

# Professional Writing Retreat Handbook







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# National Writing Project Professional Writing Retreat Handbook

A how-to manual for  
replicating the NWP  
Professional Writing  
Retreat model.





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## Why Have a Professional Writing Retreat?

The National Writing Project designed the Professional Writing Retreats to support writing by teacher-leaders for audiences of scholars, practitioners, policymakers, and other members of the public who have an interest in education. These writing retreats focus on writing about the profession of teaching, giving teachers a chance to write about their practice, make claims about policy, enter into discussions about school reform, argue about ideas concerning literacy and learning, and address a variety of other concerns about teaching writing. We believe that professional writing by NWP teacher-consultants and directors can achieve the following ends:

- By writing about school reform, NWP colleagues can help resituate reform efforts by giving voice to the most powerful agents of change in schools: teachers.
- By writing about practice, teachers can make public the vast resources of their knowledge, making it available to other teachers, administrators, and even legislators and parents.
- By writing about professional concerns, we enter into the scholarly discussions about teaching writing, making NWP's knowledge more visible to the community of researchers.

From the beginning, the leaders of the Professional Writing Retreat envisioned the retreats as a means to support an NWP culture that would support professional writing.

Toward that end, the Professional Writing Retreats also support professional writing at local sites in the summer invitational institutes and in local and regional professional writing retreats. In its focus on writing about practice, this kind of retreat offers a powerful, complementary addition to the personal and expressive kinds of writing typically produced in many summer institutes and other writing retreats.

The purposes and rationale for the first NWP Professional Writing Retreat, held at Sunrise Springs in Santa Fe the summer of 1999, grew out of a confluence of interests and experiences on the part of three NWP directors: Joseph Check of the Boston Writing Project; Tom Fox of the Northern California Writing Project; and Carol Tateishi of the Bay Area Writing Project.

Out of conversations among these three site directors, the idea emerged for an NWP retreat focused on professional writing, modeled on the Project Outreach retreats. Carol, Tom, and Joe took the idea to the 1999 NWP Annual Meeting to test the waters and found a great deal of interest and enthusiasm for it among directors and teacher-consultants. With the support and interest of National Writing Project leaders, the three directors quickly went ahead to extend the new retreat model to the NWP at large, resulting in the professional writing retreats that began at Sunrise Springs in 1999.

## Putting Together a Professional Writing Retreat

### Advance Planning

The first step in developing the retreat is to assess the interest level for this kind of event in your local writing project community and think through the purposes of the retreat for your site. You may want to begin modestly and let this kind of retreat gain its own momentum. Some sites begin with a handful of teacher-consultants who are committed to writing as professionals. This small group then provides leadership for a larger retreat.

Primary tasks and responsibilities include the following:

- choosing a location, date, time, and retreat schedule
- assuming or delegating logistical and administrative tasks
- setting up an application and selection process if needed
- inviting participants
- facilitating the retreat itself

- evaluating the retreat
- providing direction for follow-up work
- supporting any group publication that might grow from the retreat.

## Leadership Team

A professional writing retreat opens up new opportunities for teacher leadership at local sites, allowing teacher-consultants with writing and editing experience to come to the fore. We suggest putting together a small leadership team that includes the retreat facilitators themselves, whoever will be responsible for the logistics and administrative details of the retreat, and other interested teacher-consultants as needed. Strong facilitators include teacher-consultants who have an interest in and commitment to moving professional pieces to publication and who have solid experience in working with writing groups or in supporting others in their writing. We also suggest that at least one person on the team have some experience as a leader at your site.

## Funding

Funding is one of the first things the leadership team will need to consider in planning the retreat, and it is usually dictated by local constraints and opportunities. Some common costs that retreat planners will need to consider are

- food and lodging
- supplies and equipment
- stipends for facilitators.

Consider the following categories of funding possibilities:

### 1. Sharing of costs by site and participants

In this instance, the site subsidizes the retreat to the extent it can with participants picking up the rest of the costs.

### 2. Full costs borne by the site or regional network

If your area has a state or regional network, sometimes it can help defray the costs for a retreat that is open to multiple sites. For example, the

California Writing Project state network hosted and funded professional writing retreats in the northern and southern parts of the state that were open by application to any California teacher-consultant. Local sites might seek funding on their own as well. For instance, the NWP of Acadiana in Lafayette, Louisiana, secured an NWP minigrant to support its professional writing retreat.

### 3. Costs paid by participants

If you have access to inexpensive accommodations for a retreat, this option is particularly attractive. The Boston Writing Project uses cottages at Cape Cod, owned by the university, to hold regular retreats for teacher-consultants. The Northern California Writing Project has a favorite cabin near Lake Shasta that serves it well for a small retreat. In both of these cases, participants bring their own food and cook, eat, and write together.

## Participants

Who makes a good participant? We have found that participants who contribute the most to a successful retreat are those who:

- write pretty well and are not overly apprehensive as writers; this kind of retreat is not the best place for inexperienced writers
- already have something they want to work on
- are involved in teacher research and seeking outlets for their studies and findings
- are willing to share their work, take criticism, provide feedback to others, and participate as a good writing group member
- want to reflect on questions and concerns that they have become aware of in their own professional lives
- are serious about working on a piece of professional writing, not a piece of poetry, fiction, or memoir

- can take a leadership role in sustaining the work of professional writing later on.

No participant will have all of these qualities, but the list provides an idea of the kind of participants who make for a good retreat. In addition, we have found that diversity within the group is essential. We suggest putting together a group that is diverse across teaching assignments, subject areas, ethnicity, writing interests, roles at site, and local geography.

## Facilities, Equipment, and Materials

Any location that works for you is, of course, the right one. In seeking a location, however, we have found that it's important to choose a place with few distractions. We all know that when faced with writing, it's all too easy to run an errand instead. Most people need time and peace and quiet to work productively on their writing. You also need enough common space to bring the group together regularly throughout the retreat for activities such as those described in the next section, "Retreat Design."

Standard equipment has included a copier to make copies of drafts for writing groups, both Mac and PC computers, and a printer. Rentals of these have been expensive, though, and local sites will, no doubt, find their own ways of getting needed equipment. Participants also appreciate easy Internet access, if possible.

The responsibility for materials falls more on the participants than the retreat leadership. We supply paper for copying, chart paper, marking pens, extra disks, and various handouts. We ask participants to bring with them any resources they may need to work on their drafts—student writing, transcripts, journals, books, assignments, laptops, USB drives, and other kinds of data.

## Retreat Design

### Daily Schedule

The actual schedule for the national professional writing retreats has changed very little since the first retreat in 1999. It worked. That doesn't mean it's the only workable

schedule for a retreat of this type, but it does contain a few components that seem to be key to the retreat's success: large chunks of time to write and get feedback, shared meals, and a few important whole-group sessions including brief check-ins or progress reports from each participant. An example of the schedule for the national retreat is included in appendix C.

The words "schedule" and "retreat" don't seem to fit well together. Schedule is what teachers have too much of; retreat is what teachers have too little of. That's one reason our schedule for the professional writing retreats at the national level has been called

a nonschedule masquerading as a schedule. At the heart of the nonschedule are large chunks of unplanned, unscripted time—time for individual writing, thinking, and hair-pulling, time for response groups, time for conferences with facilitators and on-site editors. The chunks of time are probably longer than you would typically plan into a more general type of writing retreat because professional writing requires a different kind of thinking and a different kind of response than expressive or personal writing. The chunks of time are the core of the schedule; they are what participants of past retreats often cite as the most valuable part of their experience, using words like "gift" and "luxury" to describe how they felt about the writing time.

The large chunks of writing time are framed in our schedule by short whole-group gatherings we call "check-ins." At each check-in, a facilitator asks, "How's it going?" and each participant describes his or her process, progress, or problems

The schedule was very affirming of my own writing process. The long hours of individual time were essential.

I enjoyed the whole group activities and the small group activities. My writing group was a great support to the product and process.

Elisabeth Denisar-Babin  
Tampa Bay Area Writing Project

since the last check-in. The first check-in is the longest because we ask for feedback about the response groups as well. After that, each check-in typically requires only one or two minutes per participant.

Though brief, the check-ins are important elements in the schedule. For the participants, they provide a necessary degree of structure, a soft deadline, to keep them moving forward in their work. They also help to preserve the sense of community. Without them, some writers might hide away in their writing spaces and not be seen all weekend, but with check-ins, everyone knows something about what everyone else is working on. Often writers from different response groups have advice or resources to offer each other as a result of the check-ins.

The check-ins are also valuable for the facilitators. They allow us to do formative process evaluations of the retreat. We listen to what all participants say and how they say it. Are they tired but happy? Frustrated and stuck? We listen for a sense of how the response groups are going and for what types of problems people are having in their writing. In 2001, for example, many participants were working on case studies or other types of narratives and were struggling to find a focus and an appropriate form, so Joe spent a few minutes after a check-in to suggest ways to frame a narrative about classroom practice.

Scheduling the check-ins right before meal times has worked well. It minimizes the number of interruptions of the writing time—we have to stop to eat anyway—and it ensures the brevity of the process. Unspoken but understood by all is the thought, Let's do this quickly, then we can eat.

Longer whole-group sessions are kept to a minimum, but a few seem essential. To open the retreat, of course, we come together as a whole group for introductions, a preview of the

rhythm and structure of the weekend, and a brief reminder of our purposes for the retreat. It has worked well to begin on a Thursday in the late afternoon or early evening. This allows us to complete the introduction and orientation parts of the retreat so that the following day can be devoted entirely to the work of the retreat.

After dinner, we reconvene for two activities. First, it seems appropriate for participants at a writing project retreat to do

some writing together. The prompt we have used is to write about a “stuck point” either in our writing or in our practice. We don't ask for solutions or ways to get “unstuck,” however, just for a description of the problem. This prompt is meant to get everyone focused on the task ahead. It seems to help writers who still don't know what they will write about the next day to find a possible topic, and those who have pieces in progress identify starting places for the next day's work. We allow about seven minutes for writing and ask for a few volunteers to share. Next we go

around the circle and have each participant briefly describe what he or she is planning, at that moment at least, to work on. The facilitators take notes and use this information as a primary consideration in composing the response groups.

## Writing Response Groups

There are good reasons for having the facilitators form the response groups rather than leaving it to the participants to group themselves. It avoids the possibility of having any participant feel like the last kid to get picked for the softball team, and attention to a few parameters can enhance the effectiveness of the groups. The topics the participants have identified serve as a starting place for making decisions about group assignments. If all the members of a particular group are writing about professional development, for example, they are more likely to have experiences and insights to bring into the discussion of the pieces to which they will be asked to

What I appreciated most . . . was the focus on professional writing, the setting and time that encouraged the writer in me, and the knowledgeable/critical response from the facilitators.

Kim Douillard  
San Diego Area Writing Project



respond. Another consideration is the grade level that each group member is most familiar with. In this case, diversity is better than homogeneity. Writers with different types of teaching experiences are often more likely to notice the gaps—places where the writer has assumed understandings that readers may not have. Of course, the facilitators are also careful to avoid obvious personality conflicts. Once the groups have been composed, the facilitators post the group lists where the participants can see them when they gather for the first full day of the retreat.

The first full working day begins with another whole-group session devoted to discussion of the response groups. It is important to spend some time talking specifically about how response groups operate. Everyone comes to a retreat like this with his or her own experience of and expectations for response groups, but those may vary widely. We want to uncover and discuss those differences before they lead to misunderstandings or dissatisfaction with the types of feedback people will get in their response groups.

We start by considering both roles that one plays in a response group: writer and responder. We point out that, though most people's concern is focused on presenting their work, "on stage" time is really only a small part of each person's contribution. In a four-person group, each member will spend 75 percent of his or her time as a responder and only 25 percent as a writer/reader; therefore, good response skills are crucial to group success.

We then ask half of the group to make a quick list of the kinds of response they find helpful as writers, while the other half makes a similar list of types of feedback that have worked well

for them as responders. The lists are then shared aloud and posted on chart paper. Another important question to raise briefly is, "What kinds of feedback do you not appreciate?"

