

Steps in a Writing Conference

RESEARCH AND DISCOVER

- 1 **Start with a thinking question**, e.g., “What are you working on in today’s writing?”
If the student has difficulty explaining, ask what part she is working on.
- 2 **Scan the writing quickly to get an idea of the kind of work the student is doing.**
- 3 **Ask the student to describe or show a specific part** in her writing that shows what she is working on.
- 4 **Ask her to say more about that thing.** Ask more than once.



ASSESS AND DECIDE

- 5 **Look and listen for a partial understanding.** Which quality of writing can you build on?
- 6 **Prioritize a direction for teaching.** Use the student’s partial understanding as a jumping-off point for teaching something new about writing (ZPD).

TEACH

- 7 **State a teaching point** that extends the partial understanding, in language that can apply to the next piece of writing, and the piece of writing after that. (Show an example in a mentor text, when possible.)
- 8 **Have the student apply the teaching point** to today’s piece of writing (a “try it”). Negotiate parameters with the student, such as how many examples, where in the piece to try it, etc.
- 9 **Articulate the teaching point** as a final comment, connecting it to future writing, e.g., “Doing this work will help you practice...”

Steps in a Reading Conference

RESEARCH AND DISCOVER

- 1 Start with a thinking question**, e.g., “What are you thinking about [name of text]?” *Don’t* begin by asking for a retell. This may be useful for the teacher, but is not engaging for the student.
- 2 Listen for the most interesting thing the reader says or does**, and jot down her specific words or phrases. (If the student defaults to a retell/summary, listen for something that sounds like an idea or opinion.)
- 3 If possible, name the reader’s line of thinking** in general, transferable language that could apply to other books as well—and ask her to reflect on it, e.g., “It seems what you are doing as a reader is...am I right?”
- 4 Ask the student to find a part in the book** that illustrates what she is noticing or thinking about.
- 5 Ask the reader to say more about that thing.** Listen for the most interesting part of her response. Ask him/her to say more about that. (Ask some form of “Say more about that” at least three times before entering with your own content!)



ASSESS AND DECIDE

- 6 Look and listen for a partial understanding.** Which comprehension strategy/strategies can you build on?
- 7 Name the partial understanding in transferable language** that is about more than today’s book, so it can be generalized as a strategy for future reading, e.g., “It seems like you are the type of reader who....”

TEACH

- 8 State a teaching point** that extends the partial understanding, in language that can apply to the next book, and the book after that, e.g., “One important thing readers need to do is...”
- 9 Negotiate concrete, specific work to do in today’s text** to practice and extend the teaching point (e.g., sticky notes, reading notebook, graphic organizer). Have the students do a “try-it.” Agree on how many, how long, due date, etc. for this assignment.
- 10 Articulate the teaching point as a final comment, connecting it to future reading**, e.g., “Doing this work will help you practice....”

Qualities of Writing/Writing Cycle: A Cheat Sheet for Confering

QUALITIES OF WRITING <i>What we teach when we teach writing, regardless of genre</i>	STAGES OF THE WRITING CYCLE <i>What we may teach at different points in the writing process</i>
<p>Structure/Organization</p> <p>MACRO:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transitions, i.e., how to get from one section of a piece to the next • Reordering sections of a piece • Story structure, e.g., where and how to introduce characters, problem, solution, etc. • Essay structure, e.g., thesis statement, examples, conclusion • Informational text <i>structure</i>, e.g., topic sentence, sequence and grouping of information • Informational text <i>features</i>, e.g., captions, subtitles, graphs, and charts <p>MICRO:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thinking about the sequence of sentences in a specific paragraph, e.g., varying sentence length, putting information in an appropriate order, etc. <p>Focus/Detail/Elaboration</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which parts need additional sensory or descriptive detail • Which parts require additional info or explanation • Where to take out unnecessary detail • Deciding which sections should be longer or shorter <p>Craft/Voice</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Talking to the reader," i.e., writing in a conversational tone • Combining action and description in the same sentence (e.g., "Her black dreadlocks bounced up and down as she ran toward the goal line") • Following a long, multi-clause sentence with a very short one, for emphasis • Showing (not telling) character emotion through facial expression and/or movement • Conveying a mood through setting description • Describing by comparing (e.g., metaphor/simile/personification) • Varying the signifying verb in dialogue, e.g., "she exclaimed" vs. "she said" <p>Conventions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dividing a sentence into clauses • Varying ending punctuation • Punctuating dialogue • Following a long clause with a short one • Using punctuation to create pauses 	<p>Prewriting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning out the sections of a piece with a graphic organizer (e.g., flow chart, timeline, outline) • Narrowing down a topic with a semantic web • Freewrite about your topic to generate content • Gather information about a nonfiction topic <p>Drafting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engaging lede • Rising action (narrative) • Reflective conclusion (essay, narrative) • Varying internal thinking/feeling and external action (narrative) • Expository text structures (e.g., question/answer, cause/effect, problem/solution, chronological) • Summative conclusion (expository) <p>Revising</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Almost anything in drafting can also be taught during revision • Reordering sections in a larger piece, or sentences in a specific section • Word choice: using more unique or descriptive vocabulary • Where to add dialogue, or sensory detail, or physical description • Taking out parts that seem redundant or too long • Mixing up long and short sentences to keep it interesting <p>Editing/Proofreading</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Checking for typos, spelling, punctuation, syntax, grammar mistakes • Checking for unnecessary repetition • Looking for places where sentences that are too long may be broken up into shorter ones • Looking for places where shorter sentences may be combined into longer, more complex ones

