

TEACHING THAT MAKES SENSE

The Organizers

*Power-Packed Single-Page Tools
for Efficient and Effective Instruction*

by
Steve Peha



© 1995-2010 by Teaching That Makes Sense, Inc. Some rights reserved.

Please Use This Stuff

Just follow the rules. Thanks!

1. YOU MAY use this Work or any portion thereof for non-commercial purposes only. No individual or entity shall profit from this Work but for the intellectual benefit that may accrue by its conscientious application. No fee may be charged in connection with the use or dissemination of this Work; nor may any fee be charged to any participant in any event where this Work is used or disseminated, whether such event is conducted in person or via electronic means; nor may any fee be charged, including tuition, to any person where this Work is used or disseminated by any institution, representative, or affiliate thereof. To request a commercial use license, click here to contact us at info@ttms.org.

2. YOU MAY copy and distribute this Work, or any portion thereof, by any non-electronic means, as long as this Work is not altered in any way other than coloring, reduction, enlargement, or binding.

3. YOU MAY incorporate this entire Work or its contents into any other work. Any work containing this Work or its contents shall be bound by the same rights as this Work, shall be considered a derivative work based on this Work, shall include the text of this agreement in paragraphs 1-5 and the URL of this Work, and shall bear the following notice: © Copyright 1995-2010 by Teaching That Makes Sense, Inc. Used by permission. For more information, contact us at info@ttms.org.

4. YOU MAY NOT distribute this Work electronically or post it for electronic distribution or download. You may, however, send or post a link to this Work using its URL in the *Teaching That Makes Sense Free Learning Project Library* below:

<https://ttms.box.net/shared/static/i2doddmlps.pdf>

5. The rights enumerated above extend only to material to which *Teaching That Makes Sense, Inc.* holds applicable permissions.



“Learning begins with teaching that makes sense.”

What is TTMS?

A Brief Explanation of Teaching That Makes Sense

Teaching That Makes Sense® works with people who are passionate about learning. We provide the following services:

- Pre-Service and In-Service Teacher Training Workshops
- Summer Professional Development Institutes
- In-Classroom Model Teaching, Co-Teaching, Observation, and Planning
- Curriculum Design and Program Evaluation
- Instructional and Administrative Coaching
- Educational Leadership Training and School Improvement Strategy

We work at all grade levels, K-12, and across the curriculum, in all kinds of schools. We specialize in the implementation of research-based practices that can be scaled easily from a single classroom to an entire district.

Since 1995, we have worked with over 20,000 people in over 500 schools and other learning organizations throughout the United States and Canada.

We provide support to teachers and learners using the most sensible methods and materials available. Our goal is to increase academic achievement by making teaching easier for teachers and learning more meaningful for kids.

You can learn more about *Teaching That Makes Sense* by visiting our website at www.ttms.org.



“Learning begins with teaching that makes sense.”

TEACHING THAT MAKES SENSE

Featured Downloads

The Best of Teaching That Makes Sense

To view our entire library of free teaching materials click [here](#).



“Learning begins with teaching that makes sense.”

Featured Workshops

The Best of Teaching That Makes Sense



Writing Strategies For Every Classroom.

In this highly interactive workshop, you'll be introduced to an innovative set of writing strategies that will help your students make dramatic improvements almost instantly.



Helping Writers Master Mechanics.

Got problems with punctuation, grammar, and sentence structure? Kids don't like to edit? Get proven tools based on what writing conventions really are and how real writers really learn them.



Read Non-Fiction Now!

Non-fiction texts make up most of the reading we pursue in our daily lives but fiction dominates in school. Give your students the skills they need to succeed across the curriculum and out in the world.



Comprehensive Comprehension.

Explore techniques that dramatically improve reading comprehension without traditional tests, tedious questions, dreary worksheets, and other inauthentic unmotivating methods.



Mastering Basic Math Facts.

How is it that so many kids sneak into 5th or 6th grade without mastering their basic math facts? With a set of innovative activities, kids can master basic facts quicker than you ever thought possible.



Math Problem-Solving Power.

Serious math involves serious math problem-solving. And that means students need serious problem-solving strategies. Teach math the way mathematicians teach it and give kids an edge.



Grading That Works For Everyone.

Stop spending hours grading papers. Use a research-based approach to grading that's fair, fast, accurate, highly motivating for kids, and—this is the best part—much easier for you.



Assessment That Makes Sense.

Learn how to use the key principles of effective assessment to gather information that guides instruction in less time and with fewer interruptions in your everyday teaching.

To schedule a workshop for your school or district click [here](#).

"Learning begins with teaching that makes sense."

**“FULL”
VERSION**

The. Organizers



**FOR MORE INFORMATION
VISIT TTMS.ORG**

by Steve Peha



The best way to teach
is the way that makes sense
to you, your kids,
and your community.

www.ttms.org

The Writing Strategy Organizer

1 Pick a topic...

Topic T-Charts

Like	Hate
Pizza Baseball My dog Cars Recess Disneyland David Letterman Money Fishing Paintball Staying up late	Homework Cleaning my room All vegetables Math Spelling tests Rainy days Scary things Being bored Getting dressed up

Like/Hate

Things you like and things you hate.

Typical/Unusual

Typical life experiences and unusual life experiences.

Fun/Have To

Things you do for fun and things you do because you have to do them.

Change/Stay the Same

Things you want to change and things you want to stay the same.

Regret/Proud Of

Things you regret and things you are proud of.

2 Develop an idea...

What-Why-How

What	Why	How
My dog is the most amazing animal in the whole wide world.	He protects me.	Whenever someone comes to the door he barks to let me know.
	He plays with me.	At the park we play frisbee. He catches it in his mouth and brings it back.
	He does my homework for me.	He's great with math. He has a little trouble holding the pencil, though.
	He makes money for me.	We were on David Letterman's "Stupid Pet Tricks." Disney just called about a movie deal.

What do you think?

This is your opinion.

Why do you think it?

These are the reasons that support your opinion.

How do you know?

These are the examples, evidence, descriptions, or reference citations that prove your opinion.

3 Add detail...

Idea-Details

Idea	Details
At the park we play frisbee. He catches it in his mouth and brings it back.	He runs as fast as he can. He jumps up in the air. He almost never misses. People can't believe how good he is. He can jump about 5 feet high. He'll only catch it if I throw it.

Make a Paragraph

With just a few changes, the idea and supporting details can easily be combined into a paragraph:

"Sometimes, my dog and I go up to the park to play frisbee. As soon as I throw it, he runs as fast as he can to catch it. He jumps high in the air and catches it in his teeth. He can jump about five feet high. People can't believe how good he is because he almost never misses. But he'll only catch it if I throw it."

Not every detail needs to be used. Often, writers will change things around a bit as they go along.

4 Add "showing" detail...

Tell-Show

Tell	Show
He runs as fast as he can. He jumps in the air.	As I take out the frisbee, he starts to wag his tail. As soon as I let it fly, he tears after it as fast as he can. Just when I think he's not going to get it, he leaps into the air, stretches out his neck, and snags it between his teeth like a wild animal capturing his prey.

How Do You Do This?

Learning to create great "showing" details takes a lot of practice. Fortunately, practicing is easy and fun. The best way to get started is to visualize a scene before you start to write. Try this:

- Think about your "telling" detail(s).
- Close your eyes and make a picture in your mind.
- Make a mental list of everything you "see" in the "picture."
- Now, in your writing, describe the scene that you've created in your mind.

5 Develop a narrative...

Transition-Action-Details

Transition	Action	Details
About a month ago...	My dog and I went to Andrews Park to play frisbee.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The wind was really blowing. • There was hardly anyone at the park.
I ran him around for a while, and then...	I took out the frisbee and threw it hard and it took off over the trees.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I tried to stop my dog from going after it, but it was too late. • He ran off. I couldn't see him anymore.
	The frisbee went over the trees and down a steep hill.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There was some construction on the other side, and I was worried my dog might get hurt.
A few minutes later...	My dog came running back with the frisbee.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He was all dirty. It looked like he'd been in the mud. • He had a cut on his ear.

Fill out the ACTION column first, the DETAILS column next, and the TRANSITION column last. Try to keep the number of ACTIONS between 3 and 7. Each row of the chart can be a separate paragraph. Or, several rows can be combined together. It depends on how many DETAILS you have. Not every row needs a TRANSITION.

6 Capture a scene...

Draw-Label-Caption



I'm playing frisbee with my dog at Andrews Park.

A Few Things to Think About

- This is just a rough sketch, not a finished illustration.
- Label everything you can think of.
- In your caption, write down anything you think is important.
- Each thing you identify in the picture is a detail you can use when you start to write.
- Spending time on the picture makes you more familiar with the scene and helps you think of things to write about.

7 Create a strong beginning...

Action-Feelings-Setting



Action	Feelings	Setting
I've just thrown the frisbee, and my dog is starting to go after it.	<p>WHAT: I'm excited but also a little scared.</p> <p>WHY: I threw it too far and he's going to run off into the trees where he might get hurt.</p>	We're up at Andrews Park. It's really windy and cold. There aren't many people around.

"It was cold and windy that day at Andrews Park, and there weren't very many people around. I threw the frisbee hard into the wind and it just took off like I'd never seen before. Immediately, my dog started chasing after it. And as I saw it sail off over the trees and toward a big construction site, I started to get worried."

8 Plan an entire piece...

Content-Purpose-Audience

Main Idea	Key Details
What's the one most important thing you want your audience to know?	What details will help your audience "unlock" your main idea?
Think	Do
What do you want your readers to think about after they're finished?	What do you want your readers to do after they're finished?
People	Questions
Who are you writing to?	What does your audience want to know about your topic?

Content

The main idea plus key supporting details.

Purpose

What you want your readers to think and/or do.

Audience

The people you are writing to and the important questions they have about your topic.

The Writing Strategy Organizer

9 Improve focus and develop a main idea...

Main Idea

What is your main idea?

What's the one most important thing you want your audience to know?

It's like this...

Imagine taking an entire piece and scrunching it down into a single sentence that still said more or less the same thing. That's kind of what a main idea is. Most pieces are built on a single thought. That thought is the main idea and everything else in the piece is there to help the audience understand it. The simplest way to think about the main idea of a piece is to think of it as the one most important thing you want the audience to know. If you had to write just one sentence to represent everything you wanted to say, that would be the main idea.

Is your main idea:

- ___ A complete thought; a complete sentence?
- ___ Something that is important to you?
- ___ Something that is important to the audience?

(A good main idea has all three of these qualities.)

Something to think about.

The main idea is probably the most important thing about a piece of writing. If you make sure you have a good main idea, and that the details in your piece support it, you're almost guaranteed to have a successful piece.

10 Find details...

Where Do Details Come From?

"A detail is the answer to a question a reader might have."

5Ws+H

Who? • What? • When?
Where? • Why? • How?

Spend more time answering the "Why" and "How" questions. The answers almost always produce the most interesting details.

5 Senses

See? • Hear? • Touch?
Smell? • Taste?

Spend most of your time thinking about what you want readers to "see." Make use of the other senses only rarely.

Action

First,...
Then,...
Next,... etc...

For more details, break the action down into smaller "events." Plan out the sequence of events using Transition-Action-Details.

Feelings

Every "who" in your piece has feelings. YOUR feelings will usually be the most important. Strong feelings make for a strong piece.

Attributes

Every person, place, or thing in your story has attributes: shape, size, color, anything you can think of to describe anything in your piece.

Setting

Every setting can be described in great detail. Readers like it when the writer "sets" the scene. Don't forget to include a back story detail.

11 Write great fiction...

The 5 Facts of Fiction

❶ Fiction is all about character. Who is the main character? Can you describe his or her personality? How did your character get to be this way? The more you know about your characters (especially about why they do the things they do), the better your story will be.

❷ Fiction is all about what your character wants. What one thing does your character want more than anything else in the world? Why does your character want it? The more important something is to someone, the more he or she will do to get it.

❸ Fiction is all about how your character gets or does not get what he or she wants. Is your character successful? Or does your character's quest end in failure? What obstacles does your character encounter?

❹ Fiction is all about how your character changes. How does your character change as a result of what happens? How is your character at the beginning? At the end? What does your character learn?

❺ Fiction is all about a world that you create. What kinds of people, places, and things does the world of this story contain? What successes, disasters, and conflicts arise in this world? Complete this sentence: "This is a world where..."

❶ Main character ❷ Motivation ❸ Plot ❹ Main idea ❺ Setting

12 Write a good lead...

What Makes a Good Lead?

What's the best way to start a piece of writing? No one really knows. Each piece of writing is different because writers have different ways of introducing themselves to their readers. Every writer must consider his or her audience, and try to decide what few words will be most likely to keep the reader reading. In general, good leads:

Get right to the point. There's no rule about how short a lead needs to be. In most cases, however, the lead is contained in the first one or two sentences. Remember, you don't have much time to hook your reader.

Have immediate impact. Some leads are funny, some are surprising, some are just plain weird. But good leads make the reader feel some emotion right away.

Hint at the topic. You don't want to give away your whole idea, you want to save some of the best stuff for later. But you have to give the reader something.

Promise the reader a good experience. A reader has to make a big investment of time to read your writing. What would make someone want to spend an afternoon reading your work instead of doing something else?

Make the reader want to read on. If a lead doesn't make the reader want to continue reading, then what comes after the lead will never get read.

13 Draft effectively...

Diligent Drafting

Write on every other line.

Skip a line between lines. It's so much easier to make changes during revision when you have all that space to write between lines. And besides, it'll make you feel like you're getting twice as many pages written.

Number, date, and save everything.

With all those pages, you'll need to keep them in order. You should also put the date on each page. When you go back over previous drafts those dates could make the difference between being finished and being confused. And save everything you write—at least for a while.

Write on one side of the paper only.

This makes it easier to keep track of pieces that span many pages. It also allows you to cut your writing into pieces if you need to move things around.

If you get stuck...

Every writer gets writer's block. Here are four smart things you can do about it:

- Go back to your pre-writing and look for new material. Or, do some new pre-writing.
- Share your writing and ask your audience if they have any questions or any thoughts about what you could write next.
- Read your piece from the beginning. New ideas often occur to writers when they read over their entire piece.
- Put the piece aside and work on another piece for a while.

14 Know when you're finished...

When Are You Finished?

After reading the beginning...

- ___ Will my readers know what my paper is about?
- ___ Will my readers think my piece is going to be fun to read?
- ___ Will my readers want to find out more?

After reading the middle...

- ___ Will my readers think I included enough details to help them understand my main idea?
- ___ Will my readers have enough information so that they don't have a lot of questions?
- ___ Will my readers think I included just the right amount of information?

After reading the ending...

- ___ Will my readers understand the one most important thing I wanted them to know?
- ___ Will my piece feel finished and give my readers something to think about?
- ___ Will my readers feel that they had fun or that they learned something new?

How long should my piece be?

Your piece should be long enough to express your ideas in such a way that all your reader's questions are answered—and not one word longer!

15 Make sure you have a good idea...

Do You Have a Good Idea?

Is your idea...

- **Something you have strong feelings about?** What are those feelings? How will you communicate those feelings to your reader? Is there a key moment or a particularly important detail you want to emphasize so your reader will understand exactly how you feel?
- **Something you know a lot about?** What are the main things you want to cover? What's the most important part of your piece? What's the one thing you want your audience to know about your topic?
- **Something you can describe in great detail?** What are some of the details of your topic? Why are these details important? How do these details help the reader understand your message?
- **Something your audience will be interested in?** Who is your audience? Why will they be interested in your topic? What will interest them most?
- **Something your audience will feel was worth reading?** What will your audience get from reading your piece? Will your audience learn something new? What will make your audience want to follow your piece all the way to the end?

16 Write a good ending...

What Makes a Good Ending?

Endings are tough, no doubt about it. And what seems like a good ending to some people can be a real let-down for others. And yet, endings are important. After all, the ending is the last thing your audience will read, so it'll probably be something they'll remember. Here are some ideas for things you can try:

Your main idea. One way to make sure your audience doesn't miss your message is to put it right at the end.

