The Writing Process Notebook

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by Steve Peha
The best way to teach is the way that makes sense to you, your kids, and your community.
What is the Notebook? The notebook is a way for kids to keep track of all the work they generate in Writer’s Workshop. One of the first problems teachers encounter when they begin using Writer’s Workshop every day is that their kids create enormous amounts of writing. Kids can turn out 20-30 pages or more in just a few weeks. And before you know it, desks are bulging with loose papers that no one wants to throw away, but at the same time no one knows what to do with them either. If you don’t have a way of helping the kids organize their own work, you end up doing it for them. And that’s just not practical.

How Do I Use the Notebook? Each section of the notebook is tied to a particular section of the Writing Process. As students move pieces from one stage to the next, have them store the things they are working on in the appropriate section. All their pre-writing work will be in the Pre-writing section, all their drafts in Drafting, and so on. When a piece is finished, it can be saved in the Publishing section. From time to time, ask the kids to clean out their notebooks. You may want to set up some kind of permanent “archive” or classroom library to allow kids to save things throughout the year (ideally for portfolios), or you can just have kids take things home. Once a piece has gone through publishing, kids should feel free to throw out most of the preliminary materials they created, but try to encourage them not to throw away anything from Section 3: Responding or Section 7: Assessing. This is extremely valuable information that is well worth reviewing from time to time throughout the year. In addition to helping kids stay organized, this type of notebook format is ideal for showing to parents at conference time because it illustrates in one place all the activities you are doing in your writing program, and how each student is handling those activities. Remember, too, that students can use this notebook to organize all the writing you do in class, not just writing from Writer’s Workshop.

Do I Have to Use This Notebook? Absolutely not. In fact, I would encourage teachers to introduce their own notebook format that is ideally suited to their students and their style of teaching. This is the notebook I would hand out to my kids. It is very much in my style. But if you think it would work for you, please use it. Among other things, it has a lot of useful information about the Writing Process built into it. And this material can easily be used as the basis for mini-lessons. To help you get started with creating your own notebook, I have also included a set of “blank” section covers with just the names of the stages of the Writing Process. In general, this type of notebook format can be used for kids of all ages, except possibly very small children. My feeling is that 2nd graders and perhaps even some 1st graders should be able to manage something like this. However, for many primary students, a simpler folder arrangement may be more effective. For the most part, these very young students are not going through the full Writing Process. They don’t need seven sections in a three-ring binder to stay organized. Last but not least, you may want to consider the addition of an eighth section at the back that students can use to save handouts, keep log or journal entries, and store other miscellaneous materials that don’t fit neatly into one of the seven main sections.
Through the Writing Process with Sonja Butler
What is Pre-Writing? As its name implies, pre-writing is any writing you do before you start writing. Sound confusing? It’s not. We all do a little bit of thinking before we write (yes, even you). So why not write some of that thinking down? Maybe you don’t know exactly what you’re going to write about. Maybe you don’t know what you’re going to write about at all. The fun of pre-writing is that it really doesn’t matter. Pre-writing is a time that you can use to experiment, to jot down a few quick ideas, to try out something new without having to try very hard, to take a little time to gather your thoughts and choose a direction before you start drafting.

What Can I Do During Pre-Writing? You can do just about anything you want. You can draw. You can read (just like Alex down there in the picture). You can make notes. You can scribble random thoughts. You can make a web or a story map. You can do anything that will help you come up with good ideas for writing. It doesn’t really matter what you do, as long as it involves turning on your brain and thinking about your topic. Then, just write down whatever pops into your noggin. As you begin to put ideas down on the page, see if you can organize them in some way. Take your time. There’s no rush. Time spent pre-writing is time well spent.

Why is Pre-Writing Important? If you play sports or a musical instrument you know that it’s always a good idea to warm up before you start to play. (Actually, if you’re like most kids, you probably just ignore advice like this when silly adults like me start yackin’ away like we think we’re handing down some big secret that if you don’t know all about it something awful will happen. But anyway…) That’s kind of what pre-writing is. It’s warm-up. It gets your mind loose and limber so that by the time you’re ready to start drafting, you can push the pencil around the page without straining your brain too hard. You know the feeling: you sit there with that lazy look on your face thinking, “I don’t know what to write.” You’re just not warmed up. That’s all. And everybody knows you can’t play your best when you’re not warmed up. So do a little pre-writing before you take the field. Chances are, your game will be much better for it.
Choose Something to Write About

The first stage of The Writing Process is called Pre-Writing. “Pre” means “before”, and you already know what writing means. But what does “pre-writing” mean? Sounds kinda weird doesn’t it? How could you do any writing before you did any writing? Here you are, sharpened pencil at the ready, eager to crank out another 5000 words before lunch, and somebody says you’ve got to do this “pre” writing stuff before you can even get started. (As if you didn’t have enough to do already!) Well, you don’t absolutely have to do any pre-writing, but many writers find that their work comes much easier, and turns out much better, when they give it a try.

One of the things that pre-writing is particularly good for is helping you find something good to write about. Let’s face it: if you don’t have something good to write about, something you really want to write about, something you have strong feelings about, then you might as well put down your pencil right now and go to recess.

OK, come back here. I didn’t mean that literally. But I guess in a way, I did. People do their best writing when they’re writing about things they care about and things they know very well. Things we know very well often come from our life, the typical and unusual things that happen to us. Things we care about are often those things we really like and those things we really hate.

For her first pre-writing activity, Sonja made four lists: a list of things she liked, a list of things she hated, a list of some unusual things that have happened to her in her life, and a list of typical life experiences. Then she thought for a minute about which one to choose. Finally, she chose “heter burn” from her “unusual” list, but as we’ll soon find out, it wasn’t really the heater that caused the problem.

Teaching Tips

Choosing something to writing about is the most important pre-writing activity, so don’t take it lightly. In fact, the younger or less accomplished the writer, the more important topic selection becomes. Traditionally, teachers assigned topics. At the other end of the spectrum is the idea that students should write about anything they want. I’ve had the most success with a middle way: students select their own topics from within certain broad areas that I suggest.

Here are two basic principles about topic selection that I always give out to the students I work with:

- Good writing comes from strong feelings. Write about the things you really care about.
- Good writing comes from life experience. Write about what you know.

To this end, I have a list of lists I use to help kids on their way. They all take more or less the same form as the lists presented in this lesson. Here are some other lists that will encourage kids to pick topics that will help them grow as writers:

- Things you regret, and things you are proud of.
- Things that are easy and things that are hard.
- Things you are good at and things you are not.
- Things that are silly and things that are serious.
- Things you are an expert in and things you would like to know more about.
- The first time you ever did something and the last time you ever did something.

Of course, the best topics are those that show up on both sides of one of these lists—the complicated ideas that have both positive and negative aspects.

Help your students keep purpose and audience in mind, for these are the primary motivators that lead to the best and most valuable writing experiences. What do your kids want to say? And who do they want to say it to?

Students should select topics from the areas and genres which are most likely to help them improve as writers. Don’t worry too much if students write for weeks or even months about the same topics. They’ll move on when they’re ready. Kids should have choice but they may not yet know enough about themselves as writers and human beings to make good choices all the time. So guide them thoughtfully and “with a light touch.”
Another good thing to do before you actually get started writing is to make a few notes about your topic. If you chose to write about something you like or hate, jot down a few thoughts about why you feel the way you do. If you’re writing about something from your life, put down a few things about how it all got started, what happened in the middle, and how it ended up. Who was there? How old were you? How did you feel?

This is very casual writing. You don’t have to write in sentences or even in phrases, single words here and there will work just fine. The point of doing this is to jog your memory a little bit, to help you put down a few of the big ideas you want to be sure to talk about.

Sonja decided to write down a few simple thoughts about what happened to her. She quickly wrote down everything that took place from beginning to end. This gave her a general plan for how she was going to tell her story. This makes writing your first draft a lot easier.

She probably won’t be copying these words down exactly, she’s just using this pre-writing activity like “scratch paper,” something rough and informal that she’s probably going to throw away after she gets her first draft finished. But these thoughts will give her something to fall back on if she gets stuck and can’t figure out what to write.

Notice that Sonja also drew a little picture at the end of the second page. That’s OK, too. Anything you want to do that will help you get started on your piece is just fine.

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Make Some Notes

Teaching Tips

I hated taking notes when I was in school because no one ever showed me how to use them. As such, notes were just one more thing I had to do that didn’t have any value to me. The key to getting kids to take notes lies not in their taking but in their use. That’s what I like about this little exercise. All kids are doing is writing down, in sentences or near-sentences, what they’re going to write about. Later, they’ll simply take these initial attempts, order them, and put them into a draft.

