The Writing Workshop: A Predictable Structure

Walk into Ms. Lindsay's fifth-grade writing class, and you're likely to see children all over the room, engaged in a range of different activities. José and Hayden have their heads bent over José's paper, engrossed in a peer conference. Charlotte is working at a "private office," a desk with a cardboard carrel. Amir is at the bookshelf starting research on his report on Pluto. Yung has a colored pen in one hand and the dictionary in the other; she's editing her own writing before submitting it for publication. This is what writing workshop looks like in Ms. Lindsay's—and countless other—classrooms. Like "real writers," these students are writing, consulting, researching, changing, talking, reading, and generally making decisions about their own work.

The Writing Process
• Getting started
• Getting it down
• Getting it good
• Getting it right
• Getting it out

Writers follow a variety of routines that generally involve planning and preparation, getting ideas down on paper, rewriting, polishing, rewriting some more, and finally making the work public. In school, we have come to call these routines "the writing process," as defined by Donald Graves in 1983. Although this process may vary from writer to writer and from task to task, it usually consists of a series of activities that includes prewriting (planning, generating, and organizing ideas), drafting, revising (making changes to improve clarity and style), editing (fixing mechanical errors), and publishing (sharing with an audience). I like to tell intermediate students that the writing process is all about getting started, getting it down on paper, getting it good, getting it right, and getting it out to a reader.

Of course, not every writer or piece of writing goes through the same sequence at the same pace and at the same time. Not every piece of writing is taken to publication. Some pieces of writing take forever to plan, while others are quickly drafted then revised over and over again. Some novelists tell us that they will revise a piece of work dozens of times. It is said that Thomas Jefferson made over 30 revisions to his original draft of the Declaration of Independence. Then, Congress made another 80 changes to it before it

appeared in the form we now know. (An Internet search for "Declaration of Independence draft" will generate images of the actual document, full of strike-throughs, additions, and other revisions.)

The ebbs and flows of the writing process are challenging enough for an individual writer, so how do we manage this in a classroom full of writers? The writing workshop is an organizational structure that allows students to operate at different stages of the writing process at any given time. The great strength of the writing workshop is that it fosters student independence, freeing up the teacher to monitor, assess, and provide support that extends the reach of his or her young writers (Graves, 1983).

The Writing Workshop

Lucy Calkins (1983) has described the writing workshop as a deliberately predictable environment where the unpredictable can happen. In any writing workshop, from kindergarten to college, there are three basic time components: teaching time, writing time, and sharing time. The workshop typically starts with explicit instruction, usually in the form of a 5- to 10-minute minilesson (Atwell, 1998; Calkins, 1986). The largest portion of the writing workshop is dedicated to sustained writing and conferring with teacher and peers. As the students write, the teacher circulates among them to offer brief support and advice or to conduct individual conferences. The workshop generally ends with a brief opportunity for sharing and celebrating, often called the "author's chair" (Graves & Hansen, 1983).

Writing Workshop
• Teaching time: 10–15 min.
• Writing time: 25–35 min.
• Sharing time: 10 min.

How might this structure look in our intermediate classrooms? Given the importance of a predictable routine, explicit instruction, sustained writing time, and opportunities to confer and receive feedback, the writing workshop requires at least 45–60 minutes. The minimum 45 minutes, for example, might comprise a 10-minute minilesson, 25 minutes of writing, and a 10-minute sharing period.

Experts such as Graves advocate scheduling writing workshop every day. In our busy school timetables, how can we find 45–60 minutes a day for writing? Perhaps it might require some creative timetabling, such as splitting the 90-minute literacy block equally between reading and writing workshop, or offering reading and writing workshops on alternate days. Maybe there are existing practices we might change or reconsider to make time for writing. For example, many classrooms use precious writing time creating daily journals. Although this practice may have benefits in helping students organize their thoughts or share feelings, it rarely translates to better writing. That's because journals tend to be "hands off"; there is no explicit teaching of writing and no accountability on the part of the writers to demonstrate craft or process.

Another way to find time for writing is to reconsider dedicated grammar or language arts instruction. There is more than 75 years of research indicating that grammar instruction in isolation does not improve writing (Hillocks, 1986); in fact, the *Writing Next* analysis of research on adolescent writers found that grammar instruction in isolation was one of the few practices that actually had a negative correlation with improving writing (Graham & Perin, 2007). Embedding grammar instruction into the writing workshop makes better use of everyone's time, because it provides opportunities for immediate and authentic application and practice of grammatical concepts.