How the piece might affect the reader's life. This kind of ending can help you get the reader's attention.

A recommendation or some advice. Everyone loves good advice. Of course, everyone hates bad advice. And some people don't like getting any advice at all. But I still think this is a great way to end a piece.

Your purpose. Telling the reader why you took the trouble to write it might help them feel good about why they took the trouble to read it.

How you feel about the piece. Sometimes, a thoughtful reflection makes the perfect ending.

Thanks to Mrs. Goffe's 3rd graders at Sunrise Elementary School for giving me these great ideas about endings.

The “What is Good Writing?” Organizer For Beginning Writers

★ IDEAS	★ ORGANIZATION	★ VOICE
<p>CRITERIA</p> <p>— My writing has an important message. What’s the one most important thing you want the audience to know?</p> <p>— I included lots of interesting details. Which details are the most interesting?</p> <p>— I wrote this for a good reason. Why did you write this piece? Why is this a good reason?</p>	<p>CRITERIA</p> <p>— My beginning will make you want to find out more about my piece. What will the audience want to know about?</p> <p>— My ending will make you think about something important. What do you want your audience to think about?</p> <p>— I put everything in the best order. Are there any places where your audience might get confused?</p>	<p>CRITERIA</p> <p>— I like this piece, and my audience will like it, too. Why do you like it? Why will your audience like it?</p> <p>— I really care about my topic. Why do you care about it so much? Did you put that in the piece?</p> <p>— You can tell exactly how I feel. How do you feel about this topic? Did you write that down?</p>
<p>COMPLETIONS</p> <p>★ The one most important thing I want my audience to know is... (This is the main idea. Make it a complete sentence.)</p> <p>★ The most interesting thing about my topic is... (Sometimes it’s good to move this part up to the beginning of the piece.)</p> <p>★ I wrote this because... (The end of this sentence often makes a good ending.)</p>	<p>COMPLETIONS</p> <p>★ You’ll be interested in my story because... (Sometimes you can turn this into a good beginning.)</p> <p>★ You should remember my piece because... (This can make a good ending.)</p> <p>★ The most important part of my piece is... (Make sure this part stands out.)</p>	<p>COMPLETIONS</p> <p>★ I like this piece because... (The more you like it, the more your audience will probably like it, too.)</p> <p>★ I wanted to write about this topic because... (The best things to write about are the things you choose yourself.)</p> <p>★ The feelings I have about this piece are... (Make sure you write those feelings down.)</p>
<p>★ WORD CHOICE</p>	<p>★ SENTENCE FLUENCY</p>	<p>★ CONVENTIONS</p>
<p>CRITERIA</p> <p>— I used words that I know and understand. Are there any words in your piece that you don’t understand?</p> <p>— I used some interesting words that you’ll remember. Which words are the most interesting?</p> <p>— I used just the right words to say exactly what I wanted to say. Did you think about different ways to say what you wanted to say?</p>	<p>CRITERIA</p> <p>— I wrote my piece in sentences. Does each sentence sound right?</p> <p>— I used words that sound good when you read them together. Which words sound the best?</p> <p>— My writing sounds good when I read it out loud. Is it easy to read with lots of expression?</p>	<p>CRITERIA</p> <p>— I put capital letters at the beginning of each sentence and periods at the end. How did you know where to put the periods and capitals?</p> <p>— I used capitals for the word “I” and for the names of people and places. How did you know which words to capitalize?</p> <p>— I did my best to spell each word correctly. What did you do to check your spelling?</p>
<p>COMPLETIONS</p> <p>★ The best words in my piece are... (Try to include at least one or two interesting words if you can.)</p> <p>★ You’ll remember these words from my piece because... (Unusual words are often the easiest for people to remember.)</p> <p>★ I chose these words because... (Why are some words better than other words?)</p>	<p>COMPLETIONS</p> <p>★ The best sounding sentence in my piece is... (Try to write other sentences that sound like this one.)</p> <p>★ The best sounding words in my piece are... (Think about the sounds in these words and why they sound so good.)</p> <p>★ My piece is fun to read because... (The more fun you have reading it, the more fun your audience will have.)</p>	<p>COMPLETIONS</p> <p>★ The conventions I know are... (Make sure all of these are correct in your published writing.)</p> <p>★ The conventions I am learning are... (Make sure you try to correct these conventions; then get some help.)</p> <p>★ You can tell I edited my piece because... (Think about the different things you did to make your piece more correct.)</p>

The “What is Good Writing?” Organizer For Maturing Writers

★ IDEAS

- **An important main idea.** What’s the one most important thing the author wants the audience to know? Why is it important to the author? Why is it important to the audience?
- **Interesting details.** Which details are the most interesting? How do they help the audience understand the main idea?
- **“Showing,” not just telling.** Where does the author use “showing” details? How does the “showing” help to improve the audience’s understanding?
- **A clear and meaningful purpose.** Why did the writer write this? Why is this a good reason to write something? What does the author want the audience to think and/or do?
- **Something surprising or unusual that works.** What is surprising or unusual about the writing? How does this differ from other things you’ve read?

★ WORD CHOICE

- **Strong verbs that tell how actions are performed.** Where has the author used strong verbs? What makes them effective?
- **Adjectives and adverbs that make things more specific.** Where has the author used adjectives and adverbs to make the writing more specific? How does using these adjectives and adverbs improve the reader’s understanding?
- **Words and phrases you can remember long after you’ve finished reading.** Which words and phrases do you remember? Why are they so memorable?
- **Words and phrases used accurately and effectively.** Is the writer’s usage accurate? Are there any improvement or corrections you would suggest? Where has the author used unusual words effectively? Where has the author used common words in new ways?
- **Language that is appropriate to purpose and audience.** Are the words the author has used appropriate for the writer’s purpose and audience? Are there any words or phrases that are too casual, too formal, too hard to understand, or possibly offensive?

★ ORGANIZATION

- **Catches the audience’s attention at the start; makes them want to read more.** How does the beginning catch the audience’s attention? Why would the audience want to read more?
- **Feels finished at the end; makes the audience think.** How does the ending make the piece feel finished? What does it make the audience think about?
- **Parts arranged in the best order.** Can you easily identify the different parts of the piece? Does each part follow logically from the next? Is the sequencing effective and entertaining?
- **Spends the right amount of time on each part.** Why does the author spend more time in some parts than in others? Are there places where the author moves ahead too quickly or hangs on too long?
- **Easy to follow from part to part.** How does the author move from part to part? How do these transitions work?

★ SENTENCE FLUENCY

- **Variety in sentence beginnings.** What are some of the different ways the author begins sentences? Do you notice any patterns? Does the author ever begin two or three consecutive sentences in the same way?
- **Variety in sentence length and structure.** Does the author vary the length and structure of his or her sentences? Do you notice any patterns? Does the author use the same length or structure in two or three consecutive sentences? What sentence structures does the author use most often?
- **Easy to read expressively; sounds great when read aloud.** What are the most expressive parts? What is it about how they sound that makes them so much fun to read out loud?
- **Uses rhythm, rhyme, alliteration, and other “sound” effects.** Where has the author used rhythm, rhyme, alliteration or other effects to make the writing sound interesting? How does this improve the piece?
- **Sentences are structured so they’re easy to understand.** How does the author use connecting words and punctuation marks to make sentences easy to understand? How does the order of sentence parts make the writing easy to understand?

★ VOICE

- **The author cares about the topic.** How can you tell that the author cares about the topic? Where can you find evidence of strong opinions?
- **Strong feelings; honest statements.** Where are the author’s strongest statements? How can you tell that the author is saying what he or she really thinks?
- **Individual, authentic, and original.** Does this writing feel as though it could only have been written by one person? Does the writing sound like it was written by a real person? How original is it?
- **Displays a definite and well developed personality.** How would you describe the author’s personality in this writing? What examples from the text tell you you’re right?
- **Appropriate tone for purpose and audience.** Is the writer using an appropriate tone for this situation? How can you tell? Which parts, if any, seem inappropriate?

★ CONVENTIONS

- **“Outside” punctuation.** Has the author used periods, question marks, and exclamation marks in ways that make sense to the audience? Is it easy to tell where ideas end and begin?
- **“Inside” punctuation.** Does the author’s use of commas, colons, dashes, parentheses, and semicolons make sense to the audience? How does the author’s use of these marks help make sentences with many parts easier to understand?
- **Capitalization.** Has the author used capital letters in ways that make sense to the audience? Is it easy to tell where new ideas begin? Has the author capitalized the word “I”, as well as names, places, and things that are one of a kind?
- **Paragraphing.** Has the author grouped related sentences into paragraphs in ways that make sense to the audience? Has the author started a new paragraph each time a new person starts speaking? Has the author indented or skipped a line to show where new paragraphs start?
- **Spelling.** If the writing has spelling mistakes, do these errors make the piece difficult to read and understand? How does the author’s spelling affect the way the audience feels about the writing and the person who wrote it?

The “Writing Process” Organizer

★ PRE-WRITING

Explore Your Topic

Pre-writing is any activity that helps writers figure out what to write about. Many things qualify as pre-writing activities. The strategies that I have had success with are:

- ★ **T-Chart Topics.** (Love/Hate, Typical/Unusual, Fun/Not Fun, etc.)
- ★ **Topic Equations.** (in Math, Science, and Social Studies.)
- ★ **What-Why-How.**
- ★ **Idea-Details and Tell-Show.**
- ★ **Draw-Label-Caption.**
- ★ **Action-Feelings-Setting.**
- ★ **Transition-Action-Details.**
- ★ **Content-Purpose-Audience.** (CPA)
- ★ **What's a Good Idea?**
- ★ **The 5 Facts of Fiction.**

The best approach for me has been to introduce kids to all of these strategies and then to encourage them to pick the ones that work best for whatever they're trying to do. Ironically, the way I know I've been successful is when kids stop using them—but are still able to choose good topics and develop them logically and completely. To me, this signifies their transition from beginning writers, who didn't know how to get started, into mature writers who can successfully select and develop an idea without having to pre-write—just like adults. Most adults don't do any pre-writing. Instead they do a lot of “pre-thinking.” For example, I often spend weeks thinking about something before I write a single word.

Each year that I work with student writers, pre-writing becomes more important to me. I now encourage students at all grade levels to spend a lot of time on pre-writing. Increasing the amount of time spent on pre-writing, and using good pre-writing strategies such as those listed above, has done more to improve the quality of the writing I see than almost anything else.

★ DRAFTING

Put it Down on Paper

Drafting is where formal writing begins. Using pre-writing materials as inspiration, the writer writes. And writes. And writes some more. The goal is to get everything down on paper as quickly and as easily as possible.

The biggest problem kids encounter, of course, is writer's block. I treat writer's block just like any other problem writers have. I introduce kids to a variety of strategies and ask them to pick the ones that work best for them. Here's what I tell them to try:

- ★ **Use your pre-writing.** Go back to your pre-writing and look for new material. Or, do some new pre-writing.
- ★ **Share.** Share your writing and ask your audience if they have any questions or any thoughts about what you could do next.
- ★ **Re-read.** Read your piece from the beginning. New ideas often occur to writers when they read over their entire piece.
- ★ **Request a conference.** But only if the teacher is available.
- ★ **Work on something else.** Put the piece aside and work on another piece for a while.

It's also helpful to get the kids in the habit of “setting up” their paper before they begin to draft. I usually ask kids to keep all of their drafts, so each time they write I want them to do the following:

- ★ **Write on every other line.** This makes revising and editing easier. Put a tiny “x” on every other line at the far left edge of the paper to remind yourself.
- ★ **Write on one side of the paper only.** This makes reading easier.
- ★ **Number all your pages.** This makes finding pages easier.
- ★ **Date each page.** This makes it easier to keep track of many different revisions.

★ SHARING

Get Some Advice

For student writers, sharing is usually the most valuable and enjoyable stage in the writing process. There are three different ways to organize sharing, and each approach has its advantages and disadvantages:

- ★ **Whole class sharing.** This is the most valuable approach for the writer, but it's also the most time consuming for the class.
- ★ **Small group sharing.** More time efficient, and each writer still gets a large enough audience to get good feedback, but it can be hard to manage.
- ★ **Partner sharing.** Very efficient, but the feedback from a single audience member is often not very useful.

Though the benefits of sharing are many, I focus on one particular goal. Whenever writers share their work, I want to make sure they get useful, constructive feedback so they know what they're going to do next. When I facilitate whole class sharing, for example, I will often end each writer's turn by asking them if they know what they're going to do when they go back to their seat. If they don't know, I keep them up in front until they figure something out. In this way, kids learn quickly that the purpose of sharing a draft is to get ideas for revision.

Here are three simple things I tell kids that have made a huge difference in my sharing:

- ★ **Use the criteria.** Respond using the language of the classroom criteria when possible.
 - ★ **Questions only, please.** If the writer is still working on an early draft, ask questions only.
 - ★ **Ask “why” and “how” questions.** This helps authors by challenging them to respond in more complex and interesting ways.
- I find that sharing is also very useful for figuring out which lessons I need to teach.

★ REVISING

Take Another Look

For me, the key to revision has been effective sharing. When kids get regular feedback from their peers, revision comes more easily.

For adult writers, a sense of purpose and audience provide the necessary motivation for revision, and I find that kids aren't much different. Choice is also a significant factor: students are much more likely to revise pieces based on things they've chosen to write about than on teacher-selected prompts or other assignments. Teacher modeling helps also. When kids can see me up there struggling with my own writing right in front of them, it makes them feel like giving it a try themselves.

Revision is the point in the writing process where writers benefit most from good mini-lessons. As a guide for which lessons to teach, I use the classroom criteria. These are the areas I focus on:

- ★ **Ideas.** Main idea, supporting details, “showing” details, purpose, the unexpected.
- ★ **Organization.** Beginnings, endings, sequencing, pacing, transitions.
- ★ **Voice.** Audience emotions, audience needs, honesty, personality, control.
- ★ **Word Choice.** Appropriate language, strong verbs, precise modifiers, memorable phrases, usage.
- ★ **Sentence Fluency.** Sentence beginnings, sentence lengths, expressiveness, sound, construction.

Sometimes, writer's will get in the habit of ignoring the feedback they get from you or from their audience. When this happens repeatedly, I ask students to make a brief “revision plan” stating in writing the things they are planning to work on. I then ask them to conference with me on those things before going on to the editing stage.

★ EDITING

Make Corrections

Editing is such a complex and demanding task that I have found I need to tackle it from several vantage points. I lay the foundation with a variety of whole class activities including:

- ★ **Conventions reading.** A daily choral reading activity where kids read not only the text but every convention as well.
- ★ **Conventions inquiry.** Investigations in a variety of texts that help kids make useful generalizations.
- ★ **Expressive reading.** Solo oral reading where students use conventions to guide them in their interpretations.
- ★ **Selected mini-lessons.** I cover basic concepts like sentences, commas, dialog, and paragraphs.

I base my teaching on research-based principles: 1) Publish more shorter pieces; 2) Focus on one convention at a time; 3) Work in the context of authentic student writing.

The bulk of my direct instruction is done one-on-one during editing conferences. As time consuming as this can be, the progress kids have made has been more than worth it.

I hold children to the same standard of correctness that I hold adults: all writers must do their best to make their writing as correct as it can be. I do not believe that a child's writing must be perfect in order for it to be published—mine isn't.

Should teachers correct student work? I can't tell you what to do, but I can tell you what I value: student initiative, independence, and my time. When I work with kids, they hold the red pen and do the editing. I make suggestions, I point out trouble spots, I answer questions, I offer advice, but in general I do not correct student work. And on those occasions when I do, I'm sitting in front of the student working in the context of authentic writing.

