

*Practice does not make perfect. Only perfect practice makes perfect. - Vince Lombardi*

*In theory there is no difference between theory and practice. In practice there is.—Yogi Berra*

Taking the time to practice is a gift we all need to give ourselves. Whether it be learning to ski, practicing tricky measures on the piano, or mastering French cooking, we all need to practice well in order to improve. We often think of the first quarter of school as a time of practice—a time to practice routines, schedules, and behavioral expectations. As we move into 2nd quarter and beyond, we expect our students to know what to do and how to do it. We become discouraged if we discover they still haven't mastered an essential skill necessary to move forward. They need to know their math facts to tackle multi-step problems, know phonics skills to read more difficult passages, and know how to successfully write sentences and paragraphs to proficiently express their thoughts. How difficult it is for all of us to stop and take the time needed to allow our students to practice if they haven't mastered a skill! We have standards and content to cover! We keep plowing on through the curriculum, not allowing students the time they need. The following video of cats and dogs can be an analogy our classrooms. Watch the video and decide . . . Are we more dog or catlike as we help our students learn new skills? Do we encourage and nurture children, or push them headlong down the stairs? Here are tips to allow your students time to practice their writing skills!

Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VTbbYLvhDSM>

### **Primary Students Practice Ideas**

**Practice Gathering Ideas:** Post a picture of an object, such as a dog, on multiple pieces of chart paper. In small groups, have the students brainstorm and write as many words about “dogs” as they can in five minutes. As a class, discuss possible categories we could create from our generated words and write these categories on the board. Have each small group cut apart their words and sort them into the decided categories.

**Practice Organizing Ideas:** Provide table groups with different topics, such as *School, Foods, Toys*. Students will draw 5 things they see at their assigned topic on 5 different notecards. *For example: Students who have School as a topic might draw books, a pencil, a teacher, a desk and a computer.* As a table group, putting everyone's cards together. Ask students how they might sort the groups of cards. What is the topic of this group of cards? Are there any cards which might go under more than one topic? Have table groups switch cards and repeat the process.

**Practice Editing:** Put students into groups of three. Provide them sentences with capitalization, punctuation and spelling errors. Have one child be the spelling expert, one the capitalization captain, and one the punctuation police. Each student will only correct the assigned errors. Switch roles for each sentence.

### Intermediate Students

**Practice Organizing a Plan:** Provide students with both opinion and informational writing topics. Students must: Underline the topic, draw a circle around the format, and put a squiggly line under the needed big ideas. Students will then write only the plan to match the prompt. For example: *Write a letter to a person considering moving to Colorado. Inform your reader where they should live in our state. Include three reasons to support your choice of area.* To extend the activity, have pairs of students write a prompt on a topic. They must include the topic, format and writing expectations.

**Practice Topic Sentence:** Provide students with basic paragraph plans (or use completed plans from their writing notebook.) Students will write a *Number*, *If-Then*, and *Although Topic Sentence* for each plan.

**Practice Sentence Fluency:** Think of a topic, such as *The Messy Thanksgiving Table*. Every day, give students one basic sentence to write more fluently by adding when, where, and why to their sentence. Compile the completed stretched sentences into a writing piece. For example: The *mashed potatoes spilled* becomes *Spilling out of the bowl, the mashed potatoes began to harden on the once white linen tablecloth*. Compile the sentences into a writing piece by adding an introduction and a conclusion. For example: *Before dinner, our table was a masterpiece. The silverware glistened and the glasses sparkled. After dinner, the table was a disaster.*

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