

Workshop 1

First Steps

"I think writing is key to operating in one's life. I think it helps you to articulate your deepest feelings. And so, even if it's not necessary for your job, even if it's not necessary for you to get out of high school, I think it's just necessary for one's self."

— Ruthanne Lum McCunn, author

Introduction

The ability to write clearly and effectively is an important and treasured passport that can be carried throughout our lives as learners, teachers, doers, and thinkers. It allows us to enter many great venues, including the realms of academic, professional, and personal success.

Clearly, teachers appreciate and celebrate their students' ability to write well. But the keys they need to unlock the most appropriate teaching and learning techniques to build that success are often elusive. Local, state, and national testing results—as well as anecdotal evidence—all show that many students stumble along, moving on from high school with limited proficiency as writers. They have not savored the personal satisfaction of finding the right words to say just what they mean, of crafting words into phrases, sentences, and paragraphs that surprise, convince, and delight their readers. They have not garnered the academic success that thoughtful writing delineates. They have not seen the true value of good writing as its precepts and discipline encourage thoughtful citizenship and personal growth.

Developing Writers: A Workshop for High School Teachers offers some of the keys writing teachers seek. We tour the country to experience a variety of classrooms in a variety of settings. In each, teachers are working effectively with young writers of all abilities, establishing an atmosphere of care and respect in which students are encouraged to take steps—both small and large—as they discover and build their talents as writers. These teachers talk together about what we see in their classrooms, offering insights on what worked and why it worked. These myriad experiences and conversations are foregrounded by the reflection of noted educators and eminent authors, pointing the way toward success in establishing and maintaining a classroom where writers thrive.

Collectively, these classroom experiences and dialogues demonstrate the following key points:

- Students learn to write well by writing often. A writing classroom offers students numerous opportunities to write, to reflect on their writing, and to share their writing with others.
- A finished piece of writing is the result of a series of complex, often recursive processes which typically vary from writer to writer and even from composing event to composing event for the same writer. A writing classroom offers students numerous approaches to different processes such as invention (generating topics and content), organization (shaping and ordering content), drafting (getting words on paper or disk), revision (rethinking and reworking a piece based on demands of purpose and audience), and editing (attending to stylistic concerns and usage conventions).
- Writing is an important tool for learning. A writing classroom offers students opportunities to experience the generative and connective powers of their written language.
- Purpose and audience are two central concerns of all writers. A writing classroom gives students experience writing for many different purposes and numerous authentic audiences.
- Form follows function. A writing classroom introduces students to multiple genres (fiction and nonfiction, poetry, prose, and drama) and organizational modes (e.g., description, narration, analysis, argument) and helps them choose appropriate forms for different purposes and audiences.

Video Overview

This initial video introduces the teachers, educators, students, and authors whose experiences will serve as the heart of the workshop and defines the key attitudes and experiences that are the hallmark of *Developing Writers*.

These core people turn their attention to planning for success in the writing classroom. They talk about setting goals for themselves and their students, mindful of both local, state, and national standards and scheduling realities. Exploring some of the assignments they consider “must-haves,” the group reminds teachers to be open to teachable moments within their experiences with students. A brief look at supporting some of the processes of writing sets the stage for further exploration throughout the workshop.

Judith Ortiz Cofer leads an opening session of the writer’s workshop, a continuing experience that is also an essential part of the workshop’s Web site at www.learner.org/channel/workshops/writedevelop. At this gathering, Ms. Ortiz Cofer talks about giving students just the right push to encourage them to jump into the pool known as the writing experience.

Key Points

- In planning for success in the writing classroom, teachers have to be aware of what they want their students’ writing to look like at the end of the year.
- Teachers should consider local, state, and national writing standards as the floor, not the ceiling, in planning for student success.
- There are a multitude of processes involved in writing. Teachers should plan to support each of these as they unfold for each student writer.
- Students gain enormous personal and academic benefits in developing as writers.

Learning Objectives

After participating in this session, you will be able to:

- Describe the process through which you plan for success in your writing classroom,
- Identify some hallmarks of the kinds of experiences in which you want writing students to engage,
- Identify how these experiences match local, state, and national standards, and
- List several benefits students gain in learning how to write well.