★ PUBLISHING

Polish for Presentation

Preparing a piece of writing for publication pre-supposes that it will be published in some form. Helping kids find authentic publishing opportunities can be challenging, but it really makes a difference in the quality of their work. Here are some of the best ideas I've come across:

- ★ **Classroom newspapers.** I have never seen kids work harder to polish their prose than they do when they're publishing their own newspaper.
- ★ **Author pockets.** Outside the classroom, kids post a “pocket,” complete with “About the Author” information, where they can display their published pieces for anyone to read.
- ★ **Web site.** Classroom web sites are huge motivators, as are various other online venues like Amazon.com where kids can post their own book reviews.
- ★ **Outside school.** Letters sent to real people—some of whom even write back—seem to be the best motivators. Contests are fun, too.
- ★ **Portfolio.** In classrooms where portfolios are valued, kids seem to love getting pieces ready for them.

I don't worry about whether kids publish in manuscript or in cursive. I just tell them that the point of publishing is having someone read your work, so use the type of handwriting in which you write most neatly.

I don't have kids publish on the computer until they can touch type at least 15-20 words per minute. Until that point, kids type so slowly and with so many errors that their time on the computer is not time well spent. Kids who can't touch type have to use the “hunt and peck” approach which reinforces bad habits that have to be unlearned later. I start teaching kids to type at the beginning of 3rd grade. By mid-year, many are publishing on the computer.

★ ASSESSING

Reflect on the Work

Encouraging writers to take some time to reflect on their work pays huge dividends to teacher and student alike. I use information gained from formal and informal assessments for student-teacher goal setting and for guiding my instruction. Here are some of the assessment approaches I've had good luck with:

- ★ **Formal criteria-based teacher assessment.** Interesting and valuable, but very time consuming. I would do it only once or twice a year.
- ★ **Small group or whole class share session.** This is more celebration than critique. If a writer is sharing published work, I ask kids to make positive comments only—unless the author asks for criticism.
- ★ **Student self-assessment.** This is the most valuable assessment activity. It's also time efficient. With a little training, kids can do it on their own using the classroom criteria.
- ★ **Student written reflection.** Kids don't like to do reflections—and I don't blame them—but they can be very valuable for me and for their parents, so I request them from time to time.

★ **Formal peer assessment.** This can be risky, so I don't do it until I've seen a lot of evidence in sharing that kids can treat each other with kindness and respect.

★ **Parent written response.** I love having parents write back to their kids. Parents of elementary kids will do it any time I ask. Parents of secondary kids often don't bother. I hope that will change some day.

The most important thing I've learned about assessment is to get the kids involved as fully as possible. When the kids take the lead in assessing their own abilities, learning increases dramatically.

The “Lesson Planning” Organizer

★ WHAT MAKES A GOOD LESSON?

It seems that new lessons are everywhere: in books, on the Internet, in workshops, and of course, in classrooms. But how can you tell a good lesson from a bad one? Here are things I think of whenever I run across new teaching ideas. Keeping these things in mind helps me stay focused on powerful, practical tools that I can feel confident about using in the classroom.

When I think about improving my teaching, I think about the things that really make a difference to me and to my students, the key elements that make my teaching most effective. Here are the things I think about when I plan and deliver lessons. Few lessons meet all of these criteria fully, but the most effective lessons usually have many of these attributes. I use this checklist as a guide to lesson planning and also as a tool for analyzing my teaching and making focused improvements.

A GOOD LESSON...

- ★ **Requires little or no preparation.** You don't have time to prep individual lessons. You also need to be able to deliver lessons “on the fly” as problems arise.
- ★ **Requires few if any materials.** Materials are expensive and they take time to acquire, organize, distribute, and collect. Also, lessons that require materials can't be used when materials are unavailable.
- ★ **Is tightly focused.** Few of us can handle more than one new thing at a time. Keeping lessons focused keeps them short so kids have more time to use what you've presented.
- ★ **Is easily customized for different learners.** Different learners have different needs. The best way to customize instruction is to provide instruction that's easily customized.
- ★ **Solves a real problem real people really have.** Ask the kids what problems they're having and then teach to those needs. You can do a lot to make sure you're solving real problems by making sure your kids are always doing real—that is, authentic—work.
- ★ **Can be taught at different developmental levels.** Any group of learners will represent a wide range of developmental abilities. In order to reach all learners, lessons have to be deliverable at different developmental levels.
- ★ **Provides something students can apply right away.** Get the teaching as close to the learning as possible. The more time that stands between a learner's exposure to something new and an opportunity to apply the knowledge gained, the less likely the learner is to be successful.
- ★ **Can be repeated often.** Few of us get things right the first time; re-teaching is a given. Lessons that are tied to specific content can often not be repeated. Focus on “process” lessons that can be applied to different content.
- ★ **Is delivered in response to student needs.** Give kids ownership of their own learning by insisting that they tell you when they need a lesson and what they need it on. When conferencing, guide your teaching with this question: “How can I best help this student to communicate his or ideas most effectively to an audience?”
- ★ **Is taught in the context of authentic student work.** When you teach in context and as problems arise, students already have a rationale for the information you're offering and a meaningful context in which to apply it.
- ★ **Involves teacher modeling.** Learners learn best by doing, but they learn second best from models. Don't forget to think out loud as you model in front of the group.
- ★ **Has well-defined content (the “What”).** Make sure kids know what you're teaching them. Give your lesson a name, if possible.
- ★ **Has a well-defined rationale (the “Why”).** Learners learn better when they know why they're learning something.
- ★ **Has a well-defined implementation (the “How”).** Wrap up lessons with simple step-by-step procedures, criteria lists, guiding questions, and other helpful “tools” that learners can use to apply the knowledge you've given them on their own.

★ DESIGNING GOOD LESSONS

To me, designing a good lesson involves thinking about three components: the “What”, the “Why”, and the “How.”

- ★ The **“What”** is the content of the lesson, the “thing” I want students to learn. Ideally, the “What” should come from the kids. In most cases, they know best what they need to learn. What happens if they don't know? I show them models of good work and ask them what they like about it. Chances are good that if they like something in someone else's work they'll want to be able to do it in their own. I believe that kids should be responsible for the “What” of their learning.
- ★ The **“Why”** is the rationale for learning and applying the new knowledge I am offering. The “Why” is not the reason I want the kids to learn the content, it's why **they** want to learn it—to solve a particular problem they're encountering in their work. The “Why” is at least as important as the “What” because without a clear understanding of why something needs to be done, learners may not be able to apply the learning in new situations. I try to develop the “Why” together with the kids, usually in a group discussion format. I believe that kids need to work with their teachers to discover the “Why” of their learning.
- ★ The **“How”** of a lesson is the most important piece, and it usually has to come from the teacher. After all, if students already knew how to do something, we wouldn't spend time teaching it. The “How” is a **strategy**, and it's almost always a step-by-step process of some sort. Strategies form the core of my direct teaching. Kids often need to be given the “How” of their learning, but when they feel safe to take risks, they can discover it on their own. In this case, I feel that my role is to help them articulate and codify their own strategies so they can be repeatedly applied and refined as needed.

★ DELIVERING GOOD LESSONS

In delivering a lesson, these are some of the things I think about:

- ★ **Rationale and content.** What is my rationale for giving the lesson? What is the lesson about? Does it have a title?
- ★ **Modeling and examples.** How will I model the lesson for the students? Do I have examples I can show them of what I'd like them to do? How will I help students analyze my models?
- ★ **Analytic vocabulary.** What specific terms or criteria can I introduce to help students talk about the lesson?
- ★ **Assessment.** Is there a self-assessment component students can use to analyze their progress? Is there something I can use to analyze their progress?
- ★ **Reinforcement.** How can I remind students during writing time to apply the lesson in their writing?
- ★ **Strategy.** Is there a step-by-step process students can follow to produce the desired result?
- ★ **Application.** How can I encourage students to apply the lesson right away during writing time? How can I apply the lesson myself as I model?
- ★ **Identify success and praise.** How can I identify those students who have applied the lesson correctly? How can I praise those students for their success in a way that benefits both them and their classmates?
- ★ **Identify failure and assist.** How can I identify those students who have not applied the lesson correctly? How can I assist those students in a way that benefits both them and their classmates?

★ A FEW THOUGHTS ON LESSONS

“In theory, mini-lessons are wonderful. The ritual of beginning every writing workshop with a whole-group gathering can bring form and unity to the workshop, and it's wonderful, when writers are deeply absorbed in their writing, to see the effect of a few carefully chosen tips from experts. Yet in practice I have found that mini-lessons often represent the worst part of a writing workshop. When I bring visitors in to observe writing workshops, I often deliberately time our visits so we avoid the mini-lesson.”

Lucy Calkins, **The Art of Teaching Writing**, p. 198.

“None of the pioneers—researchers or teachers—who opened the doors to the teaching of writing provided us with prescriptive lessons. None of them has produced a book of mini-lessons. They know, because they truly understand the nature of the writing process, that such a book would become a formula written by an outsider unfamiliar with the diversity and uniqueness of the writers in a specific community.”

Carol Avery, **...And with a Light Touch**, p. 139.

“Once, after I had observed Shelley Harwayne teaching a writing workshop, I commented to her that her mini-lesson had been fabulous. Apparently this comment perplexed her because as far as she knew, she hadn't given a mini-lesson that day. Then she realized that instead of what she perceived as a mini-lesson, she had begun the workshop with a quick tip. She had said to the children, “When you open your folders today, and every day, would you reread what you have written? Before you add to it, have a little conference with yourself. Ask yourself how you feel about the piece, whether there are ways you could make it better.” To my way of thinking, this was a perfect mini-lesson.”

Lucy Calkins, **The Art of Teaching Writing**, p. 198.

Initially I was very surprised to read these quotes. But after thinking about them for a while, and running into the same sentiments in many other books, I began to understand where these folks were coming from. I used to think lessons were the core of teaching. But the more I've worked in the classroom I've noticed that lessons end up being a relatively small part of what I do. Mostly I have kids work, and while they're working I help them, in short conferences, to solve the problems they encounter.

The “5 Facts of Fiction” Organizer

★ THE 5 FACTS OF FICTION – A fun way to write great fiction, and a great way to have fun reading it.

FACT #1 Fiction is all about character.	FACT #2 Fiction is all about what your character wants.	FACT #3 Fiction is all about how your character gets or does not get what he or she wants.	FACT #4 Fiction is all about how your character changes as a result of getting or not getting what he or she wants.	FACT #5 Non-fiction is all about <u>THE</u> world; Fiction is all about <u>A</u> world an author creates.
Main Character	Motivation	Plot	Main Idea	Setting
Who is your main character? What does your character look like? Can you describe your character's personality? How did your character get to be this way? The more you know about your character, the better your story will be. Fill in as many details as you can possibly think of.	What does your character want more than anything else? Why does your character want it? It doesn't really matter as long as what your character wants is VERY IMPORTANT. The more important it is, the more your character will do to get it, and the more interesting your story will be.	Is your character successful? Or does your character's quest end in failure? Either way, you can have a great story. The trick is to describe HOW your character succeeds or fails. What obstacles does your character encounter? What solutions can your character craft to meet the challenges of your story?	How does your character change as a result of what has happened? What was your character like at the beginning? What is your character like at the end? What has your character learned? What will the audience learn from reading the story? Think carefully. These are some of the most important decisions you'll make.	How do you create a world? What kinds of people, places, and things does a world need? What successes, disasters, and conflicts does a world have? What are the good things in a world? What are the bad things? Remember: your story can be made up, but it must BE TRUE TO YOUR WORLD!

★ CHARACTER TYPES – Help students analyze characters and create realistic relationships.

PROMOTERS	SUPPORTERS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ★ Love attention: Promoters like to be out in front. They are performers. They love the limelight and crave recognition. They're not afraid to put themselves out there, but they often have trouble sharing the spotlight. They are funny and spontaneous, wacky and original. ★ Save effort: Promoters don't like to work any harder than they have to. They are the ones who typically come up with the faster, easier, simpler, and cheaper ways of solving problems—or the excuses about why problems don't need to be dealt with. They tend to get things done quickly and in clever ways, but they can also shy away from hard work, particularly if it's repetitive or otherwise uninteresting to them. They are sometimes viewed as lazy and/or self-centered. ★ Lack focus: Promoters want to do everything at the same time. They have a million things on their mind and often can't make good decisions. They tend to start things and abandon them as soon as something else catches their attention. They find it extremely difficult to concentrate on things that don't immediately interest them. They are easily infatuated. ★ Great idea people: Promoters come up with some of the best ideas. They are often seen as brilliant geniuses. They are particularly good at coming up with creative or unorthodox solutions to intractable problems. They are very flexible thinkers. They are good with the big picture, but have little interest in or aptitude for dealing with details. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ★ Love to help: Supporters are great team players. They love to get behind a cause. They love being part of a group working toward a common goal. They are willing to do anything—even hard and unglamorous work—for the sake of the greater good. They are often viewed as selfless and generous but also as people who are easily manipulated. ★ Save relationships: More than anything, supporters like to be liked. They make true and loyal friends. But they hate confrontation, and often maintain the status of relationships by keeping their true feelings hidden inside. They are people people. They know how to build and maintain rich personal relationships. ★ Lack structure: Supporters find it difficult to initiate things on their own. They work best in a structured environment with clear guidelines for conduct. They feel most comfortable in situations where the objectives are clear and their role in the hierarchy is well defined. They don't do well in dynamic or chaotic situations. ★ Most sensitive: Supporters are very empathetic. They identify well with others and their needs. They are wonderful caretakers and nurturers. They are thoughtful and considerate. But they are also very fragile. They get their feelings hurt a lot, and take offense easily, often when others wouldn't. They are not thick skinned.
CONTROLLERS	ANALYZERS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ★ Love results: For controllers, the ends justify the means. They always have their eye on the bottom line. They like to see tangible evidence of their efforts. They are willing to do whatever is necessary to get the job done. They know how to meet deadlines and perform with consistency, but often their results come at a high cost to themselves and those around them. ★ Save time: Controllers don't want to fool around; they like to cut to the chase. They want to solve problems in the most direct way possible. Often this works out well, but it can lead to being consistently stressed out and overloaded. They are often impatient with others. ★ Lack sensitivity: Controllers are often well respected but they are just as often not well liked. They run roughshod over the world around them. They are not empathetic. They're not good at building relationships because they tend to care more about projects than people. They are often seen as manipulative even though they may not be aware of this themselves. ★ Great decision makers: Controllers are very clear about what they want and how they're going to get it. They are the ones who can make the tough decisions. They seem to have clarity and courage in times of intense complication and pressure. Some controllers are great at delegating, while others are persistent micro-managers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ★ Love facts: Analyzers love factual information because it helps them do their best work. They like to know all the angles before making a recommendation or embarking on a course of action. They are masters of minutiae. They love to dig for the little details most others miss. They are often considered to be intelligent and prudent, but also nerdy and compulsive. ★ Save face: Analyzers covet their image as clear and dispassionate thinkers who are rarely if ever wrong. They hate to make mistakes and, when it appears they have done so, they will often claim that they did not have sufficient information in the first place, or that the criteria for the result has been changed. True to their nature, analyzers are very accurate and precise people. ★ Lack spontaneity: Analyzers are very cautious. They proceed deliberately and conservatively. They do not like to “wing it.” They are well organized and efficient, but not creative or flashy. They tend to be quiet and shy in groups but respond well when asked direct questions. ★ Great problem solvers: Analyzers can successfully untangle the knottiest problems. And they won't stop working on something until they get it completely figured out. They love clearly structured challenges, but find themselves frustrated in more dynamic or ill-defined circumstances. They won't define the vision, but they will provide essential information to make it happen.

★ THE CHARACTER OF A CHARACTER – Introduce students to in-depth character analysis.

