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The use of writing has greatly increased in mathematics instruction in the last two decades. Proponents of this method claim that writing helps students learn mathematics and improves their attitudes toward mathematics, as well as giving assessment opportunities. However, writing is used many ways and few studies show that any form of writing accomplishes the claims of its proponents. One hindrance to research on the effectiveness of different types of writing is that there is no standard way to describe writing tasks in detail so that they can be studied carefully and effective tasks can be clearly communicated to teachers so that they can use them.

This study develops a detailed set of categories to classify writing tasks used in secondary mathematics. The classification was based on writing tasks collected from the teachers who created and used them. These tasks were then analyzed to determine variations that could be used to differentiate between writing tasks. This resulted in forty-nine categories that describe aspects of the task. It is hoped that analysis of a writing assignment according to these categories will provide a rich description of the task that can differentiate it from other tasks, enriching both research and instruction. (Received August 03, 2005)