I'm grateful, I'm just so grateful...I don't think I had a good handle on what professional writing actually was when I came. I think that led to the feeling that I didn't really have anything to offer the professional community. Once I learned this kind of writing, I felt I had the authority to write professionally after 26 years of classroom work.

Mike Rush  
National Writing Project of  
Central Arkansas

We also provide handouts that describe step-by-step response group protocols that lend themselves to the type of writing we'll be doing. Appendix C includes three models for use with different types of drafts. Finally, we use this session to talk about equitable ways for people to divide their time between getting individual work done and being available for their response groups. We suggest beginning each block of writing time with a quick negotiation among group members about when and how long to meet, and we recommend assigning rotating timekeepers for each response session.

### Adaptations to Forming and Preparing Writing Response Groups

Increasingly, writers are coming to the NWP retreats not only with a clear focus for their writing but often with a partial draft in hand. This is in contrast to the first years of

the retreats, when most writers were coming with an idea to explore and used the retreat to begin an initial draft of a piece. This new level of readiness has resulted in two adaptations to the retreat design, both of which result in more hours of writing time for participants on the first full day.

Through the application process, facilitators already know a fair amount about retreat participants early on. Based on this information, we now compose the groups prior to the retreat. Instead of making group assignments by topic the starting point, we first group people by their level of readiness, using categories such as "exploratory" or "developing" for those writers who have a general area of focus but need time to refine their thinking. They will benefit from sounding out their

ideas with others in their group or getting support for writing their way into their topics. At the other end of the continuum are those who will be well into a solid first draft during the retreat and who will benefit from readers at a similar writing stage. Within these two groupings, we continue to follow our guidelines described earlier for heterogeneity in the groups.

The second adaptation has to do with the schedule. We now post the response group lists right after dinner of the arrival day, not waiting until the following morning. We have participants move into their groups and proceed with the discussion of response groups and the three models for response. Because people are already in their response groups the first evening, discussions about feedback and the do's and don'ts of response groups take place within the group, which has the advantage of building community and smoothing the way for a productive group dynamic. Most important, though, is that groups are ready to go by the close of the arrival day, and writers have the full first day for writing and response.

## Professional Editor Session

Editors of NWP publications present a whole-group session. Having a professional editor on hand to speak about the criteria for accepting pieces for publication adds weight to the proceedings. It gives participants with little or no experience in getting published an insider's view of the process and underscores the purpose of the retreat—to support writing about practice and to participate in the ongoing professional conversation. At the first retreat, this session was scheduled near the end of the retreat, but comments from participants revealed that they would have found the information useful earlier on, so in subsequent years we moved it to an earlier time slot. The editor's discussion of the types of writing NWP looks for in its publications and the criteria or watch

words used to evaluate a piece gives writers, responders, and facilitators an additional common framework for revising and responding to pieces in progress.

## Community Reading

The final whole-group session—a read-around—closes the retreat and celebrates the work that has been accomplished.

We can't hear all of every piece, and most pieces do not reach final draft status during the retreat itself, but we want to hear something from everyone. We ask every participant to select one small section of their work to read to the whole group—a paragraph or two, three to five minutes' worth—to give us a sense of the piece's development up to that point.

The final reading is a part of the schedule that has changed from year to year because the timing can be difficult, depending on the number of participants and the travel time involved. The first year, the group was split into two small groups for a read-around. The advantage of this plan was a shorter session, but the disadvantage was not getting to hear everyone's piece. The next year, we held a whole-group read-around on

the last morning. This ended up being quite long and several participants had to leave before it was over because of travel time to get home.

The third and most successful plan was to split the readings into two sessions, one the last night and one the following morning. We also employed rotating time keepers. The person sitting on the right of each reader became the reader's timekeeper, providing a gentle tap on the arm after three minutes to prompt the reader to stop after completing a sentence or paragraph.

I'd like to add that as a co-director of a writing project I take part in writing groups every summer, but here I felt an elevated level of expectations along with the quality of response...I feel like I'm leaving with higher expectations for myself as a writer.

Ron Davis  
Central Wisconsin  
Writing Project



## Intermediate Publication

The readings are just long enough to whet our appetites for the whole pieces, so the follow-up for the national retreats has been the production of an intermediate publication, or anthology, of each of the pieces produced at the retreat. Before closing the last session, we ask for three participants to volunteer as publication coordinators and we select a deadline for everyone to get their finished, camera-ready pieces to the coordinators. The coordinators' job is simply to compile the pieces in an order that seems best to them, create a table of contents and perhaps a foreword, and make decisions about cover, title, and binding. Over the years, the coordinators from the retreats have developed a style sheet to send out to all participants so that the submissions have a uniform appearance in the anthology. At the national level, the coordinators have communicated via email. They've been assisted by a program assistant from NWP, who receives hard copies from the participants, copies the whole packet and sends one to each of the three coordinators, and receives, binds, and distributes the compiled manuscript. The appendix to this handbook contains guidelines for anthology contributors and for anthology coordinators.

The NWP model was much in evidence as the facilitators shared the design of the retreat, kick-started the writing with a few prompts, and made themselves available for coaching. I could feel the hands of the facilitators gently guiding the weekend's activities ...

Bruce Penniman  
Western Massachusetts  
WritingProject

- Attend to the writers as well as to their writing. This includes recognizing and easing whatever anxiety participants are feeling, for example, giving them confidence in themselves and the retreat process, giving specific suggestions for how to work in writing groups.
- Monitor progress and comfort level through check-ins.
- Keep the schedule moving and the energy up.
- Respond to unanticipated needs as they arise (e.g., computer breakdowns, the need to create a brief miniworkshop on a subject like "developing a book proposal").

Retreat planners should give careful consideration to the size and composition of the facilitation team. At Sunrise Springs we have enjoyed a luxurious ratio of three facilitators and an NWP editor to twenty participants. Budget considerations may mean that site- and state-level retreats have a larger facilitator-participant ratio, but we recommend at minimum a two-person team. Cofacilitators with complementary skills (e.g. a K–12 teacher and a university person) and personalities help ensure that writers get the widest possible response.

## Role of the Facilitators

Simply put, the facilitators are responsible for the overall success of the retreat. Their basic job is to implement the elements listed under "Retreat Design," and to be available throughout the retreat for one-on-one conferencing with participants. In terms of the whole group, facilitators need to do several things:

- Establish expectations for how people will spend their time.

At Sunrise Springs we find that our basic "tool kit" as facilitators comes from our experience as leaders of NWP invitational institutes. The skill set needed for facilitating a writing retreat is very similar to that needed for a successful summer institute. One major difference, though, is the retreat's drop-in conferencing model. Our normal practice is to have the facilitators sit on a patio working on their own writing but available for conferencing to participants at any time during the writing/response group periods on the schedule. Sometimes a participant will want to conference

with a particular facilitator. At other times, two facilitators will conference with a single participant. And at busy times, participants conference with whichever facilitator is available. Conferencing with facilitators gives participants an additional perspective on their piece, one not available in their response group. At the 2002 retreat, some adjectives participants used to describe the facilitators were “very knowledgeable,” “accessible,” “personable,” “informative,” “available yet not overbearing,” “kind and accepting of where we were,” and “helpful without being intrusive.”

## Continuation/Follow-up

Though ongoing support beyond the retreat is not practical at the national level, it can more easily be provided after local, state, or regional retreats. In Louisiana, professional writing groups are convened at each of the four local sites months prior to the statewide retreat. The local groups meet according to their needs and schedules at each of their separate sites to support the participants in preparing rough drafts to bring to the retreat. Though the writing groups for the retreat will be composed of members from various sites, after the retreat, each site’s group will still exist to support each other through the process of revision and preparation for publishing. In Boston, monthly writing groups are already established and offer a natural support system for participants of the professional writing retreats. At the Northern California Writing Project, biannual professional writing retreats are available for all teacher-consultants. And the California Writing Project has offered two professional writing retreats to support this effort.

## Sustaining and Expanding the Program

The first Sunrise Springs retreat in 1999 was undertaken as an experiment. We didn’t know if the NWP network had enough people interested in writing about their practice to provide an applicant pool, and we didn’t know whether the retreat model that had worked on a limited basis in several earlier contexts would continue to succeed with a networkwide national audience. Since that first retreat we have learned

several things. There is a growing national interest in writing about practice: our applicant pool continues to grow in quality and numbers every year. The initial retreat model worked well, but we have tweaked it each year to add more sophisticated features in response to participants’ needs. And interest from sites and networks around the country has led to support for a growing number of local and network retreats.

State networks such as the Louisiana Writing Projects and national groups such as the NWP English Language Learners Network have conducted their own successful writing-about-practice retreats using the NWP Professional Writing Retreat model. Local sites have conducted smaller versions of the writing retreat, and a growing number of sites are adding writing-about-practice workshops and writing topics to their basic summer institute, or creating special advanced institutes to support writing about practice. All of these efforts fall within the spirit of the NWP Professional Writing Retreat program, which is to continue to give teacher-consultants, directors, and co-directors the support and guidance they need to bring their professional voices to a wider audience.

## Planning for a Second-Stage Writing Retreat on Editing and Publishing

The National Writing Project’s Writing Retreat B: Editing and Publishing was created in a wide-ranging conversation about the next steps that NWP’s Professional Writing Retreats could take after five years of successful retreats. Carol Tateishi, Joe Check, Tom Fox, and Iana Rogers discussed the fact that many writing project directors and teacher-leaders benefited from writing retreats that helped them complete a strong first draft, but that the next step—preparing that draft for publication—needed an equal amount of support. So we created a new writing retreat for a later stage in the writing process, one that shifts the focus from invention and drafting to revising and editing.

After leading several of these retreats, we have come to some suggestions about what to expect from writers in these

retreats, how to prepare for the retreats, and what support is needed from the facilitators.

## Participants

The ticket for attending a writing retreat on editing and publishing is a completed draft, though not a finished one. The participants need to be committed to bringing their completed draft all the way to publication. In our experience in these two national retreats, we have the following observations about writers who have benefited from a writing retreat on editing and publishing:

- Many have already published and have experienced the process of submission, revision, “revise and resubmit,” and rejection.
- Most have written about their teaching before and are experienced at writing about the profession of teaching writing.
- Most are insightful into their writing processes and articulate clearly their needs as writers.

## Preparing for the Retreat

The advanced stage of the writers means that the preparation for the retreat differs somewhat from the preparation for a writing retreat whose goal is to create a draft. Since documentation is an issue for many writers, copies of the *MLA Handbook*, the *Chicago Manual of Style*, and the *APA Publication Manual* are critical resources that need to be easily available to authors. Anthologies of seminal works in specific fields related to writing instruction, such as Victor Villanueva’s *Cross-Talk in Composition Theory* (National Council of Teachers of English 1997), have proved to be very helpful. We also set out copies of journals in composition and rhetoric, education, and pedagogy for participants to peruse as they begin to focus on a particular audience. We have had on hand copies of the *English Journal*, *Research in the Teaching of English*, *Voices from the Middle*, the *Educational Researcher*,

*Language Arts*, *Rethinking Schools*, the *California Reader*, and the *Reading Teacher* at past retreats.

Facilitators can scan the applicants’ initial drafts, brainstorm journals that would offer possible target audiences for the participants, and obtain copies of the journals or copies of the guidelines for submissions from the journals’ webpages. We recommend asking participants to research target journals in advance, and bring a copy, if possible, to the retreat.

In addition to the regular materials, we recommend having two or three flash drives available for participants. At this stage in the writing process, participants are often engaged in research and need to cite secondary sources, so the retreat needs to provide computers with high-speed Internet access. Additionally, participants find, sometimes unexpectedly, that they need new sources of information. Since many journals are now online, having Internet access helps writers complete their draft.