Teaching Time: The Power of the Minilesson

In the past, some of us have misinterpreted the writing workshop as an arrangement in which the teacher functioned as a "guide on the side," hoping that our students would flourish as writers simply by writing. While this approach may have produced *more* writing, it didn't always lead to *better* writing. If we want our students to become more proficient writers, we know that we must teach "with a capital *T*" (Atwell, 1998, p. 22). Students need organized, focused instruction on the skills, techniques, and strategies used by writers to take a piece of writing from conception to publication. The minilesson is one of the most powerful structures we have for providing that instruction.

Every writing workshop starts with teaching: explicit instruction in an element of the writing process, conventions, or craft. Because these teaching sessions are brief and focused, we call them minilessons (Calkins, 1986). We want the bulk of the writing workshop time to be for *student writing*; therefore, our minilessons shouldn't run more than 10–15 minutes. Most often, minilessons are presented to the whole class; however, at times, we may pull small groups of students with similar needs for a focused lesson.

The writing minilesson offers us the opportunity to teach a range of skills and strategies. We might introduce a new planning tool or revising technique. We might model an element of the writer's craft, such as showing rather than telling. We might even use the opportunity to establish workshop routines: how to organize a writing folder, how to conduct an effective peer conference, how to manage materials, or how to request a teacher conference. The writing minilesson is also the most appropriate place to teach writing conventions, like quotation marks, subject–verb agreement, or sentence structure.

The best way to teach children how to write is to show them what writers do. Our students need to see us write. We need to model writing and articulate the in-the-head thinking that goes on as writers make decisions about what to write and how to commit those ideas to paper. In an interview with *Instructor* magazine, Graves (n.d.) was asked, "If you had to choose one

thing teachers should do when teaching writing, what would it be?" (para. 15). He replied,

> Write yourself. Invite children to do something you're already doing. If you're not doing it, Hey, the kids say, I can't wait to grow up and not have to write, like you…. You can't ask someone to sing a duet with you until you know the tune yourself. (para. 16)

There are several different levels of modeled writing, from "I do" through "we do" to "you do." The gradual release of responsibility model (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983) starts with explicit instruction, moves through guided support, and finally reaches independent application. Explicit instruction in writing often starts with *modeled writing*, in which the teacher demonstrates and thinks aloud as he or she writes. In a *shared writing* lesson, the teacher and students compose the text together while the teacher scribes. In *interactive writing*, the students and teacher compose collaboratively, and students take turns doing the writing. It's important for students to have opportunities for *guided practice*, with activities that scaffold and support them as they practice a new strategy or craft, before sending them off on their own for *independent application*. What distinguishes guided practice from merely assigning writing? For me, the difference is a focus on the strategy or learning goal rather than on the writing product.

Almost any kind of enlarged print works well for modeled writing. Some teachers like to use an overhead projector, because it enables them to face their students. Others prefer large flipcharts to keep the students physically close. Today's interactive whiteboards make modeling and demonstration easy and accessible. Regardless of the level of technology we employ, it's important to keep the modeled piece on hand to revisit in future lessons.

The minilessons in this book all follow the same structure:

- *Introduction* links the minilesson to prior learning and explicitly introduces the lesson goal.
- *Instruction* explains the strategy, usually through teacher modeling.
- *Guided Practice* offers the students an opportunity to try out the strategy with support.
- *Independent Application* asks students to try the strategy on their own.

With only about 10 minutes for explicit teaching in the writing workshop, we want to make sure that our minilesson packs a punch. Based on research from experts such as Calkins (2004), Graves (1983), and Patricia Cunningham and colleagues (Cunningham, Cunningham, Hall, & Moore**,** 2005), as well as

experience from hundreds of classrooms, the following are some guidelines for effective preparation and delivery of minilessons.

1. *Use assessment to guide instruction.* There is no program that can tell us what to teach and when. No publisher knows what our students need at any given time. Only we can know that, and we get the information by constantly assessing our students' writing to determine what they can do well and what they need to know next.

