

ACTIVITY THREE: WRITING CONSULTATIONS

In the United States, students typically write multiple drafts before turning in an assignment. This is called “process writing.” In process writing, students begin with brainstorming and pre-writing activities. Next, they move on to drafting and revising a piece of writing. Finally, they finish with editing and proofreading tasks. The nature of the writing process is multi-layered and involves collaboration and cooperation among students and teachers. Each step in the writing process is revisited and repeated as students learn to reflect, assess, and edit their own writing as well as their classmates’. At the same time, teachers offer much-needed feedback and guidance as they oversee and manage students throughout the writing process. Throughout this process, the student writer must constantly remember who the audience is and what the audience needs in order to understand the writer’s ideas. Continuous feedback from as many potential audience members as possible is a critical part of the writing process. In the English language classroom, the audience consists of fellow students and the teacher(s). Much has been written about peer evaluations and feedback among students, but conducting teacher-student consultations during the writing process can be valuable to student writers in understanding their own strengths and weaknesses.

In this week’s Teachers Corner, we offer a template for conducting a successful teacher-student writing consultation. The time and work involved in consultations might seem overwhelming, but the value students take from the individual, focused feedback can carry over into the rest of their continued writing development.

LEVEL

Any level within academic writing

LANGUAGE FOCUS

Writing

GOALS

During this activity, students will be able to:

- Identify areas of writing that need improvement based on topics as targeted by the teacher and assignment.
- Receive feedback on writing issues unique to their own progress and writing development.
- Create an action plan for revision outlining what specific changes they will make during the next revision.

MATERIALS

- Pen/pencil
- Copy of students' writing to be discussed
- Space to meet
- Time (typically 15-20 minutes for each student)

PREPARATION

- Collect students' drafts 1 to 2 days in advance of conferences
- Schedule individual conferences with each student (block out 15 to 20 minutes of time for each student)
- Read each draft in advance noting comments, issues, and any suggestions according to your own rubric and specific assignment demands. The feedback you give will depend on the assignment demands, which draft is under review, and the focus of your teaching. Feedback should be focused, clear, and include achievable tasks for writers throughout editing and revisions. For specific ideas on how to give feedback during the writing process, check out the article "Error Correction and Feedback in the EFL Writing Classroom: Comparing Instructor and Student Preferences" from [English Teaching Forum](#). It is also good to estimate what grade or mark the assignment would receive as it is in this draft.

- Ask students to prepare and bring the following information to the conference (see optional handout in Appendix A):
 - 3 questions that they have about their paper and/or the assignment
 - 2 things they did well in their draft
 - 2 things that need improvement in their draft

PROCEDURE

1. Begin the consultation by inviting the student to sit down. Then, have the student take out the handout (Appendix A), and explain how the consultation will proceed.
 - a. First, explain that you have read their paper and have some feedback for them.
 - b. Next, address their questions and then discuss their own ideas about their paper.
 - c. Then, explain that you will share your feedback and suggestions with the student during which time the student should be taking notes and asking questions.
 - d. Once the feedback portion is over, spend time developing an action plan for how to proceed in the revision.
2. After explaining the procedure, ask the student what grade he/she would assign the writing if it were to be submitted at this time. Make a note of this grade on the handout.
3. Then, have the student ask the first question on his or her list. Offer your feedback and response. Repeat this for each question the student prepared.
4. Next, ask the student to share what she/he wrote on the handout about strengths and weaknesses. Acknowledge what the student says and reinforce the strengths. This can help build students' confidence in their skills and abilities as writers.
5. Once the student has reviewed what he/she prepared for the conference, take out the copy of the writing you reviewed. Tell the student what specific elements of writing you examined for this draft. In early drafts, give attention to structure, organization, and content development. These are called

high-order concerns. In later drafts, offer feedback on sentence structure, transitions between ideas, and grammatical features that affect comprehension. We refer to these issues as *low-order concerns*.

- a. As you review your findings, give students time to respond, ask questions, make notes, and offer suggestions for changes.
6. When you finish reviewing the draft with your comments, explain the grade or mark you would assign to the draft as it is today. This can help students see how much work they need to do as they move forward with the assignment.
7. Finally, look at the handout together and complete the section with the action plan that the student will use in moving forward with the assignment. This handout can serve as a checklist for both you and the student as you check, revise, and ultimately grade future drafts.
8. When all of these steps have been completed, ask the student what additional questions or concerns he/she has before leaving. Thank the student for coming and remind each student that even if he/she has work to do on this paper he/she has made a good start.

VARIATIONS

If you are a teacher with limited time available to meet with students individually, consider conducting small-group conferences. Small-group conferences can also support the individual feedback and attention that learners need. Put students of similar writing abilities into groups 3 to 4 and schedule a conference time with each group. With 3 to 4 students, it is better to allot a little more time, such as 30 minutes for each conference. Again, collect and mark the essays in advance of the conference, but instead of focusing on individual needs, focus on shared needs among the group. For example, each essay can be marked to address individual concerns, but look for issues that all group members need addressed such as thesis statements. Identify 3 to 5 issues that are prevalent across the group and prepare a mini-lesson that addresses the issues and gives participants a chance to work as a group to develop plans.



An additional option if time is limited is to read the draft during each conference. This will likely result in less written feedback and mirror more of a conversation about the essay. Still, students can prepare as they would for the conference outlined above and develop an action plan with you.

Teacher-Student Conference Handout

What grade/mark would you give your current essay? _____

What are three questions you have about your essay?

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Write two things that you do well in your essay.

1. _____

2. _____

Write two things that need improvement in your essay.

1. _____

2. _____

Notes from Conference

Action Plan for Revision

What are 5 changes you will make to your draft?

1. _____

How will you make this change?

2. _____

How will you make this change?

3. _____

How will you make this change?

4. _____

How will you make this change?

5. _____

How will you make this change?

What grade/mark do you want to get on this paper? _____

What else will you do in your revision to achieve your desired grade/mark?