## Facilitators

National Writing Project sites include many communities of knowledge, so it is critical to include facilitators with a variety of expertise. At the national retreat the first year, for instance, we had three facilitators, Tom Fox, Rebeca Garcia-Gonzalez, and Eileen Simmons. Fox’s academic field is rhetoric and composition, Garcia-Gonzalez’s is education, and Simmons’s expertise is pedagogy. While we were useful responders to all of the participants, when it came to detailed knowledge of journals and audiences, each of us had differing, but equally useful, knowledge. Additionally, because writing is a sociocultural as well as an academic practice, cultural diversity among the facilitators increases their effectiveness. A team of facilitators should have a wealth of experience addressing the needs of a variety of student populations.

Writing is always a risk, and the retreat’s social grouping is organized quickly. Participants obviously relate to more than someone’s academic affiliation. It is helpful to send out short

biographies of the facilitators in the advance materials so that participants can target facilitators that they feel will most benefit their work. These biographies might help participants understand where our knowledge overlaps and does not overlap. Participants should be encouraged to conference with more than one retreat facilitator and guest editor.

Guest editors add a great deal to the retreats. In 2004, Louann Reid was extraordinarily helpful and honest about publishing with the *English Journal*. In 2005, Michele Foster's deep knowledge of educational research and publication and her high-energy enthusiasm provided critical support for the participants. Writing Retreat B benefits especially from editors from a range of publications. Roxanne Barber and Art Peterson were also very helpful for authors thinking about NWP publication.

## Preparing to Conference with Writers

Participants in a writing retreat for editing and publishing come with drafts that explore ideas fairly clearly. Almost none of the conversations about their writing are about finding ideas. Instead, facilitators should be prepared to give the following kinds of guidance:

- Many writers need assistance identifying and using secondary sources. Some pieces need additional sources to back up their argument, and their authors seek out facilitators for suggestions. Additionally, some writers need suggestions about how to use sources in ways that do not detour their argument.
- Many participants' completed drafts need additional revisions that focus their article or book chapter more powerfully on a single idea or a set of related ideas.
- Most participants seek help in choosing appropriate audiences and specific journals for their piece. Once we identify

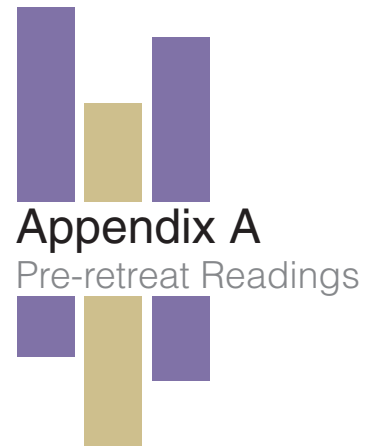
a specific journal, a new set of revisions is put into place to accommodate the journal's requirements.

## Changes to the Schedule

Participants in this kind of retreat tend to be independent and experienced. Therefore facilitators do not need to offer any whole-group workshops. Participants also tend to need longer blocks of time without response; too many check-ins interrupt rather than support the work. Finally, since these writers are more experienced, the introductions and the formation and norming of writing groups tend to go quickly, and can be completed at the first meeting of the retreat. Time to write is the critical need of all of the writers.

## Writing Groups

We found that writing groups in the advanced retreats are as helpful to writers as in retreats focused on invention and drafting. It is critical, however, not to have groups of more than three. Since the pieces in this retreat are longer, a group of four or more detracts from the time participants need to write. Expect that in this retreat, writing groups may not meet as frequently, generally twice during the whole retreat. This seems to serve the participants' purpose





# Eighteen Sources: An Annotated Bibliography of Writing About Practice

Joseph Check

We encourage NWP sites, networks, and friends to plan and conduct their own professional writing retreats. Planners need experience with the retreat process and a conceptual base from which to make adaptations and innovations. They also need arguments and examples to convince administrators, teachers, and prospective funders of the value of writing-about-practice as effective professional development and as a lever for school change. This bibliography offers a range of sources to meet these needs.

## Writing About Practice with Teachers and Administrators

1. Ackerman, R., Maslin-Ostrowski, P., and Christensen, C. (1996). Case stories: Telling tales about school. *Educational Leadership*, 53 (6), 21–23.  
Believing that “the story form is a sense-making tool for educators,” Ackerman’s group asks practitioners to “write brief stories of their own experiences, then read them aloud and discuss them with colleagues” according to a formal, four-step method which they describe as “an approach that blends aspects of the conventional case study method with the tradition, artistry, and imagination of storytelling.”
2. Check, J. (1988). Three myths that keep teachers from writing. *The Teacher’s Journal*, 1, 22–25.  
Identifies beliefs that may make practitioners reluctant to write, and suggests solutions. (This journal is hard to find; I will be happy to supply copies of the article to anyone who contacts me by email: [joseph.check@umb.edu](mailto:joseph.check@umb.edu))
3. Check, J. (2002). Reflection and reform. *The Quarterly of the National Writing Project*, 24 (3), 26–31.  
(Available online at [www.writingproject.org](http://www.writingproject.org). Go to “Publications” then “The Quarterly.”)  
Identifies and corrects five common misconceptions about reflective writing in school settings, particularly settings where “whole school change” is the dominant philosophy.
4. Check, J. (2004). I teach, (I feel), I write: The effects of emotion on writing about schooling. *The Quarterly of the National Writing Project*, 26 (3). (Available online at [www.writingproject.org](http://www.writingproject.org). Go to “Publications” then “The Quarterly.”)  
Teachers who try to write about their practice often fail when they start with the assumption that professional writing has no place for emotion. Describes three typical situations that arise from the struggle between feelings and professionalism and offers techniques for addressing these dilemmas.
5. Emig, J. (1987). Non-magical thinking: Presenting writing developmentally in schools. In D. Goswami and P. Stillman (Eds.), *Reclaiming the classroom*. Upper Montclair, N. J.: Boynton/Cook.  
A classic article that connects teachers’ writing about their practice to improved instruction.



6. Hole, S., and McEntee, G. (1999). Reflection is at the heart of practice. *Educational Leadership*, 56 (8), 34–37. Presents a five-step “guided reflection protocol” for use by individuals or in professional development or writing workshops, in the belief that “cultivating deep reflection through the use of a guiding protocol is an entry into rethinking and changing practice” and that “telling stories has the potential for changing individual practice and the culture of our schools.”
7. McEntee, G. (1998). Diving with whales: Five reasons for practitioners to write for publication. *The Quarterly of the National Writing Project*, 20 (4), 21–26. (available online at [www.writingproject.org](http://www.writingproject.org). Go to “Publications” then “The Quarterly.”)  
Grace McEntee, an English teacher and department chair with more than 20 years’ experience, distills five lessons from Writing Within School Reform, a three-year project with more than 70 practitioner-writers from schools involved in reform.
8. Thornber, J., and Williams, R., eds. (1996). *Center X Quarterly* 8, (2). UCLA Graduate School of Education and Information Studies.  
Entire issue devoted to “reflective case studies” with K–12 students, practitioners, and professors, including multiple accounts showing the connection between the close observation and reflection such studies require and classroom change.

### Articles from *English Education* on Reflective Narrative in the Preparation of English Language Arts (ELA) Teachers

**Since many writing project directors are also education or English education faculty, we thought it would be useful to list these. Several of the authors are writing project site directors.**

9. Fleischer, C. (1998). Advocating for change: A new education for new teachers. *English Education*, 30 (2), 78–100.  
Describes a methods class that equips students to “become proactive,” using advocacy skills to make parents allies, not enemies, on behalf of students and the profession, to combat the fact that “the voices of teachers, even knowledgeable and caring teachers, have been very nearly dismissed in the public discussion of our nation’s schools...”
10. Stock, P. (1993). The function of anecdote in teacher research. *English Education*, 25 (3), 173–87.  
Ground-breaking article on the role of “teacher talk” in professional conversations and continued learning.
11. Taylor, M. (1998). Telling tales (in and out) of school: Ethnographies of schooling and the preparation of English teachers. *English Education*, 30 (2), 101–120.  
Describes her methods course for elementary education majors, concluding “What I am concerned with is that teachers assert their right to tell the stories they find comprehensible and that when the conditions of their teaching become incomprehensible that they are able to search into the problem, reflect, and rewrite the story.”



## Professional Development Contexts for Writing-About-Practice Programs

12. Hoffman, J. (1998). When bad things happen to good ideas in literacy education: Professional dilemmas, personal decisions, and political traps. *The Reading Teacher*, 52 (2), 102–111.  
Useful review of a full range of staff development initiatives in literacy from the 1970s to the present (writing process, whole language, DISTAR, etc.) and their limited effects, followed by insightful comments on professional development in an age of school reform.
13. McLaughlin, M. (1990). The Rand change agent study revisited: Macro perspectives and micro realities. *Educational Researcher*, 19 (9), 11–16.  
Updates a classic study of professional development initiatives and their limitations; one conclusion, citing the work of the Bay Area Writing Project: “if teachers lie at the heart of successful efforts to enhance classroom practices, then the professional networks that engage teachers comprise promising vehicles for change.”

## Collections of Practitioner Narratives

14. Check, J., and McEntee, G., eds. (1996). *Writing within school reform*. Providence, RI: Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University. (Available to order online at [www.annenberginstitute.org](http://www.annenberginstitute.org). Go to Publications, look for items designated Writing Within School Reform.)  
Twelve individual booklets, each containing essays from several practitioners on a single aspect of school reform, for example, “Learning Leadership for Change” and “Recognizing Student Growth Through Careful Observation.”
15. Check, J., Peterson, A., and Ylvisaker, M., eds. (1996). *Cityscapes: Eight views from the urban classroom*. Berkeley, CA: National Writing Project.  
Eight NWP teachers describe the effects on teaching and learning of their long-term inquiry projects.
16. Cochran-Smith, M., and Lytle, S. (1993). *Inside/outside: Teacher research and knowledge*. New York: Teachers College Press and Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.  
Essays by the authors conceptualizing practitioner inquiry as a knowledge-making activity, followed by narratives by more than 20 Philadelphia teachers exemplifying four types of teacher research: oral inquiries, journals, classroom and school studies, and essays.
17. Freedman, S. W., Simons, E. R., Kalnin, J. S., Casareno, A., and the M-CLASS teams. (1999). *Inside city schools: Investigating literacy in multicultural classrooms*. New York: Teachers College Press.  
Combined perspectives of university researchers and high school English and Social Studies teachers on literacy and multiculturalism in four urban school settings: Boston, Chicago, New Orleans, and the San Francisco Bay Area. Includes both formal essays and oral discussions drawn from transcriptions of research group meetings over a two-year period, plus framing and interpretation by the university authors.

18. McEntee, G., Appleby, J., Dowd, J., Grant, J., Hole, S., and Silva, P., with Check, J. (2003). *At the heart of teaching: A guide to reflective practice*. New York: Teachers College Press.

“How-to” book that delves into reflection as a concept and provides specific, replicable tools for professional practice. Each teacher-written chapter draws on a particular school situation, demonstrating the value of teacher reflection and describing the nuts and bolts of the process, including protocols for handling many different circumstances

(revised 8/20/06)

# I Teach, (I Feel), I Write: The Effects of Emotion on Writing About Schooling

Joseph Check

If feeling emotion is part of working in schools, how does emotion fit into writing about that work? Over the past five years as the National Writing Project (NWP) Professional Writing Retreats have grown, this question also has grown in my mind.

As a retreat facilitator, I've worked with more than two hundred educators from all parts of the country and from all levels of instruction, prekindergarten to university. Their common goal is to turn school-based experience into a piece of "professional" writing. In retreat parlance, *professional* means "having to do with the teaching profession."

Their words reach the public in a wide range of forms, from an article in the school newsletter to a curriculum document, a book chapter, or an article for an educational journal. The retreats have been particularly successful in developing material for the NWP publications *The Voice* and *The Quarterly*.

Initially I thought I understood the needs of fledgling professional writers. I expected, for instance, to provide help with narrowing topics, finding an organizing principle, and including lots of real-world examples. As the retreats unfolded, all of these areas came up, but so did something unforeseen—a force I couldn't name but whose negative effects were manifest. I saw fluent writers mysteriously unable to produce any text; writers sailing along then suddenly wanting to abandon their work; talented, experienced writers stubbornly claiming they had nothing to say.