A related idea that works well for children who are not paragraphing effectively is called “Sentence Strips.” Have your kids write out sentences on individual strips of paper. Then, have them sort the strips into groups of related ideas. Finally, have them put the strips in order within each group. Encourage them to create new strips as needed to fill in the blanks. Then put the piles into an order that makes sense.

I don’t use webbing, mapping, or other types of more complicated graphic organizers. Here’s why:

1. Few, if any, professional writers use them or explicitly recommend them.
2. I have seen no significant research indicating that these tools help kids write more effectively than simply making lists as I advocate here.
3. For many kids, the organizer becomes an end in itself.
4. The organizer often determines what kids do, not the other way around.
5. I have never seen an explicit recommendation for their use by any of the leading teacher/researchers (Graves, Atwell, Calkins, Emig, Murray, Elbow, etc.).

I don’t mean to be dogmatic about this at all. I would never tell a child they couldn’t use an organizer. Just make sure you show them how to translate their “organized” work into actual writing. Model this process as often as possible.

And last but not least… avoid outlining. Once again, few professional writers use outlining, and prominent researchers rarely recommend it. Like graphic organizers, outlining is yet another pre-writing tool, but it’s popularity is more the result of academic tradition than real world effectiveness.

Give mini-lessons on all these techniques. But make sure each lesson focuses not on the technique itself, but how the technique helps writers harvest the fruit of their pre-writing labors, package it up, and ship it off to market for hungry readers.
What is Drafting? When countries fight wars, sometimes they start drafting people to fight them. They send you a letter in the mail, and off you go. (If you don’t go they send you to jail, so either way you’re going somewhere.) If you’re a college sports star the same thing can happen. The pro teams start drafting people, they pick you, and you’re off to a new city to play ball. (Same idea as being drafted for a war but you make a lot more money, people don’t try to shoot you, and you can wear your hair any way you want.) When race car drivers drive right up behind the cars in front of them, they do it to take advantage of the reduced air pressure that follows in the wake of the car ahead. This helps them go faster without pushing their engines quite as hard. It’s almost as if the car in front is helping to pull them along. This is called drafting. What’s my point? Well, the conventional meaning of the word “drafting” is, and I quote: “A preliminary version of a plan, document, or picture.” But all that tells you is that a draft is something that isn’t finished. Big deal. You probably already knew that. But what you may not have known is that drafting is all about being pulled into your topic and letting it carry you along right behind. You’ve thought about it during pre-writing, you may have even written a few notes, now just let yourself go. Let yourself be drawn in by the power of your own ideas. Get up close to them, put your pencil on the paper, open up the throttle of your imagination, and don’t stop until you cross the finish line.

What Makes Drafting Hard? Sounds easy, doesn’t it? Well, it’s not. You see, a lot of us don’t like to drive fast. We putz around the track at 10 miles an hour, and then we wonder why we never get anywhere. But hey, going fast is scary, right? And then there’s folks who spend most of their lives with their foot on the break pedal. That’s self-consciousness—the feeling that what you’re writing is stupid, or that it doesn’t make any sense, or that it will somehow embarrass you. So, drafting isn’t really about doing something, it’s about not doing something else. It’s about not psyching yourself out, not making yourself afraid, not worrying about spinning out in the third turn and losing the race, because here’s the deal: you can’t crash. That’s right. Drafting is like playing a race car video game with an endless supply of quarters. If you end up in a ditch with nothing to write about, just pop in another coin, pick up your pencil, and start driving again on some other part of your topic.

What Should I Do? Just keep going. If you feel your self-consciousness catching up with you, hit the gas pedal and outrun it. If you think you’re running out of gas, come in for a pitstop: take a look at what you wrote during pre-writing, fuel up on some of the notes you made before the race began, and then just get back out there on the track. Try to remember this: it’s a long, long race from beginning to end, and part of the trick to finishing in good form is keeping that in mind. Every idea is 500 miles long, and every writer has to drive around that oil-soaked oval again and again, one mile at a time. Sometimes you’re inspired and the driving is a blast, but sometimes you’re not and the driving is no fun at all. That’s what being a writer is all about; it’s about writing even when you don’t want to, even when it’s hard, even when it looks like you’re the last car on the track struggling to finish the race long after all the other drivers have seen the checkered flag and all the fans have gone home.
**Start Drafting**

As soon as you’ve decided what to write about, and sketched out a few thoughts, just grab a pencil and go to it. Just start writing. And don’t stop until you get to the end. Use the notes you created during pre-writing for inspiration, but feel free to change things here and there if you’re so inclined. Your pre-writing materials are merely meant to guide you as you wend your way through this very early stage of creating a piece of writing.

That’s an important thing to keep in mind: it’s early. You’re only drafting. You’ve still got a long way to go—many opportunities to change what you’ve written, to review and revise, to add and subtract, to modify and make corrections. Do your best, but don’t get distressed. This is not your final copy, it’s merely the first of what will probably be many attempts to get things “just right.” And with each attempt you make, you’ll get a little closer to your goal of creating a piece of writing that says exactly what you want to say it.

You can see that Sonja’s gotten off to a good start. In fact, she’s written down her entire story from beginning to end. She’s completed her first draft. Notice, too, that she didn’t just copy down her pre-writing notes. Some of her pre-writing is in her draft, but she’s added some new things, too.

One thing you might think about that Sonja did not do is this: when you are drafting, instead of writing on every line, try to write on every other line. This will make it easier for you to modify your work later on. (And besides, it makes you feel like you’re writing twice as much!)

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**Teaching Tips**

Can you really teach drafting? Is there anything to teach? Probably not in the technical sense that we usually think of, but there is much we can do, it seems to me, to help kids at this stage—and much we should be doing, too.

If you think about it, writers are almost always drafting. Any time you write a sentence or a phrase for the first time, you’re drafting. Even when you’re revising, you’re often drafting.

I have come to think of drafting as the copying of words in the writer’s head onto the page. So, one way we might help kids get started is to validate this idea of just writing what’s on your mind. So-called “free writing,” if done for short periods of time and on a regular basis, is probably the best way to get kids to become familiar with this simple but elusive transaction.

What surprises me is not that so many kids can’t do this, but that so many don’t think it’s OK. To get kids comfortable with this, I do a formal mini-lesson in which I simply write as fast as I can in front of them while at the same time speaking each word as I write it. It’s very funny: I make a lot of mistakes, my handwriting is bad, and rarely does what I write make much sense. But I do get some pearls here and there, and I always show kids how I can go back to edit and revise the rough remarks I’ve scribbled down during drafting. I think modeling is the key here because it is self-consciousness, more than any lack of ability or knowledge, that makes drafting problematic.

The ability of a group of students to draft is often indicative of their past exposure to writing as a thinking tool. Children should be writing all day long, many times each day, often for just a few minutes here and there. It is the regularity of these “quick write” sessions (a note in a reading log, a journal entry, a note to the teacher, a “to do” list, a sign, a response, a question, a memory, a reminder, a description, etc.) that helps kids loosen up. The best way to improve drafting is to make sure your kids are engaged in casual writing throughout the day.

Finally, another thing we can do is to watch our use of traditional terminology like “rough draft” or “first draft” or “final draft” which can make the process of drafting seem much more formal than it really is, and hence more intimidating. In fact, if I had my way, I’d probably just abandon the term “drafting” altogether in favor of a less specific term: “writing.” But it is a useful term as long as we are careful not to attach to it any extra formality, or the sense that children often get that somehow drafting is a performance that has to be executed in a certain way and to a certain arbitrary standard.
Sharing
The Writing Process
Stage Three

What is Sharing? Sharing means just what it says: sharing your work with other people and getting some feedback about how you’re doing. Most writers in a writer’s workshop get response from other writers when they share their work in front of the whole group. Your piece doesn’t have to be finished for you to share it. In fact, it’s probably better for you to share it several times long before it’s done, so you have a chance to make changes based on the comments you receive. One thing that helps is to focus your audience on something in particular that you would like them to respond to. Try this: “My piece is called… I’d like you to listen for…, and tell me what you think about it.”