2. *Keep it brief.* The operative term is *mini*; don't let the minilesson turn into a maxilesson. The primary purpose of the writing workshop is student writing! Avoid the temptation to extend the lesson portion at the expense of writing time. If necessary, spread the teaching over two days.

3. *Focus on only one key learning goal per lesson.* When we think aloud during the modeled writing lesson, it's very easy to run in a dozen different directions at once. It's important to be very clear about what we want students to learn from this lesson and focus on this learning with the students.

4. *Tell students what they will learn in the lesson.* Who has time to turn a minilesson into a guessing game? Not only should we be clear ourselves about the focus of the lesson, but we should also make sure that the students know what they will be learning. It helps to focus the learning when we start a lesson with a simple statement:

> *Boys and girls, today you are going to learn about revising to add details to a piece of writing.*

5. *Start by connecting to the known.* We all learn best when new information is linked to existing knowledge. Jean Piaget (1952) calls this existing knowledge "schema" and posits that learning involves *assimilating* new information into our schema or *accommodating* our schema to include the new information. When we open a minilesson with a connection to what students already know, we are preparing their schema to accept new learning. For example,

> *Boys and girls, you already know how to revise a piece of writing by inserting details. Today you're going to learn another revising technique: replacing words and details.*

6. *Be explicit and direct.* Not all of our teaching needs to be interactive. Sometimes we may want to involve the students in composing or brainstorming; at other times, we will deliver the information directly. We need to make the most of a very limited amount of time for a minilesson, which requires making choices about the most efficient way to achieve the learning goals.

7. *Expect students to be accountable for their learning.* Make it clear that you will be looking for some demonstration of the learning in the students' writing:

> *Today, when I come around to see your writing, I want you to show me a place where you added a showing detail to a telling statement.*

8. *Reteach as necessary.* We can't expect that our students will master a writing concept after one minilesson. Some kids will profess to have never heard of a concept that we taught just last week! Repeating a few lessons several times, with frequent opportunities for practice, will go further in helping our students master the habits of highly effective writers than touching on many concepts just once.

Writing Time

Writing time occupies the largest portion of the writing workshop. Most often, students will be working on self-selected writing during the workshop, although sometimes they will work on guided or assigned writing tasks. At some point in the workshop, they should be expected to try out what they learned in the day's minilesson. This expectation may entail revisiting a finished draft, integrating their learning into a work in progress, or starting a new piece of writing.

Of course, writing time is not exclusively about putting pen to paper. During this time, a student may write for a while, do some research, confer with a writing partner, or read a piece of writing aloud to himself or another student. Writing workshop packs a powerful pedagogical punch, because it immerses students in all of the language arts: reading, writing, listening, and speaking.

Writing is a social process for most writers (Roser & Bomer, 2005). Through conversations before, during, and after writing, students clarify their own thinking, rehearse, revise their writing, and collect ideas from others, including the teacher. At times, however, some writers prefer an environment without distractions, so I like to distinguish between "silent" writing time, when no talking or movement is permitted, and "quiet" writing time, when students are free to converse and confer in soft voices. Jennifer Jacobson (2010) advocates starting writing time with the "Quiet Ten"—10 minutes of silent thinking and writing time that is signaled by the sounds of soft music.

One of the greatest benefits of the writing workshop structure is the development of independent learning habits. An important lesson for students is, "you're never *done* with writing workshop." Students learn very quickly not to ask that dreaded question, "What do I do when I'm done?" because the answer is always, "When you're done, you've just begun!" When they've

finished what they're working on, students have the option of starting a new piece of writing, finishing an incomplete draft, or revising a piece of writing. It is an important step in learning for writers to take responsibility for their own learning.

Writers basically need just two tools for writing workshop: something to write with and something to write on. For intermediate grades, I prefer to have students write on loose-leaf paper. Using only one side of the page, they write double-spaced, whether it's word-processed or written longhand, which enables them to do all revisions on the same sheet. I try to avoid having students recopy anything until the final draft; let's not make revision any more painful than it already is! Of course, that means we have to provide them with the tools and symbols for revision: carets for inserting words and short ideas, strike-throughs for deleting or replacing information, spider legs for drawing a line from a point in the text to information on another part of the page, paper stretchers for taping in an extra section of paper, and of course, cutting and pasting to reorganize information.