Over time this force began to reveal itself: a paralysis produced when assumptions about what it meant to do "professional writing" led writers to suppress or eliminate the strong emotional content of the educational story they were trying to tell.

Retreat writers, including myself, tried to recognize and overcome the writer's block caused by the incompatibility between the emotional load of their subject matter and the perceived demands of professional writing. Here are examples of three typical kinds of struggle that resulted.

## Struggle 1: I'm Mad as Hell, and I'm Not Gonna Take It Anymore

Peter Shaheen, a Michigan high school teacher and member of the Oakland Writing Project (Michigan), started sending me email in April 2001, three months before the start of our retreat. Peter had been embroiled for over a year in a controversy over Advanced Placement (AP) English in his district, and he was angry. His goal for the retreat was to write an effective, reasoned argument laying out his position, but his strong feelings kept getting in the way.

Peter says his problem began

*when our state began to report on quality schools by determining which curriculums offered the most AP classes and how many students from those schools took AP tests. I was a member of an innovative interdisciplinary program and a debate coach, and the AP failed to meet any of the challenges students were finding in those two programs. However, overnight the AP currency became overvalued because of marketing schemes developed to capture a*

*bigger piece of the testing pie . . . I heard an AP representative announce bold plans to grow the corporation and to become a force for reform.*

*The politically expedient course for districts like mine was to jump on the bandwagon and promote the AP experience as part of the quality education offered in our district. As a result, my anger came from a frontal assault on my concept of myself as a teacher. Suddenly my own efforts to act as a reformer were co-opted by the status quo, and I was made to feel as if I were an outsider. My core belief that I am in the business of teaching speakers, readers, writers, and thinkers was challenged by the formula of AP that views excellence as a commodity that can be measured in a single testing experience.*

The retreat facilitators gave Peter some practical advice. We advised him, as we've advised many others, that if you are in the grip of a powerful emotion, don't stop writing but write through the emotion until you achieve some perspective. Don't try to deny the emotion or suppress it—that won't work. If you go too far, calling colleagues names or throwing around accusations, you can always edit later or ask your writing group to help you find the balance of emotion and reason. But if you try to deny the emotion, it will creep in everywhere, coloring the whole piece, or, more likely, you will be blocked and feel unable to write about the subject at all, at the same time you feel a compelling need to write—a sure recipe for big time frustration and unhappiness.

Some writers find this technique counterintuitive. When they feel they're venting in print, their internal censor steps in, telling them to control themselves. But writing through the emotion works, and there's a reason why. As expository writing develops, it transforms from what rhetoricians call "writer-based prose," which serves the writer's needs, to "reader-based prose," which takes into account the needs of the audience. Composition researcher Linda Flower, who coined these terms, describes the transition this way:

*Good writers know how to transform writer-based prose (which works well for them) into reader-based prose (which works for their readers as well). Writing is inevitably a somewhat egocentric enterprise. We naturally tend to talk to ourselves when composing. As a result, we often need self-conscious strategies for trying to talk to our reader (1993, 224).*

Venting anger is a writer-based need; achieving balance, clarity, and moderation are reader-based needs. Writers' and readers' needs exist on a continuum, and it can be perfectly natural for an early draft to be quite angry and egoistic, serving the writer's need to get something off his chest. This does not mean that the article cannot develop into a balanced piece of professional writing.

Peter took our advice. He even welcomed our suggestion that he create a survey to find out if other Michigan teachers felt the way he did. In the process, he wrote his way from anger to objectivity. In fact, he says, "in 2003 when the NWP issued grants to sites to survey their populations concerning attitudes toward the AP, I wrote our state's initial draft, and most of the final draft is my recollection of how our state responded to those surveys. The first of four drafts was scalding, but after writing hot and then cooling, I submitted a much more balanced final document—some might even say objective."

## Struggle 2: Are You in the Story?

At the professional writing retreats, facilitators also write. Here are two examples—the first from my own experience and a second from the work of Kathleen O'Shaughnessy—of how to put yourself in the story and also keep it professional. Kathleen was a participant in the first professional writing retreat (1999) and became a facilitator of later retreats.

It was July 2000 at Sunrise Springs, our idyllic retreat center just outside Santa Fe, New Mexico. My writing was less than idyllic. I was trying, and failing, to complete an article about writing in urban elementary schools. My dilemma was classic: I knew, or thought I knew, exactly what I was trying to say; I just couldn't seem to say it. Finally, a colleague with whom I'd shared the draft asked, "Where are *you* in the piece?" It seemed such an obvious question. I wanted to ignore or challenge it; I wanted to say, "I'm *everywhere* in the piece; my hands are all over it; I created it." But experience has taught me it is often better to simply nod and write the question down, trusting that its significance may become apparent later. So that's what I did.

Later, back in my room, I realized that though I was everywhere in the piece, I was also nowhere. The observations that formed the piece had been collected over several years of consulting with schools. But I had never said this; I had just started with my conclusions.

Suddenly excited about a piece I had been ready to abandon, I sat down and wrote this paragraph:

*In this article I've tried to create "an imaginary school filled with real issues." Drawing on published research, interviews, and my own experience, I've described a composite urban school—East Elementary—staffed with a principal and teachers who are both individuals and representative of larger realities. I'll ask you to join me on my initial visits to East, seeing the school through my outsider's eyes; then to sit in on conversations with school insiders while I think through ways to help East move forward and recommend first steps in the change process.*

Once I had placed myself inside the piece, declaring that I was going to combine personal experience and research by creating a composite school, my writing opened up. It became less stiff, more personal, and closer to the lived experience I was trying to communicate. I had not just put myself into the writing but also indicated how I was using my experience in relation to other types of material. I had invited my reader in, and, as I wrote, I was imagining the reader sitting beside me, watching the story unfold. I had redefined the relationship between author, reader, and subject in a way that broke down my writing block. The piece that I had been on the verge of abandoning eventually appeared first in *The Quarterly* (2000) and then as a book chapter.

Kathleen O'Shaughnessy, a co-director of Louisiana's National Writing Project of Acadiana, is a gifted writer and great storyteller. That's why I was surprised at our first retreat in 1999 when I noticed her frustration. As it turned out, Kathleen was having trouble completing an article that challenged traditional assumptions about teachers doing workshops. Part of the problem was that, in order to write the piece, she had to make public a lot of highly charged, workshop-related experiences from the previous several years. The article began to move toward completion when Kathleen linked her workshop experiences to the idea of "finding one's own way" in teaching. Being Kathleen, she did it by telling a disarming tale from her trip to London:

*In the taxi from the airport, I'd noticed a lush green park near my hotel, so on my first morning after jet lag I set out for a jog. But the park wasn't where I had left it. I went a little farther, tried a few different streets, but still no park. Then I realized I'd not only lost the park but my hotel as well. . . . Finally I found a man opening his newsstand. When I asked him, breathlessly, if he might possibly know where my hotel was, he looked perplexed and pointed over my shoulder. . . . There, almost directly across the street from where we stood, was my hotel.*

Kathleen's metaphor strikes me as apt for describing many people's first venture into professional writing. They go round and round, searching harder and harder, only to find the solution very close to home. They are, to use Kathleen's words, "disconcerted by unfamiliar territory, afraid of making a wrong turn, embarrassed to ask for help but desperately grateful when it's offered, and unaware of the feeling of power and freedom that comes with finding one's own way." When help comes, and they finally figure out how to put themselves back into their writing, they gain the feeling of control that comes only to those who have found their way in the written world they have created. Kathleen's piece became a *Quarterly* article (O'Shaughnessy 2000) that is now used by many sites in their invitational summer institutes.

### Struggle 3: My Story's So Important I Want to Tell Everybody (But That Doesn't Help Me Focus My Audience)

Sometimes even the best advice doesn't help. The written product may represent an emotional battle that's still raging in the writer's head. If that battle is not resolved, the writing cannot be successfully concluded because the writer can't let it go.

Rochelle Ramay, a high school English teacher from Northern California, produced a terrific article for her teacher research group at the Northern California Writing Project. Her research dealt with her efforts to show that good teaching and good schools develop from the bottom up—from the professional growth and commitment of individual faculty members—rather than from the top down. She sent her article to *Research in the Teaching of English*, a journal of the National Council of Teachers of English. The journal's editors liked the piece but questioned its form. Rochelle was invited to revise and resubmit, to make her paper less teacherly and more researchlike.

She arrived at our 2001 retreat conflicted but determined to revise. She was not sure that her writing should be made less teacherly and more researchlike; after all, advocacy for teachers was largely the point of what she was doing.

Rochelle worked diligently, almost frantically, throughout the retreat, seeking advice from nearly everyone and rewriting far into the night. Pushed to define exactly who she was writing for, she said she kept hearing voices: the voice of her uncle Richard, who often questioned the worth of teachers; the voice of a high-profile speaker brought in by the district; and the voice of a county superintendent, pushing for higher test scores. Rochelle was angry, advocacy-driven, and promoting an unpopular position—that teachers should be in charge of their own professional growth. This stance, and her multiple audiences, made it hard for her to decide on a final form for the paper. She didn't want to give up anything because the paper represented an argument that was still raging, unresolved, in her mind. In early 2004, Rochelle was still battling, and sent me this:

Dear Joe,

*I just reread my piece about the ways schools define success for themselves. I read several versions of it, and I find that I continually fall back on one of the earlier drafts of it—I think that's because it is so personal. You mentioned in your email about looking at the “emotional load” of writing about teaching, and I think one of the reasons the paper has been so hard to finish or even put into a form is because the motivation for the study is like a dark space in my psyche where I desperately attempt to explain what it means to be a teacher. And even as I write the word teacher, I don't think that's what I mean. I don't know what a teacher is or does; I just know what I do and hope that's what people who are teachers do.*

*The paper sounds confessional . . . I find myself overexplaining my point. I want [readers] to hear and see . . . how what is said about learning/students/us/me isn't what they think or is only part of what is so. And what seems most apparent is I don't know who I want to hear all of this—my uncle Richard, the big outsider motivational speaker, the county superintendent, my colleagues.*

*I want my colleagues honored and held in high esteem. I want them to hear themselves and the ways their experiences and knowledge about children and learning are part of the ongoing concerns about the goings-on at school—and the ways I've learned about myself through them. Many of the people I work with are disheartened by the political climate, and I have this sort of humane-society notion that I can help save them from those feelings because I know they know things about teaching and school and kids that other people don't or can't know.*

*And finally, the study this paper is based on was my own—by myself—and taught me so much about being sensitive to so many other people. . . . All of us have opinions about education, and I want to be right—only I have this enormous feeling of resignation that no matter what I say or how I say it, this article won't change much, if anything. By nature I'm an optimist, and this paper, though optimistic, probably doesn't have much power to affect the direction our professional lives are being dragged.*

*Thanks for asking,  
Rochelle*

## Conclusion

A typical middle or high school teacher comes in contact with 80 to 150 adolescents per day. An early childhood or elementary teacher guides twenty to thirty young children six hours a day for an entire year. These teachers deal with learning disabilities, adolescent angst, boyfriend/girlfriend problems, and fears about not getting into the right college. They see the pressures of unexpected pregnancy, student homelessness, family green card and visa problems, court appearances, violence in the neighborhood, and the sudden death of a parent. Though “manage daily emotional crises” appears nowhere in the curriculum guide, every good teacher knows that dealing with them is essential to successful instruction.

Such complex human interactions inevitably evoke strong emotions: elation, anger, self-doubt, anxiety, and many others. And yet our first step as professional writers, consciously or unconsciously, is often to “de-emotionalize” our writing, to rule out of bounds the emotional load that is a central reality of our professional lives.



The thinking goes something like this: I'm engaged in something called "professional writing." That means that I can't use "I" (because my high school English teacher told me not to in expository writing), that I have to use only data and rational arguments and put in nothing emotional, and that I have to hide this side of my story because maybe it will make me look unprofessional. We fear that acknowledging emotion will open floodgates and we won't be able to control the torrent ("Excuse me while I rant"). But if emotion is part of the situation about which we're writing, we can't tell our story truly without taking it into account.

