

# Best Practices of Technology Integration

**Title:** *Personalized Postcards*

**Subject:** Language

**Intended Grade Level(s):** Middle School (6-8)

**Description:**

In this unit students work on writing process skills and end up with a beautiful picture postcard as a finished product. This lesson is ideal for students who usually balk at writing projects.

Limited writing space, means that this writing project will be small in nature. The goal is to get one or two well-written paragraphs. Attention is on the steps in the writing process. Successful completion of a postcard leaves even reluctant writers looking for an opportunity to do this activity again.

I use a combination of handwritten draft copies and word-processed final copies. Students usually complete the writing process in different time lines. Handwritten draft copies are more portable in the beginning stages, students can be anywhere in the classroom writing, revising, or peer-editing. Draft copies prepared on the computer seem to use a lot of paper and students are less likely to take their draft around for editing (they just ask someone to look over their shoulder at the computer station.) In addition, combining handwritten drafts and word-processed final copies allows me to get the most out of classroom computers instead of taking the whole class to the computer lab.

**Curriculum Benchmarks:**

[MI.ELA.1.MS.1](#)

Use reading for multiple purposes, such as enjoyment, clarifying information, and learning complex procedures.

[MI.ELA.2.MS.1](#)

Write fluently for multiple purposes to produce compositions, such as personal narratives, persuasive essays, lab reports, and poetry.

[MI.ELA.2.MS.3](#)

Plan and draft texts, and revise and edit their own writing, and help others revise and edit their texts in such areas as content, perspective, and effect.

[MI.ELA.2.MS.4](#)

Select and use appropriate language conventions when editing text. Examples include various grammatical constructions, subject-verb agreement, punctuation, and spelling.

#### MI.ELA.4.MS.1

Compare and contrast spoken, written, and visual language patterns used in their communication contexts, such as community activities, discussions, mathematics and science classes, and the workplace.

#### MI.ELA.4.MS.4

Demonstrate how communication is affected by connotation and denotation and why one particular word is more effective or appropriate than others in a given context.

#### MI.ELA.4.MS.5

Recognize and use levels of discourse appropriate for varied contexts, purposes, and audiences, including terminology specific to a particular field. Examples include community building, an explanation of a biological concept, comparison of computer programs, commentary on an artistic work, analysis of a fitness program, and classroom debates on political issues.

#### MI.ELA.7.MS.2

Monitor their progress while using a variety of strategies to overcome difficulties when constructing and conveying meaning, and develop strategies to deal with new communication needs.

#### MI.ELA.8.MS.1

Select and use mechanics that enhance and clarify understanding. Examples include paragraphing, organizational patterns, variety in sentence structure, appropriate punctuation, grammatical constructions, conventional spelling, and the use of connective devices, such as previews and reviews.

#### MI.ELA.12.MS.1

Differentiate sets of standards for individual use according to the purpose of the communication context. An example is maintaining different sets of individual standards when creating texts for formal and informal situations.

#### MI.ELA.12.MS.2

Demonstrate understanding of individual, shared, and academic standards used for different purposes and contexts.

#### MI.ELA.12.MS.5

Refine their own standards to evaluate personal and public communications within a responsible and ethical system for the expression of ideas.

**Materials/Hardware/Software:**

Word-processing or publishing software such as Microsoft™ Word® or PageMaker®  
4 x 6 photographs (standard size developed by local area stores)  
Spray mount or other adhesive such as glue sticks  
Scissors to trim the paper  
light board (optional)

**Activities/Procedures:***Word processor Set-Up:*

Set a custom paper size 6.75 inch (width) and 5 inch (height)  
Set all margins at .5 inches  
Orientation should be Landscape

*Document:*

Set up a three column one row table  
Table width is 5.75 inches, table length is 4 inches  
First column 3.25 inches, second column .25 inches, and third column 2.5 inches.  
Center column use change of text direction to print text sideways

*Prewriting*

The first order of business is to have students bring in pictures to use for postcards or have pictures available for them to pick through in the classroom. I take many pictures and usually have a supply of photographs in the classroom for students to choose from. Students particularly like pictures of themselves taken earlier in the year, pictures of siblings from previous years, and pictures of former teachers taken at in-services and other district-wide events.

Students begin by deciding whom they will be sending their postcard to and then they begin forming ideas about what they might write to the person. Quite often the picture itself leads to a natural set of ideas to write about. Children should be reminded that the natural structure of a postcard lends it to be open reading to more than just the recipient. In other words, their audience may be larger than they might assume.

Once students have decided to whom they will be sending a post card, they need to obtain addresses for these people. I always instruct students to use the school return address to help protect their personal identity.

*Drafting*

Students write their drafts on lined paper using every other line. The postcard template is available for them to understand how much room they will have to write in for the final copy.  
Postcards are seldom more than one to two paragraphs because of the space available.

*Peer Editing*

Students work with a partner to make changes and adjustments to their paragraphs. Students revise and edit their paragraphs in accordance with advice from peers and comments from the teacher.

*Final Draft*

Students use the word processor to re-write their paragraphs on the template making sure that everything fits. They sometimes have to make some slight alterations at this point. The teacher grades the final copy.

*Personalized Postcards*

### *Publishing Copy*

The *published copy* is the same as *final draft* with any changes or modifications made by the teacher during the grading process. The printed *publishing copy* is cut out and carefully attached to the back of a photograph. It is easier to apply the adhesive to the back of the paper template and then set the picture on carefully. A light board is helpful during this process. If a light board is unavailable, darkening the 'cut lines' on the template will make it easier to see when the paper is turned over.

Once the postcard is completed, it is ready to be sent through the U. S. Mail.

### **Assessment/Evaluation:**

Students are graded twice during this process. The *final draft* is assigned a point value based on its accuracy. The Publishing Copy is also given a point value. I typically give 25 points for the *final draft* and 50 points for the *Publishing Copy*. The *Publishing Copy* is graded after the picture is attached. Neatness counts!

### **Alternative Ideas:**

In addition to photographs, students could make pictures (in 4 x 6 size) and use them to make postcards.

Students can complete this activity using only printed templates if a word processor is unavailable, or if the teacher would like to have students work on handwritten expression. Using printed templates may make this activity more practical for younger students.

### **Follow-up Activities**

Students are quite excited when friends and relatives start receiving the cards. Many students are encouraged to start writing to people on a more regular basis.

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