive the mini-lessons (*WR* 171)

Nine

Make full use of the internet
as a resource.



Ten



Questions/Comments

This slide show will be available on the Day of Reading website and on my school's website:

<http://www.wcusd15.org/gudwienm>

E-mail – gudwienm@wcusd15.org