The range of emotion involved in teaching creates varied demands on professional writing. These demands can constitute a hidden force leading to writer's block, to fear of approaching certain subjects at all, or to drafts that are bloodless and feel artificial even to their own authors. In response, we need a range of techniques to address the emotional content of teaching in professional discourse. We need to begin developing what Linda Flower calls "self-conscious strategies to talk to our reader" in ways that are both emotionally true and professionally effective.

In this article, I have offered, through example, several such techniques. Peter was angry, but with the aid of multiple drafts and a supportive response group, he was able to write through his anger to a more reader-centered stance. Writing through anger works much better than trying to censor it.

I was afraid to put myself into my own story and got stuck because of it. When I gave myself permission to let "I" in, the story opened up and let the reader in as well. Kathleen also let herself into her own story, in literal and metaphorical ways that exemplified the important concept of teachers finding their own way. "Where am I in this school story?" is a question responders need to help writers ask more than once as drafts develop.

But, as Rochelle's instance shows, our current array of techniques doesn't always provide the solution. Rochelle feels a pressure that confronts many teacher-writers. As a teacher-researcher she must frame her extensive insider knowledge for an outsider audience, an emotion-laden task. Rochelle hears voices, the voices of outsiders. Can she write in a way that will make them honor her colleagues and hold them in high esteem?

I believe emotion is a hidden force because it can be invisible to the writer but also because its impact on writing is something we don't yet fully understand. Retreat facilitators are writing teachers in camouflage. As a writing teacher, I'm happy that I've finally identified a force that bedevils so many retreat participants trying to write honestly about schooling and that I have a few effective responses. But a big concern for me now is what more I/we can do.

Once the issue of emotion in professional writing is identified, it nearly always provokes discussion and questions. For example, what is the answer to Rochelle's audience question? Or how should we answer questions like these, raised by Kathleen: Is the success of the retreat due, in part, to the fact that it becomes easier to emotionalize our professional drafts when we're face-to-face with colleagues, getting to know and like them at the same time as we are working on our pieces? So instead of writing to a disembodied image of reader/colleague, we're reminded that we're writing to people who are more like us than not? Is one of the answers to write *with* colleagues not just *for* them?

Now that professional writing retreats are happening regularly in local, state, and network contexts, as well as nationally, I believe it's time we began an open discussion on such topics. This article, I hope, will spark just that.



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# Ten Basic Beliefs of the Writing Within School Reform Project

*Joseph Check*

1. The reflective, written voices of practitioners are critical to the ongoing conversation about restructuring schools. Practitioners include classroom teachers, building administrators, and coaches and facilitators who work full-time in schools.
2. As certain aspects of reform become increasingly institutionalized, top-down, and removed from the classroom (e.g. national and state curriculum and evaluation standards), it becomes even more critical for practitioners to become part of the dialogue on school change. How else will the world-at-large have a window into what change really looks like at the school level, from the point of view of the people who are doing change?
3. For anyone, at any time, writing is difficult. Basic support structures and rewards (time, peer feedback, incentives, creation of audiences) greatly increase the possibility that effective, appropriate writing will take place. Much of the current writing about school change is done by people who are in professional roles where there is both an expectation that they will produce writing and a system of structures, supports, and incentives to support that expectation, e.g. university faculty, members of national, university-based reform groups.
4. If school-based practitioners' voices are to become an ongoing part of the reform conversation nationally, a similar set of suitable support structures and rewards needs to be created and sustained.
5. Creating and sustaining such structures is an appropriate role for national reform groups.
6. At no time will practitioner writing supplant or replace writing done by other groups, or replace other reform initiatives. Rather, it will add a voice and a perspective that is now largely missing to both the national conversation and local reform initiatives.
7. Practitioner writing about reform is not "just storytelling" about individual classrooms; it is an effective tool for school change. Effective stories create change; communities create change. In his book on leadership, Howard Gardner identifies the creation of stories that reflect the issues of the community as a characteristic of successful leaders. Writings created by practitioners within a community of peers can be powerful agents for change.
8. On the individual level, writing changes and deepens the practice of the writer. Writing helps teachers articulate things that were previously just intuitions, writing helps teachers build a vocabulary they can use to talk to other people (peers, parents, administrators) about their teaching. So writing about practice is a powerful professional development tool for individual teachers and administrators.

9. On the peer level, writing creates community, and in so doing changes the stance of the writer in relation to other teachers around her. Writing, often thought of as an isolated and isolating act, in fact can be a powerful builder of reflective communities, if suitable supports and structures are provided.
10. On the local and national levels, writing (to use terms coined by Marilyn Cochran-Smith and Susan Lytle), creates an avenue to transform “local knowledge” into “public knowledge.” This is a powerful idea, because “opening the classroom doors” is a major part of many reform initiatives. Opening those doors not just to let others in (e.g. peer-observers), but to let the stories of an individual practitioner in an individual classroom out, in a way that connects that classroom and that story with national reform issues—making local knowledge into public knowledge—would add a critically needed dimension to the national reform landscape. So writing can be a bridge across the immense chasm separating well-meaning reform ideas and policies developed by those far from classrooms (e.g. legislators, public policy-makers) from the day-to-day reality of the teachers, students, and administrators who must live the policies at the school level.

## A Concluding Example

One of the most effective agents for change in the field of language arts in the last ten years has been a book called *In the Middle: Writing, Reading, and Learning with Adolescents*, by Nancy Atwell. Atwell, one of the most famous practitioner-researcher-writers, has this to say about the effect of writing on her teaching: “This book tells stories because it’s the best way I know to reveal myself, my students, my subject. . . . Framing these is my own story, the evolution that brought me out from behind my big desk and allowed students to find their ways inside reading. . . . I didn’t intuit or luck into this place, and I didn’t arrive overnight. I paved the way through writing and reading about writing, through uncovering and questioning my assumptions, through observing kids and trying to make sense of my observations through dumb mistakes, uncertain experiments, and underneath it all, the desire to do my best by my kids.”

These last words would be echoed by every practitioner-writer who has participated in the Writing Within School Reform Project.

Joseph Check  
Director, Boston Writing Project  
1996, revised 2002

(These “Ten Beliefs” are bound into every volume of the Writing Within School Reform Publication Series. For more information visit the Annenberg Institute for School Reform at [www.annenberginstitute.org](http://www.annenberginstitute.org) and click on Publications.)

# Three Myths That Keep Teachers from Writing

*Joseph Check*

## Writing As an Unnatural Act

For most of us, reading is a natural act. We read a newspaper or two each day; we keep a book on the night table and read for a short while before bed each night; we stock up on trash novels to take to the beach during July and August—our “summer reading list”; and we do a certain amount of professional reading. We’re comfortable with reading; it’s part of our lives. Without having to stop and think about it, we understand why schools teach reading. We enjoy reading and we know how barren our lives would be, in many respects, without it.

Most educators I have met, on the other hand, hate to write. There is no quicker way to empty a room full of teachers and administrators than to ask them to write something and publicly share it. Many of us will go to great lengths to avoid doing an extended piece of writing. We’ll make a phone call, buy a note card at the drugstore, send a message through a friend, or just put off communicating. For most teachers, writing is an unnatural act.

In my eight years as Director of the Boston Writing Project, I have led or coordinated over 100 in-service workshop series or courses in the teaching of writing, and have worked with teachers to start dozens of writing groups. Some met for a semester or a year as part of a graduate course or in-service program, and then, their function fulfilled, were disbanded. Others are still meeting regularly 4, 5, or 6 years later because the energy the teacher-writers give each other through the group richly repays the time and effort it takes to keep the group together.

In my work I have found repeatedly that scratching the surface of the problem of writing in the schools opens a much wider discussion, which leads far beyond the writing classroom into realms such as classroom organization and control, the purpose of curriculum, the professional status of teachers, and empowerment of teachers and students.

I have also learned that none of the positive changes that come from teachers working together on these issues can occur until the individual teachers who form the group come to terms with their lack of comfort with writing. To overcome their own fears and misconceptions, they must confront their unspoken assumption that writing is, for them, an unnatural act. This confrontation includes examining their own feelings about the act of writing and themselves as writers and analyzing the experiences which led to those feelings. After leading hundreds of teachers through this process, I believe that the feeling that writing is unnatural which possesses so many teachers is rooted in three basic beliefs. I have labeled these beliefs “myths” because, like certain societal myths, they are powerful, negative, and quite untrue.

## Myth I: Writing Is a Solitary Act

Ask a roomful of teachers to define writing and you’ll get as many different answers as there are people in the room. Some will focus on handwriting, some on grammar, some on creativity, some on organization of thought, some on communication. But almost all the answers will have one thing in common: they will regard writing as a solitary act.

Close your eyes and visualize “a writer at work.” What do you see? A frustrated novelist seated at a desk, struggling to fill the blank page? A solitary poet secluded in a cabin on a mountain top communing with nature and his thoughts? A harried reporter facing a computer terminal in the city room, racing to beat a deadline? A faithful journal writer penning another entry in the seclusion of her room? A student bent over a term paper outline, trying to find the right words? Whatever your vision, it’s likely to contain a writer who is alone, confronting the work.

When asked to visualize a writer, almost no one pictures a small group of people reading aloud, responding, talking over their work. The figure of the lonely writer is embedded in our mythology. The picture of a community of writers, which is at least as accurate, is seldom to be found. Few teachers realize that successful writing frequently follows a process of alternation, a zig-zag pattern, between the individual and the social. Experiencing writing as a back-and-forth movement between individual and collective effort is often the liberating first step that allows teachers to begin to unlock their own voices.

Participation in a writing group allows teachers to discover that typically, the generating idea or experience for a piece of writing comes in a social setting—in their classroom, in the teacher’s room, around the family dinner table, or in a discussion with a close friend. The writer withdraws to an individual drafting stage, then returns to seek the advice or response of one, frequently of more than one, other person. Then there is a withdrawal back to the individual stage for revising.

This back and forth may go on any number of times, and with professional writers takes many forms. Mark Twain invariably read his day’s production out loud to his wife each evening, and solicited her response. Zora Neale Hurston customarily began composing by an intense and organized form of the simple social act of *listening*, immersing herself in the storytelling of the rural, black South. For years, C.S. Lewis, Dorothy Sayers, and J.R.R. Tolkien kept up a regular Thursday writing group to discuss each other’s work in progress. Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and Thomas Wolfe carried on long correspondences with editor Maxwell Perkins, whose fame is almost as great as theirs. When the writer is satisfied, or frequently just fed up—when the writer has reached the enough-is-enough, I just don’t want to work on this anymore stage—the piece is declared finished and submitted to the scrutiny of the outside world.

In my experience, this zig-zag pattern between individual and social is common to most successful writing. Unsuccessful, painful experiences with writing are often unsuccessful precisely because they’re stuck in the individual phase—college term papers, master’s theses, and Ph.D. dissertations are classic examples of this that many of us have experienced first hand.

Once writing group participants begin to believe in themselves and in the quality of response they get from their peers, they realize how badly our common mythology distorts the act of writing, making it more fearsome than it needs to be by focusing on the writer’s isolation. Their experience with the group shows them that the isolated portion of the writer’s task is real, but forms only part of the picture. The balancing societal part is ignored by our persistent romantic fiction of the writer as a breed apart, a rugged individualist of the pen who is in some mysterious but basic way different from you and me.

It's hard to overstate the inhibiting power this unexamined myth possesses. Humanities teachers, for example, are likely to be devotees of literature and avid readers, and so unconsciously to believe that writers exist as magic individuals inside a charmed circle that teachers can never enter. The greater one's awe for "real" writers, the more magic and untouchable the writer's work feels to you, the more frightening it will be when a workshop leader suggests that you too are a writer, or can be, if you will just put pen to paper here and now, today, and not worry about the big picture.