ACCOUNTABILITY	PARTICIPATION	HONESTY	ADVOCACY	NEEDS
Does your character “own” his or her results?	Is your character “showing up”?	Does your character tell the truth?	What does your character stand for?	What does success mean to your character?
Accountable people fully acknowledge their relationship to what happens to them in their lives—even when they don't exactly understand what it is. They say to themselves: “I attract to me that which occurs.” Victims do not acknowledge their relationship to their results. They say: “He/she/it did it to me.”	Some people participate fully in their lives. They consistently bring themselves forward to meet the challenges of each day even when they fear harsh consequences. Other people hang back. They wait for things to happen. They shy away from difficult and uncomfortable situations. They sit on the sidelines and watch.	It is said that “honesty is the best policy.” Some people believe this, some don't. Some people lie about some things but not others. Some people are honest with others but not with themselves. They either don't know how they feel inside, or they don't have the courage to confront what they believe.	When people feel very strongly about something, they advocate for it in the world at every opportunity. What are the things people fight their whole lives for? How do these “positions” affect other people's lives? Here's a hint: “If you don't stand for something, you'll fall for anything.” What do you think that means?	When people think of their needs, they think of things like money, clothes, big houses, etc. . . . But that's not what people really need. In order to feel truly fulfilled, people need certain kinds of essential experiences in their day-to-day lives, experiences like: connection, freedom, recognition, love, intensity, etc.

The “Writing Across the Curriculum” Organizer

★ REAL WORLD WRITING – Help students discover and experience the kinds of writing produced by real professionals in the real world.

SUBJECT: Social Studies	SUBJECT: Science	SUBJECT: Math
PROFESSION: Historian	PROFESSION: Biologist	PROFESSION: Computer Scientist
FORMS: Original research; Annotations for the publication of authentic historical documents; Catalogs of documents; Biographies; Interviews; Documentaries; Letters; Journals; Research grant proposals; Textbooks, Analyses of current events for policy consultations; etc...	FORMS: Lab reports; Descriptions of processes; Observations; Experiments; Letters; Journals; Environmental impact studies; Environmental policy “White Papers”; Research grant proposals; Original research; Magazine articles; Materials requests; Business presentations; etc...	FORMS: Descriptions of mathematical theories; Technical documentation; Descriptions of computer languages; Letters; E-mail; Statistical analyses; Descriptions of algorithms; Project plans; Budget proposals; Business plans; Magazine articles; FAQs; New product ideas; Product specifications; Tutorials, etc...

★ TOPIC EQUATIONS – Help students explore the connections between their interests and your curriculum.

INTERESTS	+	UNIT OF STUDY	=	POSSIBLE TOPICS
Baseball	+	World War II	=	Shutdown of major league baseball; Famous ballplayers who were drafted; Women’s professional leagues; etc...
Movies	+	World War II	=	Propaganda films; Military instructional films; Popular entertainment at home and abroad; Movie stars who served in the war; etc...
Rap Music	+	World War II	=	Popular music of the time; Political music; Urban values and culture; Artists making political statements; etc...
Skateboarding	+	World War II	=	Kids’ recreation during wartime; Home-made toys; Soapbox derby races; etc...
Beanie Babies	+	World War II	=	Kids’ toys; Effects of shortages; Collectibles of the era; etc...

★ ROLE YOUR OWN WRITING – Help students understand and employ the essential components of any piece of writing.

ROLE	FORMAT	AUDIENCE	PURPOSE	APPROACH
Choose one or possibly two. Most assignments will have one.	Choose one only. In rare cases, combining formats might make sense.	Choose one or more. If more than one, pick a main audience.	Choose one or more. If more than one, pick a main purpose.	Choose several. Some pieces may require varied approaches.
The student takes on a role and writes from this perspective:	The final version must be published in this format:	This is the student’s intended audience:	This is why the student is writing this piece:	This is how the writer will achieve his or her purpose:
Artist; Biographer; Biologist; Curator; Detective; Elected official; Historian; Expert in ...; Newscaster; Panelist; Parent; Political candidate; Product designer; Reporter; Self; Teacher; Tour guide; etc...	Biography; Booklet; Brochure; Diary; Editorial; Fairy tale; Interview; Journal; Letter; Magazine article; Manual; Myth; Newspaper article; Novel; Play; Poem; Report; Short story; Textbook chapter; etc...	Friends; General public; Judge; Jury member; Parent; People from other cultures or time periods; Professionals in same discipline; Public figures; School board members; Supervisor; Young children; etc...	Change action; Change thinking; Describe; Encourage; Entertain; Explain; Inform; Initiate action; Initiate thinking; Instruct; Persuade; Prevent; Tell a story; etc...	Analyze; Challenge; Classify; Compare; Conclude; Contrast; Defend; Define; Demonstrate; Evaluate; Interpret; Justify; Predict; Propose; Question; Reflect; etc...

★ ROLE YOUR OWN WRITING – Sample assignments generated with this approach.

CONTENT AREA	ASSIGNMENT
Social Studies	You are a newspaper reporter from the Atlanta Constitution covering the battle of Gettysburg. You have followed the battle and have now just listened to Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address. Write a newspaper article for the people of Atlanta that will inform them of the results of the battle and its impact on the Confederate war effort. Describe the battle and its aftermath. Analyze the balance of power between the two sides as a result of the battle. Reflect on the sentiments of Unionists and Confederates before and after Lincoln’s speech.
Science	You are a biologist hired as a consultant to The Nature Conservancy. Create a brochure for the general public that explains the Greenhouse Effect and its impact on worldwide climatic conditions. Analyze current data on the effects of greenhouse gases and predict the consequences of widespread global warming. Propose alternatives to improve the situation that are consistent with current positions held by your client.
Math	You are an expert in fractions . Create a chapter for a textbook to be used by 4th grade students that will instruct them in adding, subtracting, multiplying, and dividing fractions. Include an introduction that justifies the instructional method you choose.

★ MASTERING THE MODES – Help students unlock the power of the traditional modes of argument.

	NARRATIVE	EXPOSITORY	PERSUASIVE	DESCRIPTIVE
KEY TRAIT	Organization	Ideas	Voice	Ideas/Word Choice
KEY QUESTION	Why tell a story?	Why does this need explaining?	Why should the reader trust you?	Why is this worth describing?
BEST AUDIENCE	Supporters; Promoters	Controllers; Analyzers	Promoters; Analyzers	Supporters; Analyzers
BEST STRATEGY	Transition-Action-Details	What-Why-How	What-Why-How	Idea-Details; Tell-Show
ADVANTAGES	Entertaining; Subtle	Direct; Respectful; Most efficient mode	Most powerful mode; Most important mode	Captivating; Emotional
DISADVANTAGES	Slow; Inefficient; Reader has to “get it”	Can be dry; Audience-dependent	Most likely to offend; Writer is very exposed	Least direct; Easily overdone

★ RESEARCH PLANNING – Help students determine key questions, clarify focused intent, and select appropriate research strategies.

WHAT do you want to know?	WHY do you want to know it?*	HOW are you going to find it?
What kinds of spiders are poisonous?	So I can tell people which kinds of spiders to watch out for.	Insect reference book; CD-ROM encyclopedia
What’s the average temperature in my town this time of year?	I want to know when to plant my vegetables.	Almanac; Internet; Interview a local gardener; Call the newspaper
How do you put a computer together?	I want to make my own computer.	Computer repair book; Interview a repair person

*Students want to know about some things merely because they’re curious. In these cases, I ask them what they’re curious about. This usually generates another small set of more specific questions.

The “Writer’s Workshop” Organizer

★ MINI-LESSON 5-15 Minutes

A mini-lesson is a short piece of direct instruction focused on a single topic. Mini-lessons fall into three categories:

Procedures: Anything writers need to do to participate effectively in the workshop: How to get paper; How to store and organize writing; How to request a conference; How to conduct sharing, and so on.

Strategies Writers Use: This is the “how” of writing, as in “How do I pick a good topic?” or “How do I write a good lead?” These lessons are best organized around the writing process.

Qualities of Good Writing: These lessons are designed to introduce students to examples of good writing. They involve reviewing and analyzing models of good writing using the language of your classroom criteria. These kinds of lessons often come up naturally during reading time or teacher modeling.

Mini-lessons work best when: 1) They are suggested by the students; 2) They are taught in the context of authentic student writing; 3) The teacher models for students as the lesson is delivered.

YOU DON’T NEED TO GIVE A MINI-LESSON EVERY DAY!

★ CONFERENCING Durning Writing Time

During writing time you have a chance to work individually with students who need specific help. The keys to successful conferencing are good management and consistent execution.

Management: The key to all successful management is having good procedures in place. Students need to be able to: 1) Know when the teacher is available for a conference; 2) Request a conference in an appropriate way; 3) Be specific about what they want help with; and 4) Have all materials ready.

Execution: To keep conferences brief and make the most of your time, keep these things in mind: 1) Model conferences on whole class sharing; 2) Ask permission and/or start out with questions before you make recommendations; 3) Work on one thing at a time; 4) Before you leave the conference, make sure the student knows what to do.

Conferencing works best when: 1) Students know how to do it; 2) You stay focused on one thing at a time; 3) You keep conferences to less than five minutes; 4) You check back with students from time to time to see if they’re following up on what you conferenced about.

CONFERENCING IS YOUR MOST IMPORTANT TEACHING TIME!

★ STATUS OF THE CLASS 2-5 Minutes

Status of the class is a quick way of finding out what students will be working on that day. There are several ways to do status of the class:

Out Loud: Students tell the teacher and the class what they’re working on. They can tell the title, the topic, the form or genre, or the stage they are at in the writing process. Title, topic, and writing process stage are usually the most useful pieces of information.

Visually: Students indicate on some kind of chart in the room what they will be doing that day. Most of the charts I’ve seen allow writers to indicate where they are in the writing process.

Recorded on Paper: Circulate a sheet of paper and ask each student to indicate what they will be doing that day. Some teachers record status even when it’s done out loud.

Status of the class works best when: 1) You do it out loud; 2) You do it regularly; 3) Everyone can hear everyone else; 4) Students choose their own topics, forms, and genres, and manage their own way through the writing process.

STATUS OF THE CLASS IS A GREAT WAY TO BUILD COMMUNITY!

★ SHARING 5-15 Minutes

Sharing gives writers a chance to address a real audience and get valuable feedback about what and how they’re doing. There are several ways to do sharing, each has its advantages and disadvantages:

Whole Class: Gives authors their best chance for feedback, but it takes a lot of time. On most days, you’ll only be able to listen to a few kids. Best tool you have for building classroom community.

Small Group: Time efficient, but hard to manage. Very noisy. Kids easily get off track. Monitor each group by participating as a member.

Partner: Most time efficient but, with only one person in the audience, the feedback the writer receives is often not that valuable.

Sharing works best when: 1) It is voluntary; 2) The author asks the audience to listen for or help with something specific; 3) Kids with long pieces read only a short section; 4) You take an active part as an author and an audience member; 5) Students make constructive comments using the language of the classroom criteria; 6) Everyone knows that all comments, even yours, are suggestions only; 7) Students ask questions instead of making comments.

SHARING MUST WORK FOR BOTH AUTHOR AND AUDIENCE!

★ WRITING TIME 20-40 Minutes

Writing time is the centerpiece of the workshop and the longest workshop section. During writing time, students write. The teacher can::

Model: Work on your own writing. You can write at your desk or at the board or overhead. Allowing students to see what you write as you write it is very good for them. You will often discover your most valuable mini-lessons when you write in front of your students because you’ll have to tackle the same problems that they do.

Conference: Work with individual students on their writing. This is your most valuable teaching time.

Small Group Mini-Lesson: While the majority of the class is writing, you can take a small group of students and deliver a mini-lesson.

Catch Up: Spend a few minutes on other work you have to do.

Writing time works best when: 1) Students have internalized effective classroom procedures; 2) Students write frequently, and for long periods of time, on a regular schedule; 3) You write with your students for at least a few minutes during most class periods.

WRITING TIME IS THE HEART OF THE WORKSHOP!

★ TIPS ★

- ★ Concentrate on classroom management by focusing on procedural mini-lessons at the beginning of the year.
- ★ If you have less than 40 minutes, drop the mini-lesson and sharing; start with a quick status of the class and get right into writing and conferencing. Writing time is the most valuable time.
- ★ Teach the students to run their own workshop, so you don’t have to run it for them.
- ★ Keep a list from your reading program of things your students like, and then use that list as the basis for your mini-lessons.
- ★ Encourage shy kids to share by asking if you can share their writing for them.
- ★ Keep an in-class library of published student writing for students to read. This helps them get ideas and allows them to compare their work privately to the work of other students.
- ★ Have fun every day.

IT TAKES ABOUT A MONTH TO GET THINGS RUNNING WELL!

Management Strategies For Writer's Workshop

★ SO WHAT DO I DO WHEN?

If you talk to enough people or you read enough books, you'll probably bump into the idea that Writer's Workshop is a certain thing that has to be done a certain way. In my experience, that's not only not true, it's not valuable. Writer's Workshop is as dynamic and flexible as you choose to make it. And that's the main reason I like it: it gives teachers a variety of ways to manage their classroom within a basic structure that students can easily internalize and come to rely on.

The essence of workshop-style teaching—what makes it “workshop” as opposed to “traditional”—is not in what you teach, but how you teach it and how you relate to your students. If most of your class time is spent with kids writing on their own topics, if you participate as a fellow writer in the community, if everyone shares writing regularly, if you follow the kids and teach to their needs instead of to a pre-planned curriculum, then you've probably got a Writer's Workshop going.

In the four columns directly to the right, I've listed four “approaches” to getting started with Writer's Workshop. Remember: these are guidelines, not mandates.

★ LOGISTICS

Organizing Student Writing in Grades K-2: The best approach I've seen has involved giving each student a wide-ruled spiral notebook for pre-writing and drafting plus a simple two-pocket folder. On one side of the folder, students keep writing ideas and teacher hand-outs. On the other side, they keep on-going work. The teacher keeps a third set of files—one for each student—to store published work.

Organizing Student Writing at Grades 3 and Above: Many teachers I work with are using a three-ring binder with divider sections named for each stage of the writing process. As students move a piece through the writing process, they store their work in the appropriate section of their binder.

Desk and Seating Arrangements: The best approaches are based on semi-circular arrangements where all students have an unobstructed view of the primary sharing and teaching positions. Please don't seat your students in rows and columns, it isn't good for anyone.

Scheduling: In the elementary grades, it's absolutely vital to have writer's workshop every day. For more advanced writers at the secondary level, three days a week is sufficient. The ideal amount of time to allot is an hour, but writer's workshop can be done well in as little as 40 minutes if both the students and the teacher are well organized and understand how the workshop is supposed to be run.

★ TRADITIONAL ★

★ **Mini-Lesson**

★ **Status**

★ **Writing Time**

★ **Sharing**

This is the way most people start off because it is most similar to traditional teaching. This format gives the teacher the most control. I use it when I need to regain control of the class, set the stage for lesson content or a goal that I feel is particularly important, or start everyone off on a specific type of project. Some people use this format every day.

★ SHARE FIRST ★

★ **Sharing**

★ **Mini-Lesson**

★ **Status**

★ **Writing Time**

This is my favorite of the structured approaches to Writer's Workshop. The kids usually love starting out with sharing, and I get a chance to collect my thoughts about what I want to do. As kids share, I listen for specific things we could work on. When something comes up, I ask the kids if they'd like a lesson on it. That's how I choose my mini-lesson.

★ NO LESSON ★

★ **Status**

★ **Writing Time**

★ **Sharing**

This is a good approach when you're short on time or don't have a lesson you want to give. It's actually quite good to do this fairly regularly because it lets kids know that they have to get right down to business as soon as class starts. I find that I use this organization more frequently later in the year after everyone knows the class procedures and has heard most of my best mini-lessons—or when the kids just want to work.

★ DYNAMIC ★

★ **Give a MINI-LESSON when:** 1) There's something you think the class needs; 2) Students request help; 3) You detect via conferencing that 3 or 4 students have the same problem.

★ **Take STATUS OF THE CLASS when:** 1) You don't know where the kids are; 2) The kids don't know where they are; 3) You need to survey for an appropriate mini-lesson; 4) You need to survey for conferencing. 5) You think kids are slacking off.

