

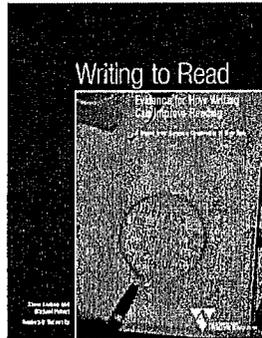
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## New report finds writing can be powerful driver for improving reading skills

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Although reading and writing have become essential skills for almost every job, the majority of students do not read or write well enough to meet grade-level demands. A new report co-authored by Vanderbilt researchers Steve Graham and Michael Hebert finds that while the two skills are closely connected, writing is an often-overlooked tool for improving reading skills and content learning.

"While writing is important in its own right, the evidence clearly shows that writing supports reading and reading development. Increasing how often students write has positive benefits on their development as readers," Graham, Currey Ingram Chair in Special Education and Literacy at Vanderbilt University's Peabody College, said. "In addition, previous research demonstrates that writing about information presented in science, math, English and social studies also supports students' learning in those subjects. If we want to maximize students' accomplishments in these critical areas, writing needs to become part of the solution."

The report, *Writing to Read: Evidence for How Writing Can Improve Reading*, was commissioned by the Carnegie Corporation of New York and published by the Alliance for Excellent Education. It was released April 14 and is available at <http://www.all4ed.org/files/WritingToRead.pdf> and [www.carnegie.org/literacy](http://www.carnegie.org/literacy).

"As the recent findings from The Nation's Report Card in reading demonstrate, nearly 70 percent of the nation's eighth graders fail to read at a proficient level," Bob Wise, president of the alliance and former governor of West Virginia, said. "Poor reading and writing skills not only threaten the well-being of individual Americans, but the country as a whole. Ensuring that adolescents become skilled readers and writers is not merely an option for America—it is an absolute necessity. As *Writing to Read* demonstrates, instruction in writing not only improves how well students write, but it also enhances students' ability to read a text accurately, fluently and comprehensively."

*Writing to Read* is part of a series of Carnegie Corporation of New York-funded reports intended to reengineer literacy instruction across the curriculum to drive student achievement. The initial report, *Time to Act: An Agenda for Advancing Adolescent Literacy for College and Career Readiness*, and corresponding reports were published in September 2009. *Writing to Read* is an extension of this work and provides practitioners with research-supported information about how writing improves reading while making the case for researchers and policymakers to place greater emphasis on writing instruction as an integral part of school curriculum.

"In an age overwhelmed by information, the ability to read, comprehend and write—in other words, to organize information into knowledge—must be viewed as tantamount to a survival skill," Vartan Gregorian, president of Carnegie Corporation of New York, said. "As Americans, we must keep our democracy and our society from being divided not only between rich and poor, but also between those who have access to information and knowledge, and thus, to power—the power of enlightenment, the power of self-improvement and self-assertion, the power to achieve upward mobility, and the power over their own lives and their families' ability to thrive and succeed—and those who do not."

The three closely related instructional practices that *Writing to Read* identifies as being effective in improving students' reading are:

- 1) **Have students write about the texts they read.** Writing about a text enhances comprehension because it provides students with a tool to visibly and permanently record, connect, analyze, personalize and manipulate key ideas in text. Students' comprehension of science, social studies and language arts is improved specifically when they
  - respond to a text in writing;
  - write summaries of a text;
  - write notes about a text; and
  - answer questions about a text in writing, or create and answer written questions about a text.
- 2) **Teach students the writing skills and processes that go into creating text.** Students' reading skills and comprehension are improved by learning the skills and processes that go into creating text specifically when teachers
  - teach the process of writing, text structures for writing, paragraph or sentence construction skills;
  - teach spelling and sentence construction skills; and
  - teach spelling skills.
- 3) **Increase how much students write.** Students' reading comprehension is improved by having them increase how often they produce their own text. The process of creating a text prompts students to be more thoughtful and engaged when reading text produced by others. The act of writing also teaches students about the importance of stating assumptions and premises clearly and observing the rules of logic. Students also benefit from using experience and knowledge to create a text as well as building relationships among words, sentences and paragraphs.

The report carefully notes that writing practices cannot take the place of effective reading practices and calls for writing to complement reading instruction, stating that each type of practice supports and strengthens the other. With lower-achieving students, an important key to success is providing ongoing practice and explicit instruction.

*Writing to Read* builds on the ideas presented in a 2006 Alliance report also co-authored by Graham, *Writing Next: Effective Strategies to Improve Writing of Adolescents in Middle and High School Literacy*. In both publications, a form of research called meta-analysis is used to collect, categorize and examine experimental and quasi-experimental data. *Writing to Read* marks the first meta-analysis examining the effects of different writing practices on students' reading performance.

Hebert is a post-doctoral fellow at Peabody College.

The Alliance for Excellent Education is a Washington, D.C.-based national policy and advocacy organization that works to improve national and federal policy so that all students can achieve at high academic levels and graduate from high school ready for success in college, work, and citizenship in the 21st century. For more information, visit <http://www.all4ed.org>.

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