

# Writing Mechanics

Heritage Prep



**Pat Heckert**

**Department/Subjects:** Middle School: English and Literature, Classes 6-8

**Advisory:** Writing Contest Coordinator

**Education:** Bachelor of Science in English, Southeast Missouri University;  
Masters in Education, Southeast Missouri University; Masters coursework  
in Literature/Composition

Heckert's approach to mechanics is to prepare students for standardized testing. Heckert focuses on these fundamental skills and truly believes mastery of these skills results in high marks on written portions of the SAT: writing on demand, vocabulary knowledge, and reading comprehension.

**Writing on Demand: Journaling**

At the beginning of every class, students are required to write for fifteen minutes (part of their forms and habits—gets them quiet and ready for instructions). Topics vary, but they start in a composition book on Day 1. By the end of school year, students have 2-3 composition books full of their daily writings they can keep. Journals are graded every 2 weeks.

Journal topics include

- rewriting for training
- writing passages of literature
- “reviews” of books for independent reading
- thoughts on chapel message
- freewriting Fridays

Rubric includes assessment of

- length—2/3 page minimum length is goal
- depth—grade-appropriate language
- correct punctuation and spelling

Vocabulary Knowledge: Sadler-Oxford Vocabulary Workshop

- Monday: lecture provides introduction to the new unit followed by independent work through the workbook through Thursday
- Tuesday and Wednesday: Heckert takes questions for 2 minutes each day about their independent work
- Thursday: workbooks are collected on Thursdays to assess accuracy and completion
- Friday: unit test on Friday

Reading Comprehension: Literature/”IRL”

- 6<sup>th</sup>—8<sup>th</sup> grade students are required to spend 20 minutes, 5 days per week reading a book.
- Students are provided a book list, but parents may approve any books off of the list. Books written “too young” are not allowed.
- The goals of this activity are

- habit and routine of reading
- good writing through osmosis

### **Increasing the Stakes: Essay Contests and Formal Presentations**

Throughout the year, students are required to write for essay competitions for organizations like DAR and VFW. This kind of exposure is good for the school and good experience for the students, Heckert believes.

Students also give formal presentations on literature for their classmates and on history as part of the school's History Week celebration.

Students receive letter grades in class on the contest and formal writing. Students receive letter grades directly corresponding to the SAT rubric for judging the quality of written compositions.

Before evaluated assignments are returned to students, Heckert provides a class-wide feedback sheet with mistakes—both egregious and subtle—and suggestions for improvement. Individual mistakes will likely be revised in the following day's journal entry.

**\*\*\*Heritage Middle Schoolers do not go through the Grammar curriculum systematically. Rather, they use the textbooks as reference resources. However, if problems recur for whole class, Heckert will go through that particular lesson.**