



Writing Conference Strategies

	WHOLE GROUP	ROVING	ONE-ON-ONE
WHY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teaches the whole class and the conferee celebrates accomplishment. Integrates mini-lessons with student writing. Models importance of rereading. Shares teaching points with the whole class. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Helps the whole class focus. Allows teacher to check in with each writer in a short time. Reminds writers of previous teaching points to incorporate. Reduces interruptions to the flow of writing. Helps others to sometimes eavesdrop and learn from the experience. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Puts the student in charge of what they need to learn. Provides specific in-depth teaching for that student. Gives enough time to assess and note what the student is working on.
WHEN	At the start of writing workshop 10-15 min.	During the writing period 1-5 minutes each student	During the writing period 5-10 minutes
HOW	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Have the student practice reading the piece aloud. Student or teacher reads the whole piece aloud (try not to look/make corrections). Read aloud again, listening for and celebrating strengths. Read sections or show sections to class to make specific teaching points. Write suggestions for the student on a post-it. Demonstrate for class how to make the changes to the piece. Be fair. Keep track publicly of who has shared. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Start with students having trouble getting started. Use "Jumpstart" techniques to have students say orally what they will write. Encourage students to reread, keep writing, check spelling. Teach on the spot. Remind students of resources in the room. Assess; as needed, take brief notes and add to checklist for individual students. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Have students read their pieces aloud to you. DO NOT make corrections to the piece while students are reading. Just listen. Begin by inviting the writer to ask for the help they need or want: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> How's it going? What are you doing today as a writer? What do you need help with today? Use further questions and direct teaching to support the writer. The goal of the conference is to help the writer say what they want in writing so that the reader of the writing may understand what the writer intended. <p><i>NOTE: See next pages for in depth information on one-on-one conferences.</i></p>

Anderson, Carol (2000) *How's it Going? A practical guide to conferring with student writers*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
 Routman, Regie (2005) *Writing Essentials*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.



Whole Group Conferences as Mini-Lessons for Writing:

Strengthening Writing



Common Core anchor standard 5 says: students will “develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach.” As early as second grade, it also suggests that students do this with “guidance and support from peers and adults.” One-on-one conferencing allows for entirely customized support of each writer’s revision process, but is not easy for teachers to find time for this in a classroom of 30+ students. Peer conferencing can be a valuable way to learn. Students automatically “kidify” their explanations for each other, however it can be problematic and also hard to manage. Either students don’t have the skill to offer suggestions to strengthen writing, or they take over and do the work for the student.

Whole group conferences using projected text of student writing provide the ideal instructional vehicle for teaching students what it looks like to *strengthen* writing, as well as how to offer suggestions in a way that is helpful, not hurtful. Here’s how:

STEP 1:

Select 2-3 students’ writing to focus on per session. Start with stronger, more confident writers so that shy or reluctant writers can see that it will be a supportive, rather than embarrassing experience. Also select writing of these students that contains a teaching point for revision that you want to make during this lesson. For example, typical revision lessons may include:

- Improving word choice
- Varying sentence structure
- Adding detail or missing information
- Selecting details or evidence that supports the thesis or main idea of the paper
- Finding more precise transition words
- Dividing run-on sentences into distinct, complete sentences
- Showing what is meant with using vivid detail instead of “telling”
- Writing an interesting conclusion

Step 2:

Ask the students permission to share their writing with the class and suggest they practice reading it aloud. They may also want to fix editorial errors so as to save embarrassment. The focus of these lessons is on *revision*, NOT editing. Project the writing on the screen and have the students read it aloud to the whole class.



Step 3: "I noticed"



Ask students to celebrate the strengths they notice in the writing with "I noticed..." statements. For example they may say, "I noticed that you really told your topic in the first sentence," or "I noticed that there is a lot of detail in your picture," or "I noticed that you used a lot of adjectives to describe things in your writing," etc. Feel free to model these statements yourself during the initial lessons.

Step 4: "I wonder?"

Tell students they can ask questions about the writing to help the writer think about what may be missing in the writing or made more interesting. Students use questions, not suggestions, to keep the writer in control of his or her own writing. Initially, students will need a lot of modeling of this by the teacher to get the difference between a comment or judgment and a question. For example, "I wonder what the room looked like when you stepped inside?" or "I wonder what else you learned about _____ that you might want to include to explain more." As the writer answers these questions from the students, you take notes for the student writer on a post-it so that they can remember what they said they wanted to add or change. After 3-5 questions are answered, project the post-it with your notes on the screen so that the class can see what you wrote for the writer. The post-it may look something like this with bullet points, not entire sentences:

I wonder?

