

How to Improve the Quality of Writing Conferences

Teacher's Packet

A KET professional development workshop for educators approved for Professional Development Training by the Kentucky Department of Education.

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How to Improve the Quality of Writing Conferences

This series of four 30-minute programs demonstrates that writing conferences do not have to be time-consuming, planned events that occur only after a student has written a draft. Conferences that directly improve writing often occur spontaneously and last less than a minute.

Effective conferences happen early and often in the writing process, beginning in the prewriting stage. They are tied directly to classroom instruction and zero in on one or two areas of need rather than addressing the entire piece. Furthermore, they are not necessarily one-on-one events. They can occur in front of the whole class or in small groups as well.

This series features expert writing teachers and consultants, along with KDE Associate Commissioner Starr Lewis, discussing the elements of quality writing conferences in a variety of settings—and at a variety of stages in the writing process. Geared to writing teachers at all levels, the seminar features videotaped footage of writing conferences, along with commentary concerning the strategies teachers use to make the most of these conferences.

Program 1 concerns the types of conferences that occur in the pre-writing stage, when teacher and student discuss writer’s notebook entries before drafting begins. The second program explores “quick conferences” that occur during the writing process and provides models for making the most of impromptu conferences, or check-ins, that take place after mini-lessons. Program 3 (“Revision Mission”) models the importance of having a narrow focus for each writing conference—e.g., checking the lead, looking at characterization, etc. And the final program features a variety of response group strategies and techniques that set the stage for meaningful, productive conferences between peers.

About This Packet

This packet includes biographies of the participants in the series, brief outlines of each program, and handouts related to the seminar content.

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Professional Development Credit

Stage of Participant Development: Practice/Application

The Kentucky Department of Education has approved all KET Star Channels Seminars for professional development credit if schools or districts choose to include them in their professional development plans. Districts or schools may choose to include preparation and/or follow-up time as part of professional development. For example, if a teacher participates in one 90-minute program and spends an additional 30 minutes in related activities, he or she could be awarded a total of two hours professional development credit.

Individual teachers who wish to use these videotapes for professional development credit should check with their school professional development chair or with their district professional development coordinator.

Professional development can also be used to satisfy requirements for the fifth year program. Contact your local university or the Division of Teacher Education and Certification at 502-564-4606 for more information.

Meet the Host and Presenters

Host

Hosting the seminar is **Starr Lewis**, Associate Commissioner, Office of Academic and Professional Development at the Kentucky Department of Education. Before becoming associate commissioner, Starr served as branch manager for the humanities at the Kentucky Department of Education and as director of the Kentucky Writing Program. She has also served as a writing portfolio consultant for the Department of Education and as a regional writing resource teacher. Starr's background includes 17 years of experience teaching high school English and psychology in Bullitt County, Kentucky. She has a degree in secondary education from the University of Kentucky and a master's in education from the University of Louisville.

Presenters

Dewey Hensley is a Highly Skilled Educator for the Kentucky Department of Education. Before accepting this appointment, Dewey taught English at South Oldham High School in Crestwood, Kentucky. He also has taught at Eminence High School and at Fairdale High in Jefferson County. Dewey's professional activities include serving as associate director of the Louisville Writing Project, conducting training sessions for the Kentucky Association of School Administrators, and serving as a table leader for portfolio analysis and on-demand writing test writer for KDE. Dewey has a B.A. in English and philosophy from Berea College and a master's in English from the University of Louisville.

Yvette Stockwell is a resource teacher for Jefferson County Public Schools. She also has taught middle school language arts in Jefferson County and has a total of 20 years of teaching experience. Yvette has served as a Writing Portfolio Cluster Leader and on the Writing Advisory Board and the State Scoring Accuracy Team and has participated in the Louisville Writing Project. She has a B.S. from Louisiana State University and a master's and Rank I from the University of Louisville.

Donna Stottmann has taught in Jefferson County for the past 12 years. She began her teaching career at Atkinson Elementary where she taught fourth- and fifth-grade and a collaborative primary class. She also spent two years team teaching primary students at Greenwood Elementary. At present, Donna is a resource teacher for Jefferson County. She also has been active in the Louisville Writing Project. Donna has a B.S. in education and an M.Ed., both from the University of Louisville.