★ **Go to WRITING TIME when:** 1) The kids want to work; 2) You want the kids to work; 3) You need to confer; 4) You need a little peace and quiet.

★ **Go to SHARING when:** 1) Writer's need feedback; 2) You need to hear what the kids have done; 3) You want to check on the effectiveness of a mini-lesson; 4) You need to plan a mini-lesson.

Each of the four sections of the workshop can also be used simply to change the tempo of the class. I often switch from one to the other just to settle kids down if they're getting a little noisy.

This is my favorite way to do Writer's Workshop because it allows me the most flexibility and gives me the best opportunity to serve the needs of the students.

★ ADVICE ABOUT SHARING AND CONFERENCING

DON'T CORRECT...

- ★ **INSPECT the writing closely.** Read or listen thoughtfully and thoroughly.
- ★ **DETECT those parts that work and those that don't.** What do you like? What would help you enjoy the writing more?
- ★ **REFLECT on why some parts work and some parts don't.** Why do you like certain parts? How would improving other parts make the writing better? Use the language of the classroom criteria to explain how you feel.
- ★ **CONNECT your reactions to the author's intent.** What is the author's purpose? Why did the author choose to write this particular piece?
- ★ **INJECT your own opinions.** Be honest. Communicate using the language of the classroom criteria so that everyone can understand you. Remember: this is just your opinion; it's not the “truth”.
- ★ **RESPECT the writer's reactions.** Listen closely to what the author has to say about your comments. Remember that the author does not have to make the changes you suggest.
- ★ **PERFECT the communication between audience and author.** Do you really understand each other? Make sure you're both using the language of the classroom criteria. Review the author's purpose and main idea.
- ★ **EXPECT to repeat the process...** as long as the author wants to continue or until the audience understands what the author is trying to communicate.

The “Reader’s Workshop” Organizer

★ MINI-LESSON 5-15 Minutes

A mini-lesson is a short piece of direct instruction focused on a single topic. Mini-lessons fall into three categories:

Procedures: Anything readers need to do to participate effectively in the workshop: How and when to get a book; How to use a response journal; How to request a conference; How to conduct sharing, etc.

Strategies Readers Use: This is the “how” of reading, as in “How do I pick the right book?” or “How do I figure out what something says?” These lessons are best organized around the reading process.

Qualities of Good Reading: These lessons are designed to introduce students to models that help them understand what good reading is. They often involve reviewing and analyzing teacher- or student-generated models and the development of classroom criteria. These kinds of lessons often come up naturally during sharing time.

Mini-lessons work best when: 1) They are suggested by the students; 2) They are taught in the context of authentic reading; 3) The teacher models in front of the students as the lesson is delivered.

YOU DON’T NEED TO GIVE A MINI-LESSON EVERY DAY!

★ CONFERENCING Durning Reading Time

During reading time you have a chance to work individually with students who need specific help. The keys to successful conferencing are good management and consistent execution.

Management: Put good procedures in place. Students need to be able to: 1) Know when the teacher is available for a conference; 2) Request a conference in an appropriate way; 3) Be specific about what they want help with; and 4) Have all materials ready.

Execution: Keep these things in mind: 1) Model your conferences on whole class sharing; 2) Ask permission and/or start out with questions before you make any recommendations; 3) Work on only one thing at a time; 4) Before you leave the conference, make sure the student knows what to do next.

Conferencing works best when: 1) Students know how to do it; 2) You stay focused on one thing at a time; 3) You keep conferences to less than three minutes; 4) You check back with students from time to time to see if they’re following up on what you conferenced about.

CONFERENCING IS YOUR MOST IMPORTANT TEACHING TIME!

★ STATUS OF THE CLASS 2-5 Minutes

Status of the class is a quick way of finding out what students are doing on a given day. There are several ways to do status of the class:

Out Loud: Students quickly share what they are doing. They can share the title, author, topic, or something else that indicates their reading for the day. They can also indicate that they are working on a project such as a book review or an activity like preparing an interpretive reading.

Visually: Students indicate on some kind of chart in the room what they will be doing that day. Most of the charts I’ve seen allow readers to indicate where they are in the reading process.

Recorded on Paper: Circulate a sheet of paper and ask each student to indicate what they will be doing that day. Some teachers record status even when it’s done out loud.

Status of the class works best when: 1) You do it out loud; 2) You do it regularly; 3) Everyone can hear everyone else; 4) Students choose their own books, forms, genres, or activities, and manage their own way through the reading process.

STATUS OF THE CLASS IS A GREAT WAY TO BUILD COMMUNITY!

★ SHARING 5-15 Minutes

There are several ways to do sharing, each has its own advantages and disadvantages:

Whole Class: Gives the reader the best chance for feedback, but it takes a lot of time. On most days, you’ll only be able to listen to a few kids. This is the best tool you have for building classroom community.

Small Group: Time efficient, but very hard to manage. Very noisy. Kids easily get off track. Monitor each group by participating as a member. Give kids specific roles when appropriate.

Partner: Most time efficient but, with only one person in the audience, the interaction is often not that valuable.

Sharing works best when: 1) It is voluntary; 2) Readers know how to talk about books; 3) Each sharing session is focused on something specific; 4) You take an active part as a reader who shares and as an audience member who questions; 5) Students make constructive comments using the language of your classroom criteria; 6) Everyone knows that all comments, even yours, are suggestions only; 7) Students ask questions more often than they make comments.

SHARING MUST WORK FOR BOTH AUTHOR AND AUDIENCE!

★ READING TIME 20-40 Minutes

Reading time is the centerpiece of the workshop and the longest workshop section. During reading time, students read. The teacher can:

Model: Work on your own reading. Allowing students to see you reading is very good for them. You’ll also come up with your best mini-lessons this way because you’ll have to tackle the same problems your students face.

Conference: Work with individual students on their reading. This is your most valuable teaching time.

Small Group Mini-Lesson or Guided Reading: While the majority of the class is reading independently, you can take a small group of students and deliver a mini-lesson or have a guided reading session.

Catch Up: Spend a few minutes on other work you have to do.

Reading time works best when: 1) Students have internalized effective classroom procedures; 2) Students read frequently, and for long periods of time, on a regular schedule; 3) Kids are taught how to pick their own books at appropriate reading levels.

READING TIME IS THE HEART OF THE WORKSHOP!

★ TIPS ★

- ★ Concentrate on classroom management by focusing on procedural mini-lessons at the beginning of the year.
- ★ If you have less than 40 minutes, drop the mini-lesson and sharing; start with a quick status of the class and get right into reading and conferencing. Reading time is the most valuable time.
- ★ Teach the students to run their own workshop, so you don’t have to run it for them.
- ★ Post student-generated lists of ideas that address key topics like: How to choose a book; How to talk about books; How to read expressively; What to do when you don’t understand something; Etc.
- ★ Teach specific strategies for sharing that are closely related to the conferencing strategies you use.
- ★ Have kids keep simple records of what they read and what they like. Help everyone determine their own reading preferences.
- ★ Have fun every day.

IT TAKES ABOUT A MONTH TO GET THINGS RUNNING WELL!

Management Strategies For Reader's Workshop

★ SO WHAT DO I DO WHEN?

If you talk to enough people or you read enough books, you'll probably bump into the idea that Reader's Workshop is a certain thing that has to be done a certain way. In my experience, that's not only not true, it's not valuable. Reader's Workshop is as dynamic and flexible as you choose to make it. And that's the main reason I like it: it gives teachers a variety of ways to manage their classroom within a basic structure that students can easily internalize and come to rely on.

The essence of workshop-style teaching—what makes it “workshop” as opposed to “traditional”—is not in what you teach, but how you teach it and how you relate to your students. If most of class time is spent with kids reading their own self-selected books at appropriate reading levels, if you participate as a reader in the community, if you share regularly, if you follow the kids and teach to their needs instead of following a program, then you've got a Reader's Workshop going.

Directly to the right, I've listed four “approaches” to Reader's Workshop. These are guidelines, not mandates. Use the approaches that make the most sense to you and to your students.

★ CLASSIC ★

★ **Mini-Lesson**

★ **Status**

★ **Reading Time**

★ **Sharing**

This is the way most people start off because it is most similar to traditional teaching. This format gives the teacher the most control. I use it when I need to regain control of the class, set the stage for lesson content or a goal that I feel is particularly important, or start everyone off on a specific type of project. Some people do this every day.

★ SHARE FIRST ★

★ **Sharing**

★ **Mini-Lesson**

★ **Status**

★ **Reading Time**

This is my favorite of the structured approaches to Reader's Workshop. The kids love starting out with sharing, and I get a chance to collect my thoughts about what I want to do. As kids share, I listen for specific things we could work on. When something comes up, I ask the kids if they'd like a lesson on it. That's how I choose my mini-lesson.

★ NO LESSON ★

★ **Status**

★ **Reading Time**

★ **Sharing**

This is a good approach when you're short on time or don't have a lesson to give. It's actually good to do this fairly regularly because it lets kids know that they have to get right down to business as soon as class starts. I find that I use this organization more frequently later in the year after everyone knows the class procedures and has heard most of my best mini-lessons—or when the kids just want to read.

★ DYNAMIC ★

★ **Give a MINI-LESSON when:** 1) There's something you think the class needs; 2) Students request help; 3) You detect via conferencing that 3 or 4 students have the same problem.

★ **Take STATUS OF THE CLASS when:** 1) You don't know where the kids are; 2) The kids don't know where they are; 3) You need to survey for an appropriate mini-lesson; 4) You need to survey for conferencing. 5) You think kids are slacking off.

★ **Go to READING TIME when:** 1) The kids want to work; 2) You want the kids to work; 3) You need to confer; 4) You need a little peace and quiet.

★ **Go to SHARING when:** 1) Readers have something interesting to say; 2) You need to hear what the kids have been up to; 3) You want to check on the effectiveness of a mini-lesson; 4) You need to plan a mini-lesson.

Each of the four sections of the workshop can also be used simply to change the tempo of the class. I often switch from one to the other just to settle kids down.

This is my favorite way to do Reader's Workshop because it allows me the most flexibility and gives me the best opportunity to serve the needs of the students.

★ READING CONFERENCES

WHY IS CONFERENCING SO HARD?

Many teachers who are new to Reader's Workshop find conferencing very challenging. Mostly, it's the management that they struggle with—it's hard, if you're not used to it to keep the other kids quiet while you focus on individual students. But that's just a matter of teaching style, and not related specifically to reading.

For me, the trick—if there is one—to having a good reading conference is simply to come from a place of curiosity when talking to a reader. I never cease to be amazed at what kids tell me about the books they read, and how revealing of a reader's process such insights can be. Even when I'm conferencing with a student on a book I've read a dozen times, something new always seems to pop up. And if I don't know the book, so much the better, I'm even more curious.

There are many different ways to conference. You'll find a basic conference here. This conference usually takes me less than two minutes and tells me a lot about a reader.

THE “BASIC” READING CONFERENCE

❶ **What are you reading?** Look for the reader to quickly tell you the title and maybe even the author. Don't let students just show you the cover. It's amazing how often kids can't remember what book they're reading. Of course, some adults can't either.

❷ **Is it any good/Do you like it?** Any comment other than “I don't know” is a good start. If the reader doesn't like the book, he or she should probably get another one. If a reader does like a book, I always want to know why. This can help me track things like decoding and comprehension abilities because often our reading preferences are related to reading level. It's very important to encourage readers to express concrete preferences. This is the beginning of reading response.

❸ **What makes it good?/Why do you like it?** If the reader has a feeling about it, he or she should be able to tell you why. Look for students to use the language of your classroom writing criteria to analyze the quality of a book as the year progresses. Encourage students to comment on technique and style in addition to content. You can also ask the reader to show you an example of what they are talking about.

❹ **What's your favorite part?/What's the best part?** Most readers can answer in just a few seconds. Kids who can't find a part they like may not be remembering or understanding much of what they read.

❺ **Can you read me some of it?** I prefer to check kids' decoding skills on passages they like and are familiar with. I have come to realize that cold reads on teacher-selected texts don't give me the best information. The amount and type of expression a reader uses tells me a lot about comprehension. If I want to know about the student's decoding or comprehension strategies I'll look for the hardest word or phrase in the passage and ask: “How did you figure that out?” or “What does that word mean here?”

❻ **What's going on there?** This is a basic comprehension check. The student should summarize the passage in their own words. If the student simply “re-reads” certain lines, I say “Yes, that's what it says, but what does it mean?” Readers with excellent comprehension often fill in additional details to supply context.

The Reader's Workshop Activity Organizer

1 Support an opinion...

What-Why-How

Opinions are like children: they're easier to have than they are to support. Most of the time we don't think too much about our opinions as we read, but they're with us all the time: "This is boring; This is cool; This character is interesting; This character is not;" and so on. To communicate an opinion, all you have to do is open your mouth. But to support an opinion you have to open your mind. In serious discussions (the kind we try to have in school), it's not enough to just say what you think, you've got to think about what you say and why you say it.

To support an opinion thoroughly, you need to answer three basic questions:

What do you think?

Just tell what's on your mind as simply as you can. Often a single sentence will do.

Why do you think it?

Opinions don't just pop up out of nowhere for no reason at all. If you've got an opinion, you've got a reason for it, and often more than one. Can't think of a reason? Maybe your opinion isn't really what you think. (But then, that's just my opinion!)

How do you know?

As the saying goes: "Everyone's entitled to their opinion." But are you really? Where's your proof? What examples can you find within the text to make your point? For every reason you should have at least one example.

2 Analyze fiction...

The 5 Facts of Fiction

❶ **Fiction is all about character.** Who are the important characters? Can you describe their personalities? How did they get to be this way? The more you know about the characters (especially about why they do the things they do), the more you will enjoy the story.

❷ **Fiction is all about what characters want.** What do these characters want? Why do they want it? The more important something is to someone, the more he or she will do to get it, and the more interesting a story will be.

❸ **Fiction is all about how characters get or do not get what they want.** Are these characters successful? Or do their quests end in failure? What obstacles do they encounter? What solutions can these characters craft to meet the challenges of their story?

❹ **Fiction is all about how characters change.** How do these characters change as a result of what happens to them? What do they learn? What might a reader learn from reading their story?

❺ **Non-fiction is all about THE world; fiction is all about A world.** What kinds of people, places, and things does the world of this story contain? What successes, disasters, and conflicts arise in this world? Complete this sentence: "This is a world where..."

❶ Main character ❷ Motivation ❸ Plot ❹ Main idea ❺ Setting

3 Analyze any piece of writing...

The 5 Big Questions

❶ **What makes this writing good?** What do you like about this writing? Why do you like it? What techniques is the writer using to make the story work? Use the language of your classroom criteria to talk about your feelings.

❷ **What would make this writing better?** Is there something missing? Is there something wrong? Could this writing be improved? What would make you like it more? Use the language of your classroom criteria to talk about your feelings.

❸ **What's the one most important thing the author wants you to know?** What's the author's message? What does he or she want you to think about after you've read this? What is the main idea? And which details in the writing support your interpretation?

❹ **Why did the author write this?** The author could have written anything else but intentionally chose to write this. Why did the author write this particular piece? What was the author's purpose?

❺ **What do you need to know to understand and enjoy the text?** What are the key pieces of information in this piece? Has anything been left out? Does anything make you wonder? Has the author included information that you don't really need? How do you think the author decided what to include and what to leave out?

4 Develop expressive reading skills...

What is Expressive Reading?

