

Chapter 10

New Teacher Spotlight: Understanding What a Writing Conference Is and Why You Should Do It

When you send your students off to write, how do you continue to support them? Many teachers struggle with how to use their time when students are working independently. Writing conferences are intentional conversations in which the teacher gathers information, supports students where they are, and provides them with instruction that will support them as writers.

We suggest creating a schedule for yourself with a list of students to visit during a given day, with the goal of meeting with everyone by the end of the week. This will ensure that you visit all students.

It's important to be an astute and keen observer of students during independent writing time, noticing both their behaviors and their writing. How do students approach writing? Which ones are quick to dive into the writing, and which ones take their time or find other things to do before the pencil hits the paper? You may decide to plan conferences with these hesitant students to get to the bottom of their behavior and offer them motivational strategies.

As you work your way around the room, what do you notice about students' writing? What topics are they choosing? How is the quality of their writing? Are students incorporating your teaching points? Based on your observations, plan writing conferences that focus on, for example, ideas, skills, habits, language use, or mentor texts. By constantly developing your knowledge and understanding about what students need, you will become keenly aware of the kind of assistance they require. Just like lesson planning, you can plan for conferences by thinking about your students and what type of conference they need.