



SHELL
EDUCATION

Strategies

FOR IMPLEMENTING

Writer's Workshop



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Foreword by Cathy Collier

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Strategies for Building a Community of Writers



Essential Characteristics of a Writer's Workshop Community

A sense of community implies that in the classroom, all aspects of the writing environment will contribute to the comfort of every student. The physical arrangement, use of space, traffic flow, and resources determine the success of any literacy environment. In classrooms with strong classroom communities, student risk-taking is accepted and celebrated by teachers, even as more rigorous standards are implemented. “A classroom that respects what the students bring to it, what they are capable of and interested in, and that welcomes them into an active intellectual community is more likely to achieve rigor” (Beers and Probst 2013, 24).

Moving along the path to an intellectual writing community involves the teacher reducing ownership of the community and distributing that ownership to students. This does not mean relaxing the structure, but rather increasing the structure so that Writer's Workshop can operate without constant teacher oversight. This can be challenging and involves close observation of student behavior in interpersonal interactions, careful note-taking, and a gradual releasing of responsibility with the teacher making adjustments along the way.

The eight essential characteristics below help teachers develop a community of writers where all ideas are valued and where student engagement is rigorous and challenging.

- 1. Teach active engagement.** Classrooms are too often places of “tell and practice” (Richart, Church, and Morrison 2011, 9). Writer's Workshop was never designed in that format. Engaging students in conversation generates ideas. Instead of “tell and practice,” a more active approach to learning might sound more like “invite and engage!”
- 2. Teach active listening.** Respectful listening does not happen without sufficient modeling by the teacher and practice by the students. Active listening in action requires student-peer conversations or conversations between team members to sustain the momentum of the conversation by questioning, elaborating, providing support, and complimenting. Active listening is dependent upon peer conversations that are clear, concise, and positive. Active listening grows out of meaningful engagement in student discussions about writing.
- 3. Practice behavior narration.** Behavior narration is a technique that can be used to establish acceptable conduct in the classroom during instruction and work time. Statements of behavior expectations provide students with direction for where to be

and what to do. *“Jamal is going directly to his seat without wasting time. I see the students at Table 3 have their writing folders opened and are quietly working together.”* Establishing a supportive relationship through positive statements about behavior can greatly reduce classroom disruptions.

4. **Know your learners.** Identifying student interests, strengths, weaknesses, controlled techniques, skills, and strategies is an important part of writing instruction. Documenting information helps target the learning in conferences and small literacy groups. Plans of instruction regarding student writing skills and strategies will likely change. As your skills of observation and documentation of student writing grow, you will truly begin to “know your learners.”
5. **Use writing resources in different subjects.** It is difficult to truly teach all of the necessary writing standards unless they are integrated throughout the school day. By getting familiar with different types of writing that are taught at your grade level and selecting mentor texts to match, you can effectively integrate writing across the subject areas. For example, science and social studies resources and techniques can be integrated into the Writer’s Workshop block.
6. **Provide immediate feedback.** Feedback should be shared with students quickly. Affirmations and authentic praise throughout the day are also important. For example, *“What a talented young writer you are! I noticed the lead in the beginning of your story sounds just like the author....”* *“You must be so proud that you figured out how to write that word by yourself. Great work!”*
7. **Share details about the day’s writing schedule.** Students should not feel as though they are guessing what is intended for writing time. It is important to be clear, yet systematic and engaging, adjusting instruction as needed. These phrases support students in understanding the expectations for writing: *“Yesterday, we...”* *“Today, I will show you...”* *“It will help you...”*
8. **Increase the rigor of read alouds.** Using mentor texts that have rigorous vocabulary is an important way to expand students’ word knowledge base. It is also important to consider pre-teaching vocabulary that might confuse students. When reading a word that may not be familiar to students, it can be helpful to stop briefly and give a short, student-friendly definition. The first read aloud of a text is for meaning. In-depth discussion of the Writer’s craft takes place in a follow-up reading.

A successful writing community should include all of these essential characteristics in a well-organized Writer’s Workshop. The strategies presented in this book will help blaze a trail for increased student achievement and motivation, as well as boost your confidence as a writing teacher.

With our eight essential characteristics of a writing community as a foundation for the classroom, it’s time to visualize where that community will reside by designing and organizing space.

Designing and Organizing Space

Efficient use of classroom space for writers can look very different depending on the

grade level. The important thing to keep in mind is that students need to be able to move easily around the classroom for whole-group mini-lessons; small, guided writing groups; and peer/partner conferences. Space and resources also need to be available for gathering information for research projects.

The following strategies will help support successful classroom design and organization:

- Use space efficiently
 - Visualize traffic flow
 - Purge nonessential resources
-



Strategy 1: Use Space Efficiently

Using space efficiently in the classroom does not happen by accident. It takes thoughtful planning and consideration. Creating a classroom map on paper will help give you a clear starting point for using the space efficiently. This reduces the stress of moving and rearranging. It also saves time and increases productivity. Moving furniture around can be done on paper much more easily than actually moving real furniture.

Never underestimate your ability to utilize space efficiently. Window ledges, the floor, and baskets from a local dollar store can become units of storage. Organizing space to improve student achievement requires only an ability to think outside of the box. For example, crates in the whole-group meeting area can be used for teacher or student storage, serve as chairs for pulling students into a mini-lesson, or to add punch and vitality to a meeting area. Add a board with hinges, cover with filling and colored fabric, and you have created added space and a place where students of all ages can come to receive essential literacy information.



Strategy 2: Visualize Traffic Flow

Movement in the classroom should be without distraction and should help to maximize learning. Visualize where and how students move for each activity throughout the school day and prepare the classroom accordingly. Consider space for whole-group instruction, small groups, partner work, and work centers. Students need to be able to move throughout the room as their writing assignments require. There needs to be space made for partners to conference during revision time, and room for modeled writing during small-group work. Students should be able to move effortlessly and feel comfortable in their own space without infringing upon the personal space of others. Teach students how to move from place to place beginning on day 1, and with review and practice at all developmental levels, it will be remembered by learners and will develop strong classroom management.

Managing is a key component of student achievement and promotes writers as independent learners. One simple consideration is the placement of trash or recycling bins. Writing is often messy and requires drafts and more drafts. Placing a small container within each pod of students rather than near the door or teacher's desk eliminates the need for students to constantly get out of their seats to throw paper away. A strategically placed can of pencils with a sign—Pencil Sharpener Closes at 10:15—can also eliminate a disruption or unnecessary movement throughout the day/class period.



Strategy 3: Purge Nonessential Resources

Throw away or donate all the classroom materials that you don't need. Nonessential resources should be boxed up and stored. Students come to the classroom with different levels of structure in their lives, but they all need to see an inviting, organized environment that supports them in their work. By getting rid of nonessential items, necessary writing tools such as paper, scissors, highlighters, sticky notes, and tape become more easily accessible and students can manage their own time without interrupting the teacher or other students.

