

Supporting Student Writers

The most important thing we can give student writers is time—time to think, time to talk with others, time to try writing, time to get feedback along the way, time to revise and edit, time to share late drafts, time to present (publish). Since time is the enemy for many classroom teachers—there’s never enough of it—it’s important and necessary to identify blocks of time so things can get done.

An Exercise in Punctuation

It’s more difficult to write using proper punctuation if we can’t hear punctuation as we speak. Give students an unpunctuated paragraph. As they listen, read it to them, emphasizing the punctuation. Then, read it again a little more slowly so students can punctuate as they listen. Have students, as a group/class, read the passage aloud in choral-reading fashion, stating the punctuation as they read.

Mini-lessons: Note the writing challenges that students are facing and offer mini-lessons on those topics: e.g., getting started, sentence variety, paragraphing, punctuation, grammar points.

Conferring: Consider both one-on-one and group conferences. Students can sign up or conferences can be teacher-initiated.

Opportunities for Authenticity: Let students write about what they know about, what they care about, what they talk about, and what others might be interested in reading about. In other words, have students write with with a strong sense of purpose. If students are going to write on topics they know little about and need to research first, have them write in forms and formats they can manage. When students are going to write about topics they know a lot about, that’s the time to introduce them to new forms and formats.

Self- and Peer-assessments and -evaluations: Encourage the students to talk about their writing and how they see themselves as writers—what they do well, what they want to work on to become better writers. Encourage pairs to critique each other’s work.

Sharing: Give students many opportunities to share their writing and writing ideas throughout the writing process, from the selection of a writing topic to the presentation of a final, polished publication.

Samples and Examples: Give students opportunities to know about different forms and formats for writing by sharing samples and examples with them—but not too many! Too many examples will result in students copying exactly and, while trying out a “template for writing” is good, we don’t want students to get so locked into that particular structure that they can’t escape.

Encouragement: All writers—young, old, and every age in between—need support and encouragement. Writing is **not** easy!