## Myth II: I Don't Have Anything to Say / I Can Do Better Than That

The second myth is two-layered. The surface layer presents itself as a writing block or an ego defense. When asked to write, the teacher's first response is: "but I don't have anything to say." What this means is: "I don't have anything I think other people would consider worth hearing."

This defense is tissue-paper thin, because it's a falsehood. I have yet to meet a group of teachers who do not, at heart, believe they have something of value to say to other teachers. This belief comes out when teachers are asked to comment on professional literature, and proceed to talk about how boring, or inadequate, or downright stupid much of the writing about education is. The gist of their remarks very often is: "the person who wrote this doesn't know what he's talking about. I've been there, and I know what I'm talking about—if I could only get it down on paper."

The "I could do better than that" feeling, though, is normally articulated only to friends or colleagues, perhaps only to oneself. To articulate it in a writing workshop situation is fraught with danger, because the writing workshop is the one setting where someone might actually take you up on it—O.K., go ahead and *do* better than that. We're behind you, let's see what you come up with.

That is why the writing workshop is so threatening, and at the same time offers such great potential for teachers' growth. The moment at which a non-writing teacher confronts the possibility of drafting a first piece of "real" writing is both terrifying and exhilarating. It means rejecting the safety of those who sit on the sidelines and criticize other people, and taking the risk of actually putting yourself and your ideas out there for public scrutiny and debate: the heart of the academic endeavor. It brings a concomitant shift in the way you see yourself: do I have the temerity to try to enter the magic circle that only writers can enter?

## Myth III: I Have Something to Say, But I Don't Know How to Say It

After one has said, "I can do better than that," what follows? "I can do better" is a step forward usually followed by a tiny, doubting step back—can I really do as well? A little self-doubt is to be expected. But again, the fact that we're teachers complicates things. Our critical faculties are hyper-developed. We've been trained to point out what's *wrong* with a piece of writing. We've been trained that the only writing worth reading is the professionally edited writing of books, magazines, and newspapers. This training is of no use, is even harmful, at the outset of the writing process when what's needed is some warmth, sunlight, and rich soil for our newly seeded ideas to gestate in. Our words can feel clumsy, awkward, and confusing, and it's easy to get discouraged. We may decide that, though our experience is valid and we know what we're talking about when we're among friends, the process of translating that validity into words that will communicate our wisdom to others whom we've never met is just too difficult. We've decided we have something to say, but we're stuck on how to say it.

Suddenly, the articles that we thought so little of now appear as the imperfect products of others who, like ourselves, felt they had something to say and dared to say it, even though they weren't able to say it perfectly. By regarding ourselves as prospective writers, our point of view as readers has changed. As we begin to comprehend the difficulty of the endeavor, we lower our critical standards without realizing it. Even more surprising, lowering of standards at this stage is a very good thing. Donald Murray, a prolific and highly regarded academic writer, novelist, and newspaper columnist gives this advice in "One Writer's Secrets":

*Lower your standards. I carry two paragraphs of counsel from poet and teacher, William Stafford, with me at all times and turn to them morning after morning: "I believe that the so-called 'writing block' is a product of some kind of disproportion between your standards and your performance . . . one should lower his standards until there is no felt threshold to go over in writing. It's easy to write. You just shouldn't have standards that inhibit you from writing.*

*"I can imagine a person beginning to feel that he's not able to write up to that standard he imagines the world has set for him. But to me that is surrealistic. The only standard I can rationally have is the standard I'm meeting right now . . . you should be more willing to forgive yourself. It really doesn't make any difference if you are good or bad today. The assessment of the product is something that happens after you've done it."*

*(College Composition and Communication 37 (1986): 151–152)*

Because of our training as educators, lowering our standards can feel like a betrayal of our profession. It is while pinioned on the horns of this dilemma—is it better to risk "lowering my standards" to produce an imperfect something, or should I maintain them and produce a perfect nothing?—that many teachers perceive the first, faint glimmerings of what it means to be a writer. They begin to understand that the craft of writing, like few other endeavors, can be excruciating, daunting, exhilarating, and rewarding all at the same time.

## Conclusion

Can writing, finally, become as natural and necessary an act for teachers as reading? Recent experience and evidence suggests it can. Across the country, teachers from all grade levels and disciplines who have participated in teaching/writing institutes have found that, long after the institute has passed, writing continues to be a wellspring in their personal and professional lives.

Not all teachers who participate in such programs continue to write and to grow as writers, but a significant percentage do, as they have amply demonstrated with the testimony of their own writing. How does writing, for these teachers, become and continue to be a natural act? The process typically begins when a group of teachers receives initial training and support from a local site of the National Writing Project, a nearby university or college, or their own school system. The teacher writing groups continue to meet periodically on a voluntary basis, either within the original support structure or in a format of their own devising. In my experience, successful groups are marked by the following four characteristics:

1. Teachers keep coming because they continue to explore with and learn from their own writing. Through their writing they learn about subjects that interest them, including the subject of themselves.
2. Teachers find a deep enjoyment in writing for the audience of the group.
3. They feel that through their writing, they grow as people and as professionals.
4. They feel that their writing brings them together with colleagues on a serious level, making them part of a literate community.

It is important to note that, in contrast to most professional development activities in education, none of these writing group characteristics is tied to a specific grade level or subject area.

Becoming comfortable with writing, finding a voice as part of a literate community of professionals, has implications that lead far beyond the individual classroom. When teachers begin writing they frequently enter an intense period of personal and professional examination, growth, and renewal. They also embark on a path that leads naturally towards larger issues of our profession: the purpose of curriculum, power relationships within schools, the professional status of teachers, the place of education in our society. They begin to become participants in and contributors to the debates about the future of our profession, not just observers. Clearly, I am arguing that when teachers write, good things happen; that writing groups frequently serve as powerful agents of renewal, growth, and change. Can writing become a natural act for teachers? The answer is yes. It is already natural for many teachers throughout the country who have been started on the right road and supported through writing institutes and local school district initiatives. The first step in making writing natural is to free ourselves from the deeply held myths which paralyze us. Writing is not a solitary act. You do have something to say. You can say it effectively.

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# Wherever You Go, Writing Is Hard Work

*Following is a reflection on the 2002 NWP Professional Writing Retreat from participant-writer Bill Connolly.*

I am in a place of exquisite beauty, surrounded by a group of inspirational colleagues—all serious about the need and desire to write—and it's still so damn hard for me to write. I am sitting on a shaded patio, typing away on my laptop, with the lilting sounds of a distant musical troupe blending with the bubbling of nearby fountains . . . and yet I'm playing Space Invaders with my backspace key, trying to figure out how to end this very paragraph.

So I guess you can take a writer from the sea-level beauty of New Jersey and raise him by 6,200 feet to this land of red rocks and dry heat, but you cannot necessarily elevate him to the mountains of writing ease. I lost myself in the desert grandeur of Santa Fe, but I could not hide from the truth: wherever you go, writing is hard work.

There is an odd comfort in that realization. It's affirming to know that the people with whom you work at the retreat—some who have published books, others who are embarking on projects of impressive depth and relevance—have their bad days. They, too, have their doubts about writing anything that anyone would ever want to read.

Do our students ever enjoy the affirming misery of that company? Just as some of us came here convinced that some clerical error or oversight had somehow landed us here among these more worthy, talented writers, how many of our students sit in their seats, thinking, "I'm the worst writer in the room"?

In the end, it's not really a question of competence. It's about the mythology of writing, and, more often, the perfectionism of the writer. Myths are often based on elementary ideas, and so I say to my students with Forrest Gump-like simplicity, "A writer is someone who writes." This conflicts with their notion that writers are godlike figures who sit at long tables in the fronts of bookstores signing their latest best seller.

The myth that is harder to dispel is that any "real" writer does so effortlessly. Her pen is a fluent paintbrush of compositional brilliance; his nimble fingers dance across the keyboard like those of a piano virtuoso. It is the sad fate of the rest of us to slog through the muck and murkiness of our writing, hitting the save button with a sense of desperate futility. "What's the point?" we wonder.

The point is simply to write. If I measure my success here at the retreat in number of articles accepted, book prospecti completed, or number of compliments from writing group members received, I should have stayed in the humidity and summer haze of South Jersey. What I must reflect upon proudly is the fact that I kept writing. I realized that the people around me were in the same wretched boat as I; all were rowing furiously, some were cresting waves and others were taking on water. Still, we kept rowing.

That's all I want my students to do, and that's all the leaders at Sunrise Springs asked of us. We eventually left our inner critics down by the meditation pool or back in our rooms, and we sat with our fellow writers, who had come from north, south, east, and west. We listened, we wrote, and then we listened some more.

I came to Sunrise Springs with pieces of a book, and I return home with even more pieces but no whole. I do, however, have a greater sense of what that whole may be one day and a plan to continue my self-discovery as a writer. My writing group and Joe Check helped me realize that what was holding me back were issues for another time. For now, my job was to write.

In a little over a week, I will begin my leadership of one of our site's summer institutes; in a few months, I will be back in my classroom with new groups of young writers. My Santa Fe experiences will be a part of who I am and how I work with our participants and my students. In both groups, it is likely that few will have been to Santa Fe and none will have attended a summer writing retreat. As writers, though, they have all been there. No matter where you are, I will tell them, writing is just damn hard.

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# The Rules of Comfort: Getting the Most out of Your Editor

*Rebeca Garcia-Gonzalez*

*To win without risk is to triumph without glory.*

—Pierre Corneille

I recently had an important insight while working as a facilitator for one of our NWP retreats. As I sat in our air conditioned meeting room, I witnessed how a guest editor sat by herself for almost an hour, waiting for *any* participant to approach her. Now this was no schoolmarmish, grim-looking lady. Her flowing hair framed soft, gentle features. She was wearing a Hawaiian print dress with sandals, and she had been joking with one of the assistants for the previous ten minutes. While I asked myself what could make her unapproachable, I realized that participant comfort, in our retreats, plays a big role at two critical junctures. The first one takes place when participants choose a facilitator to give them advice on their writing. The second one, when they decide whether or not to let our guest editor take a look at their piece.

## Choosing a Facilitator

NWP retreats allow for a generous facilitator/participant ratio. As a result, there are often more than two facilitators available for feedback. Some participants will feel nervous about showing their work at all and will hesitate to work with *any* facilitator, while others will not rest until every facilitator has commented on their piece. A happy medium may consist of choosing one person to re-read and comment, usually at the same time your response group sees it for the first time. Because this selection process poses some challenges, we've gathered some pieces of collective wisdom:

**Spend some time meeting each facilitator.** Because it is not an interview, this conversation does not have to be longer than ten minutes. The purpose is to learn more about the person's background than what our short oral introductions allow. You may be surprised at how unassuming our facilitators tend to be. 😊

**Reap the rewards of stepping out of your comfort zone.** Pick a facilitator who may not share your ethnic/social background and get the benefit of a different perspective or unexpected skills at work. You can always switch later, or ask for a "second opinion."

**Schedule a consultation right away.** Do it even if you feel your piece is underdeveloped, or if you have done little since sending in your application. By the retreat's start, each of the facilitators has read your piece, often more than once. They may already have suggestions in mind, but will not reveal them unless you request it.

**We are here to help you write.** Don't hesitate to ask even the "silliest" of questions. Take your time. Always ask what the acronyms mean. Take time to jot down what you think is important.

## Working with a Guest Editor

We choose guest editors with expertise and experience in mind; but also thinking of how friendly, how useful, and how encouraging their advice might be. Their role is to listen and then help you formulate a plan to move your piece to the next stage; yet this very same role might cause unnecessary anxiety. Let's debunk some of the myths associated with this experience:

**“My work is not developed enough to be seen.”** Even if your piece is still an outline, a good editor can help you see its possibilities, and help you decide on a target audience and publication. Resist the urge to run back to your room to write while the editor is around.

**“But I’m not a great/successful writer.”** At the bottom of this one is the fear of not measuring up, usually after the first response group meeting enables a peek at peer writing. Guest editors know writers take risks in showing their work. They are skilled at giving feedback in a compassionate but effective manner. You’re in good hands.