Figure 1.1 Sample Classroom Design and Organization 1

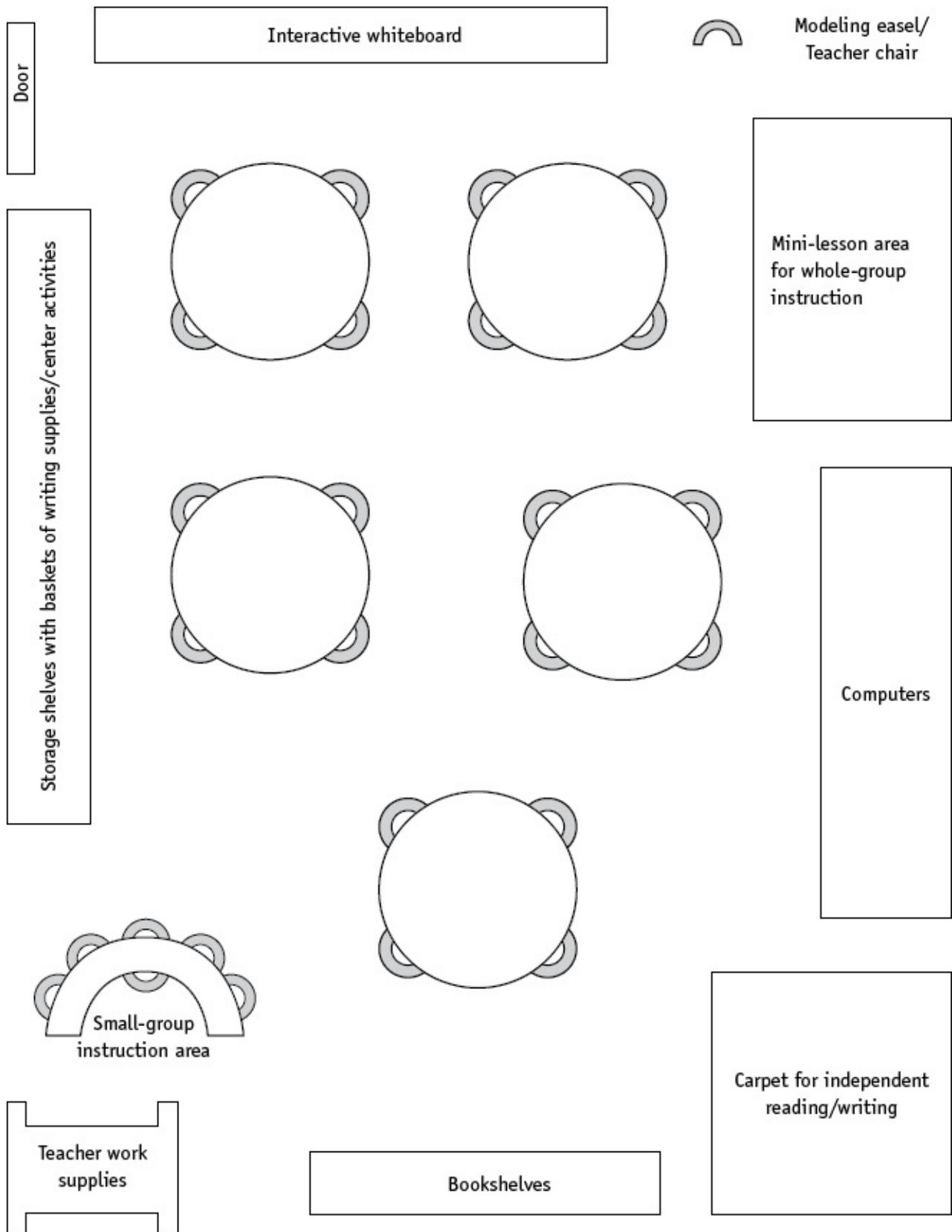


Figure 1.2 Sample Classroom Design and Organization 2

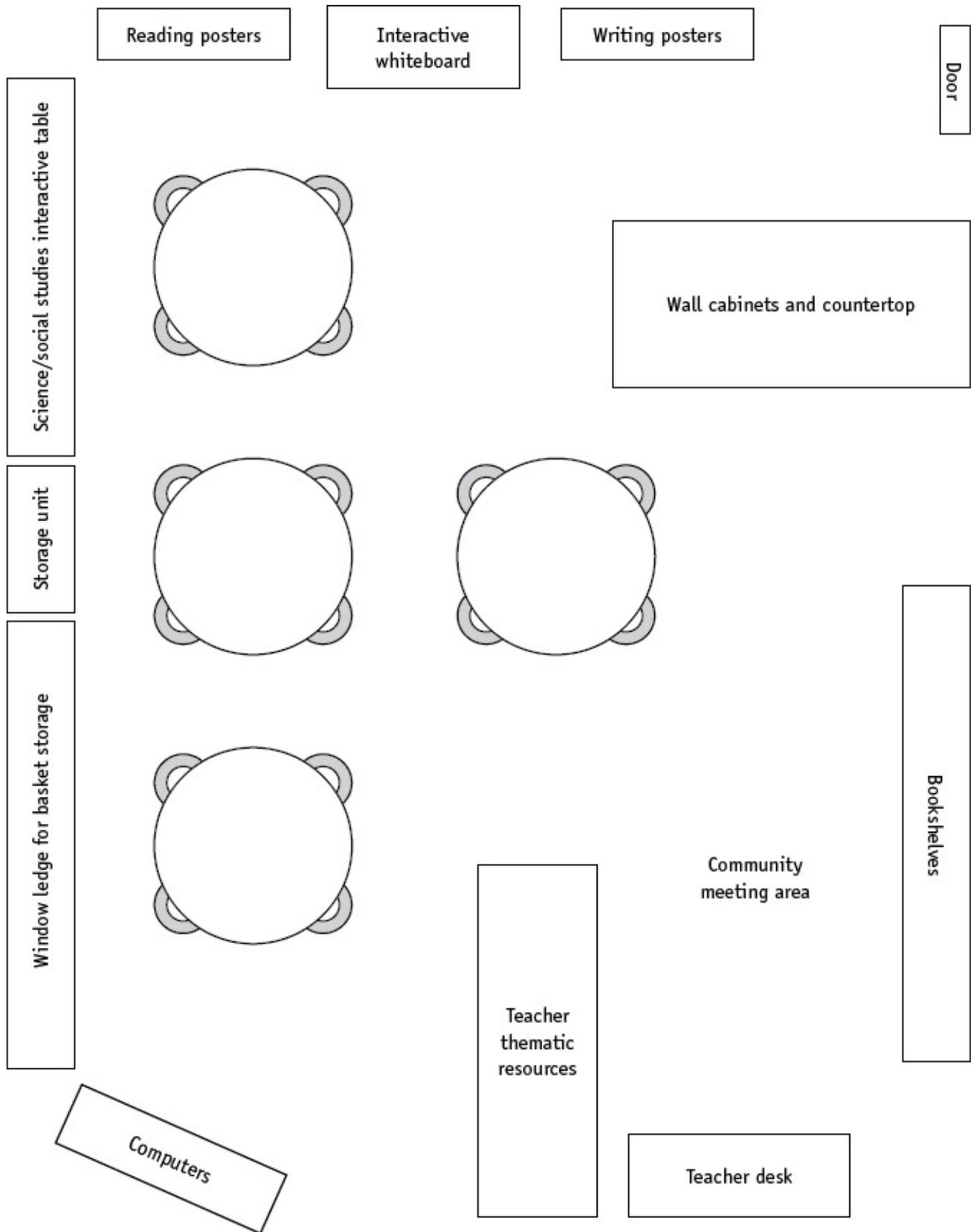
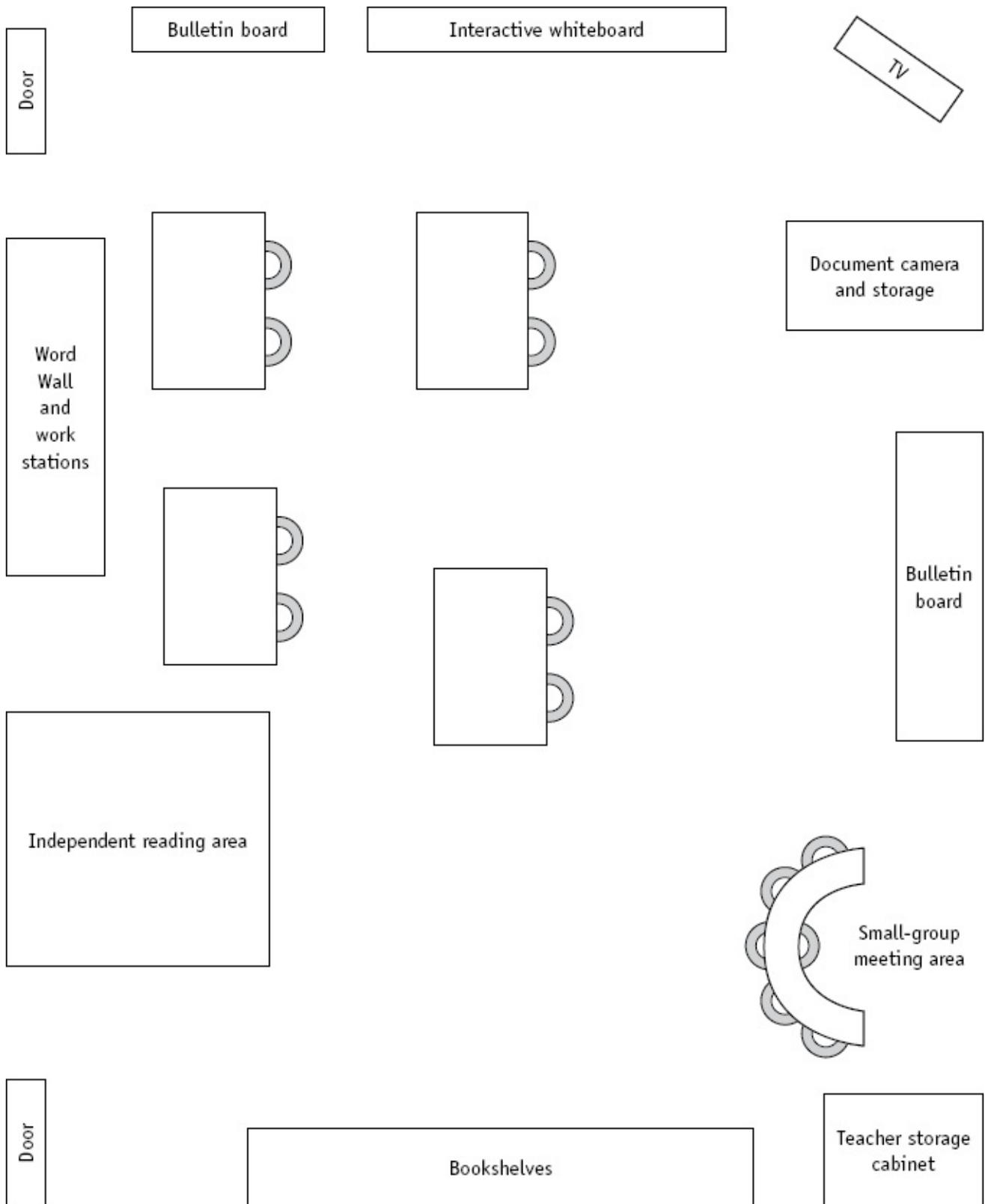


Figure 1.3 Sample Classroom Design and Organization 3



Establishing Routines and Transitions

In our work as consultants over the last 20 years, we have heard comments from student teachers, teachers, principals, and district administrators about the importance of classroom management, routines, and movement.

We know about routines and transitions that have been tried successfully hundreds, if not thousands, of times in classrooms across the globe. However, what we hope you walk away with is something new, something different; perhaps even something that may contribute to your becoming a trailblazer in terms of classroom management. What you

see in classroom examples may give rise to an exciting new twist in your own implementation of a community of writers.

The following strategies will help support successful classroom routines and transitions:

- Build a routine chart together
- Integrate movement



Strategy 1: Build a Routine Chart Together

Writing structures and routines are highly respected when students retain ownership. We often invite students to have input into the various routines we use in Writer’s Workshop. For example, one routine chart we use focuses on what Writing Workshop looks like, sounds like, and feels like. Keep in mind there are certain expectations that are non-negotiable that you add to the chart. After discussing non-negotiable routines, allow students to create an even higher standard of excellence by adding their own expectations. The sample chart (Figure 1.4) is one routine chart created with students as an anchor chart for how we want our classroom to look, sound, and feel. This routine chart, created with student input, works not only for Writer’s Workshop but also for everyday writing in the subject areas at all grade levels. Add your own personal ideas to this list.

