

Position Statement on Generative AI:



IT IS STILL A GOOD TIME TO WRITE

While the headlines may be telling a story that makes it appear as if writing education is now obsolete, the truth is it is as important as ever. Now is still a good time to write. With the release of ChatGPT and other generative AI tools, writing educators worry that this new technology may signal the end of writing instruction altogether.¹ After all, if students can use ChatGPT and similar programs to create a technically proficient piece of writing, what is the need for further writing instruction? However, at 826, the largest youth writing network in the country, we know that writing is an irreplaceable tool in cultivating citizens who can advocate for themselves and their community. Our mission is to ensure that all students have access to the transformative power of writing, and our hope is that these new technologies support that rather than create new barriers.

We are also concerned that these technologies have the potential to deepen the equity issues already present within writing education. Ninety percent of Black and Hispanic/Latine students are not writing at grade-level proficiency.² The pre-existing digital divide means that some students will have access to these tools while some will not, risking widening the gap in student achievement. As many as sixteen million U.S. students still lack adequate internet connection and/or access to devices in the classroom, at home, or both.³ Even for those with access to this technology, it will never be a substitute for the benefits gained when students learn to express their own unique thoughts in writing.



“I am a place with no final destination.

Abundant is the sky.

The seasons are whole.

**The sun beams on your soft skin.
A lavender field that dances in
unison when the smooth blissful
breeze rolls through.**

**The moon befriends your eyes as you
sleep beneath the stars pacing your
breath to match the earth.”**

Learning to write changes students—it affects how they think about themselves and the world, and it gives them tools to write their own path forward. “Writing is as much about the impact of the process as about the product itself,” says Laura Brief, 826 National’s CEO. While learning to write, students learn how to process complex ideas, reflect on and articulate their emotions and thought processes, and achieve academic and professional success. Writing education does not just teach students how to write an error-free essay, but also prepares them for their lifelong need to articulate their thoughts and communicate with others.⁴ With these skills, this next generation will have the tools they need to achieve their goals, make an impact in their communities, and shape conversations as leaders.

Here, we highlight four key benefits of learning to write, drawing from survey data of over 4,000 students in 2022–23 as well as from 826 National’s 2021 research report [The Truth About Writing Education in America](#), in which we interviewed industry experts, including authors, researchers, and educators, about the current state of writing education.

THINKING AND LEARNING

Research indicates that learning to write helps students build important cognitive skills such as critical thinking.⁵ When students write, they are not simply consuming information, but processing it—they are organizing and connecting thoughts to express their ideas and evaluating and re-evaluating their ideas through revisions. 826 Network students affirm these benefits of writing, with 88% agreeing that writing helped them to think clearly about topics, issues, and ideas. No other skill allows you to think and learn at the same depth as writing.

VOICE AND CREATIVITY

At its most basic form, we write to express, to share our stories, to explore, and to communicate. As writers, students learn that there is not one correct way to communicate an idea and are encouraged to write with their own unique voices, bringing their own thoughts and experiences to their writing. Of the 826 Network students surveyed in the last school year, 95% reported that they practiced being creative and explored new ideas, while 83% agreed that writing helped them to say the things they wanted to say. Writing allows students the opportunity to discover new thoughts and beliefs for themselves, creating new worlds and stories around them. Writing is an act of creation, where students are not merely repackaging existing thought, but contributing to humanity's collective body of work. We cannot move forward by simply rethinking and rewriting existing ideas. We must allow space for new voices and new ways of thinking to share our world.

SELF-GROWTH

Writing is an incredible tool for self-growth that has been shown to support social and emotional learning and even to reduce symptoms of depression.^{6,7} Students expressed that writing helped them to process their thoughts and emotions, with 82% agreeing that when they write, they better understand themselves and their lives. This reflective writing practice leads students to feel more confident in their thinking and more proud of their accomplishments. After participating in 826 writing programming, 97% of students agreed that they felt proud of the work that they did with 826. Not only are students understanding more about themselves as they write, they are also building empathy and their understanding of others. The majority of students (79%) said that when they write, they imagine how others might think and feel. Putting themselves in the shoes of others to develop interesting stories and characters, bouncing ideas with fellow writers and mentors, and sharing writing with listeners are all part of the writing and self-growth processes.

EMPOWERMENT & COMMUNITY-BUILDING

Writing is power: the power to use your voice to advocate for yourself, to share your ideas, to enact change, and to build community. Writing can inspire people to think in new ways, and spur them into action. When students write about their communities and the issues that matter to them, they grapple with what it means to be a part of that community or a citizen of this country. At 826, 85% of students agreed that they can use their writing to make a difference in their community, and 83% reported that their writing skills would help them be a leader in the future.