What Makes This Stage Hard? There are two troublesome things about the sharing stage: getting responses and giving them. Standing up in front of the group and sharing your writing takes guts. You’re afraid people will laugh at you or that they won’t like your writing. Maybe you don’t read very well. Or maybe you just don’t like what you’ve written. The only way to conquer your fears is get up there in front of everyone and face them. Each time you do it, you’ll begin to feel more comfortable. After a while, sharing will be fun and you’ll want to do it all the time. On the other hand, commenting on someone else’s writing can also be difficult. Telling another writer that you like or hate their piece, while possibly an honest reaction, really isn’t very helpful. The writer needs to know why you feel the way you do and what specific parts of the writing make you feel that way. It’s important to be both honest and respectful of other writer’s feelings. And this is a balancing act that takes time to perfect and a great deal of maturity. One tip for making insightful and appropriate comments is to rely on the language of the Six Traits criteria. Phrasing your reactions in these terms virtually guarantees that any comments you make will always be positive and constructive.

What Should I Do? Start by sharing your work with other people. If you don’t feel comfortable sharing in front of the group, share with a friend or a parent or your teacher. Just share. And see what happens. Most writers are pleasantly surprised by how much fun it is to present their work to others. When it comes to responding to others, try this: as you listen to the writing being read make a mental note of what you like and what you don’t. Then, before you make a comment, jot down a note or two. Try to answer these two ques-

1 Use Your Criteria
2 Get Other Opinions
3 Think it Over

Hmm…

A MESSAGE FROM MR. PEHA
“Writing is a lonely business. You think up something to write about alone. You make notes: alone. You draft: alone. But in the end, the experience you’ve created on the page begs to be shared with others. So why not share your work along the way? Ask your teacher, your parents, your friends, your enemies—ask anyone to read your work and tell you what they think. You don’t have to take their advice, but it can’t hurt to consider it. And do the same for other writers when you can.”

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Get Some Feedback

You’ve cranked out a draft, now what? Are you finished? Your piece probably doesn’t look very finished. It probably looks a bit like Sonja’s—a little messy with a few crossouts here and there, a few false starts perhaps, a few tentative ramblings, maybe even some doodling in the margins. So where do you go from here? How do you figure out what to do next? How can you determine which path to take to make your piece the very best it can be?

When you don’t know which way to go, it’s always a good idea to ask for directions. And the first person to ask is yourself. Start by reading what you’ve written from beginning to end without stopping, and then ask yourself… Hmmm… What should you ask yourself?

This is where the Six Traits criteria come in handy. Looking at the criteria is a little like reading the answers to a test before you take it. These are the things your writing needs to be effective. Do you have them?

Teaching Tips

Response can take many forms. I have featured in this lesson the idea of using the Six Traits criteria as a means self-assessment and revision planning, but that’s hardly the only source of inspiration writers should seek.

Your regular daily sharing is the first place writers will get feedback. Don’t underestimate the power of peer response. We are all influenced more by our peers than our superiors, and young writers are no exception. If you want your students to start solving certain problems, use your sharing time for this purpose. Move the discussion gently toward your areas of concern, and then back off and let the kids take it from there.

Beyond large group sharing, you have your mini-conferences, peer conferences, conferences with other adults, and especially with parents. Ask parents to respond formally in writing to their children’s work. Show them the criteria for Six Traits, and then ask them to work that vocabulary into their responses whenever appropriate.

But getting feedback is only part of the deal. It’s what a writer does with it that counts. Yes, that’s revising, but the seeds of successful revision are sewn during the responding stage—and that’s why it needs to be a formal stage of the process. I often ask kids to write down the more important responses they get. You can use a two-column format so kids can recognize what’s working and what still needs work. Then, as they revise, encourage them to go back to this list from time to time. I like to call it a “revision plan,” and though that’s rather formal, you may from time to time want to require the creation of such a plan before students move ahead.

Using the Six Traits criteria, in a formal way as I have demonstrated in this lesson, is probably the best way to introduce students to independent self-assessment. I have kids fill out a lot of these. In fact, I have them look at the criteria each time they think they are finished. I don’t make them address every issue, just the one’s they think are important. But I have noticed that the mere repetition of this ritual has the effect of making students much more aware of their own writing. As Donald Graves has pointed out, we spend a lot of time teaching kids to read the writing of others, but virtually no time teaching them to read their own. That’s what response is all about. It’s like getting different “reads” on your own material so you can come to read it better yourself. The Six Traits criteria act like a guide. They don’t tell the writer what to think, they tell the writer how to think about the writing they are reading.
Revising
The Writing Process
Stage Four

A MESSAGE FROM MR. PEHA

“Finally, after writing professionally for almost 10 years, I am coming to understand the value of revision. I used to hate it. I would crank out a magazine article or a book chapter in a day or two and never look back. But now, when I do look back, I see things I could have improved had I taken the time to consider my writing from my reader’s point of view. I now spend weeks or even months on single pieces, revising my writing again and again—and because of this I feel I am finally learning to write well.”

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What is Revising? The word “revision” literally means “to see again.” This is what revising is all about. Having received comments about your piece during the Responding stage, you can better see your writing now from the reader’s point of view. That’s the key. Up to this point, you’ve probably been more concerned about yourself—what you wanted to say, how you felt about it, things you want to include. But now it’s time to shift your thinking just a bit and really start considering your audience. It’s time to start asking yourself, “How can I say what I want to say in a way that will make my readers understand how I feel and maybe make them feel that way, too?”

What Makes Revising Hard? Revising is hard because it involves four distinctly different things you often have to do all at the same time: [1] Adding things; [2] Moving things; [3] Cutting things; and [4] Leaving things alone. You may read over a sentence, decide to add a few words here and there, realize that you need to move things around, then cut some words that don’t belong, and all the while you’re thinking about what you can leave alone just the way it was. And you have to do all this as both writer and reader. As a writer, you have to make the changes you think your readers will appreciate, but then you have to switch over to the other side and try to experience those changes as your readers will. This is an impossible task. You can’t get it right, you can only come close. This is why writers revise their work so much. Revision isn’t something you do just once. Some writers revise parts of their work 5, 10, 15 times or more; they revise until they think they’ve gotten it just right.

What Should I Do? Hmm… that’s a very good question. There’s no one right answer because there’s no one right way to revise. The important thing to recognize is how important revising is. It is the most important stage in the Writing Process. It is where you should be spending most of your time because it will help you more than anything else to improve. Revising is also the most difficult stage in the Writing Process, so be patient with yourself. Don’t expect to succeed right away. Nothing will test your patience and courage as a writer more than facing up to the task of revising your own writing, but there really is no other part of writing that is more rewarding.

1 Plan Your Changes
2 Make Your Changes
3 Produce a New Revision
4 Repeat Until It’s Just Right

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Plan Your Revisions

 Armed with ample information about how to improve your piece, you’re ready to revise. There are many different ways to revise your writing. Every writer has a different approach. Take a look at how Sonja did it. After getting some feedback on her draft, she decided to add a few things. She marked the places where she wanted to add new material by putting a number in the margin to the left of the line where the new information would go. Then, on a separate sheet of paper, she wrote out the sentences she wanted to add, and numbered them accordingly.

Revision is the hardest part of writing, but that is just as it should be because revision is also the most important part. Revision is where writers improve their writing, so if your students don’t spend significant time revising, it is unlikely they will make significant improvement.

Revision is tough because it is really two tasks in one. The first task is the one we usually think about, it’s the aesthetic task: what needs revising, what words need to be added, moved, or cut to make the piece better. The second task is the mechanical task: given the changes that need to be made, how does a writer actually enter those changes into the piece? I’ll start with aesthetic issues first, since without those there wouldn’t be any mechanics to worry about.

Writers have four choices when revising: [1] add something new; [2] move something around; [3] cut something out; and [4] leave something alone. I throw the fourth one in because I think it’s important to help kids realize that deciding not to revise something is a significant act fraught with implications that needs to be considered just as carefully as anything else. Now, here’s the tough part: the typical type of revision a writer does involves all four of these activities simultaneously. You see something you want to change, you cut some of it out, you leave some of it behind, you add something new, and then you push things around to make it all fit—tough work for an 8-year old. So what do you do?

Start with adding. That’s the easiest. Show kids how to add simple things (typically details) that will improve their piece. Introduce them to simple additions of an entire sentence, paragraph, or section. Treat these “revisions” essentially as mini-drafts to be inserted into an existing piece.

Next, think about moving. Are things in the best order? What if this part came first and that part next? Moving is easy. There’s really no writing involved. It’s more an exercise in reading, and in thinking about how a piece will be read and enjoyed by its audience.