Donna Vincent is the district-wide writing consultant for Muhlenberg County Schools. For the past seven years, she also has served as co-director of the National Writing Project at Western Kentucky University. Before taking her job with Muhlenberg County, Donna was a statewide primary writing consultant. She has 16 years experience teaching in elementary schools and is a KERA Fellow and a Writing Fellow. Donna has a Rank I from Western Kentucky University with a reading specialist endorsement.

Program Agendas

Program 1: Prewriting Conferences

- Prewriting Activity Using Benchmark Piece
- Narrowing the Focus

Program 2: Quick Conferences

- Writer's notebook conference
- "Judge Judy" activity
- Quick conference concerning leads

Program 3: Revision Conferences

- Using familiar text to explain a memoir
- Conference on revising lead
- Short story conference
- Peer group conferences
- Conference on stretching an idea
- Peer groups responding to a memoir

Program 4: Response Groups

- Response group roles
- Response group on first love piece
- Two-person response groups
- PQP
- Author's chair and peer response sheet
- Large response group
- Writer's block
- Diverse writing styles

Purpose, Audience and Publishing

Student Name: _____

Student Paper # _____

Please fill in the blanks below with information about your paper.

My paper, titled _____,
is a _____, intended to _____
the audience (that/about) _____.
It would be published in _____ publication.

My thesis statement reads: _____

My main ideas are written below (the points of my argument or the supporting information I wish the audience to know):

-
-
-
-
-
-

THIS PAPER IS DUE TO THE TEACHER IN FINAL FORM ON _____.

This document is adapted from the work of Dr. Charles Whitaker at Eastern Kentucky University.

Audience Analysis: Figuring Out What the Reader Needs

Student Name: _____

- As a writer, you must be aware of what you want to say and what the audience needs to know for you to communicate with them. You must also consider how you will say it and if the form you are using has a certain tone you must try.
- In other words, you can't write a letter to the President of the United States to get him to clean up a park in our county. It is not his job or concern; this message needs to go to someone else. Also, if you are writing an article for an audience, you must understand who they are and what they need to know to get your point. For example, you can't assume they know what park you are talking about or how planting trees in the park will help prevent a mudslide. The questions listed below will help you analyze your audience and your message to them.
- You must consider tone and form when discussing audience awareness as well. You can't write a persuasive letter to our principal convincing him to change a school rule and hope to get any results if you start it, "Hey Dude, waazup?"

Answer these questions:

1. What message do you hope to get across to your audience?
2. What does the audience already know about the subject?
3. If you were the audience, what questions would you have about the issue?
4. How formal must your writing be?
_____ Personal/conversational: something you and a single person know . . . a whisper among friends
_____ Professional/conversational: a need to sound clear yet allow the audience to hear your personal voice so as to communicate your passion to the audience
_____ Technical: a need to use the jargon or language of the audience to get straight to the point
_____ Objective: keeping your tone suitable to the task without allowing your voice to come through
5. What points do you want the audience to get after reading your article, editorial, or letter?
6. If you have a first draft, list at least three words that stick out in your paper. Are they appropriate for the audience and form?

Note Taking Form

Use this form to take notes on the subject. Be detailed and really *think*; don't just write down things word for word. Put your notes in your own words.

The important question for you to answer: _____

Notes on: _____

Reflect or pose questions about the assignment:

Take notes:

Summarize the main ideas (yours and the presenter's):

Note Taking Form

Use the columns below to record your *thoughts* and *notes* about the lecture, program, or reading material. Be specific and put this in your own words:

Essential questions you should try to answer at the end:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Reflection/Questions

Notes

Summary

**What might the answer to the essential question(s)?
(Do your best to speculate what it might be.)**

Rules for Response

- **Never give up ownership of your paper.**
- **Never try to take over someone else's paper.**
- **Learn how to accept and give criticism in the right way.**
- **Have a "candlelight dinner."**
- **Always have questions about your own piece of writing.**
- **Follow the REVISION MISSION questions in class.**
- **Give positive feedback.**
- **Be honest when you respond: point out things you don't understand.**
- **Remember the purpose of a conference: to make someone a better writer.**
- **Don't try to solve all the problems, just the important ones.**

Conferencing Form

The responder should read the piece and ask the reader all or some of these questions. The questions asked should be highlighted and the teacher or responder should write the ideas of what the student should work on in the box on the right. The teacher or student might use this form to design mini-lessons.