“Stories have made me who I am and who I want to be in the future. Without them I cannot function or organize my own thoughts.”

DELARA A., GRADE 12, 826 VALENCIA

“[When I write], I feel like I’m being heard, I get attention that really nobody has ever given me in a conversation.”

CADEN S., STUDENT, 826 MICHIGAN

“I write poetry to empower and heal and question myself and others.”

AMELIA N.P., GRADE 8, ALTADENA, CA

“I didn’t know stories could change the world, let alone stories that I have written . . . I wrote the things I knew I wouldn’t have the courage to say out loud.”

ESPERANZA, GRADE 10, 826 CHI

We recognize that ChatGPT and tools like it are not without benefits, especially for teachers. It is clear that with the right application, this technology can help teachers identify growth areas in students' writing, personalize feedback, and provide sample writing to students.⁸ However, as this technology is still so new, more work will have to be done to understand how to use it as a classroom instruction tool. It will remain crucial to strike a delicate balance and ensure that if generative AI is integrated, it is as a complementary tool to aid instruction rather than a replacement for actual writing instruction and practice.

Every day in our classrooms and in our research, we see the impact that strong writing education has on young people. In this time of innovation, we urge teachers to center writing in their classrooms, parents to encourage writing and expression at home, and students to keep writing and sharing their voices. This is not the time to move away from writing, but rather to embrace its unique benefits. Learning to write is critical for the next generation of leaders, dreamers, and changemakers.

“My hand is ready with a pencil to start a new future.”

REBECCA L., AGE 10, 826 BOSTON



Connect with us on writing education and AI: laura@826national.org

About 826 National

826 is the largest youth writing network in the country. 826 National serves as the hub of the movement to amplify student voices and champions the belief that strong writing skills are essential for academic and lifelong success. The 826 Network now serves more than 710,000 students ages 6 to 18 in under-resourced communities each year online via 826 Digital and through chapters in nine cities: Boston, Chicago, Detroit/Ann Arbor/Ypsilanti, Los Angeles, New Orleans, New York City, San Francisco, Washington, D.C., and Minneapolis/St. Paul. 826 National was established in 2008 to support a growing network of writing centers founded by author Dave Eggers and educator Nínive Calegari in San Francisco in 2002. We work toward a country in which the power and the joy of writing is accessible to every student in every classroom. Together, we believe writing is the key to cultivating a new generation of creative and diverse thinkers who will define a better, brighter, and more compassionate future.

To learn more about how you can get involved with 826's movement for writing and creativity, please visit the 826 National website at

VISIT [826NATIONAL.ORG](https://826national.org)

⁸Herman, Daniel. "The End of High-School English." *The Atlantic*, 9 Dec. 2022. <https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2022/12/openai-chatgpt-writing-high-school-english-essay/672412/>.

⁹National Center for Education Statistics. (2012). The nation's report card: Writing 2011 (NCES 2012-470). Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. <https://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/pdf/main2011/2012470.pdf>

¹⁰U.S. Department of Education. "Path to Digital Equity: Why we need to address the digital divide with solutions around adoption." White House Initiative on Advancing Educational Equity, Excellence, and Economic Opportunity for Hispanics, 6 April 2022. <https://sites.ed.gov/hispanic-initiative/2022/04/path-to-digital-equity-why-we-need-to-address-the-digital-divide-with-solutions-around-adoption/>.

¹¹Chiong, Cynthia, and Oliveira, Gabriela. The Truth About Writing in America: Let's Write, Make Things Right. *826 National*, 2020. https://826national.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Writing-Education-in-America_Full-Report.pdf.

¹²Chaffee, John, and Susan Carlson. *Critical Thinking, Thoughtful Writing: A Rhetoric with Readings*. Cengage Learning, 2015.

¹³Gortner, Eva-Maria, et al. "Benefits of Expressive Writing in Lowering Rumination and Depressive Symptoms." *Behavior Therapy*, vol. 37, no. 3, 2006, pp. 292-303. doi:10.1016/j.beth.2006.01.004.

¹⁴Wilson, Timothy. *Redirect: The Surprising New Science of Psychological Change*. Little, Brown and Company, 2011.

¹⁵Thaker, Hetal. "Worried About ChatGPT? Don't Be." *Inside Higher Ed*, 23 Jan. 2023. <https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2023/01/23/chatgpt-and-what-we-value-writing-instruction-opinion>.