Figure 1.4 Sample Routine Chart for Writer’s Workshop

Looks Like	Sounds Like	Feels Like
Anchor charts Students active Regulated behavior Visuals placed appropriately Vocabulary available Students engaged Organized and colorful Individualized and differentiated	Beehive/buzz Questions asked and answered Two voices Conversation/affirmations “I can”attitude Quiet during think time Pauses and action Students making decisions	Productive Comfortable Exciting Relaxed Confident Organized “chaos” Purposeful Comfortable sharing thoughts



Strategy 2: Integrate Movement

The expression “a rolling stone gathers no moss” is a perfect visual when thinking about getting students engaged, on task, and keeping their brains active. If students are moving and chanting, they are less likely to be off task or misbehaving during transition time. Charles Hillman, a neuroscientist specializing in kinesiology, compared brain functions of “high fit” and “low fit” children. He reported that exercisers made greater gains in fitness and on cognitive tests. These results confirm that students who move outperform their peers on self-regulation, working memory, cognitive flexibility, and multitasking (Pappano 2015). If this is the case, why not adjust classroom routines to include simple movements as part of Writer’s Workshop?

Movement from one activity to another—from seats to whole-group mini-lesson, from mini-lesson to writing practice time, and from practice time to small-group instruction—should weave in movement activity. Movement can also be added at the beginning of the writing lesson, in the middle when students need a “brain break,” or when sending them off to work independently or with partners. Regardless of how you decide to incorporate movement in the day, do it in a way that works for you and your students. If jumping jacks get your students too wild, try something less vigorous such as toe touches. The important part is not how big the movement is, but that it is incorporated strategically throughout the day.

