

American School Foundation of Guadalajara Spanish/English/Language Arts School-wide Philosophy

ASFG emphasizes effective reading, writing, listening and speaking through a multi-cultural, literature-based curriculum. This curriculum encourages a diversity of genres, time periods, and perspectives to foster critical and creative thinking, quality communication, independence, and reflection at developmentally appropriate levels. We believe that development of reading and writing skills is interdependent and developmental in process. Our approach with students progresses from a more structured program of reading / writing to a more literature-based program which will prepare them for success as effective communicators in a post-secondary environment.

Writing Philosophy

We believe every student has the capacity to write, writing can be taught, and teachers can help students become better writers. The best method for learning how to write is to write, particularly for different purposes and for different audiences. Composition occurs in different modalities and with different technologies. Writing is a process and can only be learned in a developmental nature. The process of writing is just as important as is the final product. Conventions of finished and edited texts are important to readers and therefore to writers. Writing is a tool for thinking. The development of writing is inter-related with the development of reading and speaking.

It is within this context, that our writing program is developmentally designed for the most effective student learning. At the early childhood school level, we begin with encouraging students to use drawing and writing as forms of communication. Vocabulary development and letter sounds are taught along with correct letter formation using the Handwriting Without Tears Program. The emphasis is on students creatively expressing themselves through graphics and emergent spelling. At the elementary school level, students begin to utilize formalized spelling constructs, significant vocabulary development, cursive writing and four of the Six Traits of Writing (ideas, organizations, conventions, and word choice). The emphasis is on the use of more formalized writing conventions to express creative and expository compositions. At the middle school level, students transition to the WrAP Traits of Writing (overall development, organization, support, sentence structure, word choice, and mechanics). The emphasis continues on formalized spelling and grammar constructs to express creative, expository and persuasive compositions. At the high school level, students master formalized spelling and vocabulary development, as well as the WrAP Traits of Writing. The emphasis continues on formalized writing constructs to express creative, expository, and persuasive compositions, culminating in the student-directed writing journal, Sin Fronteras, and a Senior Project Thesis.

Reading Philosophy

We believe reading is an interactive process between a reader and text. In constructing meaning, the reader combines knowledge of phonics (how written letters relate to spoken sounds), phonemic awareness (rhyme and syllables), structure of language, contextual clues, and meaning of words. Additionally, the reader's prior experience and knowledge are critical to the process. Reading is developmental in nature and complex; it requires learning the relationship between spoken and written language. We strongly believe in a balanced approach to teaching reading – one that recognizes the importance of comprehension and enjoyment as much as knowledge of discrete language skills.

Based upon this philosophy and researched best practice, our teachers utilize reading aloud, shared reading, guided reading, leveled reading, structured reading with emphasis on phonemics, spelling and vocabulary, and ultimately, independent reading. The purpose of this varied approach is to coach our students in the development of reading comprehension and analytical skills. Emphasis is on developing a life-long passion for reading, as well as developing the skills required to read analytically from a variety of genres and informational text. From the beginning of our program, students are encouraged to read or be read to at home on a nightly basis, both literature recommended by the teacher as well as literature of their choice.

References (Everything above has been stolen from...)

Seattle Public School – Philosophy of Reading
Hong Kong International School – Language Arts Literacy Curriculum
Singapore American School – Enhanced Reading / Language Arts Curriculum
National Council of Teachers of English – Position Statement on Reading
International Reading Association – Phonemic Awareness and the Teaching of Reading
Bonnie Campbell Hill – Reading and Writing Continuum workshop

Writing Instruction that Works Across the Curriculum



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Classroom Instruction

1. Give students opportunities to write to a real audience for real purpose

Students are motivated by the prospect of a real audience and develop their writing and voice in a more genuine and thoughtful way than when just writing for their teacher. This may take the form of a literary journal, an article in a school magazine or individual letters to real people in the community such as politicians, newspaper editors or advocacy groups. The new SEP Spanish program incorporates writing for real audiences. Oral performance gives students a real audience of each other and combines two important communication skills: verbal and written.

ASFG Examples: Sin Fronteras, Tirando Rostro, Don Rabano, Middle School Voices, Connexion, Frequency, Strange Spaghetti, MUN letter to S. African Embassy, Senior Project, Living Wax Museum.

2. When assigning a writing task, take pleasure in doing it along side your students

Students benefit from this in two ways. First, the enthusiasm you bring to the writing assignment helps students see it as an interesting exercise rather than a teacher-imposed task. Second, when we model the writing process ourselves, students gain an appreciation of the value of it and see it as a tool for all writers, not just students.

When taking part in writing assignments, be sure to emphasize the process, not the final product. The point is not to illustrate what good writers we are as teachers but rather that we benefit from the writing process as well.

- 3. Show students samples from peer and mentor writers:** This strategy can be very effective in setting a high standard of quality while illustrating what a good piece of writing looks like. Vary the model between peer and professional samples favoring peer samples at the younger grades and professional ones at the older grades. Be aware of the danger of overusing one particular student's samples more than once or twice. In order to take risks in their writing, students need to feel positive of their own abilities. Highlighting one student in particular time and time again could inadvertently discourage students from accepting the self image of being a good writer. Using samples from previous years is a good strategy to avoid this.
- 4. Use a common vocabulary when discussing students' writing:** The ERB and/or 6-Trait rubric gives us a framework of terminology on which to build. Students should be very familiar with rubric criteria and writing terminology so they can then internalize, reflect upon and utilize it to improve their own writing throughout all stages of the writing process. The use of common vocabulary and focused instruction should, when possible, be supported by current resources and materials.
- 5. Give students opportunities to write polished pieces in all subject areas:** It is true rubrics for some writing assignments can and should favor certain qualities of good writing over others. For example, a journal entry designed to get students to write freely and creatively should not be evaluated on conventions. However, students need opportunities in all subject areas to write polished, multi-draft pieces and apply all the writing skills they are developing and be evaluated on them. Writing across the curriculum includes evaluating *how* students write as well as what they write about. While the writing process is important and should be

emphasized in the initial stages of developing a piece, the 'polished' final product is equally important during the later stages of writing. Ultimately, it is the polished finished piece which represents the writer's process.

6. **Teach and practice the writing process to your students:** Encourage prewriting skills such as brainstorming and using graphic organizers. Promote the value of revision through meta-cognition and peer evaluation. Teach these processes explicitly and hold students accountable for them. The editorial process should be interactive and revisions should be cyclical in nature to ensure final products are structurally, mechanically and contextually of the best quality. Recognize that in this highly technical world, the computer and communication tools such as messaging and blogs can compliment some of these previously "in-class" practices.
7. **Spanish and English teachers should address common weaknesses and strengths of our students' writing:** Our efforts as writing teachers in Spanish and English need to be unified behind common practice, assessment and training. We should work together viewing our students more as communicators through written word than communicators of two distinct languages. We have a great opportunity to collaboratively address common errors that our students make in both languages. Similarly, we can take advantage of our students' 'intelligent mistakes' to help them better appreciate both Spanish and English language development.
8. **Whenever possible make writing topics interesting to students and offer choice:** Students write better when they have deep interest in and strong opinions towards a topic. When topics are engaging, discussion with students about their writing is more meaningful because we know that apparent weaknesses are indicative of real lack of skill, not lack of interest. If the topic evokes passion, the student will be far more likely to work hard on that weakness so as to make his/her point more clearly and convincingly.