

**Why do Students Struggle with the Writing Process?**

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Most students when they hear about an essay start to panic. When high school students at a local magnet school in Hartford, Connecticut were asked whether or not they struggled with writing, over seventy percent of students at Sports and Medical Science Academy said writing causes anxiety. Students tend to feel this way because most students know in writing that there are multiple steps in order to achieve a well written essay. There are different learning curves that make the writing process very difficult for students. Most students tend to struggle with the writing process due to many factors which can negatively reflect upon students in the classroom. Reading level, struggle with confidence and the actual readiness of students are the biggest factors that students struggle with during the writing.

A factor that is very important when talking about the writing process is a student's reading level. Reading level is the written or printed text that is used to see if a student can understand. This is based on three components: reading accuracy, fluency and comprehension level. Reading accuracy is used to see if students can read words without making a mistake. Fluency is how well a person can speak those words and comprehension level is how well they understand what they wrote. Reading level is critical for the writing process because students need to understand what the purpose of an article is or what it is trying to communicate before writing a paper on it. "Fluent readers more deeply understand that code. Writing also improves reading comprehension as students get better at formatting their writing. When students write argumentative essays, they learn how authors often lay out their arguments and evidence" (Ferlazzo, 2020). Reading is an essential aspect to life because being able to point out certain texts, use them to form opinions and be able to express the meaning behind it are all skills needed beyond education.

A basic but important skill in English is knowing how to speak, write and understand it. Even if a student struggles with their reading comprehension, the writing process can help develop a student's reading skills. "Writing directly benefits students' reading skills. For example, if you have students write about what they've read or learned (for nearly any content or age), you'll dramatically improve reading comprehension. Students are often forced to reread and think more deeply about what they've read. When students have to consider a controversial question and use texts they've read to defend their point of view, reading comprehension is off the charts" (Ferlazzo, 2020). Reading level is strongly connected to writing which should stress how important it is to actual use both of these. Students who are struggling with reading tend to not be able to form complete thoughts and ideas from a text. English is used every day in the majority of people's lives, and not knowing the meaning behind what a person is reading creates complications without comprehending anything.

There was a student questionnaire issued out to fellow students at SMSA to discuss how students viewed English and the writing process. Almost seventy percent of students said that writing gives them anxiety. What a lot of great authors learned at a very early time in their careers is to publish what they had confidence in. Having confidence in writing does not only impact how the author processes and works on the writing process, but it can reflect on the work a person puts out. Can you imagine an author putting out something they are not proud of? That would reflect back on the piece of work because it is very noticeable when writing does not illustrate confidence and fails to incorporate the writer's own thoughts and feelings. The mindset a person has reflects back to the writing and makes it seem insincere and disingenuous due to the lack of confidence the writer has. If a person believes their writing is horrible, everyone else around them will believe the exact same thing. "It is a mindset. If *you* aren't confident in your

writing, nobody else will be either. Having confidence as a writer allows you to speak with your own voice, not an atypical version of yourself spitting out what you expect people want to hear” (McCarthy, 2018). A lot of students might have Imposter Syndrome in their own works of writing which can ultimately impact how they feel about their writing. “Imposter syndrome is the inability to internalize your successes, coupled with the fear of being outed as an unqualified fraud” (*What Is Imposter Syndrome, and How Do You Overcome It?*, 2017). This goes with the idea that people who do not believe they are good writers will set themselves up and ultimately affect their successes with fear. Going back to how seventy percent of students said writing gives them anxiety; the lack of confidence and fear in writing will impact the future of many students in a negative way. Being able to express ideas confidently makes others feel just as confident about your writing. Confidence shows, so being able to put that out there in the world is essential; especially towards the writing process.

As discussed in the last paragraph, there was a questionnaire SMSA students took that talked about the writing process and how the students felt about it. There were many observations about this questionnaire that were surprising. When students were asked whether or not teachers “do enough” when explaining and teaching the writing process; a little more than fifty percent said no. Learning to write in school has not been actively pursued enough. Teachers are not teaching their students how to write, which is making it difficult for students to excel in writing courses. “According to Kate Walsh, president of the National Council on Teacher Quality, a scan of course syllabuses from 2,400 teacher preparation programs turned up little evidence that the teaching of writing was being covered in a widespread or systematic way” (Goldstein, 2017). Students are not prepared with the readiness they need for college because of the high school expectations of their writing. There is an article written by Sarah Butrymowicz

that discusses the readiness of high school students. Alex Mayer states that, “ The rates are “so high that there’s no question students are getting out of high school without the skills they need to succeed in college,” said Alex Mayer, a senior research associate at MRDC, an education and social policy research organization. (Butrymowicz, 2017) When Alex discusses these rates, she is referring to the rate at which the level of readiness students are at. “The other side of it is these students are not getting out of college, for the most part” (Butrymowicz, 2017). Not being able to write as frequently or at the required level for colleges and universities may lead to the downfall of students' success rates with writing.

These students are not coming into universities with the skills that are needed to pursue the career choices they decide. “Furthermore, according to a survey conducted by The Chronicle of Higher Education (2006), 61% of high school teachers said their students have never written a paper that was more than five pages. As a result, students have not had enough practice to develop a set of sophisticated writing skills. When students lack skills in these areas, their writing may be unsatisfactory in multiple ways – from poor grammar and syntax to unclear organization to weak reasoning and arguments” (Why are students poorly prepared to write - Eberly Center - Carnegie Mellon University, n.d.). Unclear ideas lead to students not being able to fully express the purpose of their writing and makes them look very weak as a writer. Teachers not teaching writing skills enough in their lesson plan is the downfall for these students.

The writing process is a very difficult concept for students to grasp. There is no key element to point out when talking about why students struggle with the writing process. There are multiple components in the writing process that each individual student can struggle with. Reading level is critical for students; writing skills are a major component on whether students. Without being able to read or write, it is hard for students to fully understand a text. It goes with

the steps of being able to actually evaluate what an author is trying to say. Being confident and having teachers being able to teach their students writing skills is important for students to actually develop these writing skills. Struggling with confidence and allowing students to go into college without the necessary skills is hurting them in the long run. These major components are affecting the way students perform once high school is over and has made the point proven that even when students go into college, there are still certain skills that do not meet expectations. If students continue to not grasp the full idea of these components, the future will look bleak due to the constant struggle in writing.

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