

CONFERRING CONCEPTS

- A writing conference is a conversation.
- The point of a writing conference is to help students become better writers.
- Writing conferences have a predictable structure.
- In conferences, teachers and students have predictable roles.
- It's important to communicate to students in conferences that we care about them as people and writers.

The Role of the Teacher and Student in a Writing Conference	
The Teacher's Role	The Student's Role
<i>In the first part of the conversation:</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invite the child to set an agenda for the conference • Ask assessment questions • Read the student's writing • Make a teaching decision 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set the agenda for the conference by describing her writing work • Respond to her teacher's research questions by describing her writing work more deeply
<i>In the second part of the conversation:</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give the student critical feedback • Teach the student • Nudge the student to "have-a-go" • Link the conference to the student's independent work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listen carefully to her teacher's feedback and teaching • Ask questions to clarify and deepen her understanding of her teacher's feedback and teaching • "Have-a-go" with what her teacher taught her • Commit to trying what her teacher taught her after the conference

(This chart is adapted from my book, *How's It Going? A Practical Guide to Conferring with Student Writers* (2000).)

QUALITIES OF AN EFFECTIVE TEACHING POINT

1. We give clear, precise feedback to the student.
2. We cue the student that we're about to start teaching by saying, "There's something I want to teach you today . . .", or, "Something writers do is . . .", or something similar.
3. We name what we're teaching the student—e.g. a strategy, a craft move, a language convention.
4. We give an explanation of what we're teaching—what it is, and why it's important to learn.
5. We explain how writers *do* what we want the student to learn to do—by describing how to do it, and/or by giving examples from our own writing, or published texts.
6. We have the student try what we've just taught them, usually by having them talk out how they could use it. We cue students that we want them to do a try-it by saying, "I'd like you to try this out right now . . .", or similar words.
7. We end the conference by linking the conference to the student's work, and by reminding them that they can use what we've just taught them in their writing from now on.

DECISIONS WE NEED TO MAKE ABOUT OUR CONFERRING

Where should I conduct my conferences?

Carl: I found it works best to confer where students are seated. They are more at ease there, and other student can either eavesdrop or become involved in the conferences.

What tools do I need to confer?

Carl: I always carry my record-keeping forms, copies of mentor texts that I think I'll use in conferences, and a pack of post-it notes.

When should we confer with students?

Carl: I confer with students at whatever point in the writing process they happen to be in when I pull up next to them to confer. I don't wait for them to finish a draft before conferring.

Who should initiate conferences?

Carl: I initiate most conferences. Occasionally, I agree to confer with a child who asks me for a conference.

Conferring with Student Writers
Carl Anderson

How long should conferences be?

Carl: My conferences average between five and seven minutes long. I usually confer with four, sometimes five students during a typical workshop period.

Finding Carl

My books, *Assessing Writers* and *How's It Going? A Practical Guide to Conferring with Student Writers*, are available through Heinemann. (www.heinemann.com). My new Heinemann firsthand series, *Strategic Writing Conferences: Smart Conversations that Move Young Writers Forward Grades 3-6*, is now available. (www.strategicwritingconferences.com)

If you have any questions about the workshop, please feel free to email me:

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Check out my website, too:

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