

## Elements of an Effective Writing Lesson:

***Effective writing instruction engages students in constructing a point, organizing to best develop the point, and delivering the point clearly and skillfully.***

### **Students must be engaged in the process of authentic writing.**

- We reject formulaic writing. For instance, we will not teach our students to be effective writers by teaching students to write responses to literature by writing formulaically [for instance: 1. topic sentence that turns around the question, 2. evidence sentence starting with “the text says...”, 3. Elaboration sentence that starts with “this proves that...”, 4. Evidence sentence, 5. elaboration sentence, etc.]. Instead this teaches them that writing is about following a set of lists instead of having something to say and then saying it in the best way possible.
- Effective writing has the following elements:
  - *A clear point.* Writing needs to say something. Therefore, when given a writing prompt or an open writing assignment, students have to have something they want to say. This is the real hook with writing – it is a means of sharing your thoughts with someone else.
  - *Organization that best develops the point.* Effective organization is not squeezing a point into a proscribed format – it is clearly relating information in the order that best conveys the point to the reader.
  - *Clear delivery of the point.* Clarity should be their key goal in all writing. Readers struggle to follow texts with incorrect conventions and imprecise and inaccurate word choice.
  - *Skillful delivery of the point.* Skillful delivery of a point not only is clear – it makes the reader care about the author’s point.
- During every writing lesson, students should be engaged in writing texts that have these elements and evaluating their own effectiveness.

### **Students must analyze the effectiveness of other writers.**

- Nearly all writing lessons include an intentional examination of a piece of writing. Most of the writing will be effective writing and the teacher will build students’ understanding of what makes that writing effective. For instance, a fourth grade text may have a clear and compelling organization that explains all the effects of a certain action. A seventh grade text may have effective transitions between paragraphs. A first grade text may have different sentence beginnings (in contrast to “Then I ...” at the start of each sentence).
- Students must engage with the selection deeply enough to consider and articulate what is effective about this writing and why.

- Students should engage in writing exercises such as combining sentences to write a clearer, more powerful sentence or separating a tangled run-on into clearer, more powerful sentences. But these exercises should be done in the context of a text, not in the context of worksheets.
- Students should also engage in comparing and contrasting two (or more) pieces of writing and clearly articulate their evaluation of the relative effectiveness of the two pieces.

### **Students write often.**

- In order to write well, students need to write daily.
- Students need to write a variety of texts of different lengths and in different time frames. They need to write shorter pieces often and longer pieces regularly. They need to write a whole piece in a given setting with time constraints. They need to write pieces that take many separate sessions to complete.
- The majority of student writing should be nonfiction writing (expository, persuasive, book reviews, etc.).

### **Students receive specific feedback on their writing.**

- Teachers need to give feedback to students on each part of the general writing process. They need feedback on whether they have a point, how well organized their piece is in delivering that point, and how clear and skillful their writing is.
- Feedback is only effective if it is specific and actionable. “Good work” or “work harder” is not effective. “This sentence is awkward and should be rewritten” or “This point contradicts what you said in paragraph 5” are effective pieces of feedback.
- Feedback must be manageable. Hearing 100 things that are wrong with your writing is overwhelming and not productive.
- Students need to understand feedback so that he or she can be apply this feedback to future writing.
- Students need a chance to rewrite after getting feedback.
- Peer feedback can be helpful, but teacher feedback is essential.

### **Students engage in the struggle.**

- We reject I-we-you teaching in which students watch a teacher model and then imitate the teacher’s approach. A teacher thinking aloud for the entire lesson puts the thinking on the teacher; effective writing lessons put the thinking on the students.
- Students must be pushed to articulate their thinking, even when that articulation is a struggle.

**All students are engaged throughout the lesson; they are engaged in the work, engaged in learning from others, and engaged in monitoring, articulating, and refining their own thinking.**

- Engagement doesn't mean every hand is up but it does mean every student is tracking the conversation and able to contribute at any moment. Students should be participating meaningfully at many times throughout the lesson; this could be achieved through cold calling, partner or group talks, quick writes, or other means.
- Engagement during writing time involves writing – planning, drafting, revising, etc.