Then cut. Tread lightly on this activity at first. Cutting is hard. Having struggled to squeeze several sentences out of their pencils and onto the page, few writers of any age or level of experience, relish the thought of throwing any of it away. The most important thing to remember is that all changes should be motivated by the needs of the audience and the purpose of the piece. Without audience or purpose, revision has little meaning.
Write Out Your Revisions

After making a few revisions, write them out and read everything over again so you can see how your changes fit in with what you already had. Sometimes, ideas that look good on a separate page or scrawled into the margins and in between the lines, don’t sound so good in the context of the entire piece.

The key here is patience. The first time you make changes may not be the last. In fact, most writers find themselves revising constantly. Why? Because revision is the most important thing a writer can do. Time spent in revision turns bad writing into good writing, and good writing into great writing.

How many times should you revise a piece of writing? As many as you want to. You can keep making changes forever (or until your teacher tells you to turn it in, whichever comes first). Every time you finish a revision, get some feedback. Look at your Six Traits criteria again, talk to your friends, teachers, and parents. You don’t have to take the advice your audience gives you, but it never hurts to listen to it.

You can see that Sonja made the revisions she had planned on. She added the new sentences she had written, and copied the whole piece out again. But wait a minute. Her piece looks like it’s just about as long as it was before. How could she have added so much new material—about 10 or 12 lines—and not made her piece any longer? She must have taken something out? She must have decided, after reading it over one more time, that some part didn’t fit ... had more revising to do. Can you tell what she took out? Why do you think she decided to make this particular revision?

Teaching Tips

Now, let’s look at the mechanical issues. Don’t take this lightly. It’s actually just as hard or harder for young writers to manage the mechanics of revision as it is to decide what and how to revise.

Managing additions. Many of the little things writers need to add can just be written in the blank lines students leave between each line when they draft. But wait a minute. Skipping every other line is not something all of us do. In fact, most kids don’t do it unless they are explicitly told to do so. Here’s how I handle it. I don’t tell kids to skip lines when they write. I wait until they need to revise and then I make them aware of how much easier it would be if they had some space to work with. With all aspects of instruction, it’s the rationale that’s most important, so I think kids should come to the rationale in a natural way, rather than having it imposed from outside. Yes, it would be great if all of us skipped a line when we drafted, but very few of us do. It simply isn’t natural. So if we want kids to learn how to do it, we need to make sure they understand why first.

For larger additions, have the kids mark where they think they want them to go with a number or a symbol, and then just write the new material on a separate piece of paper. There’s no best way to do this, and ultimately each kid will have to come up with their own process. So make it fun. Ask the kids to invent ways of doing it. Try them out as a class and see which ones work best. And don’t forget: model everything!

Managing moves. Moving text without a computer is hard work. Once again, anything that helps is just fine. I’ve had kids cut their papers into pieces and reassemble them when necessary. As with adding, encourage kids to develop their own approaches and systems. Share ideas with the class. Model.

Managing cuts. Fortunately, the mechanics of cutting is as easy as the aesthetics of cutting is hard. After all, how many kids do you have who can’t slash their pencil through a line of text? Here’s a bit of caution, however: discourage kids from erasing text or blacking it out so thoroughly that it cannot be read or—and this is the important part—retrieved when the author wants it back later. A light, thin horizontal line through the vertical center of a word works just fine.

The way to get kids doing these things is to model them in your own writing during mini-lessons. Have at least one mini-lesson early in the year on the mechanical operations associated with each type of revision. Then, periodically, ask kids to explain the techniques they use when revising.
Make a Clean Copy

If you're like me, your handwriting probably isn't as neat as it could be. OK, I'll admit it: my handwriting is awful. So, you're probably not like me. You're probably a lot neater. Even so, revising can be a very messy business. Before you head off to the editing stage, you may want to make a clean copy that includes all the revisions you have made.

Do you have to use a computer for this? Not at all. Computers can be helpful, especially at this stage of the writing process, but they are not necessary. The goal here is just to get a nice clean copy of your work, so you can begin to make the tiny corrections most writers need to make before they publish their work. And most writers—even writers with abominable handwriting like me—can copy out their own work quickly and cleanly without much effort.

And that's the key: effort. Writing is hard enough as it is, you certainly don't want to make it any harder on yourself. If you haven't learned to type—and I mean "touch type" with hands on the home row (no peaking) at least 15-20 words per minute—don't mess with a computer. You'll take much too much time, and you'll probably create many typing errors that will only make editing harder.

The Frog Leap

This is a true story about my babyhood. It was the year 1987 and I was ten months old. I was in my old house the one I was born in. I was on my changing table. My Mom and Dad were with me. They were standing right next to the changing table. That's the weird part. I was being cute and wagging my little cute bottom. My Mom and Dad were admiring how cute I was and smiling. Then I did a sudden frog leap which really scared my parents. I bounced like a ball onto the heater which had skinny little ribs. The heater was in between the changing table and my dresser. Luckily the heater was not on but I did get hurt. When I was finished bouncing I just sat there covered in bruises. My Mom and Dad helped me up and all we did was the usual hugging. I was happy to be alive.

Cautions about computer use aside, you can see that Sonja has typed up her piece. Sonja is now in the 4th grade and has had some good typing lessons. She also has a computer at home and has been putting in lots of practice. She probably could have written it out faster by hand, but she's been working at the computer for several months now and is fairly comfortable with it.
What is Editing? Editing means many things to many people. But here it means only one thing: taking care of any problems you have with writing conventions like spelling, punctuation, grammar, and usage. You can make minor changes to the content of your piece—a word here, a phrase there—but if you want to make bigger changes, go back to the Revising stage.

What Makes Editing Hard? Editing is hard because there a lot of things you need to know in order to do it well—more things than you can learn in any one year of school. To edit for spelling you have to know many words and be able to use a dictionary. To edit for punctuation you have to understand how to use every type of punctuation your writing needs.

What Should I Do? Edit the things you know how to edit. Then, ask someone else to help you with the rest. Watch what they do so you can do it on your own next time. Ask questions if you don’t understand something. That’s the only way to learn.

A MESSAGE FROM MR. PEAHA
“I don’t like editing one bit. It is tedious, it is boring, and worst of all I’m not very good at it. But I do it because I want people to know that I care enough about what I write to be as sure as I can be that it is correct. I know that if I don’t spell correctly or use proper punctuation, or write legibly, or use words in ways that my readers understand, my writing may not be very effective. Editing is hard. I am sure that I will never master it completely. But over time, and with much effort, I am getting better at it.”

Cool!
don’t like editing. I don’t like it one bit. It is boring, tedious, and worst of all it’s hard. There are a lot of things you have to know, and sometimes there’s not even an easy way of finding them out. But we all have to do it. If we don’t spell correctly, or use proper punctuation, write legibly, or use words in ways that our readers understand and rely on, no one will be able to read our writing. So, take editing seriously, and do your best.

That having been said, it’s important to mention that we don’t “formally” edit everything we write. When we write a note for someone or give someone directions, we don’t take our “work” all the way through the writing process. But, if we’re concerned about being understood (who isn’t concerned about this?), we’ll probably take the time to read things over quickly just to make sure everything makes sense. However, when we’re producing longer, more complicated, more formal pieces of writing, editing is very important, and it’s something we need to take seriously.

Edit your own writing only for the things you know how to edit. When it comes to things you don’t understand, start by asking someone else to help you. Then, study the corrections they make to your work ... Sonja’s editing is a good example of this strategy. Sonja feels that she can edit for spelling, and for capitals and periods, and she’s going to try editing for commas, too, even though she’s not completely sure yet how to do that. So, she circles the words she’s unsure of and then checks their spellings in a dictionary. All her periods and capitals seem right to her, but she does put in a comma here and there. Then, she asks me to look things over.

Parents, society at large, and even many teachers are extremely nervous about children’s mastery of writing conventions. The best way to teach conventions is in the context of student writing as that writing goes through the editing stage en route to publishing. So consider this interesting implication: if you don’t take your kids through editing and on to publishing (many times a year), they won’t master conventions.

The key to helping kids with conventions does not lie in teaching them a bunch of rules and then hoping they can apply those rules in their work. It lies in teaching them a process of producing conventionally correct writing and then taking them through that process over and over and over again. That process is one of encouraging students to identify errors, and to develop a wide range of appropriate strategies for handling them.

We emphasize correctness so much in our society that nobody wants to even consider the fact that they might have made a mistake. So, it’s up to us to change that. We have to make children aware of the simple reality that all writers make mistakes. No writer writes error free all the time. So, clearly, teaching conventions is not about teaching children to write correctly, it’s about teaching them to identify problems when they arise and to correct those problems using a variety of different techniques and resources. It’s more important to be able to recognize a problem than it is to know how to fix it.