<p>Purpose and Audience</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Who are you writing this for? ➤ Do you give them all they need to truly understand the piece? ➤ What strategies do you use to get their attention? ➤ What do you hope to accomplish with this piece of writing? ➤ Is this in your own words? ➤ Will the reader get all your points or understand what everything means? ➤ Do your words and tone help the reader by matching what you hope to accomplish? Does your voice match the tone of the piece? ➤ Other questions: 	<p>What you can do to improve:</p>
<p>Idea Development and Support</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ What are the main ideas you hope to get across? ➤ Are there enough reasons or descriptions in your writing so the reader can “see” what you mean? ➤ Are there places the reader might need to know more? ➤ What is the weakest or most confusing paragraph? Does it need more development? ➤ What additional information or description is needed? ➤ What unanswered questions might slow down the reader? ➤ Is the piece long enough, too short, or too long? ➤ Other questions: 	<p>What you can do to improve:</p>
<p>Organization</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Can you follow the ideas step by step? ➤ Are there different ways to organize this piece? ➤ Does each idea support the point you are trying to make or the story you are trying to tell? ➤ Other questions: 	<p>What you can do to improve:</p>
<p>Sentences</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Do too many of the sentences start the same way? ➤ Do too many of the sentences sound the same length when you read the paper aloud? ➤ Are any of the sentences so short and choppy you should combine them with other sentences? ➤ Are there incomplete sentences? ➤ Are there any sentences that run on and on? ➤ Other questions: 	<p>What you can do to improve:</p>

Language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Are there words that you repeat too often? ➤ Are there words that do not seem to fit? ➤ Are there words that are not appropriate? ➤ Do you use active verbs that describe what is going on? ➤ Do your verbs agree with their subjects? ➤ Other questions: 	What you can do to improve:
Correctness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Do you meet all the rules of capitalization? ➤ Do you need to check the spelling of words in the dictionary? ➤ Are there any ways punctuation should be changed or added? ➤ Other questions: 	What you can do to improve:

Overall Comments or Suggestions:

Revision Plan: Your Next Three Steps with This Paper

Writing Improvement Form

Donna Vincent

This form is designed to help you improve your writing piece. Remember the rules for conferencing and response . . . you must know your own paper and keep ownership of the paper during all conferences or response groups. You should fill in the top part of the form.

(The writer completes this part of the form.)

What is purpose of this piece of writing?

Who is your audience?

Please circle the form of this piece:

Personal narrative	Memoir	Personal essay	Letter to reviewer
Short story	Poem	Script	Screenplay
Feature article	News story	Editorial	Brochure
Persuasive letter	Proposal	“How to” feature article	Journal article

What are two questions (or more) you want answered about the piece (revision mission questions)?

- 1.
- 2.

The teacher or response partner fills out the checklist part of the form:

Purpose and Audience	<p>_____ Your piece has a clear purpose; it is clear to the reader what you are trying to make them think or feel.</p> <p>_____ You use a good lead to get the attention of the audience.</p> <p>_____ You have a clincher at the end that leaves the reader thinking.</p> <p>_____ The points you put in the piece are logical and well thought out. They support your main idea or advance your story.</p>
Idea Development	<p>_____ You use description, details, and examples to support what you are saying.</p> <p>_____ Your paragraphs are long enough to get the ideas across or describe what you want readers to see.</p> <p>_____ You use past lessons to make your piece stronger whenever possible: metaphors, similes, hyperbole, snapshots, thoughtshots, “show, don’t tell,” examples, reflection, climactic moments, OTHER:</p> <p>_____ Your paragraphs connect to the main idea you want to get across.</p> <p>_____ You help the reader to SEE, HEAR, SMELL, TASTE, TOUCH when they read your work.</p>

