

Must-Know Tips for Shared Writing

By Regie Routman

Provide sufficient shared writing experiences before expecting students to write on their own. The “we do it” part of the Optimal Learning Model (OLM) where an expert, usually the teacher, holds the pen and guides and shapes the language with students is, too often, overlooked. Shared writing is especially critical to writing success for our English Language Learners and learners who struggle. Giving students many opportunities to first express their ideas orally—and without fear of failure or worrying about the actual writing—helps sets them up for writing success later.

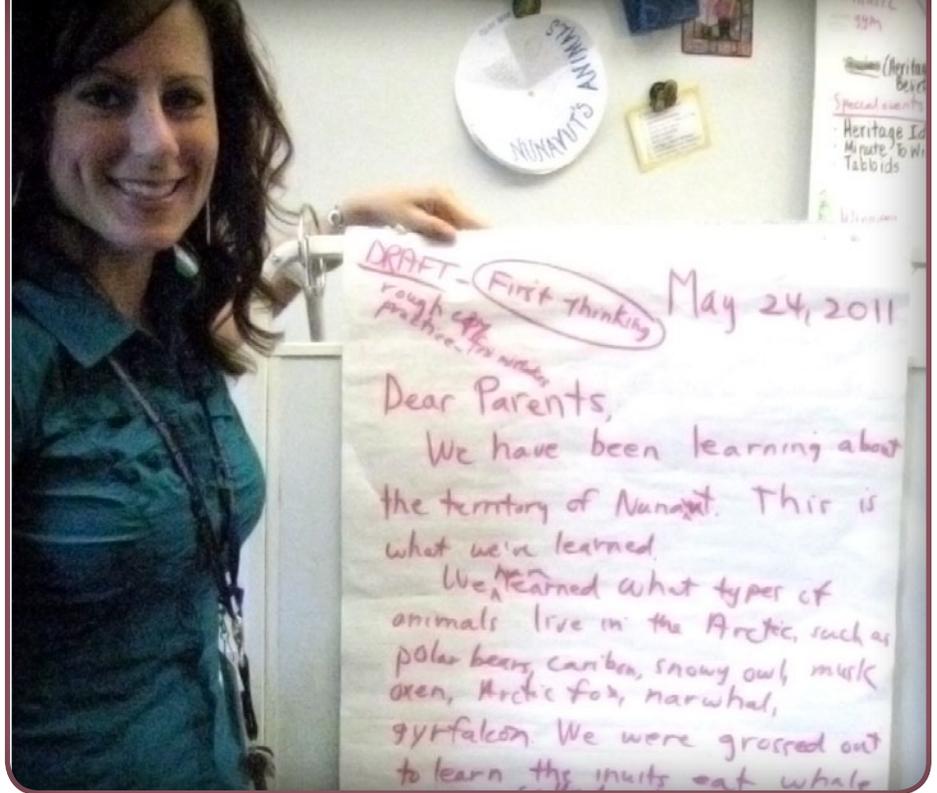
- » Take all ideas that make sense and incorporate them into the shared writing. This honors every student’s thinking. The shared writing draft can be revised later.
- » Don’t hesitate to put the language that students may be struggling to express “into their ears.” This is part of our role in helping to shape and guide the writing.
- » To ensure hearing all the voices and to evaluate *all* students’ thinking and efforts, word process the whole group, shared writing draft. Then, put students in small, heterogeneous groups and have each group revise the draft. Come together as a whole group and guide the final revisions. Use this process across the curriculum.
- » Before moving on to having students write on their own, have at least one or two public, scaffolded conversations to ensure students are ready and have cogent ideas.



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Here are a few proven ways to incorporate shared writing in a meaningful way:

- » To ensure that the audience and purpose of writing featured in school hallways is clear, compose a paragraph with the students that explains the posted writing —what it is, why the students wrote it, and so on. That sends the message that writers write for readers and that the writing that is posted is not just on the wall as decoration.
- » Instead of your regular newsletter to families, once in a while, write that newsletter with the students. Students will grasp the importance of selecting important topics, narrowing a topic, the necessity of making ideas clear for the readers, rereading the writing, and the need for careful spelling and editing.
- » Write an appreciation letter to a member of your school community, such as the custodian, secretary, cafeteria workers, crossing guards, special teachers, principal, and so on. Thank him/her for making your school a better place, and give specific examples of what the person has done. Once you've written one or more shared letters with the class, create a simple rubric and have students write their own letters.

For many more ideas and strategies for shared writing, see *Writing Essentials* by Regie Routman, chapter 5, "Do More Shared Writing" pp. 83-118. (Heinemann, 2005)