We’re so hung up in this country on factual knowledge as an end in itself that we forget this absolutely vital principle. So, your first goal should be to get kids to recognize problems and point them out. But how can they do that? How can they recognize misspellings if they don’t know how to spell? How can they put in periods and capitals if they don’t know what a complete sentence is? Easy. They can ask. Have them circle all the things they’re not sure of. Start with spelling first. Then move on to external punctuation (periods, capitals, question marks). Then look at internal punctuation (commas, etc.). And finally, consider paragraphing and other global issues.

Aren’t you ever unsure of yourself? Haven’t you ever written a word down and then thought it didn’t look right? Haven’t you ever read over a sentence and gotten a funny feeling about it? What do you do? Think about it and then share your strategies with your kids. Shouldn’t all the options available to competent adult writers be available to struggling children as well? Try not to make things harder for your kids than they are for yourself.
Make Corrections; Have Someone Proofread

Once you’ve figured out what needs to be fixed you’ve got to do it. This is one task where a computer can be helpful. If you’re not working on a computer, you may have to recopy your piece in order to fix the problems you have discovered. But even if you’re working by hand, you can still come up with efficient ways to get your writing edited.

But there’s a funny thing about editing that most people don’t like to mention to students. Your teachers will tell you (and I will, too) that you should learn how to edit your own writing. After all, most of the time there isn’t going to be anyone else around to do it. But the truth is, authors make the worst editors of their own work. That’s why professional writers have other people to do a lot of their editing for them. You see, editing is all about fixing problems so people can understand what you write. But you already understand what you’ve written—you’re not likely to have problems reading it—so you’re not as likely come across problems that need to be fixed.

Well, if the best professional writers in the world have editors, why shouldn’t you get one or two? As soon as you’ve done as much editing as you can, ask someone else to proofread your work to see if they can find any problems that need correcting. You can ask other writers in your class, your teacher, or other adults in the room, or even your parents. Just ask them to please proofread your piece for correct conventions.

Teaching Tips

“When should I correct a student’s writing?”

Since correction is the traditional foundation of our educational system, it’s only natural that this question comes up as much as it does. Many people feel that if students are not corrected, they will not learn. On the other hand, most adults are aware of the dangers of constant correction. To sort this out, it is important to remember that the source of our quandary is an emotional reaction—on the part of well-meaning adults who care deeply about kids—and not a logical one. One has only to consider how children learn to walk and to talk to realize that correction is not a requisite for mastering complex skills (modeling, criteria, scaffolding, and encouragement are the keys). Best then to separate past problems from current practice and break the bad habits we have acquired.

“So when should I correct a student’s writing?” Whenever a student asks you for appropriate help in an appropriate way. What’s appropriate? Here are some helpful guidelines.

Help kids when:

- they have already tried to fix something but can’t.
- they have not yet been introduced to something or have obviously forgotten it.
- something relatively incidental is keeping them from making more important progress in another area.

Whenever possible:

- ask the child what type of error they would like you to look for, and only correct that type of error.
- correct the work in the child’s presence.
- offer rationale for your corrections.
- emphasize the connection between correction and communication—that you are making corrections to make the child’s writing easier to read.

Certain traditional practices have limited value and are probably not a good use of your time:

- DO NOT take papers home to correct them.
- DO NOT make marks on final published pieces. Use post-it notes or a coversheet.
- DO NOT correct kids publicly in front of the class.
- DO NOT set up a grading scheme for any aspect of your teaching that tracks the number of errors students make (or the number of items they get right) and equates that number with achievement.

Of course, some people might have suggestions that you don’t agree with. As with any other type of advice, you are free to accept or to ignore it. You alone, as the author of the piece, bare the ultimate responsibility for its content and its correctness.
A MESSAGE FROM MR. Peha

“Publishing is cool. There's so much you can do to make your piece inviting to a reader. I have learned about publishing from looking closely at the published writing I enjoy. Look at your favorite books. Don't just read them, look at them. Look at newspapers, magazines, TV commercials, the Internet—every kind of print. And don't worry too much about whether you're using a computer or not. You don't need a computer to make things look cool. In fact, most times, things done by hand look better.”

Steve Peha

What is Publishing? The word “publish” might remind you of another word you know. That word is “public” because that's what publishing is all about: preparing a piece of writing so that it can be read, understood, and enjoyed by the public. Who's the public? Well, technically, it's anybody. But practically, it's the people in your class, your teacher, and anybody else you decide to show your writing to. Of course, if you send off a piece to a newspaper or magazine, things are a little different. But the main idea is that the Publishing stage is your chance to prepare your writing in a way that will best reach your audience.

Do I Have to Publish My Piece? Absolutely not. No writer ever has to publish something they don't want to. However, there are many times that people ask us to write things, and when they do, unless we feel that they are asking us to do something that is wrong or unfair, we need to do our best to honor their request. Publishing can be a very satisfying part of writing. It's fun to see your work all dressed up in a cool book with a snazzy cover. But sometimes you don't feel like publishing a certain piece, and that's just fine.

What Should I Do? Just about anything goes as long as it helps bring your writing to more people. Obviously, you wouldn't want to write so poorly that people couldn't read it, or print your piece out of a computer in some weird kind of type. On the other hand, artwork, a nice cover, or an introduction that explains who you are, what your piece is about, or why you wrote it, can be very nice. Look at some published books that you like and take ideas from those. Just remember, the point of publishing is to make your writing as readable and as attractive to your audience as possible.
Publish Your Work!

Y
ou’ve worked like a dog to get your piece drafted, revised, and edited. Now it’s time to make it look good. During the publishing stage, you can do whatever you want to make your writing appealing to the eye. For example, Sonja wanted to draw some pictures, and she wanted to format her writing in a special font that looks like handwriting. Go ahead, try a few wild ideas, but remember that whatever you do, people have to be able to read and understand it when you’re done.

Publishing Tips

When I first began teaching writing, I gave publishing short shrift. All the learning was over, I thought; publishing is just playtime. But I was wrong. While publishing is probably not as important as revising, it is crucial to realize that, when taught effectively, it can drive the entire writing process.

The reason for this is so simple that I just didn’t stop to think about it: the publishing stage focuses the writer’s attention directly on purpose and audience. After all, publishing presupposes that the writer’s work will be made available to some audience for some purpose. And for some students, this may be the first time in their lives that they’ve ever thought about their writing in this context.

To guide students in their publishing efforts, ask them to think about these questions:

- Who are you publishing this piece for? Who would you like to have read this piece?
- Why are you publishing this piece for that audience? What would you like this group of people to know?
- What form should your writing take to best reach your audience and help them understand your purpose?

Of course, you’d like your students to know the answers to these questions by the time they finish pre-writing. But because so few students have been exposed to the idea of writing with a specific purpose and for a specific audience, they may only start to get the hang of it by publishing their work.

Here are some solid ideas you can use to develop a repertoire of publishing activities:

- Formally “install” published pieces in the classroom “library” and make them available for kids to read during reading time.
- Share published writing regularly in a formal way.
- Encourage students to add artwork and to bind their books as well.
- Encourage students to read the published works of other authors in the class and to make constructive comments about the pieces they read.
- Publish class anthologies.
- Help students submit their work to magazines and to the local newspapers.
- Make students aware of Internet publishing opportunities.
This is a true story about my babyhood. It was the year 1987 and I was ten months old. I was in my old house, the one I was born in. I was on my changing table. My Mom and Dad were with me, they were standing right next to the changing table. That's the weird part. I was being cute and wagging my little cute bottom. My parents were admiring how cute I was and smiling. Then I did a sudden frog leap which really scared my parents! I bounced like a ball onto the heater which had skinny little ribs. The heater was in between the changing table and my dresser. Luckily the heater was not on but I did get hurt. When I was finished bouncing I just sat there covered in bruises. My Mom and Dad and I stared at each other and then we all screamed. My Mom picked me up and we all went over to the couch for a Sonja sandwich hug.

The End
What is Assessing? The word “assess” comes from the Latin word “assidere” meaning “to sit beside.” (This does not have anything to do with who sits next to you in class.) The idea here is to pull up a chair right alongside yourself and peak over your own shoulder to see what you’ve done. Here’s how it works: after you’ve published a piece and let it sit for a while, take it out again and re-read it. Then, jot down a few thoughts about what you did. Are there parts you like more than others? Did you learn something new? What does this piece say about you as a writer? Use the Six Traits criteria to help you analyze your work more closely. Take a look at comments you might have gotten from your teacher or other writers in your class.

