Writing to Learn
Structured student opportunities to employ writing to make sense of new learning

ELPS 1B, 1C, 1F. All of Strand 5
IP Rubric I-1, I-2, I-4, I-6, I-8

Why it works:
Informal writing may be thought of as “writing to learn” rather than “learning to write.” By interacting with text and expanding the learning with informal writing across all content areas, students further their writing skills and later apply them to formal writing. Ways to engage students is to integrate writing with structured peer conversations and the use of sentence stems/paragraph frames to help them internalize new learning, make connections, and develop academic language.

Suggested strategies:
- Graphic Organizers/Thinking Maps
- Exit Ticket
- What to Do
- Introduce New Learning
- Structured Peer Conversations
- Academic Language
- Assess Mastery
- Pacing Tools
- Determine and Track Student Progress

Tech tools:
- Onenote.com
- Edublogs.org
- Padlet.com
- Chalk Talk
- Lead4Ward

In the Pen/cil to Paper routine, we regularly:
- Plan to model informal writing consistently throughout the lesson in all content areas.
- Prepare for writing with structured conversations.
- Scaffold with sentence stems and paragraph frames.
- Model all “writing to learn” tasks.
- Circulate and coach as students write.
- Assess student writing.

* In addition to informal writing to learn, all students must develop their formal writing skills within each content area in genres such as lab reports, essays, and/or research papers.
Classroom implementation:

☑ Plan to model for informal writing consistently throughout the lesson in all content areas.

Plan how students will express their thinking with informal writing tasks aligned with the standards throughout the lesson cycle. Tasks could include quick writes, graphic organizers/Thinking Maps, Cornell Notes, interactive notebooks, learning logs, journals, and/or exit tickets. During planning, create content-aligned writing prompts, clearly define what to do, and provide word banks with visuals, and sentence stems and paragraph frames.

☑ Prepare for writing with structured peer conversations.

When you introduce new learning with writing tasks, have students generate ideas through structured peer conversations and peer writing before writing individually. Refer to the Let’s Talk routine for tips on how to create structured peer conversations, and let the students know when you plan to follow a structured peer conversation with individual writing.

☑ Scaffold with sentence stems and paragraph frames.

To differentiate, post and model the use of word bank, graphic organizers/Thinking Maps, sentence stems or paragraph frames when introducing the writing task. Students could also participate in a silent Chalk Talk or Padlet.com conversation.

☑ Model all “writing to learn” tasks.

Plan how you will model using Turn the Light On to show how to approach new writing tasks. Use academic language and key vocabulary using visuals as you model capturing your thoughts in writing.

☑ Circulate and coach as students write.

Provide quiet time for students to write using pacing tools. Scan student writing as you circulate. Use Do I Really Get It? and Huddle to prompt students to write in complete sentences, use academic language, and expand their thinking as needed.

☑ Assess student writing.

Treat informal writing as formative assessment and assess mastery. Give quick, precise, and warm written feedback on selected student writing on a regular basis, so students can apply it to formal writing. Determine and track student progress in articulating their understanding of content. Save samples of students’ writing in student portfolio to monitor progress.