

TEACHER CASE STUDY

THE CHALLENGE: Writing Is an Essential Skill to Learn and Exceedingly Complex to Teach

Demonstrating understanding. Supporting opinions. Conveying experiences.

These foundational writing skills align with college and career ready (CCR) standards, are assessed on high school equivalency tests such as the *HiSET*® exam and are required by future employers¹. However, these essential skills aren't easy to teach.

In fact, according to the National Center for Education Statistics², only about one in four 8th- and 12th-grade students scored at or above proficient on the writing portion of the National Assessment of Educational Progress in 2011. And one in five 8th- and 12th-graders scored “below basic,” indicating an inability to perform at the minimum standard for their grade level. This means many students, including those preparing to take the Language Arts Writing HiSET exam, will need instructional support.

Why is it so challenging to effectively teach writing skills? One research study³ identified three recurring obstacles that make it difficult for teachers to fully integrate a robust, in-class academic writing program:

- the pressure between marking for content and marking for convention
- vastly different writing abilities among students
- a lack of time

A DIGITAL APPROACH TO AGE-OLD TEACHING CHALLENGES: Innovative App Helps Teachers Build Skills and Confidence in Struggling Writers

ETS's *Writing Mentor*® app — a Google Docs™ add-on — addresses these three obstacles by using AI to automatically provide feedback to help student writers consider the quality of their writing. Created in response to the demand for more digital resources for student writers, the app gives novice writers the option to practice paragraph writing while more advanced writers can focus on extended writing, such as essays. These options allow students to engage with the app at their comfort level and receive feedback at their learning level.

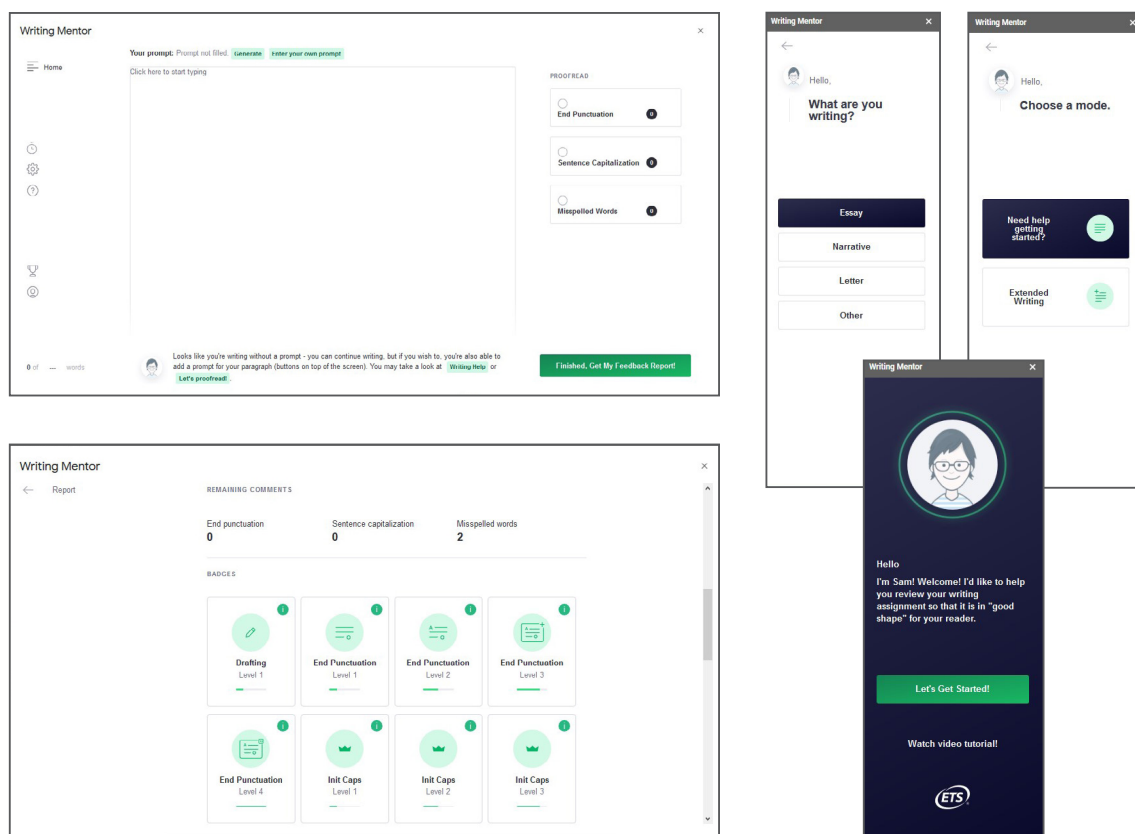
¹ *Skills and Earnings in the Full-Time Labor Market (2018)*. ETS Center for Research on Human Capital and Education. www.ets.org/research/report/earnings-full-time-labor-market/

² The Nation's Report Card, Writing 2011, National Assessment of Educational Progress at Grades 8 and 12. Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics. U.S. Department of Education. <https://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/pdf/main2011/2012470.pdf>

³ *Writing Instruction in Elementary Classrooms: Why Teachers Engage or do not Engage Students in Writing (2014)*. Literacy Research and Instruction Journal. www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/19388071.2014.896959

The *Writing Mentor* app can also be conveniently integrated into the classroom or in a HiSET test preparation program. One of its greatest benefits is that it helps student writers take more responsibility for their own writing. Students work independently and receive a personalized feedback report.

For more novice writers, the paragraph writing option requires students to prepare an academic paragraph in response to high-quality prompts or teachers can assign a prompt — allowing them to use the tool to make connections across the curriculum. For more advanced writers, extended writing provides more detailed feedback to support academic writing. The app generates a feedback page that can be referenced during a writing conference with students to see where they still need help and correct mistakes, to determine their readiness to tackle a practice HiSET essay, and to celebrate and encourage their confidence as budding writers.



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mentormywriting.org or hiset.ets.org