Mini-lesson: Writing a Friendly Letter Grades K–2

1. Tell students that there are five parts of a friendly letter (heading, greeting, body, closing, signature).
2. Touch head with both hands for the first part of a friendly letter, saying “Heading!”
3. Wave at students for the second part of a friendly letter, saying “Greeting!”
4. Sweep with both hands down the body, saying, “Body!”
5. Smack both hands on knees, saying “Closing!”
6. Pretend to write your name in the air, moving from your left to right, (directionality), saying “Signature!”
7. Transition students to seats for their guided/independent writing by chanting/singing, “We’re going to write a letter.” Repeat three times.

Mini-lesson: Sentence Fluency Grades 3–5

1. Explain to students that an appositive is a noun or noun phrase that adds additional details in sentence writing.
2. Build an anchor chart and model how to add interesting information and variety to sentences. Here is an example to begin the chart: “My dog, Cooper, (appositive) loves to run and chase birds.”
3. Show students that the appositive can be removed without changing the meaning, but that it does add details, and needs to be enclosed with commas. Incorporate multiple examples into the chart, using the names of your students.
4. As you model the lesson, weave in an “appositive action” movement by completing a karate chop motion to indicate where the commas enclosing the appositive are to

be placed. Say: “We call this ‘appositive action karate chop.’”

5. Consider giving students a challenge item such as “Kudzu, a giant plant with enormous leaves, was brought to this country from Japan” and apply “appositive action.”
6. Have students transition to the appropriate places in the room for guided and independent writing practice.

Mini-lesson: Writing Conventions Grades 6–8

1. Explain to students that writing multisyllabic words can be a challenge. Yet, with an understanding of the six common syllable rules, using the patterns makes spelling conventions easier.
2. Over several days, build the following chart:

<p>Rule 1: CVC closed syllable/short vowel condensation</p>	<p>Rule 2: CV open syllable/long vowel microscopic</p>	<p>Rule 3: CVCe consonant/vowel/consonant, silent <i>e</i> complete</p>
<p>Rule 4: R-controlled the vowel sound is changed by the <i>r</i> sound coronation</p>	<p>Rule 5: Vowel teams when a syllable has two vowels, the first vowel is usually long. impeachment</p>	<p>Rule 6: Stable/Consonant le the syllable has a consonant that precedes the <i>le</i>, usually found on the end of words. sprinkle</p>

3. Each day have students search reading material for examples of the six syllable rules and record on sticky notes. They must provide evidence of their reasoning.
4. Have students come to the front of the room each holding a letter card for a multisyllabic word, such as 12 kids holding the letters c-o-n-d-e-n-s-a-t-i-o-n. Have students move to get into syllable-pattern groups and time them to see how long it takes.
5. Have each syllable group do a chant for their syllable. For example, the c-o-n group will choose the syllable rule that applies then clap and chant “c-o-n is CVC Rule 1!” The d-e-n group does the same, respectively. The s-a group will chant, “s-a is CV open syllable, Rule 2!” The t-i-o-n group would recognize that their syllable is different and chant “Exception!”
6. When students are ready to share their writing, have them provide evidence that

shows how they used multisyllabic words accurately.

Managing Writing Tools and Resources

Once students begin writing several different pieces, they need a place to store their important work. In grades K-8, we recommend that students use two writing folders/notebooks. Students use writing folders/notebooks to organize the writing they are currently working on and to store support tools like word lists, editing checklists, and personal word walls. They use portfolio folders/notebooks to hold their non-published and published work representative of their growth as writers.

Take a look at the following strategies and examples:

- Creating the writing folder/notebook
- Creating the portfolio folder/notebook
- Designing and organizing a Writer’s folder/notebook
- Examples of writing folders/notebooks



Strategy 1: Creating the Writing Folder

A writing folder is an excellent tool for storing writing samples. Inserts can be provided, which scaffold student achievement on many different levels. Depending on developmental level, you might want to include the following inserts in the student’s writing folder:

Grades K–2	Grades 3–5	Grades 6–8
Alphabet chart	Vowel teams	Writing rubric
Months of the year and days of the week	Vowel digraphs	Chart of the six syllable rules
Family words	Graded high-frequency word list	Transition words for informative, narrative, and opinion writing
Short vowels/long vowels	Checklist for assessments/rubric	Vowel digraphs and diphthongs
Consonant digraphs and consonant blends	Transition words for informative, narrative, and opinion	Self-publishing ideas
High-frequency graded word list	Commonly misspelled words	

Personal preference will guide your decisions on a management system that works for your needs. Here is a suggestion for how to create a writing folder.

1. Select a durable, two-pocket, three-prong folder for each student.

- The left inside pocket is for pieces that students are currently working on. For grades K–2, place a green dot on the pocket. For grades 3–8, write “In Progress” on the pocket.
- The right inside pocket is for pieces that students have completed or want to save for a later date. For grades K–2, place a red dot on the pocket. For grades 3–8, write “Completed” on the pocket.
- Provide time for students to personalize the outside of their folders.

2. Determine where students will store their folders.

- Where will your students keep their writing folders? At their desks for easy access during any writing activity? In a writing bin with the rest of the class and used only during writing time? In containers labeled by rows? How will your students retrieve them and put them away in a timely manner?
- Establish management procedures that are specific and become routine in your classroom. These may be changed from year to year based on the students you have in your classroom. The procedure might be tweaked a bit throughout the year to create smoother transitions.

3. Use daily mini-lessons to build the writing folder.

- As you model and teach students to use writing tools, students add the anchor chart support pages to the middle section of the folder. Plastic sleeves are great to protect these pages, as we expect students to reference them often in their writing.
- The middle of the folder also includes tools that guide student writing such as word lists, alphabet and vowel charts, editing checklists, graphic organizers, or personal word walls.
- Have students in grades 3–8 store these support tools in their writer’s notebook rather than in the writing folder.



Strategy 2: Create the Writer’s Notebook

Designing and Organizing a Writer’s Notebook

In grades 3–8, students use a writing folder to store writing pieces and a Writer’s notebook to practice writing and to hold ideas and resources that guide and support them throughout the writing process. Joanne Hindley sums up the contents of a Writer’s notebook beautifully in this quote from her book *In the Company of Children*.

A writer’s notebook can be many things: a place to make mistakes, to experiment, to record overheard conversations or family stories, to remember an

inspiring quotation, to free associate, to ask questions, to record beautiful or unusual language, to jot down the seeds of unborn stories or story beginnings, to tell the truth or to lie, to record memories, to embellish memories, to remember what you've been reading, to record stories you've heard about other people, to remember one word that conjures up an image, to remember things you're surprised by, to observe, to record impressions, or to describe a picture or a person or an image you can't get out of your head. A writer's notebook is a receptacle, a tool to hold on to things. (p. 13)

The Writer's notebook "gives you a place to live like a writer" (Fletcher 1996). Fletcher says his Writer's notebook is the most important tool he uses as a writer and shares that, "Keeping a Writer's notebook is one of the best ways I know of living a writing kind of life" (1996, 4).

