



**PRESS KIT**

NEWS RELEASE

**PRESS KIT**

SHARP  
DECLINE IN  
WRITING  
SKILLS AMONG  
YOUNG  
AMERICANS

**PRESS KIT**

BACKGROUND

**PRESS KIT**

FACT SHEET

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
New York, N.Y.- Jan 22, 2021

**Sharp Decline in Writing Skills Among Younger Americans**  
*Inadequate writing skills negatively affect American companies and cost billions.*

There is a widespread concern among educators that writing skills among school and college students are in sharp decline, resulting in many students lacking the necessary writing proficiencies to succeed in today's job market. The business leaders share this concern as many employers struggle to hire candidates with proper writing skills, and businesses are spending billions of dollars each year on training. The poor writing skills are attributed to the educational system at schools and colleges, inadequate educators' training, social and digital media displacement of reading and writing. Numerous governmental and academic sources support the deepening concerns regarding the declining writing skills.

According to the U.S. Department of Education 2001 report, only 24% of eighth and twelfth graders tested at the proficient level of writing, 50% of students ranked at the basic level, and 20% below the basic level. Moreover, 40% of high school students who took the ACT writing exam in 2016 did not demonstrate the reading and writing skills necessary to college-level composition. The problem continues among college students as the survey on more than 2,300 undergraduates students, presented by researchers in the 2011 book "Academically Adrift," disclosed that only 50% of college seniors believe that their writing competency has improved to a professional level through college courses.

The Partnership for 21st-Century Skills reported that employers have noted the lack of writing skills in new graduates entering the workforce and stated that 26.2% of college graduates had poor writing skills, and many exhibited poor communication skills. Moreover, the study titled "National Assessment of the Perceived Writing Skills of Entry-Level PR Practitioners" found that only 14% of professionals within the PR industry agreed that current entry-level professionals are good writers. Likewise, only 9% agreed that current entry-level professionals are better prepared each year. The National Commission on Writing in America's Schools and Colleges emphasizes that writing incompetency leads to economic losses and estimates that companies spend over \$3 billion annually on remedial writing training.

The Commission on Public Relations Education (CPRE) is deeply concerned about the issue. In 2006 it has published Public Relations Education for the 21st Century Report and identified proficient writing skills as the first of five core competencies for PR undergraduates. The commission is committed to promoting excellence in public relations education and the PR industry worldwide.

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## Sharp Decline in Writing Skills Among Younger Americans

### Introduction

There is a general concern among educators and business leaders that younger Americans lack the necessary writing skills to succeed in today's job market. Journalistic periodicals published numerous stories about the decline in writing skills among American youth and the various approaches to correct the situation. Similarly, the business press circulated many stories about employers' struggles in hiring candidates with proper writing skills. While there is a general agreement on the nature of the problem, there is little consensus on its origin and possible solutions. Some believe that formal writing is no longer a common element of the educational curriculum. Others blame the soaring increase in "screen time" and the widespread use of Twitter and other messaging platforms.

### History

Throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries, formal writing was standard practice in American schools. The method involved lessons on penmanship, memorization of grammar rules, sentence diagramming, and the study of classic literature. This course of study provided the most students with the basic skills necessary to be a proficient writer. However, in the 1930s, inspired by the progressive writings of John Dewey, educational reformers moved away from strict grammar drills and the rules of writing toward a more student-centric model that stressed creativity and engagement. This reformation ultimately became the mainstream in U.S. education and has only recently been challenged by concerns over U.S. students' declining test scores compared to their peers in other countries.

### Why Is Writing Important?

Writing is how most human knowledge is captured and taught to others. Without a written language and skilled people in its use, it is hard to imagine civilization as we know it. Moreover, writing is an imperative form of communication. Whether it is a work of fiction written for pleasure, a scientific paper on a discovery, a business plan, or an advertising brief, the text must be clear, grammatically correct, and appropriate to its purpose. Any errors in writing might cause communication failure and adversely affect whatever enterprise the writing was intended to support. Furthermore, modern businesses with remotely working employee networks and virtual teams rely on email as a primary means of communication, making effective writing skills critically important. In the 2003 report "[The Neglected R: The Need for a Writing Revolution](#)," the National Commission on Writing has outlined the importance of writing in education and pointed out that "Writing today is not a frill for the few, but an essential skill for many."

## State of Writing in the U.S.

While writing continues to be an important skill, there is a sharp decline in writing skills among younger Americans.

### Schools

According to the [National Assessment of Educational Progress \(NAEP\)](#) report "[Writing 2011, National Assessment of Educational Progress at Grades 8 and 12](#)", only 3% and 24% of both eighth and twelfth graders tested at the advanced and proficient level for writing, while 21% of students in both grades tested at below basic levels. Moreover, 40% of pupils in the high school class of 2016 who took the ACT writing exam did not successfully demonstrate the reading and writing skills needed to complete a college-level English composition.