When I was in school, most of us read like little robots, droning on one word after another. I don't know which was more embarrassing: reading out loud myself or having to listen to everyone else. I knew that expressive reading was what my teachers did when they read to us. But I didn't know how to do it myself because I didn't know what good readers did to read expressively:

- **They change pitch.** Expressive readers make their voices go up and down. They go up at the beginning of a sentence and down at the end (up slightly if it ends with a question mark). They also go up and down to differentiate the words of a speaker (often high in pitch) from those of the narrator (usually lower).
- **They change rhythm.** Expressive readers speed up and slow down when they read. They also take appropriate pauses—big ones at the end of a sentence, smaller ones in between, after commas, and also between the logical parts of phrases.
- **They change volume.** Expressive readers say some words louder than others. In general, little words are said softer than more important words.
- **They change tone.** Sometimes readers use a soft, warm voice; sometimes their voice is cold and hard. They do this to communicate different feelings—soft and warm usually means nice, calm, or even sad; hard and cold can mean scary, angry, or excited.

Think carefully about the words as you read them. What do they mean? How do you feel? How should you change your voice as you read to capture the right expression?

5 Assess and improve comprehension...

How Do You Know What You Know?

(And how do you know you know you know it?)

The point of reading is to understand what you read. And while that sounds simple, it's not. When you start a book you may think you understand it, but as you get farther along, and things get more complicated, you may begin to realize that you don't. So how can you be sure you understand everything you read? Well, there are no guarantees, but if you think about these five things you'll probably be able to figure things out no matter how complicated they get. You know you understand what you read when...

- **You can read all the words.** It's the big words that are usually the hardest to read, but often these are the words you have to understand.
- **You know what all the words mean.** Once again, big words are usually the ones you need to pay attention to.
- **You can picture the story in your mind as you read it.** Close your eyes and try to imagine what the story would like if it were a movie or a TV show.
- **You can explain it to someone else who hasn't read the book.** You might feel that you understand it yourself and still not be able to help someone else understand it because they don't understand you.
- **You can read it expressively in a way that makes sense to you and to other people listening.** This may be the hardest of all. It takes a lot of time and practice. But it's worth it.

6 Improve book group interactions...

Book Group Role Play

It's reading time and your teacher tells you to get into your book groups. You find the other kids in your group, you move your chairs into a circle, you open your books... Now what? Someone starts reading, everyone listens, the next person reads, everyone listens, and after a while everyone's bored. Are there other things you can do in a book group? There certainly are. Each person can take on a specific role. Then everyone has something special to do. Try these ideas:

- **"Six Traits" Book Group.** Each person in the group monitors a particular trait. The roles are: Ideas, Organization, Voice, Word Choice, Sentence Fluency, and Conventions.
- **"Five Facts of Fiction" Book Group.** Each person in the group takes one of the five facts. The roles are: Characters, Motivation, Plot, Main Idea, and Setting.
- **"Five Big Questions" Book Group.** Each person in the group handles one of the five questions: The roles are: Good things, Bad things, Main Idea, Purpose, and Audience (or Details).
- **"Understand Everything" Book Group.** Each person in the group takes one of the five criteria for good comprehension. The roles are: Decoding, Defining, Visualizing, Explaining, and Expressive Reading.

Pick one of these options and trade roles each day until everyone has had a turn at each role.

7 Analyze any piece of writing...

CPA

When people need help figuring out their taxes, or businesses need to know where all their money is going, they hire a Certified Public Accountant, or CPA as they are called. CPAs are trained so they can literally "account" for every detail of your financial life. Books have a life, too, and readers need to account for what happens. As a reader, you are accountable to three things: 1) The book: you have to read and understand the words; 2) The author: you have to understand the author's message and purpose; and 3) Yourself: you have to try to make sense of your reactions. To accomplish all this, you need a CPA of your own, but not a Certified Public Accountant. You need a different CPA:

- **Content.** What is this book about? What's the one most important thing the writer wants you to know? Which details tell you you're right?
- **Purpose.** Why did the writer write this piece? What is the writer's purpose? What makes you feel the way you do?
- **Audience.** Who is this book written for? What kind of person would like it and find it valuable? How can you tell who the writer is writing for? What do these people want to get from this book?

When you can answer these questions, you can account for just about anything in the book you're reading. And when you can account for anything in a book, reading becomes a lot more interesting.

8 Perfect expressive reading skills...

Advanced Expressive Reading

Take a look at this sentence:

On a bitter cold winter morning, Malcolm Maxwell, a young man of simple means but evil intention, left the quiet country town in which he'd been raised, and set off on the dark errand he'd been preparing for all his life.

You can see that it is made up of several parts. There are four kinds of sentence parts to watch for:

- **Main Parts.** These parts usually contain the main action of the sentence: "Malcolm Maxwell...left the quiet country town in which he'd been raised..."
- **Lead-In Parts.** These parts often introduce a main part: "On a bitter cold winter morning..."
- **In-Between Parts.** As the name implies, these parts go in between other parts. They feel like a slight interruption: "...a young man of simple means but evil intention..."
- **Add-On Parts.** These are extra parts that convey additional information about any of the other parts: "...and set off on the dark errand he'd been preparing for all his life."

Experienced expressive readers change pitch when they change part. MAIN PARTS should be spoken at a middle pitch level. INTRO PARTS are often read at a higher pitch level. IN-BETWEEN PARTS are usually read at a level lower than the parts they are in between. And ADD-ON PARTS should be spoken at a slightly lower level than the part they follow.

The Reader's Workshop Activity Organizer

9 Explore the author's ideas...

What's the Big Idea?

Books are full of big ideas. All you have to do is figure out what those ideas are. It's kind of like a detective story. The writer sprinkles clues up and down the pages and the reader finds them and tries to figure out what they mean. One way to make this process easier is to know what you're looking for ahead of time. When you want to understand an author's ideas, look for these things:

- **An important main idea.** What's the one most important thing the author wants you to know? Why is it important?
- **Interesting details.** Which details are the most interesting? How do they help you understand the main idea?
- **Showing, not just telling.** Where does the author use "showing" details? How does the "showing" help to improve your understanding and enjoyment?
- **A clear purpose.** Why did the writer choose to write this particular piece? Why is this a good reason to write something?
- **Something unusual or unexpected.** What makes the writing unusual or unexpected? How does this writing differ from other things you've read?

Reading can be just like playing a game. And like any game, it's more fun when you're playing well. It's not like sports, board games, or card games. You don't keep score, and anybody who tries wins, but that's because reading is a special kind of game, it's a game of ideas. Be a player.

13 Look deeply at the language...

Wordsmithery

Wordsmithery? What's that? Well, a "smith" is someone who works with something: a "silversmith", for example, is someone who works with silver. Some people work with words. These "wordsmiths" work hard to find the right words for the right effect. If you want to find out if the writer you're reading is a real wordsmith, look for these things:

- **Appropriate language.** Are the words the author has used appropriate for the audience? Are there any words or phrases that are too casual, too formal, too hard to understand, or possibly offensive?
- **Strong verbs.** Where has the author used strong verbs? What makes them effective?
- **Specific and precise adverbs and adjectives.** Where has the author used adjectives and adverbs to make the writing more specific and precise? How do these adjectives and adverbs make the writing better?
- **Memorable words and phrases.** Which words and phrases do you remember? Why are they so memorable?
- **Well used words.** Where has the author used unusual words effectively? Where has the author used common words in new ways?

The English language is one of the largest languages in the world. With more than 490,000 words to choose from—and new ones being added every day—writers have a lot of freedom to say what they want to say exactly the way they want to say it. But with that freedom comes responsibility. Words are powerful. Use them wisely.

10 Analyze organizational structure...

Get Yourself Organized

As a kid, my room was always a mess, and now as an adult, my office isn't much better. I have the same problem when I write; I just try harder now to clean up my messes before anyone reads them. Since I hate to study organization, I think the best way to learn about it is to read good writing and see how it's put together. Look for these things:

- **Catches the audience's attention at the start.** How does the beginning catch the audience's attention? Why would the audience want to read more?
- **Feels finished at the end; makes the audience think.** How does the ending make the piece feel finished? What does it make the audience think about?
- **Arranged in the best order.** How could the author move things around to make the piece better? What would the author need to change in order to do this in a way that made sense?
- **Spends the right amount of time on each part.** Why does the author spend more time in some parts than in others? Are there places where the author moves ahead too quickly or hangs around too long?
- **Easy to follow from section to section.** How does the author move from section to section? How do these transitions work?

Some people think that good writers start with a pre-planned organizational structure, but that's not often true. The best writers concentrate on their ideas and the needs of their audience. When you do that your writing organizes itself.

14 Explore sound and rhythm...

Life Sentences

Most of the time we don't think about the way words sound or how phrases feel as we read along from sentence to sentence. But great writers think about this all the time. To serious writers, every part of every sentence has to sound and feel just right, and every sentence has to flow smoothly, one right into the next. If you're interested in how writers add life to their sentences, look for these things:

- **Different sentence beginnings.** What are some of the different ways the author begins sentences? Do you notice any patterns?
- **Different sentence lengths.** Where does the author change sentence lengths? Do you notice any patterns?
- **Easy to read expressively.** What are the most expressive parts? What is it about how they sound that makes them so much fun to read out loud?
- **Uses rhythm, rhyme, alliteration and other "sound" effects.** Where has the author used rhythm, rhyme, alliteration or other effects to make the writing sound interesting? How does this improve the piece?
- **Sentences are put together in ways that make them easy to understand.** How does the author use connecting words and punctuation marks to make sentences easy to understand? How does the order of sentence parts make the writing easy to understand?

It's hard to investigate an author's Sentence Fluency unless you read the writing out loud and with a lot of expression. Try it. You'll be surprised by what you discover.

11 Get a glimpse of the person behind the words...

Hearing Voices

Voice is the personal quality in a piece of writing. It's all the things that tell you about an author's personality even when they aren't writing about themselves. When you want to understand who authors are—behind the words they write—look for these things:

- **Makes the audience care.** Which parts are most effective at making the audience care about what the author is trying to say? Why are these parts so effective?
- **Respects the needs of the audience.** Which audience is the author trying to reach? What do these people need to know to understand the author's message? How do they want to find out about it?
- **Strong statements; honest feelings.** Where are the author's strongest statements? How will these parts help achieve the author's purpose?
- **Plenty of personality, but always appropriate.** What makes this writing different, unusual, or unique? What does the writing suggest about the writer's personality? Are there any parts that might offend the audience?
- **Energy under thoughtful control.** Which parts show energy? Is there anything that might distract the audience or make them feel uncomfortable?

Some people say that voice is choice. But what does that mean? A person's identity is what makes them unique. And what makes us unique often has to do with the choices we make. You can find evidence of an author's voice every time you notice a conscious choice being made in the writing.

15 Learn how conventions really work...

Master Mechanics

When I was in school, we studied the conventions of writing by reading English books. We studied, yes, but we didn't learn very much. If you want to learn about conventions, don't go to an English book, go to a real book and see what real writers do. Look for these things:

- **Capitalization.** Has the author used capital letters in ways that make sense to you? Is it easy to tell where new ideas begin? Has the author capitalized the names of people, places, and things that are one of a kind?
- **"Ending" punctuation.** Has the author used periods, question marks, and exclamation marks in ways that make sense to you? Is it easy to tell where ideas end?
- **"Inside" punctuation.** Does the author's use of commas, colons, dashes, parentheses, apostrophes, quotation marks, or semicolons make sense to you? How does the author's use of these marks help make longer sentences easier to understand?
- **Paragraphs.** Has the author grouped related ideas into paragraphs in ways that make sense to you? Has the author started a new paragraph each time a new person starts speaking? Has the author indented or skipped a line to show where new paragraphs start?
- **Spelling.** If the writing has spelling mistakes, do these errors make the piece difficult to read and understand? How does the author's spelling affect the way you feel about the writing and the person who wrote it?

Almost every book you read contains almost every rule of writing. All you have to do is look and learn.

12 Recognize writing conventions in print...

Conventions Reading

Read this:

On a dark December night in 1776, as he led a barefoot brigade of ragged revolutionaries across the icy Delaware River, George Washington said, "Shift your fat behind, Harry. But slowly or you'll swamp the darn boat." He was talking to General Henry Knox (they called him "Ox" for short). There's a painting of George Washington where he's standing up in a boat scanning the riverbank for Redcoats. I always thought he just wanted a good view. But I guess the reason he was standing was because he didn't have a place to sit down.

Now read this:

[NEW PARAGRAPH] [INDENT] [CAPITAL] on a dark [CAPITAL] december night in 1776 [COMMA] as he led a barefoot brigade of ragged revolutionaries across the icy [CAPITAL] delaware [CAPITAL] river [COMMA] [CAPITAL] george [CAPITAL] washington said [COMMA] [QUOTE] [CAPITAL] shift your fat behind [COMMA] [CAPITAL] har [HYPHEN] ry [PERIOD] [CAPITAL] but slowly or you [APOSTROPHE] ll swamp the darn boat [PERIOD] [QUOTE] [CAPITAL] he was talk [HYPHEN] ing to [CAPITAL] general [CAPITAL] henry [CAPITAL] knox [PARENTHESES] they called him [QUOTE] [CAPITAL] ox [QUOTE] for short [PARENTHESES] [PERIOD] [CAPITAL] there [APOSTROPHE] s a painting of [CAPITAL] george [CAPITAL] washington where he [APOSTROPHE] s stand [HYPHEN] ing up in a boat scanning the riverbank for [CAPITAL] redcoats [PERIOD] [CAPITAL] i al [HYPHEN] ways thought he just wanted a good view [PERIOD] [CAPITAL] but [CAPITAL] i guess the reason he was standing was because he didn [APOSTROPHE] t have a place to sit down [PERIOD] [END OF PARAGRAPH]

Pretty weird, huh? But it's also pretty interesting if you ask me. That's what you're really reading every time you read. Even though we don't say the conventions out loud, or even quietly in our own heads, we do read over them every time we read. But we don't pay much attention to them, and that's where we miss some valuable learning. For example, in that single paragraph, we encountered:

- **48 conventions:** not including the spelling of 95 words and the use of 94 spaces.
- **10 different conventions in addition to the space, including:** new paragraph, indent, capital, comma, quote, hyphen, period, apostrophe, parenthesis, and end of paragraph
- **The following rules:** Indent for new paragraph; Period at end of sentence; Capital at beginning of sentence; Capital for proper noun; Capital for the word "I"; Parenthesis for an aside; Quotation marks for dialog; Quotation marks for a nickname; Comma to separate clauses; Apostrophe for contraction; Hyphen to break a word at a syllable boundary for a line ending.

Not bad for a single paragraph from a 5th grade research paper. As you can see, there's a lot you can learn about conventions from your reading if you take the time every once in a while to pay close attention to what's going on.

Is this a good way to read? Hardly. It's very slow, and it's hard to understand what you're reading. But it's a great way to learn about conventions. And it's kind of fun, too.

The “Best Practice” Organizer

★ THE PRINCIPLES OF BEST PRACTICE

BEST PRACTICE TEACHING IS...

- ★ **Student-centered.** The best starting point for schooling is young people's real interests; all across the curriculum, investigating students' own questions should always take precedence over studying arbitrarily and distantly selected “content.”
- ★ **Expressive.** To fully engage ideas, construct meaning, and remember information, students must regularly employ the whole range of communicative media—speech, writing, drawing, poetry, dance, drama, music, movement, and visual arts.
- ★ **Collaborative.** Cooperative learning activities tap the social power of learning better than competitive and individualistic approaches.
- ★ **Constructivist.** Children do not just receive content; in a very real sense, they re-create and re-invent every cognitive system they encounter, including language, literacy, and mathematics.
- ★ **Experiential.** Active, hands-on, concrete experience is the most powerful and natural form of learning. Students should be immersed in the most direct possible experience of the content of every subject.
- ★ **Social.** Learning is always socially constructed and often interactional; teachers need to create classroom interactions that “scaffold” learning.
- ★ **Cognitive.** The most powerful learning comes when children develop true understanding of concepts through higher-order thinking associated with various fields of inquiry and through self-monitoring of their thinking.
- ★ **Reflective.** Balancing the immersion in experience and expression must be opportunities for learners to reflect, debrief, and abstract from their experiences what they have felt and thought and learned.
- ★ **Challenging.** Students learn best when faced with genuine challenges, choices, and responsibility in their own learning.
- ★ **Holistic.** Children learn best when they encounter whole ideas, events, and materials in purposeful contexts, not by studying sub-parts isolated from actual use.
- ★ **Developmental.** Children grow through a series of definable but not rigid stages, and schooling should fit its activities to the developmental level of students.
- ★ **Democratic.** The classroom is a model community; students learn what they live as citizens of the school.
- ★ **Authentic.** Real, rich, complex ideas and materials are at the heart of the curriculum. Lessons or textbooks that water-down, control, or oversimplify content ultimately disempower students.

