

Every Child a Reader & Writer
Writing Workshop Implementation Scale: CONFERRING

Description	<p><i>During independent work time, teachers confer with students about their writing, making sure to confer with all students throughout each unit of study. Both teachers and students have conversational roles in the conference. Depending on instructional purposes and where students are in their writing, teachers can confer with individuals or small groups. Conferences vary in length but follow a predictable sequence:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research: teacher listens to student and may read student work to get on a line of thinking about the work • Decide: teacher uses information gathered and knowledge of writing, language development, and individual student needs to decide how to support the student’s agenda and what to teach • Teach: teacher gives feedback, teaches the student, guides student to try what was taught and links the conference to ongoing work • Record: teacher systematically records what she has observed and taught in order to make future instructional decisions.¹
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Getting started	Effective	Highly Effective	Creative adaptations	Misconceptions
<p>The teacher</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • confers with every student to some extent • may decide what to teach before researching student needs • routinely re-teaches the mini-lesson • tends to focus on fixing a particular paper rather than teaching the writer • may focus on content in the paper rather than craft, structure or purpose • may focus on a teaching objective that doesn’t meet the student’s needs or focus on multiple teaching points • may use academic language for talking about writing • has difficulty keeping records that are helpful <p>The student</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • views the conference as meeting the teacher’s needs • follows teacher’s directions about what to bring to the conference • may have little to say to the teacher’s opening question • may talk about the content of the writing rather than ongoing writing work • follows the teacher’s lead about what to do next, rather than contributing his/her own ideas 	<p>The teacher</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • routinely confers with all students – individually and in small groups, depending on purpose • begins by researching the student’s needs to determine a specific area of focus • gives students time to think about and explain where they are in their work • teaches the student with the goal of improving ongoing work • conveys genuine interest in the writer’s process and thinking • invites students to set the agenda for conferences • provides honest feedback that includes praise for strengths • focuses teaching point on one technique, strategy or concept • may use academic language to talk about writing and be able to point student to a model • guides student to try what was taught • uses records to monitor and inform decisions about whom to confer with, what students are working on and writing goals <p>The student</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • brings work to conference and through conversation can begin to say where they need help • responds to teacher’s inquiries by describing work more deeply • collaborates with teacher to develop next steps 	<p>Meets all the criteria for effective and in addition,</p> <p>The teacher</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is very conversant with students’ work and goals which may be outside the content of the mini-lesson • balances intentional decisions about when to follow a student’s agenda and when to suggest a different direction (identifies the high-leverage teaching point) • consistently selects the high-leverage teaching point • not only uses academic language to talk about writing, but has access to multiple models to help student explore thinking behind writers’ decisions • helps student link the conference with ongoing work <p>The student</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • uses conferring as an opportunity to gain new learning and inspiration (without depending on it) • can articulate the goals s/he is working toward as writer • ultimately retains authority but is willing to try out suggestions • can link the conference with ongoing work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The teacher and student determine the focus and content, after conversation to determine the type of help the student wants and needs.</i> • <i>Sometimes student works on a teaching point and the teacher comes back later to check on progress</i> • <i>Teacher utilizes individual and small group conferences</i> • <i>Occasionally, the teacher stops class to explain a brief teaching point that all might benefit from hearing</i> • <i>Early in the year, the teacher might conduct a “fishbowl” conference for students to learn about conferences</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The session is used solely as an opportunity to determine if the student is carrying out as assignment that was given to all students.</i> • <i>The session is very prescriptive with the teacher telling the student exactly how to fix the specific piece of writing.</i> • <i>The teacher doesn’t keep records or fails to use them as part of long-term planning to assist the students</i> • <i>Students are overly dependent on teacher input to move forward in their work</i> • <i>Students never take on the teaching points</i> • <i>All conferences represent a re-teaching of the mini-lesson</i>

¹ Much of the description in this document is based on: Anderson, C. 2000. *How’s it going: A practical guide to conferring with student writers.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann. Noyce Foundation 2007