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# How to be a \*Great\* Journal Writer

by Gillian James

A very bright teacher once told me, “A journal writing habit can be lifelong and very rewarding.” (Thanks, Mrs. B!) Here are some tips to make journal writing in your classroom a success.

**WHAT YOU NEED:** A pencil or pen, a notebook, and a desk.



## STEPS TO FOLLOW:

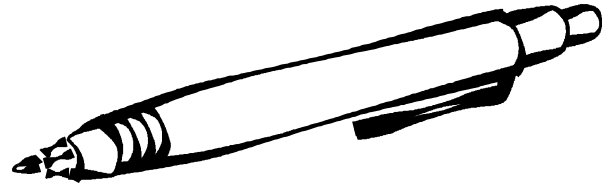
### 1. Create the right environment:

- a. Make sure your classroom is well-lit and well-ventilated.
- b. Set aside a specific time for journal writing every day. Journal writing sessions can run anywhere from ten minutes to a half hour. As students gain fluency throughout the year, ask if they need more time.
- c. Remind students that journal writing time is a quiet, reflective time. Their busy minds need to be clear and calm in order for thoughts to flow. Set the mood with breathing exercises and soft, soothing music.

### 2. Inspire the writing mind:

- a. Grab your students’ attention with entertaining themes and topics that interest them. Ask them about themselves — what they like and what they dislike.
- b. Write a famous quote on the chalkboard and ask them what it means to them.
- c. Allow students opportunities to free write about whatever they want.





d. Keep journaling fun and creative. Have students tap into the other side of the brain by asking them to write with the hand they don't normally use to write. Change their perspective by posing an unusual, if not downright silly, question. For example, ask them to describe a day in the life of their family pet.

### 3. Set some standards:

a. Even fun exercises require structure. Let students know that you will be collecting their journals to make sure they are keeping up-to-date with their writing.

b. Ask students to date the upper right-hand corner of each entry and to start every paragraph with an indentation.



c. Encourage students to write clearly and in full sentences. A journal is a great way for students to practice their spelling, handwriting, punctuation, and grammar.

d. Respect your students' privacy. If a student considers an entry very personal, then he or she can fold and staple the entry closed.

e. Offer words of encouragement to your students. Everyone likes to be told they are doing a good job.

### 4. Go back to the beginning:

a. Have students read past entries so they can see their improvement not only academically (in their spelling, handwriting, and sentence structure), but also personally (in self-esteem and their relationships with others).

The final, most important step is to write every day! Like any skill, writing only improves with practice. As Mrs. B would say, if you want to be a good writer, you have to:



WRITE, WRITE, WRITE, WRITE, WRITE,  
WRITE, WRITE, WRITE, WRITE, WRITE!