

# Minnesota Writing Project

## --- Demonstration Lesson ---

**Title:** “What Do You Want Me to Do?” Using One-on-One Conferences to Reinforce Students’ Ownership of Their Writing

**Grade appropriate:** Adaptable for any

**Approximate length of time to complete lesson/unit:** 45 minutes to set up conference expectations

**Learning objectives and significance of lesson:**

The objectives of this demonstration are (1) to show how using writing center strategies and principles while conducting one-on-one conferences allows the teacher to reinforce students’ ownership of their writing and (2) to provide activities that set up conference expectations before the conferences begin. This lesson provides teachers with a mindset and strategies that they can bring to conferences in order to promote student learning.

**Brief summary/outline:**

Use these activities to introduce to your students the concept of and expectations for conferences.

1. Discuss with your students what they think the conferences are for, what their role is in them, and what your role is.
2. Conduct a “fishbowl conference” in front of the class with a student in which you model what you will do during a conference. Stop and explain your actions, behaviors, and questions. Prompt the student to take on the role you expect for your students; praise him or her when he or she fulfills that role well.

Use these basic tips from the writing consultancy world to promote students’ ownership of their papers:

A. Conference mindset:

1. The conference is a conversation between writers, one of whom is also a writing mentor.
2. Talking about one’s writing facilitates better writing
3. We use the writing to focus on the writer and teach her or him something to use in future writing.
4. It’s vital for the student to feel at ease with us and to receive our full attention.
5. Praising what is done well is as important as pointing to areas that are weaker.
6. Focus on the writer’s current concerns rather than what we think she or he ought to be working on, and limit the focus to one or two issues, depending on the time we have.
7. The writer owns the writing; the consultant is a sounding board and an objective reader whose purpose is to evoke and promote students’ ideas.
8. When the conference ends, the writer ought to have a good idea of what to do next.

B. During the conference:

1. Use Active listening (“What I’m hearing you say is...,” “It sounds like...,” “Why did you choose those?” “Tell me more about...”)
2. Use open rather than closed questions. (“What is the main idea of your paper” rather than “Does your paper have a main idea?”)
3. Pay attention to body language—yours and the writers.
4. Respond as a reader:
  - a. React as a reader (“I’m confused...,” “I get lost here,” “From your introduction, I expected... but instead I got ....”)

- b. Request information (“Can you tell me more about...?”)
  - c. Request clarification (“What’s your idea here?” “How does this idea connect to the one before?”)
  - d. Develop critical awareness and encourage the writer to consider audience or purpose (“So what?” “Can you give me an example?”)
  - e. Help the writer to refocus or rethink (“How would someone who disagrees respond to your argument?” “How is that related to...?”)
  - f. Prompt the writer to think more deeply (“What happens after that?” “If that is so, then what happens?”)
5. Use silence and wait time to allow the writer time to think.

### **Related Resources:**

Anderson, Carl. “Conversations with Student Writers.” *School Talk* January 2001: 2-5.

---. *How’s It Going? A Practical Guide to Conferring with Student Writers*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2000.

Connors, Robert, and Cheryl Glenn. *The New St. Martin’s Guide to Teaching Writing*. New York: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 1999. 53-59.

Ryan, Leigh, and Lisa Zimmerelli. *The Bedford Guide for Writing Tutors*, 4<sup>th</sup> edition. New York: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2006. 21-27.

### **Possible extensions or adaptations for different purposes/student needs:**

Teach the writing consultancy tips to students to help them be more effective when giving feedback to each other.

**For additional information, contact:**

**Debra Hartley: [hartley@umn.edu](mailto:hartley@umn.edu)**