

Writing in English Language Arts Grades 6-8

As outlined in the West Hartford District Curriculum Overview documents, writing is one of the basic skills developed over all three grade levels of middle school. Students learn the basics of grammar, usage, and mechanics through regular practice in a variety of writing genres, but their development as writers does not stop there. Students apply the skills they learn in English during other classes such as social studies and science. By the time students arrive at Conard and Hall, they have experienced instruction and assessment that calls for higher-order thinking, creativity, and reflection. Though the samples offered in this brief description indicate the thoughtfulness and care West Hartford Middle School teachers put into their instruction of writing, it is by no means a comprehensive list of student writing tasks and experiences in West Hartford middle schools.

Students practice writing in genres, understanding the characteristics familiar to readers and the organizational structures authors use. Comparison and contrast essays, narrative fiction in creative writing tasks, and reflective journaling in response to literature require students across the grade levels to see how organization and development shape the author's message and create the means of understanding for the audience. In works collected throughout the year in student writing portfolios, students practice the skills of word choice and sentence fluency displaying voice in their personal narratives and reflective essays. As writers across the disciplines, students practice expository writing skills of descriptive language and supporting points with details from non-fiction texts. This is especially true in social studies where students practice open responses citing the text, respond critically to primary source documents, and employ steps in the writing process as they complete a research experience. As they progress, middle school students at the honors level will interweave supporting examples with commentary required in advanced courses at Conard and Hall.

Students at the middle school level begin regular practice with sentence fluency, developing the skills of writers who vary sentence length and type to communicate both with an audience and for a purpose. Students at the middle school level are encouraged by all teachers to practice the skills of topic development and elaboration, as these skills are put into practice in both everyday writing tasks such as open-ended questions and complex writing tasks such as formal thesis papers and research papers requiring multiple drafts. Teachers differentiate instruction in writing by addressing specific student needs and providing focused correction for classes, small groups, and individuals. Students then use the feedback in teacher comments to practice the skills of revision and editing in their own written work. These skills are shared across the curriculum, so that what is practiced in English language arts class is applied in other subjects requiring a variety of writing tasks.

Parents are welcome to ask questions and discuss the focus of writing instruction in the classroom. English teachers across the district are willing to share their students' writing development and discuss how parents can help with writing outside of the classroom. Here are a few good questions to ask your son or daughter about their writing:

- What is this assignment asking you to include in your writing?
- Have you included supporting evidence for your written answers?
- Have you made your points to the reader in clear and concise language?

A good way to start the conversation about his or her writing is to act as the reader in a writing conference where you provide a real audience for their writing. For more information about the district's English Language Arts Curriculum visit:

<http://www.whps.org/whps/instr-and-curric/curriculum-overview>

Tom Paleologopoulos, English Department Supervisor