We suggest your students' Writer's notebooks be:

- **Personalized:** The notebook is a personal reflection of the student and his or her journey through learning the writing process. It should hold photographs, words, and phrases that personify the student.
- **Organized:** We recommend organizing the notebook for easy access to specific writing topics and strategies. This helps students quickly revisit resources taught throughout the year when needed.
- **Cumulative:** The notebook is created over time and gradually builds by continually adding mini-lesson resources, writing examples, and student writing.

1. Select the type of notebooks you prefer for each student.

- Decide what works best for you and your students. Consider durability, cost, and purpose. Some teachers use binders and not folders. Others use composition notebooks or spiral notebooks and use a folder for storing ongoing writing pieces.

2. Celebrate and decorate the Writer's notebook.

- Discuss the value and meaning of this important writing tool and how each one will be similar, but different. Emphasize that it holds the ideas, memories, pictures, words, and phrases that are their very own. They are writers!
- Take time to share notebooks as a class. Lay out all the notebooks with a pen and paper for each and do a gallery walk. Students leave a compliment/comment for students about their notebooks, such as *I like the way you...*, *Can't wait to learn more about...!*

3. Determine where students will store their notebooks.

- Similar to the writing folder, it is important to establish management procedures that are specific and become routine in your classroom for storing and using the writer's notebooks.
- Keep in mind that the notebooks are a place to gather ideas, thoughts, and inspirations for writing. If they are tucked on a shelf and not accessible to

students, it may be a missed opportunity to record genuine writing observations.

4. Organize the notebook.

- Decide what will work best for you, your students, and your writing curriculum. We typically have students divide their composition notebooks into sections with 10–15 blank pages with chapter tabs labeled:

Chapter 1: Table of Contents

Chapter 2: Management

Chapter 3: Ideas

Chapter 4: Organization

Chapter 5: Voice

Chapter 6: Sentence Fluency

Chapter 7: Word Choice

Chapter 8: Conventions

Chapter 9: Miscellaneous

5. Begin adding resources to the writer's notebook.

- As you teach mini-lessons, students add resources from the lesson to the left side of an open page and practice the writing skill on the right side of the notebook.

Examples of Writer's Notebooks

Using the right organizational plan builds the right environment for writing success. A kindergarten teacher uses the OWL (Organized While Learning) notebook in [Figure 1.5](#) to organize students for writing. The third-grade crates are organized by groups and distributed at the beginning of writing class ([Figure 1.6](#)). Three crates represent three Writer's Workshop sessions as this group is departmentalized. Notebooks are slipped into folders so that both writing tools are available at the beginning of class. A middle school teacher embraces the idea of a tabbed notebook as displayed in [Figure 1.7](#).

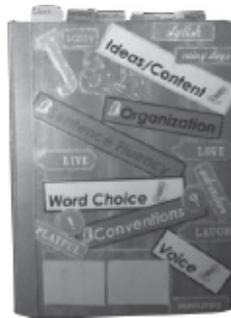
Figure 1.5 Sample OWL Notebook



Figure 1.6 Sample Writing Notebook Crates



Figure 1.7 Sample Tabbed Writer's Notebook



Develop Learning Walls, Anchor Charts, and Writing Centers

Classroom snapshots and sample classroom conversations help show how the following three strategies can be implemented across grade bands:

- Use word walls
- Use anchor charts
- Create a classroom writing center



Strategy 1: Use Word Walls

Word walls can be organized in all sorts of ways (alphabetically, by subject, for genre study), but they can also include different word categories (high-frequency words, content vocabulary, spelling vocabulary, etc.). If attractive, timely, and appropriately placed using cheers, chants, clapping, and moving, word learning can happen throughout the day and across curriculum.

Word walls can be placed on chart paper and hung across a clothesline if space is limited. High-frequency words for primary students can be alphabetized for ease of word location. Content-area words need to be placed where they are accessible for writing instruction for arguments, position papers, reaction papers, reports, and manuals for vocational education. Math vocabulary connected to instruction can hang from a coat hanger with small clothespins. Word walls need to be creative and provide the necessary support to build word knowledge. Using word walls supports student writers, allowing them to devote more attention to their message and build automaticity for word knowledge.

Word Walls for K–2 Writers

The goal of a word wall in grades K–2 is to target specific vocabulary and high-frequency words needed for easy recall in reading and writing. The area should be colorful and attractive and easily accessible by all students.



Classroom Snapshot: Word Walls

Grades K–2

1. Locate an area in the room that will accommodate your targeted word list of high-utility and high-frequency words.
2. Introduce the lesson by explaining that knowing how to write words with ease is necessary for reading and writing projects.
3. Choose three to five words to introduce with scaffolding and support. Use visuals when possible and introduce in context.
4. Say the word. My turn, “I Say _____!” Have students repeat the word. “You Say _____!”
5. Touch to the left of the word and say the word. Tap under and say each letter. Have students clap, snap, or stomp their feet as they chant the letters of the word. Repeat this a few times, as necessary.
6. Use the word in a sentence.
7. In partner pairs, engage the students in a routine. Say the names of the letters and think of a sentence to use the word in context.
8. Display the word.
9. As an option, have students put the words in a vocabulary notebook and make a picture. Or, place students in pairs and have them create a word search.

Word Walls for Grades 3–5

Word Walls in grades 3–5 can use an alphabet chart with sticky notes that are organized by units of study, domain-specific tier 3 words, or targeted words for writing projects. These walls can be portable and moved from space to space when systems departmentalize. If students have difficulty, then differentiate words by creating a personalized alphabet chart for students to keep in writing folders.



Classroom Snapshot: Word Walls

Grades 3–5

Introduce students to the idea of a portable word wall. The words displayed on the actual word wall will relate to what is being studied in class or a piece of literature/informational text that is being studied.

1. Choose five to seven words to focus on each week, adding a different activity each

day.

2. Words for a research project about the study of the brain might include impulsive, creativity, intelligence, chemicals, neurons, microscopic, and spatial.
3. Place a word on a sticky note on the alphabet chart in the proper box.
4. Move to the board and break the word into syllables. Touch to the left of the word: “I say microscopic. You say, microscopic.” Slide your hand quickly under the word left to right.
5. Write the word in syllables on the board.
 - *mi* open syllable/long vowel
 - *cro* open syllable/long vowel
 - *scop* closed syllable/short vowel
 - *ic* closed syllable/short vowel
6. Give the meaning of the word.
7. Have students engage in a discussion saying the word in syllables, using fingers to tap out syllables, and using the word in a meaningful sentence
8. Keep the word wall posted in the room for use in reading and writing projects.
9. When finished with theme words, move them to an anchor chart and start a new list.

Aa	Bb	Cc	Dd	Ee
Ff	Gg	Hh	Ii	Jj
Kk	Ll	Mm	Nn	Oo
Pp	Qq	Rr	Ss	Tt
Uu	Vv	Ww	Xx	Yy
				Zz

Word Walls for Grades 6–8 Writers

The goal of word walls in the middle school classroom is to build oral and written words that are high utility and will increase student achievement in all content areas.

Consider creating a calendar of words for your classroom and introduce two new vocabulary words each day. Invite students to go word hunting and bring in challenge words for the class Calendar of Words. The Calendar of Words can match units of study in content areas or special writing projects.