What Makes Assessing Hard? Have your teachers been asking you to write down a lot of things about the work you’ve been doing? Are they always wanting you to tell them what you did and why you did it? Do you ever get tired of it? I think one of the things that makes assessment hard is that we have to do it all the time. Just when we think we’re all done, there’s this other part we have to deal with. The reason your teachers ask you to assess your own work so often is because it’s really important. Assessing your own work helps you learn about how you learn so you can repeat those things that work best for you the next time you have something to do. Learning how to learn is more important than any single skill or piece of information you can acquire because once you learn how to learn, you can learn anything you want.

Do You Really Have to Do This? You don’t really have to do anything. But if you don’t do anything you won’t learn anything. Assessing is very important. Without it, we would have no easy way of charting our own progress, or of determining what we needed to learn next. I’ll admit, as a teacher, that part of why we ask you to do this is to help us. The more we learn about what you learn, the better we can help you learn more. But you’ll get a lot of out this, too. After you’ve done it two or three times, you’ll start to see some very interesting patterns. You’ll start to notice things you usually do well, and things you probably haven’t mastered yet. You’ll develop a better sense of yourself as a writer, and that will help you develop a better sense for writing.
Reflect on Your Accomplishment

Though you were finished, didn’t you? Not quite. Actually, in some ways, this last stage might be the most important one of all. You see, everybody wants to be a better writer. (Yes, even you!) And probably the best way to get better is to find out what you’re doing well and what you need to do better. It’s especially important to know what you’re good at already because it’s always easier to learn through your strengths than to concentrate on your weaknesses.

There are many ways to assess your performance. Every source you used during the responding stage is a good source for feedback now. Here’s one approach using the Six Traits:

Use the Six Traits to find out what works for you and what doesn’t.

You can see that Sonja feels pretty good about this piece; there are only a few areas where she thinks she could have done better. For her next piece, she may want to make some specific improvements like working on her conventions, for example. She will also want to make sure she continues to work on her strengths of writing true stories about her life that have moments of excitement in them.

Teaching Tips

Where does the learning happen? More and more, as I find myself getting caught up in the theory and implementation of writing instruction, that’s the question I focus on. Clearly, there are opportunities for growth at any stage of the writing process, but are there key points where we can help kids have those wonderful “Aha!” experiences, when real learning is more likely to happen? I think there are.

It’s logical to think that kids are “getting it” when we give a lesson, but most of them aren’t, and the ones who seem like they are are usually just aping back those learned behaviors that we’ve come to mistakenly interpret as understanding and intelligence.

It’s also logical to think that the learning is taking place when the kids are actually writing. And to a great extent this is true; certainly there is no real learning without it. But I think it’s fair to wonder just how much learning could be taking place when so much of a student’s mental bandwidth is being used to solve the problems of the moment.

Since starting to use Six Traits, I have come to believe that the learning happens primarily in two places: during the responding stage and during assessing stage. And the mechanism that makes everything go is the Six Traits criteria—both the written criteria students use for self-assessment, and the language of the criteria that other students will use to comment on an author’s work.

True learning is often the result of conscious reflection. And reflecting on the Six Traits criteria—assessing a piece of writing in light of that standard—is a powerful reflective experience that I believe has a profoundly positive effect.

Without this kind of formal reflection, key insights may be lost. This is not to say that they won’t resurface, but catching them right here, when the piece is finished and the mind is full of the process that has just occurred, may allow students to take more of their achievements with them when they move on to tackle their next piece.

This is also the best time for you as a teacher to understand how your students are doing. Yes, you can intuit things from the work itself—the Six Traits criteria and Direct Writing Assessment are excellent tools. But an assessment merely indicates what a child can do at present; a formal written reflection can tell you how likely a child is to improve in the future. It can also help to clarify certain things for you with regard to areas of your assessment that may not be conclusive.
## Ideas

**Interesting Things to Say**

- What’s your favorite part of this paper? Why?
  - I did a sudden frog leap. Because it sounded so active.

- What part could you tell the reader more about so they would understand it better?
  - Not any part.

## Organization

**The Way it Goes Together**

- What’s the best thing about the way your paper is organized? Why?
  - It goes from how old I was to what I was doing and it has a happy ending. It doesn’t give away the fun part till the middle.

- How could you improve the organization of your paper?

## Voice

**Sounds Like You Talking**

- What part of this paper sounds most like you? Why?
  - The frog leap.

- How could you make other parts sound like that?

## Word Choice

**The Best Words For Your Ideas**

- What are your favorite words in this paper? Why?
  - Cute, sudden and frog leap. Because they sound like ME!

- Are there any words you would like to change to make the paper more interesting? Which ones?

## Sentence Fluency

**The Way it Sounds When You Read it Out Loud**

- What are your favorite sentences in this paper? Why?
  - This is a true story about my babyhood.

- Are there any sentences you would like to change to make them sound better? Which ones?

## Conventions

**Spelling, Punctuation, Grammar, Capitals, Etc.**

- Do you think you did a good job with spelling, grammar, punctuation, capitals, and other conventions? Why?
  - Yes.

- Are there any parts of your paper that you think someone might have trouble reading? Which parts?
Seek a Wider Audience

Another cool thing to do after you’ve published a piece of writing is to send it off to another publisher. Sonja decided to send her piece to a magazine called Stone Soup. But to do that, she had to write a submission letter to the editor telling her why she thought her piece would be of interest to the readers of her magazine. She wrote a rough draft of the letter first and then typed it up.

November 25, 1996
Stone Soup
Children's Art Foundation
P.O. Box 83
Santa Cruz, CA 95083

Dear Editor,

I like my story because it sounds like me. I’m always hyper. I get really silly. I love to read and write. I think other people should read my story because it is not some fiddle-faddle fiction it is true! I organized my paper from what year it was and where I was. It’s like a hill. It gets more exciting in the middle with a happy ending. It’s not only talking to kids it is also talking to adults.

Sincerely,
Sonja

Teaching Tips

If it is through publishing that children begin to realize the importance of their audience, why is this activity here? Because I believe there is a very important kind of assessment going on in a writer’s mind when they seek a type of outlet for their work outside of the usual venues of the classroom and school communities. When writer’s begin to consider widening their audience, they are forced to engage in a basic but powerful form of self-assessment. They have to ask themselves, “Will the people I am submitting my work to understand and enjoy it?”

To this end, I would encourage every writer, young or old, to make a case for their effort, to root strongly its strengths, to highlight its highlights, to point out for anyone who might not have noticed just how much there is in the piece that might be worthy of note. To do this effectively, a writer needs an analytic vocabulary, and the only place a writer can get such a vocabulary is from the criteria he or she has internalized that, in their opinion, define high quality work.

What intrigues me about this particular activity is its authenticity. Yes, the narrative reflection based on specific prompts drawn from the Six Traits is valuable and interesting, but this is real. In a sense it is true literature response, but in this case reader and writer are one and the same.

Something like this also represents a quick turnaround publishing opportunity which, among other things, will afford students yet another chance to develop their knowledge of writing conventions. The value of such incidental activities should not be doubted. Short, authentic publishing opportunities like this are critical to a young writer’s development. In many classrooms across the country, students turn out 20 or 30 such published pieces per year.

Beyond writing letters, students can write pieces that approximate the foreword one might find in a book by a professional writer. These pieces serve to introduce and interpret the writing for the reader. They also serve to clarify the author’s intention and, like the work done during revision, they encourage children to re-read their own work thereby gaining additional insight.

It’s interesting to note exactly what young writers are willing to say about themselves and their own work. You may notice, for example, that a student will write one thing for readers who know her, and quite another for readers who don’t. This is a wonderful window into the development of the writer’s voice, something that can be difficult at times to pin down.
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Sincerely,

Sonja
Compare With Your Previous Piece

Another great way to learn about your own writing is to compare your current work with work you did before. The piece called “grown up” was the last piece Sonja wrote before “The Frog Leap.” When she wrote “grown up” she didn’t know how to use Six Traits or the Writing Process. What differences do you notice in the two pieces? Do you think Sonja’s writing has improved?

The End

Compare current work with old work is the best way to see how far you’ve come.

Teaching Tips

When we were in school, each writing assignment was a world unto itself. And if you were like me (and I suspect most other kids, too) that world came to an abrupt end when it was handed back covered with red ink and a grade you didn’t understand, stuffed in a folder, taken home, and shortly thereafter thrown away. Back then a piece of writing was just an assignment, and writing students were just kids who couldn’t spell well, print legibly, or write grammatically.