The Classrooms in This Video

- Joan Cone, Ph.D., 9th grade. El Cerrito High School, El Cerrito, California
- MaryCarmen Cruz, 9th–12th grade. Cholla High Magnet School, Tucson, Arizona
- Charles Ellenbogen, 11th and 12th grade. Baltimore City College High School, Baltimore, Maryland
- Robyn Jackson, Ph.D. 11th grade. Gaithersburg High School, Gaithersburg, Maryland
- Susie Lebryk-Chao, 12th grade. Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology, Alexandria, Virginia
- Lori Mayo, 9th grade. Far Rockaway High School, Queens, New York
- Kelly Quintero, 12th grade. Huntington High School, Long Island, New York
- Renee Spencer, 11th grade. Woodrow Wilson High School, Portsmouth, Virginia

Featured Voices in the Conversation

- Kylene Beers
- Lucy Calkins
- Judith Ortiz Cofer
- Margo Jefferson
- Maxine Hong Kingston
- Tracy Mack
- Ruthanne Lum McCunn
- Christopher Myers
- Amy Tan

Background Reading

“Teaching Composition: A Position Statement.” The Commission on Composition, National Council of Teachers of English. This statement is available in the Appendix of this guide.

Optional: For additional resources, visit the *Developing Writers* Web site at www.learner.org/channel/workshops/writedevelop. Select Workshop 1 and Additional Resources.

Workshop Session (On-Site)

Getting Ready (30 minutes)

Discuss

Discuss the following questions:

- Considering the grade level and ability level of the students you teach, what have you come to expect about their writing as they enter your class?
- Again considering grade and ability levels, where do you want your student writers to be in terms of their development at the end of their time with you?
- What is the most important thing you can do to help students move forward as writers?

Facilitator: Use the questions below to spark discussion before viewing the workshop program. Participants may write answers to the questions in their workshop journals, as time permits. You may use all of the questions or select only a few.

Reflect in Workshop Journals

If you had to choose a metaphor for your work with student writers, what would it be? Explain your choice.

Watch the Workshop Video (60 minutes)

Watch and Discuss

Questions to think about and discuss as you watch the video:

Pause at the title card “Why Should Students Write?” This follows a discussion about connecting with other professionals.

- In planning for your writing classroom, how much time do you slot for writing *per se* on a daily/weekly/monthly/semester basis? What are some of the advantages and disadvantages of your plan?
- How many of the writing assignments in your class could be classified as “writing to learn” and how many could be classified as “learning to write”?
- What texts do you plan on using in your writing classroom throughout the year? To what degree will you integrate literature with writing?
- What are the major writing assignments you plan (or are expected) to incorporate into your curriculum throughout the semester/year? How do these correlate to local, state, or national standards?
- How do you share your expectations for the year (scope of assignments, progress, participation, etc.) with your students?
- Do you agree with Lori Mayo’s statement that good teaching is good teaching and local, state, and national standards are generally in tune with techniques of good teaching?
- What questions or concerns come to mind as you watch the video?

Facilitator: If you are watching on videocassette, you may pause at the segments indicated in this section to give participants opportunities to discuss, reflect, and interact with the program. If needed, rewind and replay segments of the program so that viewers can thoughtfully examine all pertinent information. If you are watching a real-time broadcast, ask participants to consider the questions as they view the program and discuss them later.

You may select any or all of the questions below to discuss, as time permits and according to the interests of your participants. Encourage participants to respond to the questions they didn’t have time to discuss as a group in their journals or on Channel-Talk.

Workshop Session (On-Site), cont'd.

View program until the end.

- In your opinion, what is the most important quality students gain by learning to write well?
- How important is it for you to share your own writing with your students? Explain why you feel this way.
- What are the kinds of prompts your students are expected to respond to on high-stakes assessments? What specific kinds of prewriting exercises would be helpful to them in preparing to respond to these prompts?
- What are some ways in which you have helped students discern the difference between editing and revising?
- What is the best piece of advice you ever heard or read about the processes of writing?
- What strategies that you saw demonstrated in the video would you like to adopt for use in your own classroom? Why do you think they would work well with your students?
- What questions or concerns come to mind as you watch the video?