Classroom Snapshot: Word Walls

Grades 6–8

1. Introduce students to the location of the word wall. Talk about why a word wall is important and useful in the classroom.
 2. Choose two words from the daily calendar described above (e.g., articulate: express clearly; clarify: explain to make easier).
 3. Define each and use in a sentence.
 4. Explain how these words can be used in daily life, as well as across other content areas.
 5. Have students move into small groups to interact, explain, define, and use words in oral conversation.
 6. Add the words to a vocabulary notebook using a picture, a student-friendly definition, and a sentence.
 7. Display the words on the word wall and challenge students to use them in their writing as well as in conversations.
-



Strategy 2: Use Anchor Charts

Anchor charts help keep learning uppermost in the minds of students as the displays are permanent and visible. Students are expected to refer to them in daily instruction. These charts should be created by and with students for the benefit of students. Discussion of strategies charted are reminders to students they can return to gather and use essential information. Anchor charts can be generated in all content areas and displayed for use during the Writer’s Workshop schedule.



Classroom Snapshot: Anchor Charts

Grades K–2

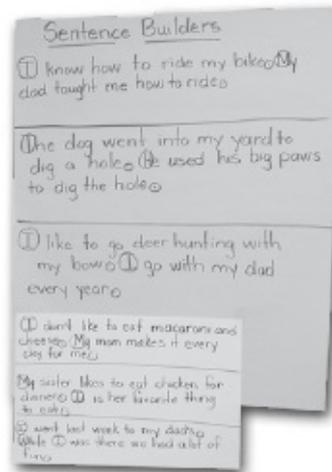
Have chart paper and markers ready.

1. Tell students, “Writers, today we will be creating a chart of sentence builders to extend and enrich our sentence muscles.”
2. Model this process for students by saying, “I will generate a couple of sentence ideas and we will extend those ideas using rich details.”
3. Title the anchor chart Sentence Builders. Then, write the start of generic sentences on the chart, such as the following:
 - I know how to
 - The dog went
 - My favorite food is

- I went to
 - I wish that
4. Lead students in an interactive discussion about adding details to increase sentence variety. Record students' ideas for completing the sentences onto the anchor chart.
 5. Display the chart for the class to see, but make it portable so that it can be moved into an area for guided writing follow-up.

The chart in [Figure 1.8](#) was generated in a second-grade class to add details to sentences.

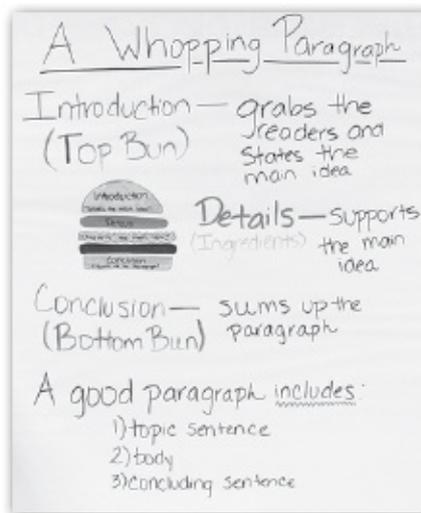
Figure 1.8 Sample K–2 Anchor Chart



Classroom Snapshot: Anchor Charts **Grades 3–5**

1. Tell students that as writers they need to choose an idea and tightly organize their thinking around that idea while grouping related ideas together.
2. To model this for students say, “To organize our thinking we can use a visual to remind us of idea grouping. We need an introduction, details that support the main idea, and a concluding statement.” Label the anchor chart “A Whopping Good Paragraph.” See [Figure 1.9](#).
3. Draw or sketch a hamburger during your explanation to show the three components of an organizational structure. The top bun is the introduction, the meat and ingredients in the middle are the details, and the bottom bun is the conclusion.
4. In small groups, have students plan their thinking for the next writing piece, visualizing a hamburger as sketched on the anchor chart.
5. Pull students back together and refer back to the visual on the anchor chart. Hang it up in the classroom as a visual reminder unless you need to pull it to a small guided-writing area.

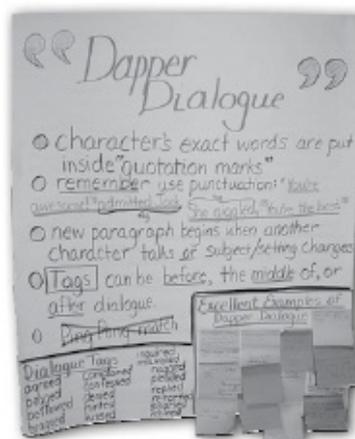
Figure 1.9 Sample Grades 3–5 Anchor Chart



Classroom Snapshot: Anchor Charts **Grades 6–8**

1. Introduce students to the lesson by demonstrating the importance of visual cues to support the concepts they are learning. As learners, they will be aware of how to write more challenging words and longer texts.
2. At the top of the chart, write “Dapper Dialogue”.
3. Select a text that uses dialogue well and project it for the class to see. Have students reflect and discuss how dialogue aids in meaning and how to read it fluently.
4. Model how dialogue is used to record a character’s exact words.
5. List examples of tag words that indicate that quotations are needed: pleaded, screamed, nagged, replied, etc.
6. Place sticky notes of excellent examples on the Dapper Dialogue anchor chart. Place the chart in a visible place to be used throughout instruction.

Figure 1.10 Sample Grades 6–8 Anchor Chart



These classroom snapshots model the type of rich language that can be developed through the use of anchor charts.



A Classroom Conversation Grades K–2

The students have gathered in the whole-group meeting area in front of an anchor chart with the words who, what, where, when, and five short sentence stems written on it.

Teacher: We have been adding when and where to our sentences to create a more vivid image. Today we will create rubber band sentences. The longer the sentence, the more you stretch the rubber band. Here is my sentence. “The fish swam.” The sentence tells who and what. Who can add a where to build a more interesting sentence?

Student 1: The fish swam in the ocean.

Teacher: Great job!

The teacher writes the suggested “where” to the sentence on the anchor chart.

Teacher: Now who can add a “when” to further stretch the sentence?

Student 2: The fish swam in the ocean in the middle of the night.

Teacher: Wow! Let’s use our rubber band and check our sentence for interest and length.

The teacher stretches a rubber band to show how the length of the sentence changed with more detail that was added. Then, the teacher turns to the anchor chart and reads the remaining small sentences: “The kitten slept”; “The tiger roared”; “The boy cried”; “The duck swam.”

Teacher: Writers, you will meet with your writing partner and practice adding the “when” and “where” to each sentence.

The students work with their partners adding vivid details to the sentences and the teacher moves about and praises their effort or uses questions to prompt struggling students.



A Classroom Conversation Grades 3–5

Teacher: Writers, yesterday we worked on building excellent sentences using appositives to strengthen and lengthen. Today, we will use a circle chart to create interesting words to replace an overused word that shows a character is speaking.

Teacher models substituting “said” in a page from mentor text *Bedhead*.

Students: That’s too many saids.

Teacher: You’re right! Now I’ll reread and substitute words for said. How did these words make my story more interesting?

Student 1: You didn’t have to repeat yourself.

Student 2: It gets annoying and boring!

Teacher: Here are words I pulled from literature.

Teacher writes substitute words for said on a circle chart. Teacher uses familiar material for strategy instruction.