### Higher Education

The problem continues in higher education, with college students acknowledging that they lacked writing proficiency. In the 2011 book "[Academically Adrift](#)" by Richard Arum and Josipa Roksa, the authors presented their research on more than 2,300 undergraduates students from twenty-four institutions. According to their analysis, only 50% of seniors

### Workforce

Once students complete their education and enter the workforce, the lack of writing skills becomes an issue that American businesses have had to address. [National Commission on Writing in America's Schools and Colleges estimates](#) that American companies spend over \$3 billion annually on remedial writing training. Most of the budget, almost \$2.9 billion, is spent on current employees rather than newly hired staff. According to a report from the [Partnership for 21st-Century Skills](#), employers stated that 26.2% of college students had deficient writing skills and lacked proper communication skills across the board.





## Teachers

The potential cause for the decline in writing skills is that many teachers lack preparation in providing instructions on this topic. In the New York Times article "[Why Kids Can't Write](#)", the author pointed out that in the survey of 500 teachers, researchers found that less than 50% of teachers had taken a college class devoted significant time on providing instruction on writing skills. Likewise, less than 30% of respondents had taken a class solely dedicated to providing education on writing skills, and only 55% of respondents stated that they enjoyed teaching the subject.

## PR Industry

Moreover, the "[National Assessment of the Perceived Writing Skills of Entry-Level PR Practitioners](#)" found that only 14% of professionals within the PR industry agreed that current entry-level professionals are good writers, and 41% strongly disagreed with the statement. Likewise, 49% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that current entry-level professionals are better prepared each year, and only 9% agreed with the statement. Overall, the national survey validates a significant dissatisfaction and strong negative perception among PR practitioners of entry-level practitioners' writing skills.



## What Is Being Done?

Educators, government, and business recognized and acknowledged declining writing skills among younger Americans and took a range of steps to address this issue. Government and educators have developed a "[Common Core](#)" [State Standard Initiative](#) that stresses formal mastery of the subject with a strong focus on writing competencies. The business community has been investing heavily in providing remedial writing training for their employees. Also, several organizations such as [Writing Revolution](#) and the [National Writing Project](#) have formed to advance the schooling of writing skills by improving teacher education.

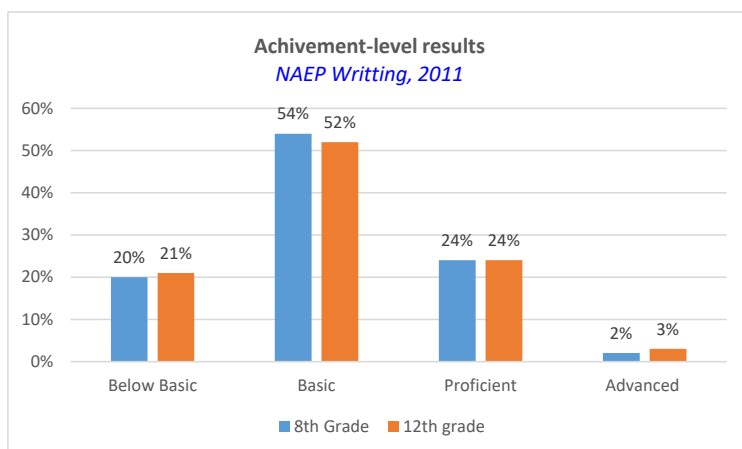
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## Sharp Decline in Writing Skills Among Younger Americans

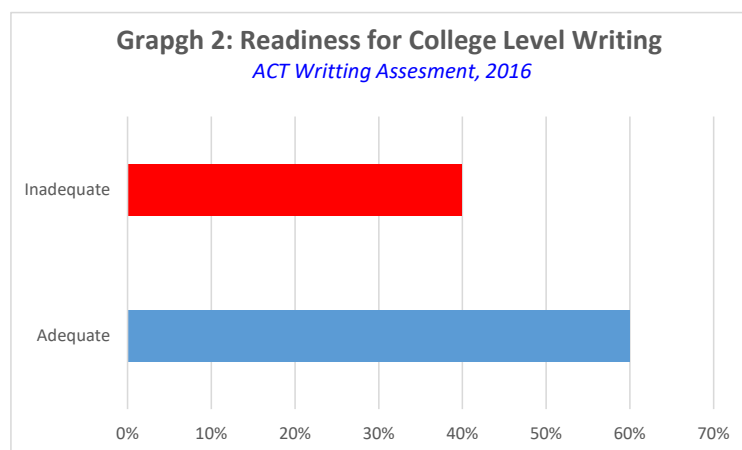
There is a mounting concern in the educational and business community about the decline in writing skills in younger Americans. The decline in writing competencies is attributed to the failure within the educational system. As a result, college graduates lack the necessary writing proficiencies to succeed in today's job market, forcing companies to spend billions on re-training. This fact sheet presents illustrative data evidence from a variety of governmental and academic sources.

