

Structure of a Conference

Your conferences are based on theories you are building about a writer. That theory is formed from your interviews with and observations of the student.

Research:

Check out your theory about the reader/writer.

- What is he/she able to do as a writer?
- What is he/she trying to do?
- What do I think he/she might need to try next?
- Solidify or revise your theory.

Decide:

What does this writer need in order to get further in his/her work?

- How can you “get behind” (support) that which he/she is trying to do?
- Based on what you know about what good readers (or good writers) do, what strategies might you offer that would help this student?
- Choose one strategy you will teach the writer (that can be applied beyond this one piece)

Praise:

- Positive feedback
- Praise what the writer is doing well or trying to do

Teach:

Hook your student into the strategy.

- What one strategy (or crafting technique) can you leave this writer with?
- How can you clearly explain the strategy?
- Have you explained how this work will help them as a writer? Have you helped them see the purpose?
- How can you hold the student accountable for doing this work? (ex: The student might restate or write down the work he/she is about to do.)

How Long? With practice, and through the study of conferences, you should be able to have quality conferences that last only 10-15 minutes. Some will last only 5 minutes; it varies.

Record Keeping: It is important during a conference to take brief notes about what the student is doing (intentions, strengths and weaknesses) and what strategy you've offered. You might do this by keeping track on a clipboard chart or in individual conference notebooks. You should reflect periodically on your conference notes. Those notes should:

- Inform future conferences with students - helping you rethink your theories about each student as a reader/writer.

- Give you ideas for future mini lessons.