

The Teacher's Role in Reading Workshop



In a reading workshop, the teacher is the lead expert and facilitator, just like the master artist in a Renaissance painting workshop. Workshop differs from a traditional classroom setting because the students do most of the talking, reading, writing, and collaborating. In a workshop, it's the teacher's job to think deeply about designing reading units that matter to young adolescents, monitoring students' learning and progress, and developing learning experiences that invite students to do the majority of the work. "Teacher talk" in a 45-minute workshop should be no more than 10 to 15 minutes and should include reviewing the schedule, presenting a demonstration lesson, and discussing directions for the day and for long-term projects. What follows is a list of the teacher's jobs that relate directly to workshop:

- Get to know each student and build a trusting relationship.
- Plan active-learning, hands-on lessons.
- Develop reading units that are relevant to students' lives.
- Create daily plans that emerge from unit planning.
- Lead guided practice lessons.
- Estimate students' instructional reading levels at the start of the year and monitor progress and specific needs throughout the year.
- Organize strategic reading groups for each unit and meet with them three times during a six-day cycle.
- Develop and present mini-lessons to make reading process visible.
- Take observational notes.
- Maintain literacy folders and evaluate students' progress.
- Adjust curriculum when your observations and students' work reveal this need.
- Book-talk new additions to the class library and featured authors or genres.
- Plan required assessments such as essays.
- Teach students to choose books they can read and enjoy for independent reading.
- Plan scaffolds and interventions for specific students.
- Confer with students about reading strategies, independent reading, journal work, tests, etc.
- Teach students to confer with one another.
- Set guidelines for independent reading workshop time.

Creating Choice Time Guidelines

After students have completed their warm-up and you've reviewed the schedule and completed a read-aloud and mini-lesson, it's time for students to choose their independent work based on your suggestions. During the 25 to 30 minutes that remain of each workshop, students should be engaged in independent, paired, or small-group projects and journal work (with the mainstay being strategic reading groups and independent reading). Write the options on the chalkboard, offering two for fifth and sixth graders and two or three for seventh and eighth graders. Students can choose to engage in one activity or budget time to work on all of them. See the list of choice time activities on pages 50–51.

During choice time, I am free to meet with reading groups, which I do three times during a six-day cycle (see page 52), and to provide support for students who need more than mini-lessons and guided practice sessions to move forward. You can gain this scaffolding time on days when you're not presenting a mini-lesson or leading guided practice, and on those days you can meet with one group of students who all need help on a strategy, or conduct one or two individual conferences.

The amount of choice time students have depends on the time your school has reserved for language arts. In some schools, reading and writing is taught by one teacher, affording flexibility in dividing the time between reading and writing. In others, the subject is split between two different teachers. Only through choice time can students develop responsibility and independence as they inquire, read, write, and collaborate with peers, because choice time asks students to make decisions, to negotiate adjustments with their teacher, and to budget their time so they support group members and meet deadlines.