

# Education Leader Explains 4 Reasons Why Today's Students Can't Write

If you've endured a peer review session in college or been the lucky one to sort through job applications for the opening at your office, you've probably discovered a sad truth about Americans: They can't write.

Marc Tucker, a leading expert in the world of education, recently had the latter experience. As he explained in [an article](#) for *Education Week*, the process was grueling and eye-opening:

*"We had close to 500 applicants. Inasmuch as the task was to help us communicate information related to the work we do, we gave each of the candidates one of the reports we published last year and asked them to produce a one-page summary. All were college graduates. Only one could produce a satisfactory summary. That person got the job."*

One look at the national writing proficiency shows why situations like the above are all too common. The last time the Nation's Report Card surveyed writing performance, only [27 percent](#) of high school seniors were able to achieve satisfactory scores.

As Tucker goes on to explain, there are four reasons why America produces such poor scores and quality in the area of writing. These include:

## **1. Lack of Reading**

To gain improvement in sports, the best thing to do is observe and play with the experts.

So it is with writing. A writer who avoids the examples of

high-quality writing supplied through books will miss out on hours of effortless instruction from the masters.

Yet, as Tucker indicates, many of today's schools simply aren't putting enough reading material in front of their students, a fact which will eventually hinder their writing performance.

## **2. Lack of Practice**

Practice makes perfect, but according to Tucker, today's students get little, if any, opportunity to practice crafting an argument in an extensive paper:

*"There is only one way that we can find out whether a student can write a substantial research paper—by asking them to write a substantial research paper and looking carefully at the result. If we do not ask them to produce this product—over and over again, as they get better and better at it—then they will not be able to do it well."*

## **3. Reliance on Standardized Tests**

Writing practice is limited, Tucker argues, because a great deal of emphasis is now placed on standardized tests. These tests operate largely on a fill-in-the-blank basis, a procedure which Tucker asserts is a poor substitute for composing lengthy research papers.

## **4. Inadequate Instruction**

Finally, Tucker suggests that today's students can't write because their instructors are poor writers themselves:

*"If we do not demand that those who want to become teachers are themselves very good writers, why would we expect our teachers to be good teachers of writing? We should, in fact, be requiring our candidates for teaching positions to write 20-page papers of their own which analyze and summarize a topic from the literature in their field. We*

*should be asking them to produce, on demand, a one-page summary of something they are given to read that is complicated and difficult.”*

Do you think we would see a drastic improvement in writing ability if we corrected even one of these areas in today's schools?

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