To keep the writing organized, I like to use a three-pocket writing folder, such as the one pictured in Figure 1.1. The first pocket holds ideas, plans, and topics for future writing. The second pocket holds works in progress and incomplete drafts. The third pocket holds finished drafts that have not yet been revised and edited for publication. These folders are simple to make from easily available materials, can be personalized by each student, and if laminated, are durable enough to carry over from one year to the next.

FIGURE 1.1. Three-Pocket Writing Folder Instructions

Materials: One 24" × 36" sheet of colored poster board, tag board, or Bristol board (as heavy in weight as possible while still folding effectively)

Directions:
1. Fold the bottom third of the paper up to form a pocket along the bottom.
2. Fold the entire page into three equal vertical sections.
3. Label the first pocket "Writing Ideas," the second pocket "Works in Progress," and the third "Finished Drafts."
4. Have the student personalize his or her own folder.
5. Laminate the folder, if possible.
6. Use a long-armed stapler to reinforce the three pockets.

Conferences: The Teacher's Role

During writing time, the teacher circulates among the students, offering support, gentle nudges, guiding questions, and explicit suggestions for improvement. Teacher conferences are one of the most powerful ways of differentiating writing instruction and improving writing proficiency, because they provide us with the opportunity to offer individualized instruction at the point of need (Calkins, 2004). Conferring facilitates the "just-in-time teaching" that helps our students grow as readers, writers, and thinkers. As Ralph Fletcher and JoAnn Portalupi (2001) tell us, conferences enable teachers to "stretch the writer" by teaching strategies intended to take the student beyond a piece of writing to improve "*all* the writing that student will do" (p. 52).

There are three main types of teacher conferences conducted in the writing workshop: quick "status-of-the-class" conferences to determine each student's plan for the day, "TAG" conferences for revision, and editing conferences for final polishing before publishing. In addition to teacher conferences, many teachers like to include student-to-student peer conferences.

Status-of-the-Class Conference

Before writing time begins, we want to get an overview of what each student will be working on that day. Students will be at different stages of the writing process at any given time; some may be starting to draft a new composition, and others may be in the final stages of publication. A daily status-of-the-class assessment requires students to articulate their plans for the day and gives the teacher a "lay of the land." There are different approaches to handling the status of the class. Many teachers call out students' names one by one to ask what they are working on or what stage of the process they are engaged in. Other teachers have a pocket chart or work board on which students post their plans for the day.

I prefer to have each student maintain an individual writing log (see the reproducible on the following page). At the beginning of writing workshop, the students take a few minutes to record the date and their plans for the day. They might write something like, "Edit my piece 'My Camping Trip,' find a topic for a new piece, and start planning." Then, at the end of writing workshop, we allocate a few minutes to record what was accomplished. For example, the same student might write, "'My Camping Trip' edited and in the teacher's editing conference box, started planner for piece on my papa." I find that this is a good way for students to take responsibility for planning their time, and it gives me another tool for assessing their writing process. As the students are beginning to work, I can do a quick walkabout to check writing logs, ask questions, and make sure that everyone is ready to write.

Writing Log

Date	What I Plan to Work on Today	What I Got Done Today

TAG Conference

The heart of the writing workshop is the TAG conference (Rog, 1996; Rog & Kropp, 2004), which is a process for conferring with students in order to improve the clarity and effectiveness of a piece of writing. *TAG* is an acronym: Tell something you like, ask questions, and give advice.

This writing conference guides student revision and offers a powerful opportunity for brief, focused, individual teaching at the point of student need. The TAG conference starts with specific and focused praise for the strengths of the piece. This important step affirms what the writer has accomplished and makes him or her more receptive to hearing constructive questions and advice. Asking questions about the writing empowers the writer and reminds him or her that there is a reader on the other end of the writing. Asking questions does not imply a criticism of the writing but simply suggests that there may be some ideas that might be expressed more clearly and effectively for a reader. The challenge in this process is to ask meaningful questions that will lead to a piece of writing that is more interesting, clear, and powerful. Questions usually focus on either the content of the text or decisions made by the writer, for example,

TAG Conference
• Tell something you like.
• Ask questions.
• Give advice.

