

CONFERENCING WITH STUDENTS

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« Conferences are the heart of the workshop. In a very real sense, they are the main reason we go to all the trouble to set up the norms, the structures, and processes of workshop in the first place. What we're trying so hard to create is time and space to sit down with kids, one at a time, and work for a few minutes on just what each student needs. »

Zemelman and al. (2007)

Types of individual conference with a student

- Content
- Process
- Editing

General Suggestions for Individual Conferencing

- State your expectations at the start of the writing workshop (phase 5 - individual writing).
- Rule number 1 - The teacher is never to be interrupted by other students during conferencing.
- To maximize time, go to the student's desk and not the opposite.
- Be unpredictable and go in zigzags in going "physically" from desk to desk.
- In mini-lessons, start by teaching strategies/skills that lead to writer autonomy (e.g., If you encounter this problem, here how you can solve it on your own.)
- Try to avoid dominating the students. Let the students do much of the talking. The goal is teaching students to solve their own problems by guiding them with cues and not by giving the answers.

Content Conference

- Ask student to tell you about the content (e.g., the topic, theme, plot) of his/her draft. (Sometimes as a language teacher, if you look at the draft, you will probably have difficulty concentrating on the content because problems with linguistic conventions may distract you).
- Start with a general question: Talk to me about the content of your text or Tell me your story.
- For more specific questions, please see the sheet distributed.

Process Conference

The purposes of process conference are to help students:

1. Learn how to reflect on their work;
2. Review their progress;
3. Identify their problems;
4. Set their goals;
5. Plan the next steps they will take.

Zemelman and al. (2007)

Questions to Ask During Process Conference

- What are you working on?
- How is it going?
- What do you plan to do next?
- How did you go about writing this?
- Did you make any changes? How did you do that change?
- What do you think of this piece of writing?

Graves (1983) and Zemelman and al. (2007)

Editing Conference

- Read the student's text and concentrate on one problem in particular.
- Try to give clues to the student to correct his/her own mistakes instead of correcting him/her yourself.
- Teach the rule or the skill to the student.
- If you notice that one problem is common in many texts, you can do a whole-class mini-lesson.
- If you notice that a few students have the same problem, you can do a group mini-lesson during guided writing.

Examples of Questions to Ask During Editing Conferences

- What is the subject of your verb? What do you do when your subject is the third person plural (ils/elles)? Can you review your piece with that rule in mind?
- I see that you spelled “organisation” with an “s”. This is the French spelling. What would you use in English?

Anecdotal Reports: Writing Folder

- Provide students with a folder to keep “everything” they will produce while writing. That includes the brainstorming, the graphic organizer, the drafts and so on.
- On the cover of the folder, ask students to write the title “Published Texts”. As they write, they will indicate in that section the names of the texts they have completed (i.e., their “publications”).

Anecdotal Reports: Writing Folder (cont'd)

- On the interior of the cover, ask students to write “New ideas”. As they come up with new topics that interest them for future writing pieces, they will write the topics in that section.

Anecdotal Reports: Writing Folder (cont'd)

- On the interior of the back cover of the folder, ask students to write “Skills/Concepts/Strategies”. You will write what the student needs to improve most about his/her writing (Only 1 or 2 aspects at a time).
- In that section, indicate what skill/concept/strategy you taught the student during conferencing. As the student masters the skill/concept/strategy, indicate it with a date and signature and add a new skills/concepts/strategies to be mastered.

Anecdotal Reports: Writing Folder (cont'd)

- On the back of the back cover, ask students to write “Topics and interests in which I am an expert”. As students develop expertise, they can write it in that section.
- In the folder, you can ask the students to include a personal grammar that they will develop as you teach them new rules and to include a personal dictionary as they learn new words. You can provide them with a list of the most common words, verification checklists, and a description of writing traits.

Anecdotal Reports: Examples of Evaluation Grids

Graves (1983)

- 1 sheet per student

date

title

skill taught

evaluation*

* (-) poor, (o) impossible to determine, (+) good

Anecdotal Reports: Examples of Evaluation Grids

- Atwell (1987)

Conference report for: name of student

| Title, date and comments | Skills used correctly | Skills taught |
|--------------------------|-----------------------|---------------|
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Bibliography

- Atwell, Nancie. (1987). *In the Middle: Writing, reading, and learning with adolescents*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook Heinemann.
- Graves, Donald. (1983). *Writing: Teachers and Children at Work: The Essential Guide*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Zemelman and al. (2007). *Best Practice: Today's Standards for Teaching & Learning in America's Schools*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann