

Quotations and questions from the article *Teaching to the test...not! Balancing best practice and testing requirements in writing* (Higgins, Miller and Wegmann, 2006).

QUOTE	EVALUATION/QUESTION
“This instruction [based on best practices] should include teaching students to write in a variety of genres, providing time for writing and revising, allowing students to write on their choice of topics, encouraging creativity, and incorporating writing conventions” (pg. 310) “...Narrow test preparation does not necessarily produce the kind of writing that will be useful to students. Manzo further suggested that rather than spending time on test preparation, writing should be ongoing” (pg. 311)	Teachers <i>should</i> do this in writing instruction. Students need to be instructed on <i>how</i> to write and revise and be writing often. At the same time, they will not have the luxury of multiple class periods to complete a writing sample on a standardized test. They <i>also</i> need to be taught how to utilize these strategies in a testing setting.
“The underpinnings of this article are...(b) that this learning allows students to become better writers, which results in better scores on formalized writing tests” (pg. 311).	Typically, elementary students do not take a solely written standardized test. ELA tests also evaluate other things (comprehension, listening, etc.) State tests do <i>not</i> care if students are good writers. They care that they are able to thoroughly answer the prompt that is put in front of them. If students are not instructed on how to tackle <i>this</i> type of writing, they will not be successful when evaluated by those who grade state exams.
“Driven by state testing, teachers are being pulled toward prompt-and-rubric teaching that bypass that human act of composing and the human gesture of response” (Wolfe & Wolfe, pg. 313)	Writing is <i>always</i> graded in one way or another. In an authentic scenario, students would work with the teacher to create a writing rubric. In a testing situation students still need to know how they will be evaluated. Giving them an opportunity to engage in writing with the state-mandated rubric will prepare them for test writing.
“Shelton and Fu (2004) reported successful scores on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test from the classroom of one teacher who involved her students in a yearlong writing workshop and the writing process approach” (pg. 313)	What did they write? What ‘format’ did they use? How were they assessed?
“Although these studies do support a link	At the time this article was written (2006)

between the writing process and test scores, the lack of other research indicates that this area is ripe for exploration” (pg. 314)	there was very little support for the author’s argument. How, then, is she able to claim that solely authentic instruction will benefit students in a standardized writing situation?
“Another study conducted with kindergarten through fifth-grade students in one school in Kansas focused on narrative writing instruction using the 6+1 Traits model” (pg. 314)	When are students asked to write a narrative (that is not prompted, even) on a standardized test? Especially at the elementary level, students are typically expected to write about a given passage. If you <i>only</i> focus on one genre of writing, how are students supposed to grow in other areas (let alone excel on a mandated test)?
“Good writers will do well on standardized writing tests” (pg. 317).	What are ‘good’ writers? Is someone a ‘good’ writer if they excel in narrative writing but struggle in expository writing? No matter how well your writing workshop goes, there will always be those students that struggle with writing. What else will you do for them, particularly on a standardized test? Perhaps these students <i>need</i> the direct instruction provided by ‘test-prep’ to help them in a testing scenario.
“We acknowledge that it will take courage for teachers to abandon the drill and practice imposed by many school districts in preparation for the state tests...” (pg. 317)	Drill and practice should never be the “be-all end-all” of teaching for any subject. However, students <i>do</i> need to be <i>prepared</i> to take a writing assessment. They must see copies of the test layout before they take it. They must know what the scorers are looking for in their writing. And they must know what sort of responses they will be writing and have time to engage in that type of writing before the test. This is not drill and practice in the traditional sense. But it is providing students with the knowledge they need about the testing “genre” (Calkins, 1998).