

Tips for Teaching Science Writing

Share good science writing.

You doubtlessly share science from the news with your students. Read examples of good science writing from magazines, books, or newspapers, and point out what makes it good writing. Does it use language in interesting, creative ways? Does it explain complex ideas in clear language? Does it incorporate lively examples?

Provide sufficient time for good writing.

Writing-to-learn is a one-draft operation, but writing for an audience takes time. Give students time to get feedback and make revisions. Including assessment of revised drafts in a final grade encourages students to take more time with their work and reduces plagiarism.

Teach relevant writing skills.

Science class is not writing class, but short, focused lessons on specific writing skills or techniques delivered in the context of a project allow students to apply what they learn immediately. These short lessons can range from a spelling exercise where students practice words you know they will use in their writing, to modeling how to use analogies or metaphors to describe a scientific concept.

Make meaning and interest the focus of assessment.

Errors are extremely distracting in writing, and students should certainly be expected to produce error-free writing. When assessing student writing, however, try to look at it holistically, noting errors, of course, but also noting clarity, organization, and liveliness.