Teacher: You will be working in groups to create more interesting words using some stories we've already read. Turn to a partner and tell them what your group will be doing.

Students energetically talk and the teacher circulates around the room and praises, confirming that students understand what to do next. To differentiate instruction, the teacher gives groups different texts for the group work and uses questions to prompt any struggling students.



A Classroom Conversation Grades 6–8

Students are gathered on crates and carpet in the meeting area with sample narrative texts.

Teacher: Writers, we've been working on narrative writing using the text *The Table Where Rich People Sit* as a model to build from.

The teacher rereads an excerpt from the text and models on an anchor chart how to put exact words from the text in quotation marks.

Teacher: Today, we will check our writing for character talk and remember to enclose exact words using quotation marks. Turn to your partner, find an example of dialogue from the text, and then record it on a sticky note. Please put your thumbs up when you are ready to share.

Student 1: He replied, "Well, tell me some Bubby."

The student places the sticky note on the anchor chart.

Student 2: My family responded, "Here is why we are rich."

The student places the sticky note on the anchor chart. Students continue sharing examples from the text and placing them on the anchor chart.

Teacher: Now it's time to evaluate your own writing and make revisions to include dialogue.



Strategy 3: Create a Classroom Writing Center

The writing center is an area in the room where individuals or small groups of students gather to engage in a writing activity. Sometimes a teacher will be working with a guided writing activity or individual conferring session while a small group conducts peer conferences, revisions, or editing sessions in the writing center. The writing center is not static and can change as the need develops. The location of the center is not fixed and can even be located at a group of student desks with a small Writer's toolbox moved onto the table to share.



Classroom Snapshot: Sample Writing Center **Grades K–2**

The goal of a K–2 writing center is to reinforce and practice strategies and behaviors that strengthen literacy learning. Centers provide multileveled activities where students learn to practice independently and collaboratively. Place the center in a quiet corner, arranged with multiple seating options (four at most) with a bulletin board displaying a variety of writing projects or samples of past student projects.

Writing tools include a variety of premade writing paper, examples of published books, technology available for research and publication, a variety of writing pencils, markers, some form of correction tape, and an alphabetized high-frequency word wall nearby. Add to this list as students make progress and more rigorous expectations can be met. Here is a short checklist for analyzing a primary writing center.

- Is the center organized and inviting?
- Are mentor texts integrated into the center?
- Are all materials neatly labeled for primary writers?
- Are displays of writing at student eye-level?
- Is the center located so that the teacher has a view while conducting other activities?



Classroom Snapshot: Sample Writing Center **Grades 3–5**

A quality writing center in grades 3–5 is a well-defined area designed for thinking, talking, and practicing life skills for writing success. Attractive, organized, and colorful shelves of books organized by genre should be labeled and accessible for student cross-content writing. Include artifacts from the science and social studies world to get creative writing juices flowing. Helpful sentence stems/frames and transition words and phrases can be placed on a bulletin board adjacent to the writing center, along with rubrics and exemplar writing examples so that students can compare their work to other student examples. Writing should be fun as well as rigorous, so have students come to the writing center to create alternate forms of writing as well, such as rhymes, jingles, and lyrics to familiar tunes to remember content. Here is a short checklist for analyzing your writing center in grades 3–5.

- Are all resources clearly labeled and organized for easy access and return?
- Is student work organized to turn in or stored in center folders/notebooks?
- Is wall space available for displaying student artifacts?
- Is there a variety of writing mentor texts clearly labeled and displayed?
- Is there a high level of choice based on your observations of student writing behaviors?



Classroom Snapshot: Sample Writing Center **Grades 6–8**

A good writer will apprentice himself/herself to experts in writing agreement. Therefore, a high-quality writing center for middle schoolers should contain thought-provoking, interesting material, including ideas and lists of possible topics. Tubs of biographies, historical novels, and picture books should be provided. Include bulletin board photos of sports figures, national heroes, charity organizations, community leaders, science discoveries, and current events to spark creativity and ideas for writing.

Sentence stems and paper-fold graphic organizers provide support for students who need additional methods of planning. Tools for publishing, such as technology, dictionaries, and generic word walls should also be provided to support the writing process. Here is a short checklist for analyzing your middle-school writing center.

- Are students able to collaborate with partners in the center?
- Have mentor texts been organized according to style of writing or genre?
- Is the center motivating, engaging, and appealing to writers of both genders?
- Is the use of the writing center as routine as daily teeth brushing?
- Have you included attractive charts, photos, and resources that promote writing?

Strategies for Toolkits and Talking Writer-to-Writer

As a writing coach, talking one-on-one with your students is key. There are several tools you can use as a teacher to help discuss writing to students. The strategies that follow focus on:

- Creating a teacher toolkit/tote
- Using conversation cards
- Using mentor texts



Strategy 1: Create a Teacher Toolkit/Tote

Just as a clipboard serves as an important tool for sports coaches during a match or game, teachers (“coaches” of writing) need a small tote to access necessary resources during instruction. The tote needs to be small enough to carry as you move from table to table to confer individually or in small groups, or move to a designated area for guided writing. The importance of the toolkit rests on the understanding that availability of writing resources is necessary for conferencing, pacing, and efficient use of writing time. The concept of the toolkit/tote and how to use it always stays the same, but depending on the grade level, thematic unit of study, and time of year the resources included may change. Totes/toolkits may include the following:

- mentor text(s) recently used (for modeling)
- exemplar writing samples by grade level in all genres
- student writing samples (poetry, reports, recipes, directions, manuals—depending

on instruction)

- rubrics for narrative, informational, opinion/argument, and research writing matched to appropriate assessments
- teacher conferring notebook for formative assessment (see [Chapter 7](#))
- handheld thesaurus and dictionary
- teacher personal notebook/writing folder with personal texts (for modeling)
- editing checklist
- sticky notes for instructional strategy for students to “have a go.” (Do not write on student papers. They are the owners of their work. Any notes should be placed on a sticky note for practice or changes based on your teacher talk.)
- scissors, tape, glue, and correction tape to support revisions/editing
- small container of extra pencils
- magnetic chips to move into letter-sound boxes (Elkonin boxes)
- magnetic wand to quickly pick up chips so that time is not wasted
- small whiteboard and markers to practice word work, to use letter-sound boxes and show sound/symbol, to practice high-frequency words, to break words into syllable components, or to reinforce six syllable rules: 1—open syllable (end in vowel—*ta ble*), 2—closed syllable (vowel closed in by consonants—*riv er*), 3—r-controlled (*farm*), 4—vowel teams (*ea, ee, ai, brain*), 5—consonant le (*responsi ble*), 6—vowel/consonant silent e (*com plete*).



Strategy 2: Use Conversation Cards

Have you ever observed a coach fully engaged throughout a football game, pacing the sideline, tapping a player on the shoulder for a job well done? Have you noticed the talk, the pointers as the game is progressing, the clipboard with play possibilities or changes when change is needed? Great coaches do not just start to make changes when the score is 45–0, and winning is out of reach. Neither do writing coaches, and if you teach writing, **YOU ARE A WRITING COACH!**

The secret to talking writer-to-writer is to build an internal control and a self-extending system so that the writer becomes the problem solver. The process of a self-extending system will carry over into all content areas and into a student’s life skills, as well.