On Workshop-Style Teaching

“Undoubtedly the single most important new strategy in literacy education is the reading-writing workshop. As Donald Graves, Nancie Atwell, Lucy Calkins, Linda Rief, Tom Romano, and others have explained, students in a workshop classroom choose their own topics for writing and books for reading, using large scheduled chunks of classroom time for doing their own reading and writing. They collaborate freely with classmates, keep their own records, and self-evaluate. Teachers take new roles, too, modeling their own reading and writing processes, conferring with students one-to-one, and offering well-timed, compact mini-lessons as students work. In the mature workshop classroom, teachers don't wait around for “teachable moments” to occur—they make them happen every day.”

Best Practice: New Standards for Teaching and Learning in America's Schools, p. 197.

“The workshop model is simple and powerful. It derives from the insight that children learn to read by reading and to write by writing, and that schools in the past have simply failed to provide enough guided practice. It recognizes that kids need less telling and more showing, that they need more time to do literacy and less time hearing about what reading and writing might be like if you ever did them. Even the term workshop harks back to the ancient crafts-place, where not only did products get produced, but education went on as the master craftsman coached apprentices.”

Best Practice: New Standards for Teaching and Learning in America's Schools, p. 198.

“A defining element of a true workshop is choice: individual students choose their own books for reading, projects for investigation, topics for writing. They follow a set of carefully inculcated norms for exercising that choice during the workshop period. They learn that all workshop time must be used on some aspect of working, so when they complete a product, a piece, or a phase, they aren't ‘done’ for the day. Instead, kids must begin something new, based on an idea from their own running list of tasks and topics, or seek a conference with the teacher. While there are regular, structured opportunities for sharing and collaborating in a workshop, students also spend much time working alone; there are other times of the day when teachers set up collaborative group or team activities.”

Best Practice: New Standards for Teaching and Learning in America's Schools, p. 198.

“Today, pathfinding teachers are beginning to extend the workshop model outward from reading and writing, where many have already found success, into other parts of the curriculum—establishing math workshops, science workshops, and history workshops. Teachers are adapting workshop because they see that deep immersion is the key to mastery, whatever the subject: they want kids to do history, do science, do math.

Best Practice: New Standards for Teaching and Learning in America's Schools, p. 198.

On Authenticity

“Virtually all standards documents that have been published over the past decade entreat teachers to “make it real,” to involve students in tangible, genuine, authentic, real-world materials and experiences. This challenge is problematic in several ways. To begin with, school itself isn't “real,” in the sense that schools are purposely separated from the rest of life and people and work and community. If we want to make education “real,” we have to somehow overcome that segregation, either by sending bits of the world into schools or bringing the kids out into the world. Well, that's okay; the school-house door does swing both ways. But the “how” part is tricky. After all, realness or authenticity isn't exactly a teaching method, but rather a condition.... But it is worth the difficulty to sort this out. In every story of powerful, transformative learning we've heard (or shared in this book), there's almost always the crucial detail that students were working on something that felt real.”

Best Practice: New Standards for Teaching and Learning in America's Schools, p. 202.

MAKING LEARNING AUTHENTIC

- ★ Let kids in on curriculum planning, choosing topics and readings, making schedules, keeping records.
- ★ Assign real, whole books, rather than synthetic texts created by basal publishers.
- ★ Use primary resource documents, not just textbooks, to teach history, science, etc.
- ★ Have tangible, tactile materials, artifacts, and live demonstrations where possible.
- ★ Invite in speakers, experts, and interview subjects from the community.
- ★ Favor learn-by-doing over learn-by-sitting-there-quietly-and-listening.
- ★ Bring in parents to give presentations, conference with kids, create materials.
- ★ Follow news and current events, connecting them with curriculum.
- ★ Mix children through multiage grouping, cross-age projects, buddy programs, and mainstreamed special education.
- ★ Include activities that connect with students' multiple intelligences and cognitive styles.
- ★ Schedule time in flexible blocks that match the curriculum.
- ★ Let students subdivide content, form groups, and conduct team projects.
- ★ Stress student goal setting and self-assessment.
- ★ Have frequent one-to-one conferences across the curriculum.

On Assessment

“In Best Practice classrooms, teachers don't just make up tests and put grades on report cards. They are less interested in measuring students' recall of individual facts or use of certain subskills than in how they perform the authentic, complete, higher-order activities that school aims for: reading whole books, drafting and editing stories or articles, conducting and reporting a scientific inquiry, applying math to real problem solving. Because progressive teachers want deeper and more practical information about children's learning, they monitor students' growth in richer and more sophisticated ways. More and more, teachers are adopting and adapting the tools of ethnographic, qualitative research: observation, interviews, questionnaires, collecting and interpreting artifacts and performances. They use information from these sources not mainly to ‘justify’ marks on a report card, but to guide instruction, to make crucial daily decisions about helping students grow.”

Best Practice: New Standards for Teaching and Learning in America's Schools, p. 206.

“One of the most promising mechanisms for authentic evaluation is the student portfolio, a folder in which students save selected samples of their best work in a given subject. The practice of keeping such cumulative records has many benefits. First, of course, it provides actual evidence of what the child can do with writing, math, art, or science, instead of a mark in a grade book—which represents, after all, nothing more than a teacher-mediated symbolic record of a long-discarded piece of real work. These portfolio artifacts also invite all sorts of valuable conversations between the child and the teacher, children and peers, or kids and parents.... The process of selecting and polishing items for inclusion in the portfolio invites students to become increasingly reflective about their own work and more skillful at self-evaluation.”

Best Practice: New Standards for Teaching and Learning in America's Schools, p. 207.

“In Best Practice classrooms, it is common for students to have periodic “evaluation conferences” with their teachers, where both parties use their notes to review the child's achievements and problems over a span of time, and then set goals for the upcoming weeks or months. In a curriculum that values higher-order thinking as well as individual responsibility, such self-evaluation teaches multiple important lessons.”

Best Practice: New Standards for Teaching and Learning in America's Schools, p. 207.

Best Practice in Reading and Writing

★ BEST PRACTICE IN READING

INCREASE	DECREASE
★ Reading aloud to students.	
★ Time for independent reading.	★ Exclusive emphasis on whole-class or reading-group activities.
★ Children's choice of their own reading materials.	★ Teacher selection of all reading materials for individuals and groups.
★ Exposing children to a wide and rich range of literature.	★ Relying on selections in a basal reader.
★ Teacher modeling and discussing his/her own reading processes.	★ Teacher keeping his/her own reading tastes private.
★ Primary instructional emphasis on comprehension.	★ Primary instructional emphasis on reading sub-skills such as phonics, word analysis, syllabication, etc.
★ Teaching reading as a process: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Use strategies that activate prior knowledge. ◆ Help students make and test predictions. ◆ Structure help during reading. ◆ Provide after-reading applications. 	★ Teaching reading as a single, one-step act.
★ Social, collaborative activities with much discussion and interaction.	★ Solitary seatwork.
★ Grouping by interests or book choices.	★ Grouping by reading level.
★ Silent reading followed by discussion.	★ Round-robin oral reading.
★ Teaching skills in the context of whole and meaningful literature.	★ Teaching isolated skills in phonics workbooks or drills.
★ Writing before and after reading.	★ Little or no chance to write.
★ Encouraging invented spelling in children's early writings.	★ Punishing preconventional spelling in students' early writings.
★ Use of reading in content fields (e.g. historical novels in social studies).	★ Segregation of reading to reading time.
★ Evaluation that focuses on holistic, higher-order thinking processes.	★ Evaluation focus on individual low-level sub-skills.
★ Measuring success of reading program by students' reading habits, attitudes, and comprehension.	★ Measuring the success of the reading program only by test scores.

★ BEST PRACTICE IN WRITING

INCREASE	DECREASE
★ Student ownership and responsibility by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ helping students choose their own topics and goals for improvement. ◆ using brief teacher-student conferences. ◆ teaching students to review their own progress. 	★ Teacher control of decision making by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ teacher deciding on all writing topics. ◆ suggestions for improvement dictated by teacher. ◆ learning objectives determined by teacher alone. ◆ instruction given as whole-class activity.
★ Class time spent on writing whole, original pieces through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ establishing real purposes for writing and student involvement in the task. ◆ instruction in and support for all stages of the writing process. ◆ pre-writing, drafting, revising, editing. 	★ Time spent on isolated drills on "subskills" of grammar, vocabulary, spelling, paragraphing, penmanship, etc.
★ Teacher modeling writing—drafting, revising, sharing—as a fellow author and as a demonstration of processes.	★ Teacher talks about writing but never writes or shares own work.
★ Learning of grammar and mechanics in context, at the editing stage, and as items are needed.	★ Isolated grammar lessons, given in order determined by textbook, before writing is begun.
★ Writing for real audiences, publishing for the class and for wider communities.	★ Assignments read only by the teacher.
★ Making the classroom a supportive setting for shared learning, using: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ active exchange and valuing of students ideas. ◆ collaborative small-group work. ◆ conferences and peer critiquing that give responsibility for improvement to authors. 	★ Devaluation of students ideas through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ students viewed as lacking knowledge and language abilities. ◆ sense of class as competing individuals. ◆ work with fellow students viewed as cheating or disruptive.
★ Writing across the curriculum as a tool for learning.	★ Writing taught only during "language arts" period—i.e., infrequently.
★ Constructive and efficient evaluation that involves: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ brief informal oral responses as students work. ◆ thorough grading of just a few student-selected, polished pieces. ◆ focus on a few errors at a time. ◆ cumulative view of growth and self-evaluation. ◆ encouragement of risk taking and honest expression. 	★ Evaluation as negative burden for teacher and student by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ marking all papers heavily for errors, making teacher a bottleneck. ◆ teacher editing paper, and only after completed, rather than student making improvements. ◆ grading seen as punitive, focused on errors, not growth.

Read the Book! Don't Wait for the Movie

All of the material on this organizer card comes from the book "Best Practice: New Standards for Teaching and Learning in America's Schools" written by Harvey Daniels, Steven Zemelman, and Arthur Hyde, and published by Heinemann. As far as I know, this book is the only comprehensive guide to effective teaching practice in all subject areas. As such, it is one of the best teaching resources available today—and it isn't very long, very technical, or even very expensive; it's just good common sense advice, well organized and easily read. If you only have time to read one book on teaching, this should be it. Nothing else I've come across speaks more directly to the essential elements of high quality teaching. You can find the book at bookstores that have large sections devoted to professional education, or you can order it directly from the publisher's web site at: www.heinemann.com. You'll be glad you did.

The “Teaching That Makes Sense” Organizer

★ WHAT IS TEACHING THAT MAKES SENSE?

WHAT IS EFFECTIVE TEACHING?

In studying effective teaching practice, I have found that the teachers who are most successful are the ones who have the best understanding of their work. Specifically, successful teachers are the ones who can tell you what they do, why they do it, and how they know it's good for kids. Somehow, these teachers have made sense of their teaching in such a way that they produce consistently good results regardless of the students, subjects, schools, or grade levels they work with. “Teaching that makes sense” is not a particular way of teaching. It's a process teachers can use to gain a deeper and more meaningful understanding of their work. It involves figuring out the answers to three questions.

WHAT DO I DO?

Keeping track of what I do used to be very hard for me—because I really didn't know what I was doing. But once I became familiar with workshop-style teaching, and learned to depend on its consistent and thoughtful organization, my teaching became much more logical.

But more important, I think, than what I do is how I do it. The longer I work in education, the more I consider the “how” of my teaching. I've noticed that I can do the same lesson in several different classes and get different results simply because of how I deliver it. I've come to believe that how I teach is at least as important as what I teach, and maybe more. As the old song says: “Tain't what ya do, it's the way that ya do it.”

WHY DO I DO IT?

This is often a very hard question to answer. There's a temptation to do things in the classroom for many reasons that have more to do with getting through the day than with optimizing kids' learning. I try to come up with reasons that are focused on the kids and their well-being. When I find myself doing something just because it's easy for me, because it's the way I've always done it, or because it's the only way I know how to do it, I know that I'm probably not doing my best work. Working to understand the “why” of my teaching has helped me get beyond simply copying ideas I come across; I can now invent my own teaching. This has made me more confident and much more responsive to student needs.

HOW DO I KNOW IT'S GOOD?

This is a hard question to answer, but I think it's very important. Given enough time, teachers can teach kids to do almost anything. But how do we know that what we're teaching kids is actually good for them? Just because certain practices reliably produce certain results doesn't mean that those results are useful to our kids or our society. The way I try to answer this question is to look closely at my values. What is it that I value about a particular ability or attitude in a student? What do I think will serve kids best when they leave school and enter the adult world? This kind of thinking has helped me bring more of a “real world” perspective to my work, and that's helped me make my teaching more authentic.

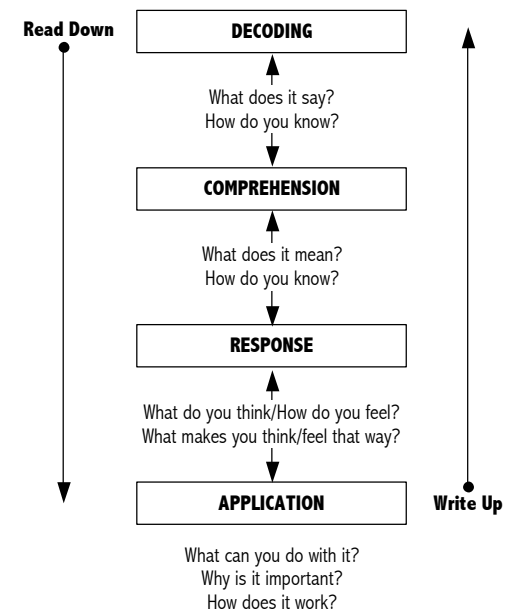
★ THE 7 HABITS OF HIGHLY EFFECTIVE TEACHERS

- ★ **Assess to learn, not to judge.** Use assessment to learn about students, not to judge them as good, bad, or in between. Strive to see them clearly and completely as whole human beings, rather than as letters and numbers through the clouded and reductive lens of grades, test scores, and other quantitative measures.
- ★ **Work with what's there, not with what's missing.** Traditionally, school has been all about deficits. We test students, determine their weaknesses, segregate them into groups according to their failings, and then attempt to “fill in the gaps” in their “abilities” with our “instruction,” as though human beings were blank slates in need of being written on, or empty vessels to be filled. But brain research and common sense tell us that students will learn more effectively if we base our teaching on what they know rather than on what they don't.
- ★ **Seek to model, not to correct.** Correcting students, along with making marks on their assignments and tests, is largely ineffective at helping them learn. It is also a time consuming and unrewarding way to work. Correcting merely points out mistakes, it doesn't help students learn to spot them and correct them on their own. In fact, it robs students of that very experience. Children learn best from models not from correction.
- ★ **Provide tools, not rules.** Too often, teaching becomes a matter of laying down rules: “Do this. Don't do that.” Etc. But this only increases reliance on the rule maker, and decreases a student's potential for self-governance, which is, after all, the fundamental capacity we hope they acquire before they leave our care.
- ★ **Think process, not product.** Regardless of age or developmental ability, students will make better progress if those of us whose approval they so desperately seek focus our comments more on the process of their learning rather than on the product. By valuing how children learn in addition to what they learn, we validate individuality and lay the foundation for lifelong learning.
- ★ **Constrain the activity, not the child.** All learners need some structure to their instruction, especially when they're just starting out, but that structure shouldn't determine how children work or what they work on. Children need choices—especially when it comes to the content of their learning and the way they solve problems. Without choice there is no ownership, and without ownership there is little motivation to do one's best work.
- ★ **Praise the effort, not the results.** It's a simple truth that children will do just about whatever adults praise them for. So why not praise them for their efforts instead of their results? What's wrong with favoring the attempt over the outcome? Not every student will succeed at every new thing he or she attempts, but if students try their best, there will almost always be opportunities for them to learn and to improve. And they'll

★ THE READING/Writing CONNECTION

While it's obvious to most people that reading and writing are in some way connected, we rarely explore exactly what that connection looks like. I treat reading and writing as two opposing and complimentary parts of the same process—communication. I like to explore the reading/writing connection every chance I get because I think it's so valuable. To get kids off to a good start, I give them two pieces of advice:

- ★ **Read like a writer.** As you read, ask yourself questions like, “Why would the writer do that?” or “Why this word and not another?” or “Why is the writer spending so much time describing this character or this scene?” Always remember that someone just like you wrote each and every word.
- ★ **Write like a reader.** As you write, ask yourself questions like, “How is this going to sound?” or “Will this be easy to read?” or “How will the reader be able to follow what I'm saying?” Never forget that someone just like you will be reading every word.