Organization	<p>_____ Your piece has a beginning, middle, and end the reader can follow.</p> <p>_____ Your paragraphs connect to each other so the piece flows.</p> <p>_____ Your paper doesn't jump around so the reader is confused.</p> <p>_____ You can do a "timeline" of your writing so it is clear what goes first, second, third, etc.</p>
Sentences	<p>_____ You use a variety of sentences that are different lengths and begin in different ways.</p> <p>_____ You use sentences that are complete and correct.</p> <p>_____ Your sentences never appear to be awkward or difficult to understand.</p> <p>_____ Each sentence seems to belong to the piece; they all go to the purpose of the piece and the paragraph.</p> <p>_____ None of your sentences runs on too long.</p> <p>_____ None of your sentences are short and choppy.</p>
Language/Words	<p>_____ No words are incorrect.</p> <p>_____ Your verbs are active and descriptive (remember our lesson on descriptive verbs).</p> <p>_____ No words seem out of place.</p> <p>_____ There are no words that do not fit the audience or purpose.</p> <p>_____ You use appropriate vocabulary (the real words) whenever you can or need to.</p>
Correctness	<p>_____ You have no misspelled words.</p> <p>_____ You end every sentence with proper punctuation.</p> <p>_____ Your commas are correctly used.</p> <p>_____ You have the pages numbered properly.</p> <p>_____ You have your title in the correct place.</p>

Revision Plan: Looking at this checklist, this is what I should do next:

Conferencing Roles for Different Genres

Donna Vincent, Muhlenberg County Schools

Dorothy Hennings, *Communication in Action*, says that students need direction when learning to listen strategically. She recommends that we assign them things to listen for during speeches, presentations, videos, etc.

I have realized that peer conferencing is a good time to do this. Often, students are at a loss for ways to help their peers revise. Either they like it all or they don't know where to start. If they are given specific things to listen for, not only are the conferences more productive, but the participants might actually learn something about listening. To help students remember their assigned listening roles, I use the names of people famous for those very things. We wear sticky nametags and are encouraged to be the experts (without "physically" personifying our roles).

Different genres have different characteristics and different writers have different needs so I decide which roles to assume based on those kinds of observations. See the list of recommendations for genres at the bottom. You might even have students help to come up with famous "experts in the field."

Here are a few I've used:

Judge Judy—listens for *evidence/proof* in the form of stories and examples to find the person, place, or thing "*GUILTY as charged*" by the author.

Daniel Webster—listens specifically to *language*: vivid verbs, strong nouns, language of the expert, etc.

David Letterman—paraphrases what the writer has said and asks questions to help him or her elaborate on the *how(s)* when needed.

Christopher Columbus—listens for organization. He makes sure that the reader *finds her way* through the piece without getting lost: beginning, middle, ending, transitions...

Thomas Edison—listens for "*static*" (side-issues, distractions, times when the writer gets off track, etc.).

Albert Einstein—listens for insight and reflection.

Martha Stewart—listens to be sure that the *setting(s) is just perfect* for the purpose. Notes the way the writer embeds details about the setting in a way that shows where the event(s) take place without telling. (She also notes if the setting details are irrelevant to the purpose.)

Oprah Winfrey—listens for *sensory detail* and tries to recognize the feeling (purpose) and tries to *feel* the way the writer wants his audience to feel. (She also notes if the sensory details are distractions/side issues.)

Stephen Spielberg—pays close attention to the *action* in the story. Makes sure that *slow motion parts* are there to help the audience experience the most important part(s) or event(s).

Santa Claus—hears what characters say (*dialogue*) and knows what characters think (*thoughtshots*).

Heloise—listens for hints and warnings to help the audience be successful.

Dear Abby—looks for *identified and solved problems*.

Elvis—listens for evidence of *voice*.

Fran Drescher—listens for appropriate tone for the purpose: no whining, no condescension, no anger...

Suggestions for specific genres/roles:

Memoir—Judge Judy, Christopher Columbus, Thomas Edison, David Letterman, Albert Einstein

Personal Narratives, Plays, and Short Stories—Martha Stewart, Santa Claus, Christopher Columbus, Stephen Spielberg, Daniel Webster, Oprah Winfrey

Poetry—Daniel Webster, Oprah Winfrey, Stephen Spielberg, Christopher Columbus, Albert Einstein

How to's, Feature Articles, and Brochures—Daniel Webster, David Letterman, Christopher Columbus, Heloise

Persuasive Letters—Christopher Columbus, Dear Abby, Fran Drescher, Elvis, Daniel Webster

Thomas Edison Revision

Your job is to listen for “static.” Details that don’t seem to fit the purpose. Times when the writer gets off track. Side issues. Distractions.

