

MENTORING SPARK

Quick ideas to light up your doctoral conversations.

► WRITING



SOLUTIONS FOR STUDENTS

Particularly in **STEM fields**, advisors often focus on feedback related to the research itself, and assume students can just “*write it up*” later after the results are known. Students may not have the necessary writing skills, and may not know how to ask for help this late in their degree progress. Students are not inherently good or bad writers, nor is knowing how to write an inherent skill. Good writers are students who have learned writing as a *skill*. Becoming adept at making arguments—and becoming more efficient in writing practices—can significantly reduce the time and effort needed to generate written products.



FACULTY FYI

While writing is an important part of research, it is also a distinct skill that must be developed with intentionality. If students are not taught about writing, there could be a mismatch between advisor expectations and what the student delivers in terms of writing products. This mismatch can lead to frustration and degradation of advising relationships. This **Spark** is intended to help students develop general academic and disciplinary-specific writing skills.

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► LEVEL 2

LEVEL 1: GETTING READY TO WRITE

LEVEL 2: WRITING MECHANICS

LEVEL 3: GETTING WRITING DONE



ACTIONS FOR FACULTY

- Talk about writing as a skill and how it can be developed through practice.
- Discuss how to make arguments consistent with disciplinary expectations appropriately. Share some exemplary works.
- Ask your student to identify what makes writing hard for them, and identify strategies to overcome these particular challenges.
- Recognize that writing challenges are not always about the mechanics of writing; writing is a process, and the work of writing can be tangled with broader feelings and beliefs about competence, self-worth, pressures to “*just get it done*,” etc.

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A RESOURCE FROM:



Use this QR code to access this and other *Mentoring Spark* tip sheets:





DIGGING DEEPER

- There are many books and online resources related to writing that can be helpful resources. Specific areas on which to focus are creating arguments, and understanding the use and function of different moves in academic writing.
- **Faculty:** Work with a writing coach to teach your students the basics of good writing, and to teach *you* how to teach them.

Please visit the RDI Mentoring Sparks website for examples and links to these tools and resources!



EXERCISES FOR STUDENTS

1. Identify a complex paragraph in writing that is not yours or your students' (*so no one feels judged*). Work together on rewriting the paragraph to achieve a simpler form that is easier to understand.
2. Practice writing a different argument each month for the next 4-5 months. Having a clear and direct argument makes it easier to support with reasons and evidence.
3. Have your students identify a scholarly writing product that they admire for the writing (*not necessarily the content*), and discuss what makes this writing appealing.
4. Ask students in your research group to collectively talk about what makes writing easier and harder for them individually. They can learn from each other!
5. Reflect on your process for giving and receiving feedback. Identify what has been most helpful in terms of content and format for you and your student. Discuss what, if any, changes are needed.



REFLECTION & NEXT STEPS

- **Faculty:** What patterns do you notice in your student's writing? Are you constantly making similar edits in their work? How can you help them break unhelpful habits?
- **Student:** How has your writing developed over time? What areas of improvement do you still have?



ACTIONS FOR FACULTY

- Discuss different kinds of feedback and at what stages in the process/product each is expected. For example, giving grammatical feedback when the arguments are flawed may not be productive for the student or advisor.
- Focus on distinguishing feedback on **research** quality and productivity from **writing** quality, in order to help students recognize these as different skills that must **both** be developed.
- Discuss appropriate use of generative AI in writing, based on department, university, and disciplinary expectations. Similarly discuss plagiarism and use of citations, since there can be cultural differences.
- **GOAL Setting:** Agree on a goal for the student related to assessing their writing abilities and potential gaps in needed writing skills.

Good writers are students who have learned writing as a skill.



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