CONTENT OF COMPREHENSION: A CHEAT SHEET FOR CONFERRING

METACOGNITIVE STRATEGIES

What readers do in their heads

- **Prioritize**
Deciding what's more and less important.
- **Infer**
Reading between the lines, understanding what the author is implying without saying directly.
- **Question and Argue With the Text**
Not taking things at face value, e.g., noticing what information is left out of a news report, thinking a character action in a story is unrealistic.
- **Make Connections**
Accessing prior knowledge; connecting to personal experiences, other books, and/or things we know about in the world.
- **Evoke Sensory and Emotional Images**
Visualizing what's happening in a text; imagining what it sounds, feels, or tastes like; feeling the feelings of a character, or the mood of the story.
- **Monitor for Meaning**
Knowing what to do when something in a text is confusing or complicated.
- **Synthesize**
Connecting the dots, within or between texts e.g., understanding how something on the first page connects to a detail on the second page, or how an idea in one book connects to another.

Adapted from *Mosaic of Thought* (Keene & Zimmerman, 2008)

TEXT-BASED CONTENT

What's on the page, not in readers' heads

- **Story Elements**
Plot, character, setting, movement through time, problem/solution/reflection.
- **Literary Devices**
Such as metaphor, simile, personification, alliteration, etc.
- **Punctuation**
Such as exclamation marks, parentheses, em-dashes, question marks, etc.
- **Informational Text Features**
Such as captions, subtitles, sidebars, italics, etc.
- **Informational Text Structures**
How the text is written, such as problem/solution, cause/effect, question/answer, etc.

ART OF CONFERRING RUBRIC

Conferring Competencies	Beginning	Developing	Applying	Strategic Thinking Across Reading and Writing
Content Knowledge (qualities of writing; comprehension strategies)	Addresses issues in reading conferences that are text-specific (e.g., correcting literal misunderstandings in a book), and piece-specific in writing conferences (e.g., fixing grammatical errors in today's writing), rather than making teaching points generalizable to future reading and writing.	Is able to name grade-appropriate qualities of writing, and/or comprehension strategies in reading—and sometimes apply them to the strengths and needs of a particular student.	Is able to identify and prioritize appropriate teaching points in reading and writing, and then match them to strengths and needs of an individual child.	Is able to identify and prioritize appropriate teaching points for an individual child that help her/him see connections between reading and writing, i.e., to “read like a writer and write like a reader.”
Diagnostic Listening	Confers with an imbalanced ratio of teacher-to-student talk; lacks strategies to draw out and elicit student thinking.	Approaches a conference as a place to teach predetermined curriculum goals for the grade or unit, rather than taking cues from the individual child.	Is able to make appropriate instructional decisions based on what a student says and does in a conference, as well as considering long-term individual goals for that child.	Can listen to and elicit thinking from a student that suggests possible reading and writing connections, and then follow up with appropriate teaching points.
Structure, Sequence, and Pacing	Confers with no structure in mind, and/or as a review/remedial session related to a whole-class lesson.	Has a general sense of the research-decide-teach arc of a conferring conversation.	Confers with an appropriate structure and sequence in mind, in this order: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • listening • eliciting further student thinking • teaching an individually targeted strategy or skill • giving the student appropriate, engaging work to practice and apply. 	Confers with an appropriate structure and sequence in mind (see descriptors in “Applying”), with conscious attempts to connect teaching points across reading and writing conferences.