

Go Back and Check!

BY MARY ROSE



“Go back and check your work!” These are the words that every teacher says every day, but how many of our students actually “go back and check?” When they do, what are they checking for? How can we convince students that the time remaining after they complete an assignment is valuable and should not be wasted? How can we help them avoid careless, silly errors? More important—how can we teach students the skills necessary to actually go back and check their work?

One way to create conscientious paper checkers is to teach these skills every day from the beginning of the school year. Give every child a manila folder to keep at his or her desk. When a child completes an assignment, have them place their work into the folder and leave it on their desk. Near the end of class, have students get out the paper and teach them how to “go back and check” and what to look for. Start with the simplest tasks:

- A proper heading, including name, date, and subject.
- Make sure the writing is legible—and promise to take off points if it isn’t.
- Allow students to make corrections before they turn in their papers for grading.

As the year progresses, gradually add the following items to the checking process. As students check their work, present some mini-lessons to review grammar rules. Suggest that students write check lists inside of their folders so that they will eventually be able to do the checks independently. (Having THEM write the list is more effective than having the teacher provide a typed list.)

- Look for capital letters on everyone’s names and on the beginning of sentences.
- Look for ending punctuation for every sentence.
- Have them reread the questions and their answers to see if they have really answered them instead of getting off track.
- Check to see if there are any omissions—part two or three of multiple response questions, correct bubbling, questions on the back of the paper that may have been skipped.
- Check for spelling errors too—many times students misspell words that appear somewhere in the story or on the paper on which they are writing.

Try teaching these lessons to help students improve study habits, avoid careless mistakes, and become better test takers, and remember, checking completed work should not be just for state assessments; these should be done with EVERY assignment!