

can you Hear Me now? USING DIGITAL RECORDING TOOLS TO CAPTURE AND SHARE WRITING CONFERENCES

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Giving feedback to student writers is something that teachers and writers have struggled with for as long as there have been teachers of writing. And with so much of a teacher's time devoted to commenting on student writing, it is no wonder. But over the course of the last few decades, teachers and students have benefited from feedback strategies rooted in a process-based approach to teaching composition, understanding that intervening after students complete the project of composing does little to help them develop their skills as writers. By providing feedback to students as they engage in the act of composing rather than at its conclusion, students more readily make revisions to the content of their work. Writers like Donald Graves, Peter Elbow, and Kelly Gallagher explicate the reasons why giving feedback to students during the writing process rather than after expands and enlarges student writing experiences.

TYPES OF FEEDBACK:

In chapter seven of *Teaching Adolescent Writers*, Kelly Gallagher develops specific strategies to help focus teacher feedback on the craft of student writing. In thinking through what kinds of feedback will best help his students develop their writing, Gallagher divides his responses into two areas: craft and editing. “*Craft* is defined as those things that good writers do. *Editing* is defined as fixing mistakes writers make” (143).

ELEMENTS OF CRAFT	ELEMENTS OF EDITING
Strong voice	Sentence boundaries
Sentence sense/variety	Run-on sentences and fragments
Word power (mature vocabulary/use of metaphorical language/show, don't tell)	Subject/verb agreement
Strong verbs	Comma errors
Paragraphing for effect	Quotation marks
Effective introductions/conclusions	Pronoun agreement/vagueness
Clear thesis	Capitalization
Flow (sequence/coherence)	Apostrophes
Development/complexity of ideas	Semicolons and colons
Effective transitions	Italics
Special narrative strategies (e.g., flashback, time shifts)	Numbers
Strong dialogue	Parenthesis
Rhetorical choices to suit particular audience/purpose	Word Choice
	Spelling
	Citation/formatting

Based on Figure 7.3 from Kelly Gallagher's Teaching Adolescent Writers, Stenhouse Publishers, 2006.

TEACHER REFLECTION:

Think about a student essay on which you recently wrote feedback to the student writer. Use the chart on the previous page to check off the types of comments you wrote on that essay. Do you find yourself providing more feedback on craft elements or elements of editing? Why do you think this is the case?

ADOPT THE STANCE OF a reader, NOT a grader

"When responding to students' writing, either via written commentary or conferencing," Kelly Gallagher writes, "I am careful to take a stance as the reader rather than as the grader" (144). Gallagher suggests using one or more of the following phrases as a starting point for providing feedback to practicing writers:

- As a reader, I wonder...
- As a reader, I am confused about...
- Will the reader understand...?
- What about this passage might confuse the reader?
- Is this enough context for the reader?
- What might still be missing for the reader?
- What do you want the reader to take from this sentence/passage/piece?

TEACHER REFLECTION:

Both Kelly Gallagher and Peter Elbow advocate that teachers take on the role of supportive readers for their practicing writers. In "Ranking, Evaluating, and Liking: Sorting Out Three Forms of Judgment," Peter Elbow writes, "...the way writers *learn* to like their writing is by the grace of having a reader or two who likes it-- even though it's not good. Having at least a few appreciative readers is probably indispensable to getting better" (200). How might adopting the stance of interested reader change the ways in which you respond to your students' writing?

CONFERRING:

Conferring with students isn't about fixing the particular errors in a particular piece of writing. Instead, as Lucy Calkins' suggests in her book *The Art of Teaching Writing*, "[We] are teaching the writer and not the writing. Our decisions must be guided by 'what might help this *writer*' rather than 'what might help this *writing*'" (228). The act of conferring is a dialogue between writers about rhetorical choices, and those conversations support the writer, not simply a single piece of writing. The goal of the writing conference is to provide a student with supportive feedback and a writing strategy that she can use in her current writing piece as well as in her future compositions. Inspired by the work of Lucy Calkins and Nancie Atwell, teacher and writer Carl Anderson has published and presented extensively on conferring with student writers. Below you will find a model for the basic writing conference adapted from Carl Anderson's 2010 NESa Spring Educators Conference presentation.

