



# Helping High Schoolers Improve English and Writing Skills

Webster Schroeder High School, Webster, New York



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“IXL supports what I am doing in the classroom and makes my job as a teacher easier. It allows me to give students targeted practice aligned to our standards and pinpoint individual areas of need. It is the one tool I say I really need.”

*Susan Woodward,  
High school English teacher*

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A year and a half of remote and hybrid learning left Susan Woodward’s high school students lacking in many basic English and writing skills. IXL English Language Arts is helping her 10th- and 11th-graders brush up on essential standards, master the skills they will be expected to demonstrate on state tests, and improve their writing.

## The Challenge: Catching Up on Basic Writing Skills

Webster Central School District is a suburban district near Rochester, NY, on the shores of Lake Ontario. Webster Schroeder High School has roughly 1,300 students. This includes a number of English as a New Language (ENL) students, as the school serves all ENL students for the district. Tenth and 11th-grade ENL students are concentrated into two of Susan’s English sections, which are co-taught by an ENL teacher, Katherine Pazmiño.

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit in the spring of 2020, the district went fully remote. For the 2020-21 school year, some students stayed remote and some participated in a hybrid learning program, in which they were in class two days a week and working from home the rest of the time. While instruction continued throughout the pandemic, Susan says many of her students started the 2021-22 school year with significant skill gaps, especially in basic writing skills.

“Students are really struggling with writing, especially after a year and a half away from the regular school routine. They really needed basic grammar, mechanics and writing conventions,” she explained. Many students had a hard time making the leap from informal “texting speak”—their primary mode of written communication—to more formal academic writing. They needed to start from basics, with how to write a complete sentence.

Susan was also worried about how her students would perform on the NY State Regents Exam at the end of the year. “When we started our short story unit in September, I could see that their analytical skills needed work.” She needed a tool to help students recover and practice essential grade-level skills. IXL English Language Arts was just what her students needed.



## Focusing on the “Super Standards”

To help students catch up and prepare for high-stakes testing, the Webster district has defined a small number of essential standards (“Super Standards”) for each grade level. While teachers attempt to cover as many of the standards as possible, students spend extra time on these Super Standards, which are considered essential for grade-level mastery. With IXL, Susan can easily match the platform’s skills to the standards she and her students are held accountable for.

Susan started using IXL English Language Arts in 2020 while she was teaching remotely. During remote learning, IXL gave her an easy way to push standards-based assignments to students and keep them on track. She used Live Classroom to monitor which skills students were working on and how they were doing in real-time. At the same time, the reports in IXL Analytics let her monitor progress towards mastery of the Super Standards and plan instruction or reteaching in response to student needs.

“IXL was great for distance learning,” she says. “I didn’t have to make worksheets, and I didn’t have to spend time grading. And if parents want to know what their kids are working on, it gives me the proof I need to show them how much of the time their student is on task and how they are progressing towards mastery. It also allowed me to hold students accountable, which is really tough during remote learning.”

Now that students are back in class, Susan uses IXL to support her instruction. She assigns IXL skills related to the standards she is focusing on in each unit. Students are expected to work on the skill until they earn their gold medal, signifying a SmartScore of 100. (SmartScore is IXL’s proprietary scoring system that measures how well a student understands a skill. A SmartScore of 80 is considered proficient, and a SmartScore of 100 means the skill has been mastered.) For many standards, Susan offers students a choice between two different IXL skills that align to the standard; choice helps to keep her students engaged and motivated. She also assigns IXL skills to address specific problems she sees in student writing, from basic sentence structure to higher-order skills, such as transitions or choosing evidence to support a claim.

IXL English Language Arts has been especially helpful for her ENL learners and other students needing additional practice time. With IXL, she can see which students are struggling and address that with additional reteaching. Susan uses the IXL Real-Time Diagnostic to monitor growth for individual students and for the class as a whole. She also uses IXL for extra credit or credit recovery. Students who want to try to improve their score on a quiz given in class can practice the skill in IXL to bring up their grades.

## The IXL Effect: Strong Gains in English and Writing Skills

Susan says that many of her students have shown strong growth since they started working on IXL. Some students have demonstrated gains of 200 points (equivalent to two grade levels) or more in the first semester on the IXL Real-Time Diagnostic. “Some of my students who were resistant at first were so excited when they saw their scores. They are seeing growth, and so am I. That helps them stay motivated to continue working on their skills.”

The skills they are learning on IXL translate into their writing, too. Student portfolios showed solid growth in paragraph writing skills over the first semester, which she attributes in part to IXL. “We’re working on writing an argument right now. I have specifically chosen skills for them to work on in IXL



that will help them write a better paper, such as recognizing good evidence,” she says. Her 11th-grade students are also spending extra time practicing the skills they will face on the NY State Regents Exam.

Susan says IXL is one of the essential tools for growth that she uses in her classroom—and she has the data to prove it. “I showed my department head the diagnostics from last year, which showed that my students were making gains even during remote learning. If anyone questions whether IXL is worth it, I say just look at the results.”

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“IXL helps me hold my students accountable. I can see exactly what they are working on, how much time they have spent, and how many questions they have answered. It gives me the data I need to evaluate progress, even during remote learning.”

*Susan Woodward*

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## A Model for Success at Webster Schroeder High School

Here’s how English teacher Susan Woodward is using IXL English Language Arts with her 10th- and 11th-grade students:

- Students take the IXL Real-Time Diagnostic the first week of class to establish a baseline.
- Susan assigns IXL skills aligned to the concepts she is teaching in class and the “Super Standards” the district is focusing on for each grade. For many standards, students can choose between two or more IXL skills.
- Students are expected to achieve a SmartScore of 100 to demonstrate mastery of each assigned skill. They can take as much or as little time as they need to achieve mastery.
- Students can use IXL as an alternate way to demonstrate mastery if they perform poorly on a quiz in class. They can also get extra credit by working on additional skills. The IXL Real-Time Diagnostic provides individualized practice recommendations for each student.
- To reinforce writing skills, Susan assigns IXL skills that support the type of writing they are working on or address specific problems she sees in writing samples.
- Students repeat the diagnostic at the end of the semester to evaluate growth. Many of her lower-performing students showed gains of 200 points or more in the first semester.