### Schools



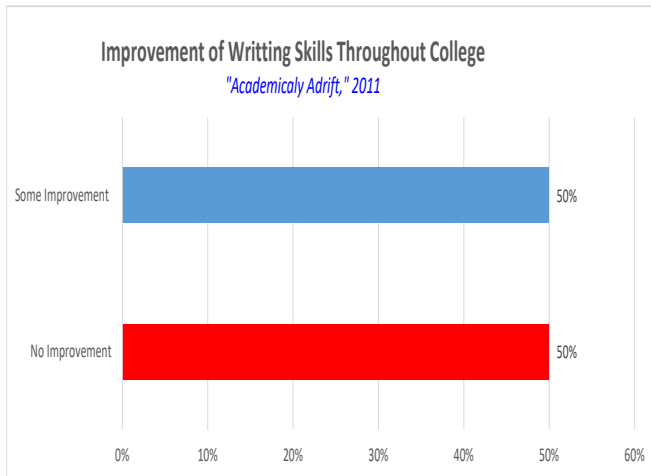
More than **50%** of high-school students **have basic writing skills** and **20%** test **below the basic**.

**40%** of high school **do not demonstrate** the reading and writing skills necessary for college-level composition.

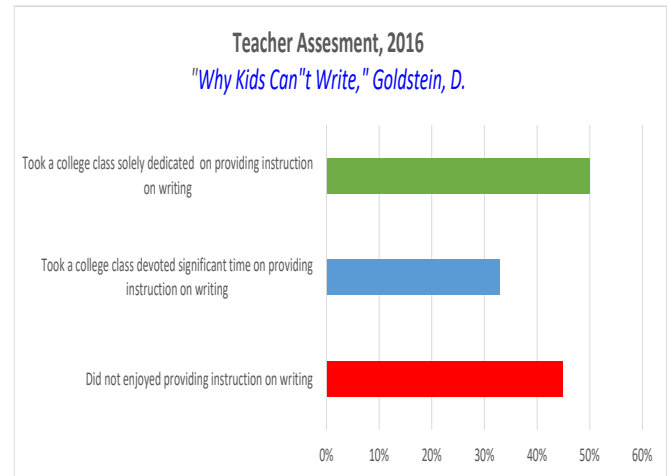




## Higher Education

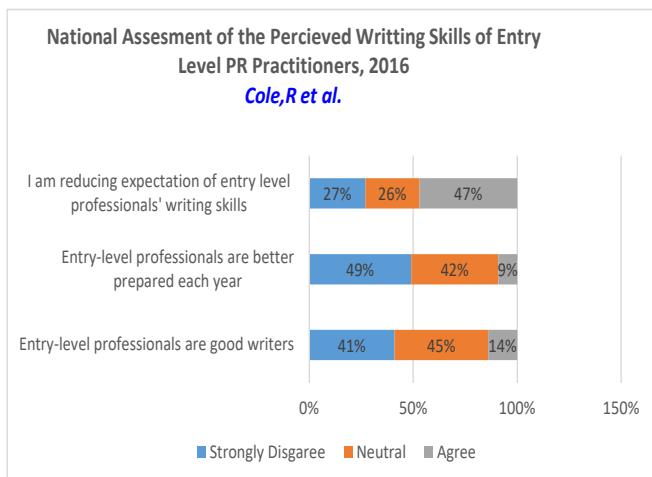


50% of college students **did not improve** their writing skills while in college.

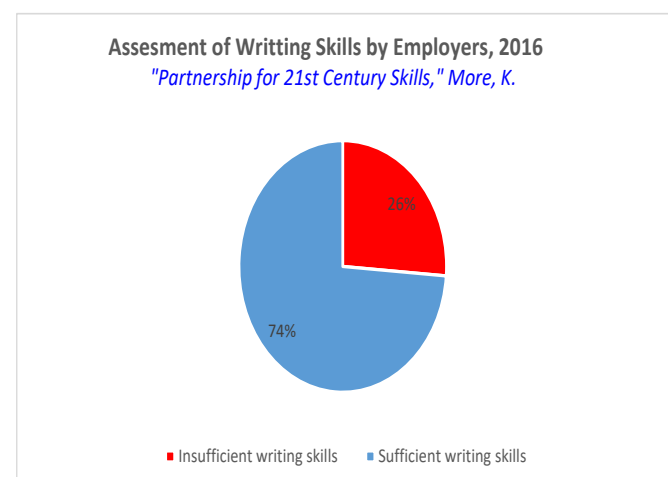


45% of teachers **do not enjoy** providing writing instruction, and only 50% took a college class devoted to teaching writing.

## Workforce



47% of PR professionals **reduced their expectations** of entry-level employees' writing skills, and more than 40% **disagree** that entry-level PR professionals are good writers and better prepared each year.



According to employers, 26% of employees have **insufficient** writing skills.

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