- *What do you mean by...?*

- *Why did you decide to insert this detail right here?*

The final step of the TAG conference is to give advice—suggestions intended to improve the quality of the writing as well as give the writer some strategies to use down the road. Sometimes the advice will address clarification of content:

I think you should add in the part that explains how your dog got out of the yard.

At other times, the suggestion may apply a writing strategy:

Why don't you add a little dialogue here to make the character's voice come through?

Note that we should not supply the actual wording, but we want to give students a tool or strategy to make the piece better.

The words *suggestion* and *advice* are perhaps a tad euphemistic, as these offerings are not optional. If the students are to become better writers, they need to practice the strategies and techniques that good writers use. Research tells us that when students have opportunities to revise their writing based on specific and focused feedback, the quality of their writing improves significantly (Hillocks, 1986). That's why I'm careful not to overwhelm students with too many changes—no more than two or three suggestions at most.

We're not going to turn a piece of fifth-grade writing into a Pulitzer Prize–winning essay; our job is to turn that fifth grader into a *better* writer.

Too often, our students are resistant to revision. They know the message they intended to convey, and if they had a better idea, they'd have written it the first time around! Even if they don't see their writing as the embodiment of perfection, they often just don't know what to do to make the writing better. The TAG conference helps writers see their work from a reader's point of view. What's missing? What's unclear? What's irrelevant or unnecessary? The TAG conference can provide that just-in-time teaching to improve not only today's piece of writing but also strategies for future writing. It's been my experience that when the students know specifically what they are to do (and know they don't have to rewrite the entire piece), even the most reluctant writer will go back and make the necessary revisions. Most writers, even intermediate students, really do want their writing to be clear and well crafted. What a switch from the old attitude of "it's perfect just the way it is!"

An effective TAG conference requires preparation and thoughtfulness on the part of the teacher. When a student places a piece of writing into my TAG basket, my homework is to read it and plan the comments I will make. I need to be able to see as many students as possible during writing time, and I simply can't read a piece and offer meaningful comments on the spot. My goal is to conduct the legendary "three-minute conference" proposed by Graves (1983) in his pioneering work on writing process so that I can spread my time and attention around evenly.

In my writing workshop, students *must* have a TAG conference on every piece of writing they choose to publish. Although it would be nice to confer with them on every piece they write, given the restraints of time and class size, that's pretty difficult. For the most part, I only confer with students on pieces that they are taking to publication.

Top Tips for TAG Conferences
1. *Be specific.* Comments like "nice work" and "needs work" do nothing to help either the writer or the writing.
2. *Focus on content and clarity, not conventions.* This is not the time to remind students about spelling or punctuation.
3. *Be brief.* Focus on only two or three things at most. Keep the information manageable for the students and the time manageable for you.
4. *Plan ahead.* Read the piece and plan the TAG conference ahead of time to make the most of teacher time and talent.
5. *Make students accountable.* You're doing your part to help students become better writers; they have to do their part to complete the revisions.

Editing Conference

The final type of conference is the polish-to-publish conference, otherwise known as the editing conference, which takes place only after all revisions are completed and the writer is ready to fix up spelling, punctuation, and grammar. We correct mechanical errors to make the writing accessible to a reader. That's why we don't spend a lot of time correcting until just before publication.

Some teachers believe that they must be the final editor for published work, just as professional writers have copyeditors who proofread their work.

But we're teachers, not editors. An editor's job is to produce a clean piece of writing; the teacher's job is to produce more skillful writers.

For me, the degree of editing support that I give students depends on how public the writing will be. When writing is going out into the world, I usually do a final edit of the piece to fix all errors. I don't want outside readers to be distracted from my students' content and craft by missing punctuation or misspelled words. But for classroom publication, I prefer to use the editing conference to focus on a few key teaching points that I feel are developmentally appropriate for that student, such as a spelling pattern, a run-on sentence, or a misplaced apostrophe. This is also a good opportunity to reinforce the differences between standard spelling and chat acronyms—and when each is appropriate.

It is always a balancing act between setting standards for correctness and encouraging students to take risks with language and structure. The more risks

<div style="border:1px solid #000">

A Simple Editing Technique

Read the piece sentence by sentence, reading every sentence twice.

- During the first reading, listen for overall meaning and syntax. Fix grammar and punctuation.
- During the second reading, read word by word, tapping under each word as you read, to find spelling errors.

