



A Qualitative Analysis of Deaf Secondary Students' Writing

Article reference: Wolbers, K., Dostal, H., Spurgin, K. & Martinez, E. (2026). A qualitative analysis of deaf secondary writers' strengths and needs. *Journal of Deaf Studies and Deaf Education*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jdsade/enag013>

Topic & Purpose

This study examined the narrative and argumentative writing of 75 deaf high school students to identify their writing strengths and areas needing support. Researchers analyzed idea development, organization, style, sentence fluency, word choice, and conventions. The purpose was to better understand the range of writing abilities in secondary classrooms and help teachers provide adaptable instruction that meets students' varied needs.

The study included narrative and argumentative writing from 75 deaf high school students. Researchers selected 85 writing samples representing a range of writing quality, including both lower- and higher-scoring pieces. The samples were analyzed for idea development, organization, style, sentence fluency, word choice, and conventions. Researchers used thematic analysis to identify common patterns in students' writing strengths and areas of need.

Study Outline

Findings

Findings showed a range of writing abilities, from emerging skills to writing that met grade-level expectations. Lower-scoring samples were often brief, loosely organized, and showed limited sentence variety. Higher-scoring samples demonstrated clearer purpose, stronger organization and idea development, and greater control of sentence structure. Performance also varied by genre, especially when students were expected to use sources and evidence. These differences may reflect the cumulative effects of language access, schooling experiences, and instructional opportunities.

The study highlights the need for writing instruction that is flexible enough to address the wide range of strengths and needs among deaf secondary students. Teachers may need to provide explicit support for genre structure, idea development, organization, sentence variety, and the use of evidence from sources. Instruction should also build on students' language experiences and give them meaningful opportunities to write for different purposes and audiences. Some students may need support with functional writing, while others need opportunities to develop grade-level argumentative and source-based writing.

Ideas to Consider

How to cite this summary: Martinez, E. (2026). A qualitative analysis of deaf secondary students' writing. *Research Brief of Wolbers et al. (2026) in Journal of Deaf Studies and Deaf Education*. <https://siwi.utk.edu/wp-content/uploads/QualAnalSecondaryWriters.pdf>