

# Journal Writing for Emergent Readers

(With thanks to Barbara Flores and Barbara Maio)

## How Do I Begin?

Introduce journals on the first day of school. Ease students' writing fears by letting them know that all writing efforts will be accepted; the only expectation is that they TRY.



## Time Allotment

Journals must be done daily—20-30 minutes a day. This should be at a specified time, at the beginning of the morning or right after recess.

## Writing topics

Students choose their own daily topic. This can be prompted by asking a personal question such as "What did you do this weekend?"

## Spelling

Invented (temporary) spelling must be encouraged. Students should be free to use interesting and dynamic vocabulary without the burden of "spell it correctly."

Dictionaries should not be used. Dictionaries tend to make students want to spend all their time looking up words.

## Room Environment

Students should be allowed to interact with one another while they write. This fosters language that leads to interesting writing. Students may share their journals with tablemates and even borrow topics from one another.

## Journal Writing for Emergent Writers (cont.)

### Expectations

Students should work daily in their journals. Of course, each child will perform at a different level. Each student's entry should be treated with respect. Reluctant writers need a risk-free environment in order to feel comfortable when writing.

High expectations for all students should be a goal . . . but remember, students are at different developmental levels. A pre-determined amount of sentences or pages should not be a requirement for all. More is not always better.

### Responding

Responses are done daily with the student. Individual students may read a journal entry and the teacher responds with a meaningful comment. Teachers may also choose to write a comment in a student's journal. Avoid general praise comments such as "nice work, good job." Meaningful comments and short questions promote better interaction and better writing. No correction of student writing should be made. This is a key point in emergent writing. Students must be able to experiment.

### Assessment

Keep journals as an indicator of a student's true writing ability. Journals are a perfect tool to use at conference time. If space is a problem, save a sample page from each month. Show the student's September journal alongside the May/June journal and celebrate the progress!

I Love to Write!

