

Why should we have students write across the curriculum?

As most Florida educators are aware by now, student writing has emerged from the language arts classroom and is now expected to form a significant part of the instruction in every class from K to 12.

We know this for two reasons:

1. The Florida Standards say so. In addition to the standards for language arts, we now have Standards for Literacy in History, Social Studies, Science, and the Technical Subjects in grades 6-12.
2. These literacy standards – for reading, writing, listening and speaking – are now part of all course descriptions. (That includes chemistry, health, civics, career and technical courses and every other course in Florida’s course directory.)

Those are reasons why teachers are expected to integrate writing and other literacy skills into their teaching.

Now here are the reasons why you should:

- **The process of composing text improves reading skills** (Fitzgerald & Shanahan, 2000).
This makes sense when you think about it. In working through the cognitive steps of developing ideas, planning the structure, choosing and arranging details, finding the language and formulating the phrases and sentences necessary to produce a piece of writing, the student extends and deepens her understanding of text and is better prepared to comprehend and analyze what she reads.
- **Writing about what we learn helps us to understand it better and move it into long-term memory.**
Think of a few things you have written recently. They likely include many of these: emails, letters, daily notes, brainstorming, lists of ideas or items, meeting minutes, reports or directions. What was your purpose for each? Writing helps us sort out our ideas, share our thinking, document information, remember and understand.
- **Developing a foundation of academic discourse, both in speaking and in writing, allows students to collaborate, learn from others, and find the language to clearly articulate their ideas.**
In the workplace and in college, students will be expected to express themselves with professionalism. It is our job to support them in learning and using academic and discipline-specific language, and collegial ways of expressing themselves.
- **Written work provides a window into student thinking (formative assessment).**
Try a quick-write at the end of the class period. For example: “Explain in one paragraph the process we studied today.” The results the students hand you as they head out the door will give a quick and fairly accurate idea of what they have learned and what still needs work.
As a bonus, by pulling together their understanding of the material and trying to explain it, your students will have gained a deeper understanding of it.

There are many ways that writing and other literacy strategies can help your students to extend their thinking and reach greater mastery. For more information, please contact Julia Somers-Arthur, literacy specialist, at julia.somers-arthur@fldoe.org.