**“I have never shown anything to an editor. What if it isn’t good enough?”** Your response group may be very good with feedback and you may have already found a good facilitator, but if you skip on this opportunity you will have missed half of what this retreat has to offer. Nothing ventured, nothing gained.

**“I’m almost done with this article.”** Savvy writers know the importance of opening up to different perspectives, even when a piece feels “finished.” An experienced editor can shed light on the way your piece will be perceived by various audiences, or talk about the best marketing strategies.

In their evaluations, participants often comment on how mustering up the courage to visit a facilitator or editor made a significant difference in their piece’s development. We hope you take advantage of the many opportunities available to develop or improve your writing, knowing that your local site will also benefit from what you learn with us.

# Teaching in the Time of Dogs

Todd Goodson

**Summary:** *This parable-like account of a classroom incident makes clear that it's the students that bring "the uncertainty that is the beauty and the challenge of teaching." "We will," writes Goodson, "only improve schools and schooling by taking the students and their worlds and their cultures as our starting point." Goodson's article, published in 2004, was the 2005 winner of the Association of Educational Publishers Distinguished Achievement Award.*

A number of years ago, I was a middle school teacher. One morning I was standing outside my classroom as my first-hour group assembled when one of my students approached me in tears.

"Mr. Goodson," she sobbed, "I think my neighbor skinned his dog."

As she stood there crying, and I stood there looking at her, it occurred to me at that moment that I really had no clue how to handle this situation. I knew there were interpersonal and cultural and ethical and perhaps even legal issues unfolding in front of me, but I didn't even know what they were, much less what I, as a teacher, was obligated to do. But as a crowd of curious middle-schoolers gathered around us, I knew I had to do something. I decided to start with the obvious question.

"What makes you think your neighbor skinned his dog?" I asked.

"Because it's hanging from his clothesline," she wailed.

Her answer didn't help my state of mind all that much. For a moment I wondered whether it was the neighbor's *dog's skin* or the neighbor's *skinned dog* hanging from the clothesline, but I decided it probably didn't matter. (Except, of course, to the dog.) The real problem at the moment was my student, still standing there, crying, waiting for me to resolve this matter. I decided on a bold course of action.

"Have you told your mother about this?" I asked.

She shook her head no. "I saw it on my way to school," she said.

"Why don't you go down to the office and call your mother?" I suggested, and I was more than a little grateful when she nodded and turned away, leaving me to curse those idiot education professors who didn't prepare me for this encounter.

A few minutes after she left to call her mother, she came back to my classroom. She wasn't upset anymore. In fact she bounced to her seat and started whispering and giggling with her friends. I drifted through the room and back to her seat.

"Is everything all right?" I asked, now thoroughly puzzled by her dramatic change in mood.

She seemed confused, as if she didn't know what I was talking about.

“Your neighbor’s dog,” I reminded her.

“Oh, yeah,” she said. “It was just a coyote.”

“Great,” I said. And I suppose it probably was. (Except, of course, for the coyote.)

Years passed. Today I’m an “idiot education professor,” trying to figure out a way to teach young people things they can only really learn from experience and writing about the curious magic of literacy and its teaching.

But I’ve reflected considerably on the skinned-dog matter over the years, to the point that the skinned dog has become, for me, a darkly comic metaphor for the uncertainty that is the beauty and the challenge of teaching. You see, I was just minding my own business that morning, standing in the hallway, waiting for classes to start. I’ve long since forgotten what I had planned for that day, but I’m sure it was something that seemed important at the time. I had probably prepared my lessons according to the Madeline Hunter Model, which was popular in those days, and I imagine I had something cute planned to launch the first hour.

The skinned dog changed everything that day. The skinned dog forced me to step out of my abstract plans and deal with students in a world that doesn’t respond to even the most carefully worded behavioral objective, a world where students are human beings and not the idealized student construct we have in mind when we produce the standards documents, curriculum guides, and lesson plans. The ideal student of the standards document comes to school like one of the McGuffey’s Reader “scholars” of a long ago era: well-scrubbed and eager for the learning we have designed. But real students sometimes live in neighborhoods where anything can happen. Despite our best efforts to take the mystery out of teaching and learning and to standardize the process, we will never standardize or eliminate the skinned dog. No matter how many years I teach, I know that each time I open the classroom door, the skinned dog might well be waiting on the other side, ready to force me to confront a situation I have not planned for and could not have planned for because schools and students are, by nature, nonstandard.

We live and work in a time when we have tried to preordain crisp and neat learning outcomes for all of us. We have studied teaching and learning. We have invested lots of money in writing standards and spelling out benchmarks for students from kindergarten all the way through high school, and we have created the same sorts of expectations for teachers, from their preservice years through their completion of National Board certification. And it is good to spell out our goals and to rigorously investigate our practice and to measure ourselves and our students against ideals, but the certainty of our current approaches neglects the stark image of the skinned dog, reminding us that the art of teaching, like the art of writing, lies as much in how we respond to the irregular as in how we plan to create regularity. The skinned dog teaches a few simple-but-powerful rules about teaching.

## Truisms of the Skinned Dog

*We never know what to expect.*

*We’ve never seen it all.*

*In every interesting situation, we never really know what to do.*

*We should always proceed with caution.*

*We should always proceed.*

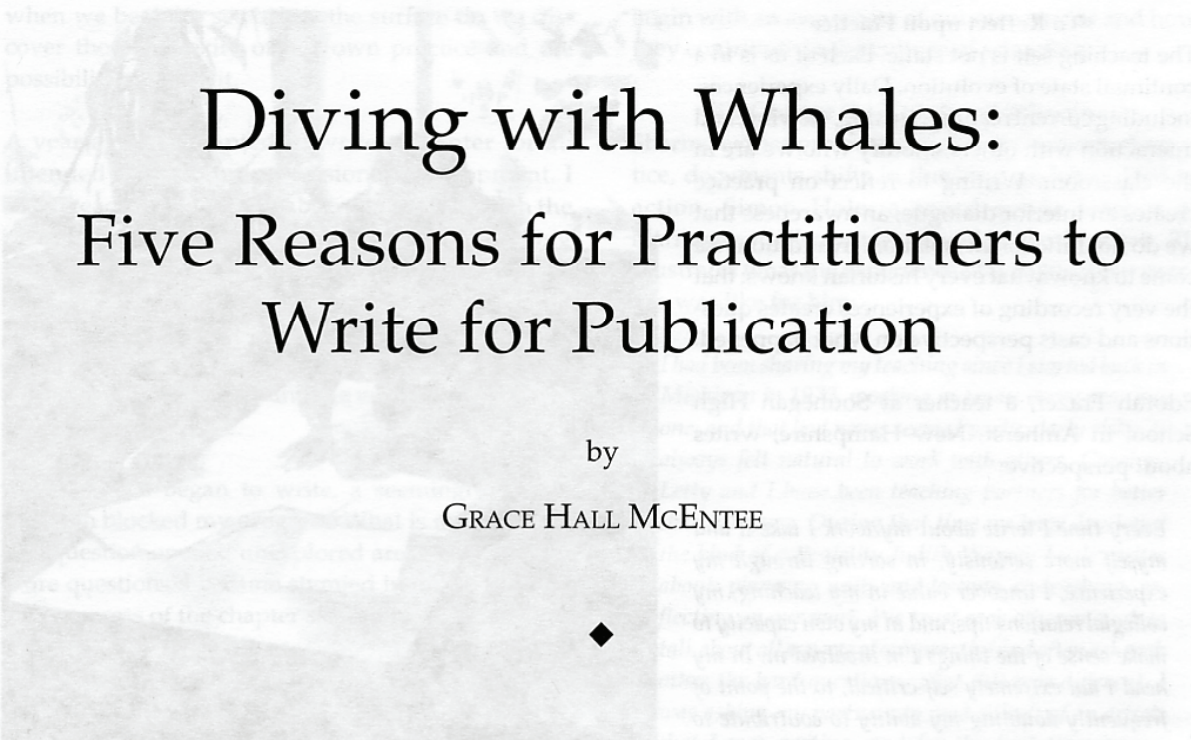
And if we apply the truisms of the skinned dog to our contemporary educational reform effort, we come to understand how our efforts to raise standards for all students in an effort to narrow the gap between the top and the bottom don't take into consideration the unpredictable quiriness that is part of the teacher's and learner's daily diet. The skinned dog helps us understand that students at the bottom of the achievement gap are there because of complicated social, economic, and cultural reasons and a forceful application of the upper-middle-class system of rewards and consequences will not likely have the desired effect.

When a student confronts a skinned dog on her way to school, the last thing she needs from the school is the opportunity to sit in class and move through a carefully scripted lesson pointed toward a high-stakes test. She needs an opportunity to tell her story. She needs a little help in understanding and interpreting her world, and she depends on us for that help. The fundamental flaw of our contemporary model for school reform is this: It begins with what we want students to know, not with the students themselves. It is nice (perhaps even essential) for us to know and agree upon what we want students to know and be able to do, but we will never be successful with this as our starting point. We can only improve schools and schooling by taking the students and their worlds and their cultures as our starting point. We have to work from the students toward the standards. We cannot simply work through the standards. In short, we have to account for the skinned dog.

**TODD GOODSON is an associate professor of English education at Kansas State University and the director of the Flint Hills Writing Project. He is the current editor of *The Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, published by the International Reading Association. Commenting on this article, which won the 2005 Association of Educational Publishers Distinguished Achievement Award in the Editorial category, Goodson says, "I tell this story to my education classes to drive home the point that you never know what to expect when you walk into a classroom. It's important to prepare your lesson plans, but you also have to be prepared for things you can't prepare for."**

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# Diving with Whales:

## Five Reasons for Practitioners to Write for Publication

by

GRACE HALL McENTEE



Why should we write for publication about our own practice? At least five reasons exist for writing from the inside about the hard work of changing individual practice and whole schools:

- to reflect upon practice
- to discover who we are and what we think
- to change school culture
- to model for students
- to inform and interact with the public

Teaching practice is part of a complex system within the universe of education. Like change in any organic system, a thoughtful shift in any facet of practice impacts everything else. But how does one get inside teaching practice in order to study it and in order to change it?

Sylvia Earle, internationally renowned marine biologist, recently worked with some of our writers. She told her story of trying to change the “culture” of the way people study the seas. The whale, for example, had been studied only from the surface of the sea. The tail of the whale is its thumbprint, by which scientists know one from the other and track them from place to place. But who would know how they nurture their young, how they look and sound within their own environment and their own culture? With the courage

of any explorer of the unknown, Earle dove with the whales.

Writing for publication about practice thrusts the writer through the surface to the deep water of professional practice. Practitioner-writers swim through stages of awareness and discovery from the first moment when they consider the dive. They see students, colleagues, parents, the school in new ways. Writing groups become vehicles for probing more deeply.

My partner Joseph Check, Director of the Boston Writing Project, and I did not know this when we first joined with other practitioners to create a journal where teachers’ voices could be heard in the educational arena. Now, nearly ten years later, we have found that practitioner-writers supported over time, from idea to publication, often plumb the depths of their work. Through this medium, they see and understand their own practice in new ways.

Writing for publication about practice is like diving with whales. Traditionally, schools and classroom teaching have been studied from the outside looking in. While this is one valid way of knowing education, it is from other perspectives, closer to the heart of learning, that writing about practice gains its value.



### To Reflect upon Practice

The teaching self is not static. Each of us is in a continual state of evolution. Daily experiences, including current reading, writing, viewing, and interaction with others, modify who we are in the classroom. Writing to reflect on practice creates an interior dialogue, an awareness that we do not function in isolation. In addition, we come to know what every historian knows: that the very recording of experiences creates questions and casts perspective on what happened.