Going Further (30 minutes)

As a group, brainstorm a list of writing classroom goals you feel are worthy. Think about ideas raised in the video, in the background reading for this workshop (“Teaching Composition: A Position Statement,” available in this guide’s Appendix), and within the standards that guide your individual classroom practices.

Facilitator: Compile suggestions on a list and display it so that everyone can read it. Divide participants into groups of four or five.

In your small groups, determine one concrete way of implementing a specific goal on the list. Map out a list of several procedures and/or processes that will help you meet the selected goal. Reconvene as a whole group to share ideas and suggestions. Select a volunteer recorder to compile a list of ideas that can be shared with participants at a later date.

Review and recap the discussion by picking one or two key goals that are universally shared by all participants. Record these goals and the related suggestions for implementation in your workshop journals.

Between Sessions (On Your Own)

Homework Assignment

Journal

Often, teachers use student work as a measure of their success. If students have generally improved their writing over the course of a semester, instructors feel that they have been successful. Think about other, more personal measures of success. Describe one of these measures in your workshop journal and outline a plan to work toward that goal. Consider objectives such as holding successful conferences with your writers or consistently being able to find one thing about every student's work that you can praise or celebrate.

In your journal, you may also want to include answers to any remaining questions from this session that you did not have time to discuss, as well as thoughts, questions, and discoveries from the workshop itself and learning experiences that take place in your own classroom.

Reading

In preparation for the next session, read the Background Reading for Workshop 2: Barbara Gross Davis. "Collaborative Learning: Group Work and Study Teams," *Tools for Teaching*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1993. This chapter is available in the Appendix of this guide.

Optional: For additional resources on topics discussed in this session, visit the *Developing Writers* Web site at www.learner.org/channel/workshops/writedevelop. Select Workshop 1 and Additional Resources.

Teacher Tools

The following Teacher Tools are included in this guide for your use in planning classroom experiences:

- Standards and Planning
- Planning for a Major Project in the Writing Classroom

Ongoing Activities

Channel-Talk

You are encouraged to participate in an email discussion list called Channel-Talk. Send comments and questions regarding the workshop to other participants around the country. Comments can also be viewed on the *Developing Writers: A Workshop for High School Teachers* Web site. Access Channel-Talk on the *Developing Writers* Web site at www.learner.org/channel/workshops/writedevelop.

Consider sharing thoughts that came up as you wrote in your journal, questions you did not have time to discuss in this session, and experiences from your classroom.

The Web Site

Go online for materials and resources to deepen your understanding and enhance implementation of the practices shown in the workshop.

Between Sessions (On Your Own), cont'd.

The Classroom Connection

Student Activities

Try these activities with your students.

- **Planning for Success:** What do your students value about writing? What aspects of writing do they think they need to improve? What kinds of genres do they want to master? Talk about their individual goals as you share your thoughts about the scope and nature of the writing class experiences you had planned for them. Can you amend or change any of your plans to accommodate their goals?
- **Preparing for High-Stakes Tests:** Because students often face stringent requirements in high-stakes writing assessments, it's best to start thinking about incorporating activities that will scaffold student success as you plan your curriculum for the year. Look closely at past copies of tests that your students will be required to take. What are some commonalities you observe? (Does the test emphasize timed writing? Does it require outlines or other prewriting activities? How long must the pieces be? Etc.) How can you best help students succeed in these common elements within your current curricular plans for the year?
- **Inkshedding:** One activity you may want to consider introducing to your class during the first few days of meeting is a technique called *inkshedding*. In this technique, writers respond in writing to a common experience (coming into your classroom for the first time, listening to your expectations, etc.) and immediately exchange their papers with one of their peers. The peer then marks anything they found striking in the piece by underlining it. The underlined passages are then transcribed, copied for all members of the class, and discussed the next day. Inkshedding encourages a vital dialogue between writer and reader, providing an immediate and identifiable audience for each writer. This practice also offers a nonjudgmental experience, providing student writers the chance to hear that their words have affected their readers.

Teacher as a Reflective Practitioner

Think about the most successful experience you have had with a student writer and respond to the following questions:

- What about the experience made it so memorable?
- What are some ways in which you might build on the essential features of this event as you plan for the semester or year with other writers?

Notes