But things are a little different today as most of us now realize that when we encourage children to take a more formal attitude toward their accomplishments, by giving them powerful tools to do so, we are capitalizing on valuable learning opportunities. To this end, I think it is helpful—to both teacher and student—to think of the child as a writer (not a student of writing) and the work that writer does as somehow comprising a career. After all, we now ask children to compose real pieces for real people and real purposes, why not think of them as real writers?

Portfolios are probably the most formal hint that this shift has taken place. But most teachers only do portfolios once or twice a year. I would like to see students reflecting on their progress more often and in a less time consuming way.

Can young children develop a sense of their own development? I think they can. In fact, whenever I’ve asked kids to reflect in writing on the previous year in their development, they can almost always point to significant changes in their abilities and attitudes. And even if their assessments aren’t strictly accurate I think they act almost like a self-fulfilling prophecy. That is to say that I believe many children, simply by articulating specific improvements in their writing, may in fact be helping to psych themselves up, to see into their work and its potential in as hopeful a way as possible.

This is one of those activities I truly enjoy because even when it doesn’t work it does. Even if students can’t articulate any improvements, or the differences they notice are somewhat superficial, they are still learning a process that will serve them well when they mature enough to take advantage of it.

By encouraging children to compare current work with past work, we invite them to regard all of their efforts as one big piece of writing, an unbroken chain of expression stretching back to kindergarten and perhaps even before. This can be a very profound experience for a child, something that can give rise to that special feeling we want all children to have, that feeling that says: “Hey, I’m a writer.”
Review Any Comments You Receive

Just as you did during the responding stage, you may get written comments now. For example, if you share your writing with the class or publish it for the class library, some of your readers may want to tell you things about it. In addition, your teacher may want to give you some detailed feedback using the Six Traits criteria to help you understand what you did well and what you might think about improving the next time you work on another piece.

Teaching Tips

All writers, no matter how small, want to know what others think of their work. No writer’s assessment of her own achievement would be complete if the assessment of others weren’t factored in to some degree.

All too often I think we’re inclined to soft-pedal this issue of response. It’s funny really. In our reading programs we ask our children to give us thick, meaty responses to the books they read. But then we turn around as their teachers and serve up marshmallow fluff: “I really enjoyed your paper. You have a way with words. A wonderful effort! You are a very talented writer. I can’t wait to read your next piece.”

Of course, as caring adults ever mindful of the fragile egos in our charge, we pull our punches so as not to hurt their feelings. But I think, sometimes, the children are aware of our duplicity, and even if they aren’t, they get very tired of hearing what talented little people they are (I certainly did), especially when they know they are not always so talented.

The crux of the problem is that, traditionally, we have relied upon a very personal vocabulary to describe a student’s work. Because we had no words to actually talk about the writing, we talked about the writer instead. And the consequences were, in many cases, quite devastating as many young people began to equate ideas like “I’m not a good speller,” with “I’m not a good writer,” with “I’m not a good person.”

But the analytic vocabulary of Six Traits gives us better leverage. It allows us to comment in an in-depth fashion on the writing itself in a way that children who have been introduced to the criteria can understand and deal with effectively. When students comment to each other, we are often afraid that they won’t adequately consider their classmates feelings. To a certain extent this is true. Consideration for others takes many years to develop. (So why not practice it regularly?) To mitigate this potential problem I tell students they should use the vocabulary of the traits and any related vocabulary we have developed in class when speaking to students about their work. When a student feels like saying, “That was stupid,” I direct them to their Six Traits criteria and ask them if they can find this comment anywhere on the sheet. I don’t want to restrict discussion, I just want to encourage a healthy exchange.
Student: Sonja Butler    Paper: The Frog Leap    Date: 12/3/96

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Ideas</td>
<td>The heart of the message, the content of the piece, the main theme and supporting details.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>What a great thing to write about! It reminds me of when I was a little baby and I swallowed a safety pin. My parents were scared, too. I like the part where you said: “I bounced like a ball onto the heater which had skinny little ribs.” That’s a great detail. I could really see it happening. I would have enjoyed more details like that.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/4</td>
<td>Organization</td>
<td>The internal structure, the thread of central meaning, the logical pattern of ideas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Pretty well organized. I like the order you told things in. Each idea lead to the next and I never felt lost. I liked the ending, too. I’m glad you were all right. I was worried there for a minute. If you had included more details then splitting the story up into paragraphs would have made it even better.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Voice</td>
<td>The heart and soul, the magic, the wit; the writer’s unique personal expression emerging through words.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>This sounds just like you, full of energy and enthusiasm. I especially liked it when you wrote “I was being cute and wagging my little cute bottom.” And I like the phrase “a Sonja sandwich hug.” That’s a great expression. When you put in details like this it helps your audience feel what you felt.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/4</td>
<td>Word Choice</td>
<td>Rich, colorful, precise language that moves and enlightens; a love of language, a passion for words.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Nice job. How did you decide to call what you did a “frog leap”? That’s a really good descriptive phrase. I like the word “babyhood,” too; it’s so much more original than “childhood.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Sentence Fluency</td>
<td>The rhythm and flow of the language; the way the writing plays to the ear, not just to the eye.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Your paper reads very easily, but a lot of your sentences start with “I”. To make it a little more interesting you might try starting some of your sentences in other ways. You’re very good with alliteration (that’s when you use several words that have the same starting sound). I especially like the sound of: “I bounced like a ball…” and “…a Sonja sandwich hug.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Conventions</td>
<td>The mechanical correctness of the writing and its contribution to meaning and readability.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>You did a good job on your spelling. I liked the way you circled the words you weren’t sure of and then looked them up in the dictionary. You used periods and capitals well, too. Did you know that there are two kinds of “witch”? There’s “witch” as in Halloween and “which” as in “which one.” Words that sound the same but are spelled differently are called homophones. We’ll have a lesson on that soon. I’ll also show you how to break your stories up into paragraphs.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

You did a wonderful job on this paper, Sonja. I really appreciate how hard you worked from the very first pre-writing session through all your drafting, revision, editing, and publishing. You put in a lot of effort and it really shows. You have a wonderful voice that just pops right off the page. I can’t wait to read your next piece.

Scoring Guide: 1-Beginning ➤ 2-Emerging ➤ 3-Developing ➤ 4-Maturing ➤ 5-Strong
An Introduction to Writing Process

As a formal method for teaching writing, Writing Process goes back to the early 1970’s when dozens of academic articles\(^1\) inquiring into the nature of the compositional process began to appear. But writing as a process goes back even further than that—way, \emph{way} back. Indeed, all writers have used one “process” or another to render their ideas in print, it’s the nature of the beast; words just don’t magically materialize on a page or a computer screen every time we want them to. So writing as a process is as old as writing itself. It’s just that in the last 30 years or so, we’ve thought to inquire about exactly what processes might best be shown to students to help them grow as writers.

\textbf{Been There, Done That}

At one time or another, we’ve all been there: first draft, final draft, done. And for many of us, the final draft probably consisted of little more than recopying our teacher’s red pen corrections. Here’s what one class was like for me:

\begin{quote}
7th grade. Hell hath no fury like Mr. Hackworth. A most mercurial man. Tall, dark hair and beard, piercing stare, earth-shattering voice, ego-crushing demeanor. He had no trouble getting our attention and keeping it. His class was a series of rituals: weekly news quiz, worksheets, and \emph{the research paper}. The quizzes and worksheets I could handle, but I was completely unprepared for the paper. The longest thing I think I had written up to that point was about five pages. Suddenly, there were rumors in circulation about students from the previous year’s class topping 50; someone even said that one paper was over 100 pages long.

To get us started off on the right foot, Mr. Hackworth introduced us to his version of the writing process: \begin{enumerate}
\item Choose a country;
\item Make sure you cover history, economics, climate, geography, government, etc.;
\item Write in pen;
\item Hand in the paper before Christmas break.
\end{enumerate}
That was it. We received no additional instruction whatsoever on how such a report was to be researched or written.
\end{quote}

Sound familiar? No wonder so many of us struggled to get our work done—or even to get started. As much as I love writing now, I hated it during school. And I think part of my frustration came from not knowing anything about how to write, that is, how to go about the business of carefully crafting a piece of prose from beginning to end.