- dog: rusty brown, long fur
- park: windy, leaves, ground
- feeling: confused

Step 5: Closure:

End the session with reminding students "what we learned about revising writing today while helping our fellow students." Suggest to the others that they use what they learned to strengthen their own writing during writing time. The spillover effect of these whole group conferences on all the students' writing is notable. Make sure to be equitable and work your way through the entire class list before you invite the first writers up to share again. You may choose to do this at the beginning of a writing session to make a specific teaching point to apply, or at the end as a way to celebrate as well as extend quality into the writing for the next day.





One-On-One Conferences

Students sign up for a conference after they have completed the criteria for requesting a conference.

For example:

1. I have followed the steps for this writing assignment and completed everything I can do on my own.
2. I have reread my piece and checked to make sure it makes sense.
3. I have reread my piece and fixed any spelling or punctuation that I can.
4. I have practiced reading my piece aloud to myself.

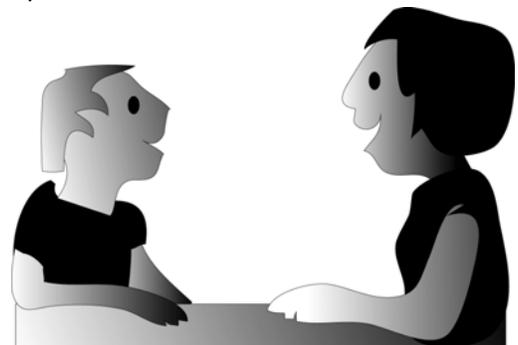
Bring to the Conference:

- Your writing folder
- The writing you are working on today
- A pencil
- Your personal spelling dictionary or spelling wall
- The checklist for this writing

Steps to a One-On-One Conference:

1. Have the student read their piece aloud to you. DO NOT make corrections to the piece while they are reading aloud. Just listen.
2. Begin by inviting the writer to ask for the help they want or need:
 - How's it going?
 - What are you doing today as a writer?
 - What do you need help with today?
3. Use further questions and direct teaching to support the writer. The goal of the conference is to help the writer say what they want to convey in writing so that the reader may understand what the writer intended.

See next page for additional questions...





One-On-One Conferences

Questions to Ask

Questions that nudge students to say more:

- "Could you say more about that?"
- "What do you mean by....?"
- "Could you explain what you mean by...?"

Questions to help with organization:

- "What do you want to say first, next, last?"
- "How would you like to begin/end?"
- "I am wondering if you could begin/end/continue with _____?" "What do you think about that?"

Questions to help with punctuation:

- "Listen to this...," (read the section aloud). "Where do you hear the end of that sentence?"
- Ask students to add punctuation as they listen to you read their piece.

Questions to help with spelling:

- Circle the words that don't look right. Ask, "Can you think of a way to help yourself with the spelling of that word?" (Word wall, word bank, dictionary, sound/spelling cards etc.)
- Write the words they need on a post-it or scratch paper and ask students to transfer those to their pieces after the conference. Ask them to add them to their personal word wall/dictionary too.

Questions to wrap up the conference:

- "What are you going to do next?"
- "How will you finish this piece?"
- "What are you going to work on next?"





Peer Conferencing

Tips for Teaching Students to Work with Peers on Editing, Revision, and Response

Teach the procedure using role play in a “fishbowl” setting. Have two students conduct a peer edit/revision or response session in the center of the room while the rest of the students form a circle around them. Make sure these two students know the precise steps you want them to use.

For example:

1. Student reads the piece aloud to the peer.
2. Peer asks student with what he/she wants help.
3. Peer uses polite language in offering suggestions.
4. Student writes down what he/she will change or makes the changes during the conference (not the peer!).
5. Student thanks peer for help.

When they are beginning, teach students to focus on one element at a time in conferences. Try mini-conferences with the whole class at the same time on a single focus such as punctuation, word choice, or spelling. Have the students use a simple student writing checklist for their work from which to choose a particular focus.

Designate a quiet corner or special location for peer conferencing so that others are not disturbed.

Use the Individual and Whole Class conferencing formats for a while before doing Peer Conferencing. Wait until you feel the students really understand what happens during a conference.

Consider assigning “writing buddies” for longer writing projects so that they won’t have to read through everything each time and can help each other through to the final product.

