

# Provide frequent feedback to student writers

## Hold writer-process conferences daily

Literacy expert Carl Anderson has done extensive work in the area of writer conferencing. He asserts that conferring with students is a teacher's most crucial writer's workshop role. This type of formative assessment reveals the skills students are mastering but also what they need next instructionally.

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PRODUCT CONFERENCE	PROCESS CONFERENCE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consumes approximately 15+ minutes.</li> <li>• Occurs in preparation for final-draft publishing.</li> <li>• Addresses numerous areas to improve.</li> <li>• Requires a one-on-one between the teacher &amp; writer.</li> <li>• Typically held at a separate/isolated place.</li> <li>• Occurs infrequently.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consumes approximately 2-5 minutes.</li> <li>• Occurs during any stage in the writing process.</li> <li>• Addresses a single area of improvement.</li> <li>• Occurs within a small group (i.e., teacher and writers).</li> <li>• Held at the students' desks.</li> <li>• Occurs daily/regularly.</li> </ul>

## Product Conferences

The notion of conferencing often includes a long, laborious meeting with one student at a time at a separate table or at the teacher's desk. Such a conference is called a product conference as the teacher will spend 15-25 minutes with an individual student going over all parts of his piece. The advantage of this meeting is that the teacher can point out numerous strengths and numerous areas for improvement in preparation for a final draft. While spending all this time with one student is powerful, the other 25 kids lack teacher feedback and support for a long time.

Although these types of conferences are important, product conferences should happen infrequently. Plan to conduct them only about three or four times a year, in preparation for publishing a piece. In between, converse with students via frequent process conferences.

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## Process Conferences

Students need feedback during all stages of the writing process— not just during the final revision and editing stages. Unlike the longer product conference, a process conference lasts only a few minutes, and it can happen at any stage in the writing process. Teachers may sit down with students and discuss their pre-writing plan or give feedback on a current draft.

Students would rather have a few minutes of teacher feedback regularly versus 20 minutes once a month. They need to be in touch with the teacher more often, but they do not necessarily need one-on-one support. Leading a process conference with small groups of students allows more students to receive feedback more often.

During the 2-5 minute process conference, each student will read a small portion of his writing and receive a specific compliment from the teacher. Then, the teacher offers individuals (or the whole group) a single suggestion for improvement. (Since this group meeting is much shorter, there isn't time to point out all the weaknesses.) These compliments and comments are all based on the 6 Traits of Writing. An added benefit to conversations with multiple students is that they can grow from listening in as feedback is offered to their peers.

Group process conferences allow teachers to touch base with more students each day and provide a critical formative assessment of where students are and what they need next.

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"Confering with writers is our most critical writing workshop role."

Carl Anderson  
*How's It Going?*

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"If the piece of writing gets better but the writer has learned nothing that will help him or her another day on another piece, then the conference was a waste of everyone's time."

Lucy Calkins  
*The Art of Teaching Writing*

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"...The more feedback during the process, the better students can achieve the goals."

John Hattie  
*Visible Learning for Teachers: Maximizing Impact on Learning*

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