★ FOUR STAGES OF LEARNING

Stage	Feeling	Learning	Teaching
Unconscious Incompetence	Contentment	Nothing	Models
Conscious Incompetence	Embarrassment	What you're not good at	Solutions
Conscious Competence	Confidence	What you are good at	Problems
Unconscious Competence	Contentment	Nothing	Models

The “Teaching That Makes Sense” Organizer

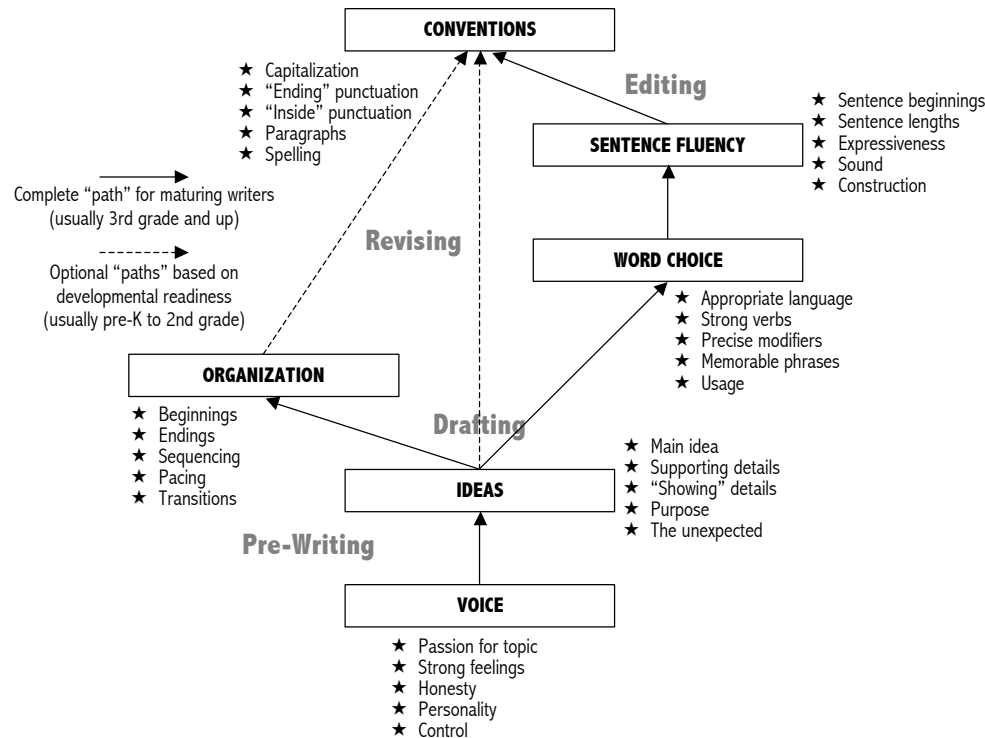
★ THE 5 BIG QUESTIONS

	What makes this writing good?	What would make this writing better?	What’s the one most important thing the writer wants you to know?	Why did the writer write this piece?	What does the audience need to know?
Use this when...	A piece of writing has some good parts.	A piece of writing has some weak parts.	A piece of writing has no focus.	A piece of writing has no point.	A piece of writing seems incomplete or overly detailed.
The answer is...	Your Classroom Criteria	Your Classroom Criteria	The Main Idea	The Author’s Purpose	What the Audience Needs to Know
Think about this...	Use this question any time you experience a positive reaction to something you’ve read, or any time you want to bring something good to someone else’s attention.	Use this question with any writing that doesn’t seem quite as good as it could be. Work down at the “level of the text” by referring to specific words, phrases, sentences, etc.	In non-fiction, look for the main idea to be stated literally in the piece. In fiction, remember that the main idea is almost always implied and can only be determined through inference.	Emphasize the word “this” as in “Of all the things the author could have written, why did he or she write this?” The purpose should be relevant to both the author and the audience.	Audience drives the entire writing process from choosing a topic to editing and formatting for publication. Some pieces have several audiences each with different needs.
This emphasizes...	Quality	Quality	Content	Purpose	Audience

★ RELATE THE TRAIT

As undemocratic as it sounds, all traits are not created equal. Some are simply much more important than others in terms of what they contribute to how writers communicate with readers. In addition, their relative importance shifts as writers move through the writing process. The traits are also related in a very significant way. Some traits literally depend on others. As writers build pieces from scratch, I try to help them put things together by starting with a solid foundation and building from there.

For me, writing begins with the trait of Voice. When a writer’s voice is not coming through, it’s usually an indication that motivation is low. Maybe the topic is uninteresting, or the writer feels that no one will want to read what he or she has to say. Whenever I conference with students, I check to make sure that they’re committed to their writing, that they’re writing from the heart with the expectation that someone else will be reading it. I felt that helping writers get clear about what they want to say, and what they want their audience to hear, is really my first and most important job. Once that’s done, working with Ideas, Organization, Word Choice, and Sentence Fluency seems to come along more easily and more naturally.



★ THE BEST WAY TO TEACH

Sometimes people ask me about the best way to teach. Or, they’ll tell me how they teach and then ask if I think it’s OK. No matter what they ask about, I always say the same thing: **The best way to teach is the way that makes sense** to you and to your students. Do what works best for you and for your kids. Own your own teach-

★ WHAT EVERY LEARNER NEEDS

Time. Every learner needs adequate time for practice. Without enough time, no one can improve significantly. The most important kind of time learners need is time spent working on real things that really matter to them.

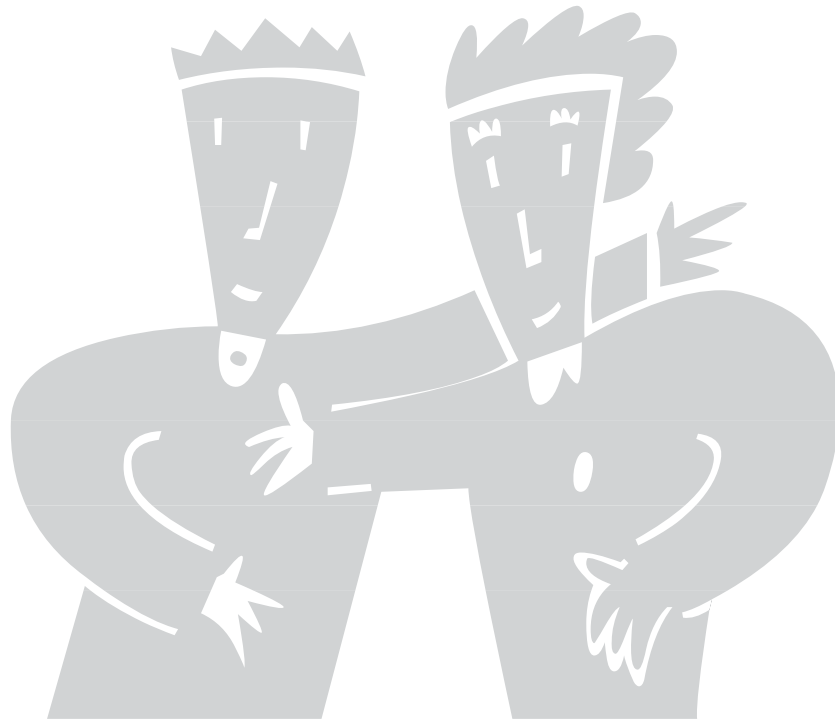
Choice. Learning is all about making good choices. Without the opportunity to make choices independently and without fear of punishment, learners cannot make good progress. Choice is also the key to motivation.

Purpose. Learning is always easier when we know why we’re doing what we’re doing. Learners need purposeful activities that make their learning matter. And they must be encouraged to develop their own sense of purpose, their own reasons for what they learn and how they go about learning it.

Audience. Learning is a social experience. We strive to learn in order to better ourselves in the world. And that world is full of people, an audience that provides invaluable feedback and an authentic context that provides motivation and gives meaning to everything we do.

Models. Learners not only need models of what good learning is, they also need models of what good learners do. Models give learners tangible examples that provide the explicit information they need to be successful.

Advice. One definition of teaching is “to impart knowledge.” And though that’s not everything that teaching is all about, it’s not a bad place to start. The easiest way to impart knowledge is simply to give advice. But in order for that advice to be valuable it has to be true, useful, and understandable to the learner, and it has to be given at the right time and in just the right way.



Let's work together to
make your teaching
the best it can be.

Please contact me any time!

Even the best workshops and teaching materials can't meet the needs of every teacher all the time.

That's why we need to stay in touch. Send me an e-mail any time you have a question.

*I'll do my best to get back to you quickly with answers, additional teaching materials,
or other resources.*

Please send suggestions, questions, and corrections to:
stevepeha@ttms.org

TEACHING THAT MAKES SENSE

Learning Patterns

Teach Smarter Not Harder

Imagine a structure 13 years tall, 180 days wide, and five subjects deep. This is a K-12 education. Each cell in this structure represents a single class period in a single subject for a total of 11,700 educational opportunities.

By using *Teaching That Makes Sense® Learning Patterns™* we can reduce this academic load for students, simplify planning and instruction for teachers, and help more kids learn more things in less time and with less teacher effort.

Learning Patterns are cross-curricular tools optimized for successful teaching in any subject or grade. They are designed to be used, re-used, and shared across classrooms without requiring extensive training or preparation.

By analyzing standards documents and the methods of effective teachers, *Teaching That Makes Sense* has identified underlying commonalities in learning targets across the curriculum. These commonalities represent dozens of potential assignments that can be taught and learned through a small set of foundational skills.

Consider exposition. Students consume and create expository information in many ways: they read expository texts, write expository essays, create reports, answer test questions, etc. As varied as expository expression is, it has a simple underlying structure that can be explained by a single *Learning Pattern*.

Some *Learning Patterns* cover skills like narration, exposition, and persuasion. Others help teachers and students with things like assessment, reading comprehension, and memorization. The same patterns can be used across grade levels and subject areas as well, so kids take their learning with them as they grow.

For more information about Learning Patterns click [here](#).



“Learning begins with teaching that makes sense.”

Agile Transformation

Building Collective Capacity for School-Wide Change

We are discovering better ways of improving schools by doing it and by helping others do it. Through this work, we have come to value:

- **People.** *Individuals and interactions* over policy and politics;
- **Achievement.** *Maximum potential* over minimum competence;
- **Courage.** *Fierce collaboration* over comfortable compromise;
- **Agility.** *Responding to change* over following a plan.

The items on the right are important, but we value the items on the left more.

Agile Transformation is grounded in two principles: **(1)** People are more successful when they enjoy their work; and **(2)** Schools are more successful when they support people in developing the autonomy, competence, and relatedness that makes their work more enjoyable. Features of *Agile Transformation* include:

- **Paired Practice.** Nobody works alone. Everyone has a team and a teammate.
- **Rapid Iteration.** Sprint through big problems one small problem at a time.
- **Making Sense.** What do we do? Why do we do it? How do we know it works?
- **“Stand Up” Sessions.** What did you do yesterday? What are you doing today? What do you need to be successful? Agile leaders remove impediments.
- **Successful Failure.** Fail fast, fail smart. No blame games. Apply what you learn as you move closer to your goal with each iteration.
- **Souls and Roles.** Aligning what we do with who we are.
- **“Just in Time” Solutions.** Handle problems as they arise. Respond as needed.



“Learning begins with teaching that makes sense.”

Essential Elements of Agile Schools

The Qualities of Effective Educational Communities

1. **Agile schools work because people choose to make them work.** We believe in freedom of choice, and that making the choice to participate fully in teaching, learning, and leading is the most important choice we can make.
2. **Agile schools love to learn.** We believe that learning is inherently enjoyable and that giving learners a responsible degree of autonomy in their individual pursuit of knowledge and skill makes it even more so. Agile educators are learners, too.
3. **Agile schools take a constructive approach to failure.** We believe failure is a normal part of success. Kids struggle to learn. Teachers struggle to teach. Administrators struggle to lead. We all experience failure on the way to solving new problems. The faster we fail, the more solutions we try. The smarter we fail, the more knowledge we bring to the next iteration. Instead of looking back at problems, Agile schools look forward to solving them.
4. **Agile schools are always getting better.** We believe there's almost always a better way of doing something, and that it's almost always worthwhile trying to figure out what that better way is. Agile schools value progress, and the appropriate measurement thereof, because progress is the true indicator of learning.
5. **Agile schools empower people to empower others.** We believe that individuals—not systems or policies—are the true sources of power in our schools. Our responsibility is to use our power in service of the greater good, and to teach students how to use their power that way, too.
6. **Agile schools achieve extraordinary results.** We believe in transformative learning that goes far beyond incremental improvements in test scores. Adults in Agile schools also strive for extraordinary achievement in their profession as well.



“Learning begins with teaching that makes sense.”

Essential Elements

continued...

7. **Agile schools are based on deeply-held beliefs, clearly-articulated values, and a firmly-rooted sense of commitment.** We believe that the most successful schools are those run by people who know what matters most to them and who possess an unshakable determination to get it.
8. **Agile schools are communities where people make a difference and connect with something greater than themselves.** We believe that the drive to contribute is part of human nature. Our role is to guide people in directing their contribution toward its highest and best use.
9. **Agile schools value ownership, positive attitudes, high expectations, and unwavering optimism.** We believe that making a good life is about making good choices, that the pursuit of happiness is an inalienable right, and that self-mastery is the key to its rightful exercise.
10. **Agile schools embrace the risk inherent in the achievement of great things.** We educate for maximum potential not minimum competence. We believe that all learners have within them extraordinary strengths and untapped resources, and that learning is only limited by our willingness to attempt what has never before been attempted. We welcome change, we innovate, and we seek out challenges that organize and measure the best of our energies and skills.
11. **Agile schools affirm self-knowledge as the most valuable knowledge and self-determination as the most basic right.** We believe that introspection, self-disclosure, and intellectual honesty are essential to personal transformation. We seek to support young people in becoming the adults they want to be.
12. **Agile schools are communities where no one is above the rules, everyone has a voice, freedom is sacred, equity and excellence are not mutually exclusive, and the highest goal of education is contributing to the present and future well-being of individuals who can thrive independently in a modern democracy.** Agile schools value college preparation, career fulfillment, and engaged citizenship, but we value something else even more. Collegiate, career, and civic achievement are important, but they are means to ends, not ends in themselves. Human happiness, meaningful contribution, and sustained well-being of self and community are the ultimate ends to which Agile schools aspire on behalf of the children and families we serve.



“Learning begins with teaching that makes sense.”

TEACHING THAT MAKES SENSE



“Learning begins with teaching that makes sense.”