The Role of the Teacher and Student in a Writing Conference

TEACHER'S ROLE

STUDENT'S ROLE

In the first part of the conversation...	
• Invite the student to set an agenda for the conference. What is it that she is working through? • Ask assessment questions. • Read the student's writing. • Make a teaching decision.	• Set the agenda for the conference by describing her writing work. • Respond to the teacher's research questions by describing her writing work more deeply.
In the second part of the conversation...	
• Give the student clear, precise feedback. • Teach the student a writing strategy, craft move, or language convention that she might apply to her writing. • Describe how writers employ the strategy discussed, and when possible, share examples from our own writing or published texts. • Nudge the student to try the strategy. • Link the conference to the student's independent work.	• Listen carefully to her teacher's feedback and teaching. • Ask questions to clarify and deepen her understanding of her teacher's feedback and teaching. • Try the new strategy discussed with the teacher. • Commit to trying the new strategy after the writing conference.

TEACHER REFLECTION:

Conferring with students maintains the student writer's authorial control over his work and opens greater opportunities for teachers to have conversations with the writer about his rhetorical and content choices. Rather than the one-sided feedback that students get through a teacher's written comments, writing conferences encourage reflection and support the student's autonomy. But opening up space during class to engage in writing conferences requires time.

Both Kelly Gallagher and Carl Anderson write about a shift that happens when teachers begin to implement writing conferences as their strategy for providing student writers with feedback. Rather than spending a majority of our time responding to the final, polished writing pieces our students turn in for a grade, we need to shift our time so that we provide more feedback as they write. This is a more valuable use of our efforts to support our emerging writers. How will you go about opening up class time to make

this shift? What strategies or routines will you put in place to support your use of regular writing conferences?

RECORDING THE WRITING CONFERENCE:

Many students and teachers are using Google products and shared folders to turn in written work. Digital tools like the shared folders within Google Drive makes it easy for teachers and students to give feedback on each other's work throughout the drafting process since both can access each other's writing at any time, either in school or outside of it. In addition to using the comment feature found in Google Drive products to provide written feedback to student writers, there are also a number of Add-On features which make it easy for both teachers and students to access audio recordings embedded within a specific writing document. And accessing such tools will make it easy for teachers to record their writing conferences.

Why record them? When writing conferences happen in the presence of other students in the classroom, there is the added benefit of supporting other writers in the room who overhear. Penny Kittle writes in her book *Write Beside Them*, "Students want to hear what other students are writing about and will listen in, doubling or tripling the value of that writing conference. Writing depends on talk" (86). So it makes sense that using audio recording tools to capture and share these conferring moments can become a powerful tool for providing feedback to student writers. And here's how:

USING GOOGLE DRIVE:

On the day of a writing conference, the teacher will call a student up to the teacher's computer where the shared student's essay is pulled up on the teacher's computer screen using Google Drive. As the teacher engages in her regular conferring routine, the teacher can load an audio "Add-On" to record the conversation she is having with her student about the writing piece. There's a handy little tool in Chrome called Kaizena that can help teachers do just this (formerly 121Writing).

When in Drive, click on "Create," and at the bottom of the options, you will see "Connect More Apps." Use the search box to find and install Kaizena. What does it do? It allows a user to record audio while looking at a specific Google document. So, while the student and teacher are conferencing, the teacher can record their conversation so that when the student goes back to her seat or goes home, she can access a recording of the conversation about her writing piece any time she wants. And not only will individual students have the ability to go back and listen to the audio record of their conference, but if their work is shared in a class Google folder, other students in the class could access the conference and learn from it as well. Using this conferencing model, a teacher could end up with four or five essays from each student with audio conferences for each, and at the least that's 80 recorded conferences for students to use as models to improve their own writing.

TUTORIAL:

Find a video tutorial at <http://vimeo.com/76071853>.

TEACHER REFLECTION:

Using audio recording apps to combine what we know from Peter Elbow and Kelly Gallagher about *when* to provide student writers with feedback with Carl Anderson's work on *how* to provide feedback through writing conferences seems a fruitful way of leveraging 2.0 tools to expand the connections our student writers can make to the feedback discussed during the conferring session. And there's a lot of promising research being done on the effectiveness of using audio recordings to provide feedback to practicing writers. But as any good teacher knows, we need to scaffold new learning and new routines in order to ensure their success. Where do you see problems arising? What might you do to provide support to your student writers as you move to recording your writing conferences using digital tools?

RESOURCES:

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