</div>

students take in sentence structure and vocabulary, the more errors they are likely to make. Ultimately, I want intermediate students to take responsibility for their own editing rather than rely on a teacher. Sometimes that means work will be published with mechanical errors in it. Research shows that when students attend to their own errors, they are more likely to learn from them (Hansen, 1987). Experts such as Calkins (1986) and Cunningham et al. (2005) caution us that when teachers conduct the final edit of a piece of writing, they are taking the "ownership" of the writing away from the writer.

As always, it is a call that depends largely on the situation and the individual student.

A simple editing routine I suggest is to provide a collection of brightly colored skinny markers for editing. As students read their work sentence by sentence, they tap under each word, leaving a dot. This helps them focus on the individual words rather than the overall meaning. If they notice errors, they either strike through the word and correct it on the spot or circle the word and look it up in the dictionary later.

Peer Conference

In addition to teacher conferences, student-to-student peer conferences can also provide valuable learning for both the writer and the partner or partners. Peter Elbow (1973) popularized the idea of peer conferences in his book *Writing Without Teachers*. Anne Ruggles Gere (1987) concurs that peer conferences are particularly effective in supporting audience awareness. However, Betty Bamberg (2003) points out that students need instruction and practice in how to effectively function in peer groups. In fact, in later writing,

Elbow revised some of his earlier thinking to make the peer conference more structured and directed (Elbow & Belanoff, 2000).

The "stars and wishes" peer conference, described in the minilesson **Tell Me More: Powerful Peer Conferences** (see Chapter 4), is an adaptation of the TAG conference. Students confer with each other to offer compliments (stars) and questions (wishes) about a piece of writing. Of course, it's as vital to explicitly teach the peer conference as it is with any other writing skill or strategy. Taking time to model the conference structure, then providing students with opportunities for guided practice, will have lasting benefits for effective peer conferences.

Students need language to talk to one another about the content and craft of writing. Otherwise, they fall into the trap of pointing out misplaced punctuation or slips in spelling. Although this type of peer editing may (or may not) reduce some of the teacher's editing burden, it really doesn't teach either student participating in the conference much about being a better writer. I encourage students to sit facing one another, with the writer reading his or her piece aloud, so there is less temptation for the partner to focus on errors in conventions.

Effective Peer Conferences
• Stars: What I like about the piece.
• Wishes: Questions about content or craft.

That's where rubrics, such as the six-traits framework described in Chapter 2, come in. These assessment tools guide readers in looking at all the elements of writing—ideas, organization, voice, word choice, sentence fluency, and conventions—and help them understand the criteria that make writing effective. The six traits also build a common language for teachers and students to talk to one another about writing.

When students are taught to have meaningful conferences with peers, they learn to be more critical readers of both their peers' and their own writing. George Hillocks (1986) describes a study in which sixth-grade students in inner-city schools were taught to evaluate writing using defined criteria. Not only did the students become adept at assessing the writing of others, but also they were able "to internalize criteria which then served as guides for their own independent writing" (p. 158).

Sharing Time

Ending the writing workshop with sharing time brings closure to the session with an opportunity to reflect and celebrate writing (Graves & Hansen, 1983). Some teachers designate a special "author's chair" just for this purpose. For intermediate students, I find a music stand works very well as a podium, and if we can add a microphone, it's even better. Everyone must take a turn at sharing; it is an expectation of our writing community. As long as students know when their turn is coming, they can prepare themselves by choosing a
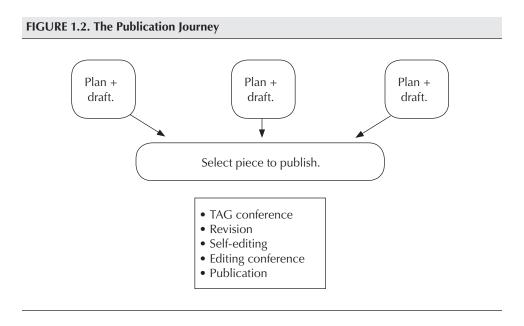
piece of writing and practicing it for fluency and expression. I usually allow students to read any piece of writing that they haven't shared before, whether it's published or in process.

It's important to teach the audience how to respond appropriately in sharing time. Even in intermediate grades, we often have to model and practice good listening behaviors. Sharing time is a wonderful opportunity to build the language and habits of stars and wishes, setting the stage for effective peer conferences (see page 59).