I think the purpose is _____

Static _____

Static _____

Static _____

(Only fill in these lines IF the writer gets off track. If details don’t seem to go with the purpose of the piece.)

These details are “static” because _____

Christopher Columbus Revision

Your job is to find out how the writer is guiding you through the piece. You're looking for how the ideas are chunked, how they are arranged, and how they are connected to each other.

You're also to see how the lead gets your attention and if you can find the big idea there. The closing should feel finished.

I think the writer is chunking the information by _____

I think the writer arranged his chunks of information by _____

Transitions that I noticed are _____

The writer's lead is a/an _____

It does/does not help me know what the piece is about because _____

The closing makes the piece feel finished by _____

A suggestion that I have is _____

Peer Revision
Donna Vincent
Muhlenberg Co. Schools

Judge Judy Revision

Your job is to figure out what the focused purpose/big idea is and make sure that the writer has given enough support to prove it to the reader.

The big idea (focused purpose) is _____

Support #1 (story, example, fact) _____

Support #2 (story, example, fact) _____

Support #3 (story, example, fact) _____

Support #4 (story, example, fact) _____

I, Judge Judy, find the big idea to be **supported** _____

unsupported _____

Peer Revision
Donna Vincent
Muhlenberg Co. Schools

David Letterman Revision

Your job is to summarize what the writer has said in your own words so he can tell if you understood what he meant. You're also to ask questions about parts that you don't understand.

In my own words, I think your story says _____

Questions about parts that I don't understand are:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Peer Revision
Donna Vincent
Muhlenberg Co. Schools

Fiction Prewriting Conference

Donna Vincent, Muhlenberg County Schools

The guidance counselor at Drakesboro Elementary gave sixth graders there an authentic audience and purpose for writing short stories. She asked for books to be written and illustrated with plots that deal with the kinds of problems for which she counsels kids.

I conferenced with them after she shared her request and list of problems (see below) to help them select animals from their research to personify as main characters in their short stories who have the problem and learn the lesson. The goals listed are HER goals for her students in need.

We purchased Bare Books for Treetop Publishing in Racine, Wisconsin for publishing and placed our books in the guidance counselor's office to be read as a part of the service she provides.

Problems

Lying
Fighting
Name calling
Stealing to get what they want
Not completing work
Fussing
Poor self-esteem
Thinking negatively
Not controlling angry actions
Sleeping in class
Being disrespectful
Being shy
Having no friends
Interrupting
Being sad (depressed)
Cheating
Disrupting class

Goals

Telling the truth
Solving problems peacefully
Solving problems peacefully
Earning money to get what they want
Completing work
Getting along
Good self-esteem
Thinking positively
Controlling angry actions
Paying attention in class
Being respectful
Being a little more outgoing
Having friends
Not interrupting
Being happier
Taking pride in doing their own work
Listening and doing their work in class

What Kind of Character Are You Reading/Writing About, Anyway?

Character's Name _____ *Character's Age* _____

Character's Weakness/Problem _____

Kinds of Evidence To Look For

Evidence Found

Dialogue (The exact words out of the character's mouth)

Body Language/Actions (Movements, mannerisms)

Thoughts (The exact words in the character's head)

Physical Features/Style (Clothes, hair, etc.)

Reactions of Others (What they said, thought, did)

Extremely _____ |-----|-----| **Not** _____ **at all**
 (problem goes here) (problem goes here)

Place an X on the continuum to indicate the degree of evidence of the problem.

Donna Vincent, Writing Consultant, Muhlenberg County Schools, dvincent@mberg.k12.ky.us

Fiction

The main character's problem is _____

Perhaps this character has this problem because _____

The solution will be _____

Events (The Plot)

The Beginning: Shows What the Problem Is as It Gets Bigger and Bigger

Event One _____

The Setting: _____

Event Two _____

The Setting: _____

Event Three _____

The Setting: _____

The Middle: Solves the Problem

Event Four _____

The Setting: _____

The End: Proves the Character Has Thought About the Problem and Is Trying To Change

Event Five _____

The Setting: _____

The moral, lesson learned, or big idea I want my audience to come away with after reading my fiction is: _____

Donna Vincent, Writing Consultant
Muhlenberg County Schools

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