

You Can't Separate 'Critical Thinking' and Good Writing

One of the main things that today's education system seeks to instill is "critical thinking." But as progress in critical thinking is difficult to measure, how can we know if students are learning this valuable skill?

The answer, I discovered, is simple: look at their writing skills.

Such an idea was suggested in the early 20th century by George Townsend Warner of the University of Cambridge. According to Warner's [essay-writing guide](#), the sole purpose of an essay is to get a student "to think, and to write down his thoughts in good English."

Given the [deplorable state](#) of writing skills in America's schools, it would seem that students have not learned to be "critical thinkers" as well as we might have hoped. Warner's little essay-writing guide, however, provides several tips on how to foster both good thinking and clear writing skills in today's students. Here are three of the tips:

1. You Need a Good Teacher

Not surprisingly, the process to good writing and thinking begins with a good teacher. Many teachers, Warner writes, assign writing concepts too difficult for their students to ponder. A good teacher will assign an understandable topic on which their students may actually have experience or thoughts that they can incorporate into their writing.

2. You Need to Brainstorm

Brainstorming is such a well-known tool of good writing that it's often overlooked. Warner's three ways to teach this vital tool include reading books on the subject, writing down any original ideas that the subject triggers in the student, and also asking questions like the 5 Ws (who, what, when, where, why) to spawn further thinking in the student.

3. You Need to Stick to the Basics

Although experienced writers can break the rules and engage in various stylistic flights, Warner encourages young writers to stick to the basics when writing their essays. These basics include using a variety of sentence types, sticking to simple vocabulary, and avoiding a preaching or argumentative tone.

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