The sample conversation cards in [Figure 1.11](#) provide teacher support when moving around having a conversation with a student or pulling a small group of struggling writers to the side.

Figure 1.11 Sample Conversation Cards



Strategy 3: Use Mentor Texts

Read alouds, both literary and informational, should be incorporated into daily literacy time and further studied to analyze the author's writing craft. Students tend to imitate literature in which they have a vested interest. For example, middle school students interested in Gary Paulsen literature tend to write about nature, survival, and the wilderness. Take students outside their immediate comfort zone by using literature that stretches and builds their background knowledge.

Mentor texts help motivate writers and provide a model for them to emulate. Students can craft solid narrative, informational, and opinion writing if they have a pattern to explore. A text can be used as a mentor text for a variety of different reasons. For example, text structure, language choice, hooks, endings, imagery, or dialogue can all be great topics for mini-lessons using a mentor text as a guide.

The following is a short list of great literature to use as mentor texts. Study the craft, make notes on anchor charts, decide who is telling the story (point of view), and how the story is crafted. Even in the early years, dig deep into texts.

Mentor Texts for Grades K–2

- *I Like Myself!* by Karen Beaumont: This text is great for rhyming words and repetitive sentence structure. It also is a good guide for writing personal narratives/poetry.
- *Wallace's Lists* by Barbara Bottner and Gerald Kruglik: This text is a wonderful model to help students begin making lists of interesting topics about which they would like to write.
- *Apples* by Gail Gibbons: This text is fantastic for examining how images and diagrams contribute to overall understanding of the topic/concept.
- *Harold and the Purple Crayon* by Crockett Johnson: This text is great to get students thinking about the tools that writers use.
- *I Wanna Iguana* by Karen Kaufman Orloff: This text is helpful to model opinion/argument writing.

- *Knuffle Bunny* by Mo Willems: This text can be used to illustrate how to write with speech bubbles.

Lesson Idea: Using a Mentor Text Grades K–2

1. Remind students that writers often get their ideas from stories in books. Say, “We can study an author and use their craft as a model for our stories.”
2. Read the mentor text, *I Just Forgot* by Mercer Mayer. Remind students that in this story, Little Critter forgets to do many of his daily responsibilities, such as brushing his teeth, making his bed, and forgetting his lunch.
3. As a class, create an anchor chart about things that may be difficult to remember.
4. Model how to take a few of the ideas from the chart to create your own story.
5. Provide each student with a small book (a few sheets of paper folded and stapled together). Then instruct students to begin writing their own books about things that they often forget.
6. Circulate around the room to see whether students understood the story pattern. Are students engaged? Do you notice writing stamina? Prompt struggling students as necessary.
7. Once writing is complete, have students share their book writings with a writing partner, then in groups of four.

Mentor Texts for Grades 3–5

- *The Grouchy Ladybug* by Eric Carle: This is a funny book that can be used as a model for how to incorporate dialogue.
- *Hope Is a Ferris Wheel* by Robin Herrera: This text provides a good model for exploring metaphors.
- *It’s Disgusting and We Ate It! True Food Facts from Around the World and Throughout History* by James Solheim: This text is great to examine a variety of text features, such as captions and sidebars.
- *Brave Irene* by William Steig: This text is full of strong verbs.
- *The Great Fuzz Frenzy* by Janet Stevens: This is a superb book for teaching students to use onomatopoeia.
- *Owl Moon* by Jane Yolen: This book is rich with details and visual descriptions.

Lesson Idea: Using a Mentor Text Grades 3–5

1. Display the text *Everybody Needs a Rock* by Byrd Baylor. Remind students of the format and basic structure, written in column layout. Discuss and chart anything noticed as you skim through the book.
2. Read aloud the simple 10-rule text on how to find a rock. Tell students to pay particular attention to the introduction and the conclusion so that they can imitate the style.

3. Discuss the setting of the book (the Southwest) and how the author's rules pertain to that type of climate and geography.
4. Reread the introduction aloud. As a class, brainstorm ways to imitate the author's style while making the story more relevant to today's students. For example, "I'm sorry for kids with tricycles, bicycles, horses, goldfish..." changes to: "I'm sorry for kids who only have movies, tablets, and cell phones."
5. Fold a sheet of paper in half and model the column format with text flowing down both sides. Write your Rule 1 and Rule 2 for how to find a rock in your geographic region (see below for an example).
 - **Rule 1:** Go somewhere very quiet where you can hear the birds singing and the water gurgling across the rocks in a stream.
 - **Rule 2:** When you're looking for your rock, don't let anyone interrupt your search. Choose a rock from a mountain where the forest thins out as you climb to higher elevations.
6. Divide students into groups of four. Have them begin to brainstorm rules for finding a rock in their own geographic location. Allow several minutes of talk time and then bring them back to whole group.
7. Remind students the sky is the limit. Encourage students to be creative and think of locations around the school or their home where they may go to find a rock. Provide them with the tools and send them off to write their 10 Rules for Finding a Rock.

Mentor Texts for Grades 6–8

- *Doll Bones* by Holly Black: This paranormal-mystery text is great for setting and character development.
- *Enormous Smallness: A Story of E. E. Cummings* by Matthew Burgess: This book provides a beautiful example of mood and tone.
- *The Music of the Dolphins* by Karen Hesse: This text uses typical grammar, usage, and mechanics rules to convey style, tone, and emphasis.
- *Middle School Is Worse than Meatloaf* by Jennifer L. Holm: This text shows a great example of a personal narrative, especially for middle school students.
- *The Year Down Yonder* by Richard Peck: This text presents a variety of high-quality sequence and transition words.

Lesson Idea: Using a Mentor Text Grades 6–8

1. Remind students of the targeted vocabulary word wall for domain-specific words needed for success. Explain the importance of increasing vocabulary exposure.
2. Read aloud *The Boy Who Loved Words* by Roni Schotter and build an ABC chart of interesting words from the text. When reading aloud, give a brief, student-friendly meaning of difficult words: e.g., periphery (surrounding space), swarthy (dusky color), clamor (loud complaint or demand).
3. In small triads, have students remember as many words as they can from the active

read aloud. Pull back together as a whole group and add their thinking to the word chart.

4. Make a paper fold of four squares. Show students how to write a word in each square, sketch a picture to illustrate, and use the word in a sentence. When completed students should have a word, picture and sentence in each of the four squares with a new and unusual word to build word knowledge.
5. Collect all examples, copy, make a cover, and staple together a book for each student. Books will be stored in a writer's folder for future writing projects. Consider having students bring in a four-square paper fold with four challenging words they found in their independent reading. Compare the class lists and have students choose five words for everyone to learn.

In summary, mentor texts are indispensable when embedded in Writer's Workshop. Students are required to search for author craft, communicate their understanding of text structures, and increase literacy skills in the process. Students will thrive in an environment that celebrates the work of a variety of authors. Studying mentor texts also opens the door for exposure to many sources of information. Embrace, enjoy, and energize your classroom using mentor texts to strengthen writing stamina, hone the writing craft, and increase student achievement.

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