The Publication Journey

Cunningham and her colleagues (Cunningham et al., 2005) recommend that students publish one out of every three pieces they draft. This teaches them to be selective about what they publish and ensures that there will always be something in the writing folder to use for guided practice or strategy work. Figure 1.2 illustrates the publication journey.

When students have three pieces in the finished drafts section of their writing folders, they select one to take to publication. They place the selected piece in the teacher's TAG basket and wait to be called for a TAG conference. In the meantime, they may start a new cycle of planning and drafting. Some teachers require students to have a peer conference before the teacher conference.

FIGURE 1.2. The Publication Journey

Plan + draft.   Plan + draft.   Plan + draft.

Select piece to publish.

- TAG conference
- Revision
- Self-editing
- Editing conference
- Publication

Following the TAG conference, the student completes the required revisions, performs a self-edit for conventions, then places the piece in the teacher's editing basket for a polish-to-publish conference. The final step is publication—by rewriting, word processing, illustrating, binding, or whatever process is used in the classroom. I sometimes ask parent volunteers to do the final word processing if students' access to computers or their keyboarding skills are limited.

Making the Most of Technology

Many teachers have students word-process their published writing. Word processing makes the published piece look more professional and facilitates last-minute revision and editing, but computers can be much more than glorified typewriters in our intermediate writing classrooms. What can we do to provide a full range of writing experiences that take advantage of what technology has to offer while balancing social networking communication and formal writing conventions?

1. *Familiarize students with keyboarding as early as possible.* This doesn't necessarily mean traditional touch typing but rather helping kids develop a system of automaticity with the keyboard. As long as students need to hunt and peck for every letter, it will interfere with their thinking processes as they write. The whole point of keyboarding is to allow the writer's fingers to move as quickly as his or her brain. When keyboarding becomes automatic, students can plan and draft as well as publish their writing on the computer.

2. *Require students to print a copy of each draft.* It's too easy for intermediate students to mislay files, lose revisions, or fail to make changes at all. For instructional purposes, you need to see evidence of revision and proof of process, and whether we like it or not, the hard copy is the most reliable.

3. *Teach the proper places for symbols and for standard spelling and mechanics.* There is no point in railing against emoticons and text-messaging abbreviations; instead, teach students when these typographic symbols are appropriate and when they're not. While texting to friends who understand their symbols can be perfectly appropriate, these acronyms probably won't make Grandma ROFL.

4. *Encourage the publication of multimodal texts.* Not every type of writing requires a paper report with indented paragraphs and a title centered at the top. Could a PowerPoint presentation or a wiki be equally useful? Encourage students to blend print and pictures, and teach them how to lay out a page efficiently, so the urge for graphic design doesn't overwhelm the need to craft the text.

5. *Combat the cut-and-paste culture generated by Internet research.* Require students to use a variety of print and Web-based sources to gather information. Teach students how to be critical readers and to discern factual information from opinions and inconsistencies. Explain the difference between effective use of quotations, how to cite references, and the pitfalls of plagiarism. (See Chapter 5, "Researching and Writing Informational Texts," for ideas.)

It's easy to create books of published writing by binding pages together with plastic coils. Each time a new piece is published, simply open the coils and insert the new piece. This makes a wonderful collection of the student's writing and an interesting portfolio of his or her progress as a writer over the course of the year.

After Publication

For most students, it takes three to four weeks to make the publication journey, depending on the frequency and length of the writing workshop. This highly predictable structure keeps the writing workshop manageable for teachers and students, and students only have to keep track of three pieces of writing at a time. We can allocate time for conferences and instruction more evenly and adjust the publication cycle for differing student needs and abilities.

As students complete each writing cycle, I have them submit their published copy and all three rough drafts. When I evaluate their writing, I'll look at different pieces of writing for different things. Perhaps I've had them practice a strategy on a draft in progress, or perhaps I'm looking for automatic spelling (as opposed to editing) of high-frequency words. The drafts can sometimes provide more—or different—insight into the student's writing process than the "clean" copy. In Chapter 2, we'll examine the trials and tribulations of assessment and how it fits into the planning process.

Discover how easy
writing instruction
can be!

>

Get your copy today!

Order online at
www.reading.org/Books