

Strategies for Struggling Writers: Production

The following strategies are for students who are writing below the threshold and not producing their targeted word count.

Give extra time (but not during class) for particular students to write.

If you can reliably control any part of your students' free time (recess, lunch, after school) without completely ruining your day, invite students to come during that free time to complete the Writing Prompt. Only have them stay as long as it takes to finish the targeted number of words—and you won't have to invite them more than a few times before they figure out how to reach the target during class time. If the student is struggling, you can reduce the target temporarily (and then gradually raise it), but make it higher than the student has been able to meet during class so far.

Remember, you are “giving” the student this time. This strategy should not be presented as a punishment.

Work on improving the whole class sharing session.

See [Feedback on Written Work](#) for troubleshooting tips on how to make sure you are building a writing community in which students can share their work with each other regularly. When it isn't working, it can sound like a utopian vision. But Amplify's protocol, implemented systematically, has been tested with a large variety of middle school students and will work—and is essential to driving consistent writing productivity for each student.

Give extra feedback to particular students.

Written comments:

You don't have to spread your written comments equally among your students at all times. Choose a few students who are not producing enough writing and see what happens when, for a week, you give them a quick, authentic response to a sentence here and there every time they write. Make sure these lucky students open the work and read the feedback out loud (maybe privately, while other students are doing vocabulary exercises).

Spotlight app:

As soon as the student reaches a new productivity target, post a sentence or two from this student's writing as a model of strong writing. Call out even the smallest victories.

OTSCs:

Focus on building productivity by writing intermediate goals for a number of words on an index card on the student's desk. See below for more information about how to use this approach.

Try one or more of the following strategies during OTSCs:

- 1. Reduce the targeted number of words for that student.**

Yes, it sounds counterintuitive, but you want the student to set a manageable goal and enjoy success. Point out how many words he or she seems to be writing regularly and together set a goal of 5–50 words above that. Write the number on an index card on the student's desk. Let the student settle at that number for a few days before asking him or her to set a new goal.

“When you hit that number, raise your hand so that I can read what you wrote.”

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2. Let the student talk it out.

Let the student dictate his or her answer. Write down the first few sentences the student gives you that are specific. Turn the tablet back to the student to write the next sentence. If necessary, take the tablet back and take dictation for the next sentence.

“When you have written two of your own, raise your hand and I’ll come back and take down one more.”

3. Make a “word bank” with student-generated words. (include phrases, not just individual words).

Ask the student to take a minute to tell you about his or her topic. List some of the words and phrases that the student uses correctly in the answer space on the tablet. Hand the tablet back to the student so that he or she can use those words and phrases in sentences.

You can also use this technique with a group of students by writing the words and phrases on the board.

4. Give the student a place to start (and a reason to start).

Write a good opening line to get a student started, or write a sentence in the middle of an entry to help the student keep writing. For example: *When I walked into the Aquarium, I sniffed, and the next thing I saw...*

Or maybe try inserting a sentence with which your student will disagree and see if you can provoke your student to disagree and write over your sentence! (Just make sure this is a student who is paying attention.) For example: *Dahl felt really awful that he had made fun of an old lady....*

5. Help students find the textual evidence they need.

When students are writing about text and need to include textual evidence, post specific paragraph numbers for the class, or have these paragraph references ready to share during OTSCs. By finding the textual evidence for students, you allow them to focus on discovering what they think about it. Make sure to reduce this support over time. Students need to learn on their own how to find those moments in the text that interest them.

6. Ask the student to draw a picture.

Ask the student to draw a picture of a specific moment, and have him or her label the picture using descriptive words. Have the student begin writing by adding a sentence to each label. Then, ask the student to add more details to describe the picture more fully.