\textbf{Writing is a Process, Isn’t it?}

Like any academic theory, Writing Process has evolved considerably over the years, but two beliefs have remained constant: \begin{enumerate}
\item Methods of teaching writing should be structured to account for the fact that the creation of a piece of writing is a developmental process that occurs over time; and
\item Writers engage in different activities depending on which stage of development a piece of writing is in.
\end{enumerate}

\(^1\) The most important of these articles have been conveniently collected into a book called \textit{Landmark Essays on Writing Process}, edited by Sondra Perl and published by Hermagoras Press. This is a wonderful book which not only includes essays by academics but also by professional writers like Annie Dillard and William Stafford. It really goes far beyond Writing Process to more general discussions of writing itself. I highly recommend it.
Writing Process as a method of helping student writers has always, to my knowledge, been conceived of as a set of discrete stages wherein a writer engages in certain activities designed to solve particular problems unique to that stage. And it is this practical problem-solving approach that I think makes Writing Process and other contemporary approaches more effective than traditional methods which often attempted to teach writing in a manner that ran counter to the ways in which writers naturally go about their work.

As it was initially conceived, the process had only two stages: drafting and revising; the writer was said to cycle back and forth between them until a piece was finished. While this is probably the most accurate reflection of how writers work, it isn’t very useful in the classroom; student writers seem to benefit from a bit more structure. In the 1980’s, Writing Process theories crystallized into something most of us are now familiar with: a five stage process that includes Pre-Writing, Drafting, Revising, Editing, and Publishing.

But now in the 1990’s, we have further refinements that, at least in my experience, have truly made Writing Process valuable to student writers working in the classroom, and to teachers trying to help them. There are now three distinct ways of looking at Writing Process:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Traditional</th>
<th>Contemporary</th>
<th>Primary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No Assessment Stages</td>
<td>Criteria-Based</td>
<td>Modified for K-2 Writers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-Writing</td>
<td>Pre-Writing</td>
<td>Pre-Writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drafting</td>
<td>Drafting</td>
<td>Drafting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revising</td>
<td>Revising</td>
<td>Sharing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Editing</td>
<td>Editing</td>
<td>Optional or Limited</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publishing</td>
<td>Publishing</td>
<td>Publishing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessing</td>
<td>Assessing</td>
<td>Optional or Limited</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

With the incredible popularity nationwide of criteria-based assessment, and the recognition of the power of criteria-based instruction in all subject areas, the traditional process has been expanded to accommodate the use of criteria like those in the Six Traits approach. This only makes good sense. According to research the use of criteria by student writers as a tool for focused revision is the single most important and most valuable technique we can employ, so having two distinct stages (Sharing and Assessing) for this activity is well warranted. Without formal recourse to criteria, students cannot effectively shape their writing in the Revising stage, nor can they assess their own progress after Publishing. I recommend that teachers take students through the contemporary seven-stage process making appropriate changes for writers in grades K-2 who are not yet revising.

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2 See *Research in Written Composition* by Robert Hillocks, Jr. published by NCTE.

3 Some very young writers can and do revise. But many just aren’t interested. I recommend introducing all writers to the full process, but making all stages after Drafting optional for K-2 writers. I don’t absolutely require kids to go through the whole process until mid-year 3rd grade, and even I will let some “slide by” until they feel more comfortable. By 4th grade, all students should be mature enough to deal with the demands of working on the same piece of writing over a long period of time in a more detailed and more technical way.
Why is it Important to Teach Writing Process?

Writing Process is the “how” of writing. Think about it for a minute. How do you write? There’s much more to it than just putting pen to paper or dangling your fingers over a keyboard. Consciously or not, most writers go through a predictable set of stages as their work evolves. Those stages—our own individual writing process—evolve slowly over time as we develop, and as the nature of our writing changes. As competent adult writers, we all have a writing process. But when you’re young, just starting out, you really have no idea what to do first, where to go next, or how to finish up. Small children reach for a pencil before they have any idea what they want to write. Older students may sit in class for days complaining that they can’t get started. The Writing Process gives inexperienced writers a simple, dependable structure they can follow, a foolproof plan of attack that will always yield results. By helping students with the process of writing, we free them up to put more effort into the execution of their ideas.

From a teacher’s perspective, Writing Process is extremely helpful because it solves some very basic, but all too common, problems:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common Problems Solved by Using Writing Process</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students don’t know how to get started: No problem, just introduce them to Pre-Writing activities like brainstorming, webbing, mapping, freewriting, or listing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students don’t write because they are afraid of making errors: Tell students they will have a chance to make corrections during the Editing stage.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low productivity; students don’t write very much: Pre-Writing activities like free writing increase fluidity of expression; the knowledge that things can be changed during Revising frees students up to experiment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No effort in Revision; no ability to rethink earlier drafts: By teaching focused lessons in specific writing skills, and showing students how to use the Six Traits criteria, young writers become interested in and committed to serious revision.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sloppy work; no attention to detail in final drafts: By reserving a special stage for Publishing, and creating authentic publishing opportunities for your students to publish their work, you can show them how important this aspect of writing really is, and you can give them specific lessons in how to go about it.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Last but not least, Writing Process is a required component of the Washington State Essential Academic Learnings for Writing. Like it or not, Writing Process is the law in this state. Students are expected to know it inside and out.

But is the Writing Process Real?

Yes and no. No professional writer that I’ve ever heard of goes through seven distinct stages with each piece (or any number of distinct stages for that matter). I know I certainly don’t. Competent adult writers tend to pursue all of the stages more or less simultaneously. We cycle: we think of an idea, write it down, read it over, change it a little, fix a typo, format it… and then we start the cycle all over again. Students will cycle, too, though probably not as dynamically or as purposefully when they’re just starting out. So, rather than a fixed set of stages each writer goes through, like this:
It’s better to conceive of the process as less of a one-shot assembly line affair and
more like a flexible, dynamic system that will vary to some extent with the individual
needs of the writer and the type of writing he or she is trying to do:

Of course all of this speculation about the creative inner life of writers begs the obvi-
ous question: if nobody really uses the Writing Process, why do we teach it at all? Here’s
how I look at it:

The most important contribution of the process writing movement has not been the
revelation of a single most productive, most perfect, and most proper way of writing. It is
merely the idea that there are ways of writing: predictable paths good writers follow that
lead them step-by-step to the successful rendering of their ideas in print. There is no sin-
gle writing process, no “secret formula” known only to a select cadre of award-winning
educators, elite researchers, and literary mavens. Writing is a process in and of itself.
And it is the recognition of this simple fact that has so significantly influenced the way
our best teachers teach writing today. Once we acknowledge that writing is not a sponta-
neous act, but rather a series of discrete events scattered through stages that unfold over
time, we can begin to guide young authors through those stages, so that ultimately they
can guide themselves.

I teach students the contemporary seven stage process (even if I don’t require writers
in grades K-2 to use it, I still tell them about all the stages and invite them to try it out),
and I take them through it until they know it cold. As they experience more success and
begin to develop a sense of what works best for them, I give my students more latitude to
find their own ways of getting things done. But when they get stuck, I send them right
back to the seven stages again. Eventually, they develop a way of writing that works best
for them that incorporates all of the components I have introduced. I use Writing Process
more as a problem-solving mechanism than as a way of monitoring student progress or
long term development. You see, whether or not writers pursue the stages deliberately, it
is a simple reality of the task that anyone who attempts any kind of formal composition
must eventually draw from each of the seven “wells” in order to nourish their work from
beginning to end. What I like to say to teachers is this: Writing Process is a tool, not a
rule. And it usually works best when it’s used in that context. Instead of telling students:
“Here’s something you have to do.”, tell them “Here’s something that will help you out.
Give it a try and then take a little bit of time to assess how well it works for you.
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.** (OPA)

★ What’s a Good Idea?

The 5 Facts of Fiction.

- **The biggest problem kids encounter, of course, is writer’s block.** I treat writers’ 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.
  - **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. 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.

★ DRAFTING

Put It Down on Paper

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

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★ SHARING

Get Some Advice

For student writers, sharing is usually the most valuable and enjoyable stage of 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 consuming for the writer, but 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 a 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 next when they go back to their seat. If they don’t know, I keep them up 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 choose 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 ideas, supporting details, “showing” details, purpose, the unexpected.
- **Organization.** Beginnings, endings, sequencings, pacing, transitions.
- **Voice.** Audience emotions, audience needs, honesty, personality, control.
- **Word Choice.** Appropriate language to teach, 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. Then I 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 it necessary to teach one general advantage to groups of writers. I lay the foundation for 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 sentence beginnings, conjunctions, dialog, and plus. I base my teaching on research-based principles:
  1. Publish more pieces; 2) Focus on conventions 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 have to do the revision and the editing. I make suggestions, I point out troubled 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 found that 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 curric. 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 computer is not used well. 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 big dividends for both the teacher and the 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 too 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 will usually do it and hope that that will change some day.

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