Edorah Frazer, a teacher at Souhegan High School in Amherst, New Hampshire, writes about perspective:

*Every time I write about my work I take it and myself more seriously. In sorting through my experience, I uncover value in my teaching, my collegial relationships, and in my own capacity to make sense of the things I'm involved in. In my head I am extremely self-critical, to the point of frequently doubting my ability to contribute to my learning community, my school. As I write about my work, though, it looks better to me—not, I think, because I write with rose ink, but rather because I ultimately write more objectively than my spontaneous mind thinks. I make up stories and exaggerate all day long in my head. Somehow in writing my heart begins to balance the harshness of my mind and I can get closer to truth. Of course, sometimes I write things that aren't true. But the grace of writing is that it lingers to be looked at again, and I can come back with renewed integrity or fresh perspective and capture what's real.*

When practitioners initially dive into writing about their work, at one level they simply intend to tell their story. A good story is worth sharing. The story might be about an incident from a single class or lesson, a conflict with a student or colleague, a dilemma in implementing new curriculum or assessment. Once the story is told, or within the process of telling the story, however, something happens to the storyteller. The teacher now looks at the story through the lens of a writer who must be clear about both content and process. The writer asks in reflection, "Exactly what is it that I need to say? How will I best convey my story?"

The archetypal writer — let's make her a poet — has always been the seer, the one who is more sensitive to



the world around her, who says what needs to be said for others in similar situations. Through writing, the practitioner gains a heightened awareness of professional practice as she intends to share that practice with others. Even as the writer prepares to share experiences and learning through text, however, the dive deepens through the medium. The process of reflecting and choosing language to capture experience provokes new discovery. "When she...begins to perceive the close relationships between language thought and reality in her...transformation, she will see the need for new forms of comprehension and, also, expression" (Freire, 1985, p. 22).

### Discovery of Who We Are and What We Think

In order to communicate with each other, with our students, and with parents, teachers need to become clear about who we are and what we think. The complexity of our work often hides like a sea creature at the bottom of the ocean's deepest trenches. Initially, writing about practice seems fairly straightforward, but the process of writing complicates things. Only



when we begin to see below the surface do we discover the complexity of our own practice and the possibilities within it.

A year ago I attempted to write a chapter for an intended book about professional development. I was a teacher on leave of absence working with the professional development team at the Annenberg Institute for School Reform, a national school reform organization at Brown University. My chapter was to be about teachers' changing practice. I had decided to write a personal narrative that included both my voice and the voices of practicing classroom educators.

As soon as I began to write, a seemingly simple question blocked my progress: What is my practice? The question opened unexplored areas which led to more questions. I became stymied in murky waters. The progress of the chapter slowed to a stop.

Some practitioners do break through the complexity of practice to a place of clarity. At that point the act of writing casts a light for discovery. Chris Louth, a teacher at Croton-Harmon, a secondary school in Croton-Harmon, NY, discovered that the process of capturing what she had learned revealed new learning yet to be explored. She writes:

*Recently I completed an article which was an attempt to sum up several years of work with various colleagues on peer coaching. As always the writing nudged me toward a kind of clarity about what I'd learned from my experiences. To convey to others the importance of something I felt passionately about, I needed to get clear about what I was saying, shed much of the ambiguity inherent in such complex work....The writing helped me to achieve a greater clarity, but as I used that new clarity as a lens to process continuing experience, I realized that conclusions achieved through writing suddenly became just the first step in a new learning.*

Boldly, teachers must now use their stories for a new purpose — school reform. If schools are to change for the better, teachers must use their stories to analyze their best practices and discover their core values. Schools do not change under the pressure of mandated rules and policies. Rather, schools change through a combination of forces from within and without. Changing that culture from within must

begin with an awareness of our own stories and how they contribute to the culture of schooling.

### To Change the Culture of Schooling

Sharing stories provides insight into individual practice, documents shifts in thinking, and may lead to action. Simon Hole, a fourth-grade teacher at Narragansett Elementary School in Narragansett, RI, illustrates what the experience of writing about practice was like for him:

*I had been sharing my teaching since I started back in Michigan in 1973, working in teams every year but one, and that had never seemed particularly risky. It always felt natural to work with others. Carolyn, Letty and I have been teaching partners for better than 10 years. During that time we have developed the kind of collegiality Judith Warren Little writes about; planning units and lessons, co-teaching, reflecting on our work. We trust each other enough to talk about all aspects of our practice and often ask each other the hard questions....But this was different. I was asking my partners to read a draft of an article that I was writing, and for the first time in our professional relationship, I was nervous about sharing my ideas with them. Well, not exactly ideas—those we had been sharing for quite some time. And it wasn't just that I was sharing my writing, although as a novice writer, I still find it a bit scary to have others read my pieces...So what was the difference?...For the first time I was attempting to describe several of our co-teaching sessions and had included my own attempt to make some sense of what had happened.*

*My dilemma was that while we often talked about our work, there was, in a corner of my mind, a chance that my attempt to write about it for publication would change our relationship...Is it worth taking the chance? ... Apparently it was, as the writing was shared and the learning that resulted from our conversations about that piece have helped us all improve our practice.*

By the time Hole and his team members joined with others to form a Critical Friends' Group at Narragansett Elementary School, they had already gone public with their work through Hole's writing. Without hesitation they stepped forward to model observation and "public" debriefing. His team member Letty Mills said during one of those early debriefings that her



lesson is always better when she is being observed. She said, "It is not because I am better prepared but that I am better focused. A change occurred within myself. It is as though I am two people in my classroom. One is teaching, the other observing through the lens of my focus question." Writing about practice creates that same dual role: the writer is both practitioner and critical observer.

Traditionally, teachers work in isolation. They plan lessons alone, teach alone, feel success alone, and sometimes agonize alone about why a lesson or a class did not produce the learning intended. Coming out of isolation broadens the possibilities for teaching and learning. In a sense, teachers who work together move to a more public arena with their work.

Teachers writing about practice become acutely aware not only of their work with students in the classroom but also of their relationships with other faculty in the school who in a large way create the culture of the school. They become sensitized to the effect that their words may have within the larger context within which they teach. Peggy Silva, a teacher at Sonhegan High School, in Amherst, NH, shares her heightened awareness:

*As a teacher trying to write from within and about her workplace, I am struggling to be honest, open, fair, protective. I recognize that my words about my work will affect colleagues and change my relationships with them in subtle and not so-subtle ways. The Hippocratic oath challenges the medical community to 'First, do no harm.'*

The tension teacher-writers face is first to define the word 'harm.' Silva and her colleague, Edorah Frazer, wrote a controversial piece about an experience with the evolving career ladder/portfolio system at their school. Silva applied for career advancement through the portfolio process; Frazer sat on the board. Before the process began, the two decided to write about it from their individual perspectives. To preserve the integrity of the process, they agreed not to talk until a decision about Silva's advancement had been rendered by the board. The painful initial denial of Silva's application thrust the two into unexplored personal and professional territory. During the editing of their writing intended for publication, they negotiated with each other, as well as with administrators and faculty, to find grounds for common understanding and progress

in this revolutionary and very important project.

Teachers interested in changing school culture may be inspired by the work of Paolo Freire. Freire writes about his educative theory and practice with South American peasants living and working within an oppressive system. In order to assist them in transforming themselves and their culture, he first used stories relevant to them; then he asked them to tell their own stories. Once told, the stories became texts for learning, for analysis and action. The storytellers and their peers learned to question both their own assumptions and actions as well as those of their overseers. Freire calls this a "crack" in the silence of a society. Telling the story is a liberating act. Through this "pedagogy of the oppressed," peasants learned to ask "Why?" and, in so doing, embarked upon the process of transforming both the self and the culture. Teachers and students become co-learners in the process of inquiring into and decoding the stories. Themes for study emerge.

Good stories beg for climactic moments or subtle turning points. According to David Tripp in his book *Critical Incidents and Professional Judgments*, a critical incident is an occurrence in our daily practice that we hold up for examination by isolating an incident, writing about it in detail, analyzing it and exploring its significance. Critical incidents become tools for carefully looking at the quality of professional judgments and at the assumptions underlying those judgments. Through these and other tools, writing groups in schools can begin to explore issues of common concern and may serve as turning points in changing practice.

Both Freire and Tripp advocate using our own stories as text to inquire into ourselves and our culture. Such texts for learning place the teacher in the position of learner. They create a dialectic about what is and what might be. And they create a model for critical thinking and dialogue for our students.

### To Model for Students

Deborah Meier, author of *The Power of Their Ideas* and founder of Central Park East Secondary School in East Harlem, NY, is an outspoken proponent of teachers serving as models for students. She writes:

*I'm always hoping that if teachers write more they will share with their students their particular struggles to get the words down 'just right.' Imagine what a difference it would make if students were exposed to*



*dozens of such adults over the course of their school-going lives.*

At CPESS Meier created a culture of intellectual discourse as a strategy for running the school and as a model for students. She is vehement in her belief that we cannot teach students to debate issues in an informed manner if we do not model that behavior on a regular basis in faculty lounges and in classrooms.

Craftsmen of old served as professional models for apprentices who observed and asked questions about their craft. Students learned by observation, listening, sometimes copying. After the conclusion of the apprenticeship, novice craftsmen incorporated those learned skills into their own emerging artistic style. Jon Appleby, a teacher at Noble High School in Berwick, ME, not only models for his students but also enjoys their questions about his work. He writes:

*I get curious reactions to my writing from colleagues. Articles about education bring brief, "I liked it" kinds of comments. When I gave about thirty poems I wrote this year to a dozen or so teachers, their responses were awkward and surprised, as if the openness of poetry had somehow broken rules of distance in the profession. Only my students seemed able to ask real questions and make some good comments, perhaps because my class is always putting the heart and the head in contexts for sharing.*

Veterans model for neophytes in the world of work. Physicians serve as models for interns, judges for clerks, mentor teachers for student teachers and so on. Through the process of writing about practice, teachers retain their vulnerability as learners, sensitive to the complex challenge of putting thoughts into words. Writing is a humble act during which the writer is always up against personal inadequacy. Sharing this struggle with students models genuine learning.

#### **To Inform and Interact with the Public**

Writing about practice for an audience is very different from journal writing. It is also very different from writing about someone else's practice or about education at large. The practitioner who writes from personal practice looks inward through a process of reflection upon practice in relation to students, subject matter, colleagues, and sometimes the system within which the work occurs. At some point toward revision for publication, the writer looks outward, some-

times with trepidation, at who the audience might be, within the school or beyond. As a reader, the writer knows that good writing will have impact. Sometimes for the first time, the practitioner-writer realizes that writing about practice is a political statement.

Such narrative explications have the effect of framing the idiosyncratic in a 'lifelike' fashion that can promote negotiation and avoid confrontational disruption and strife ... the conditions by which differences in meaning can be resolved by invoking mitigating circumstances that account for divergent interpretations of 'reality' (Jerome Bruner, *Acts of Meaning* p. 67).

Each of us sees reality from a different perspective. Through writing for publication about practice, practitioner/writers learn to tell a story to a particular audience in a particular way. Personal narrative has powerful potential to link the school to the community.

Through stories about practice we can create an understanding between writer and reader. Most educators, like most members of the general public, were schooled in traditional ways. It is hard to imagine schooling without basal readers and students seated quietly in rows. By writing for publication about changing practice, they can include the public in their own search for improved schooling.

Writing our stories about practice seems, in a very complex way, to be one way to immerse ourselves in our practice, a way to plumb its depths through another medium. On a literal level in *Sea Change*, Sylvia Earle tells her story of trying to change the "culture" of the way people study the seas. She dives with whales.

She writes:

*One moment, all I could see was a massive black head, 15-foot-long flippers, a grapefruit-sized eye, then, in a mountainous blur of motion, she swept by, miraculously avoiding contact by inches.*

In a sense Earle became a whale. Inside the dramatic moment, she experienced a shift in perspective about her own role in the underwater community.

Throughout her career Earle has been an explorer and caretaker of the sea and vocal advocate of reform. She



dove with whales to understand them and tried to get to the ocean bottom to prove her own ecological theory. To get to the bottom, Earle founded a company to build a deep ocean-diving vehicle.

Writing about practice for publication is one way for practitioners to dive with whales, to sit in a deep ocean diving bell to explore the depths of their own teaching practice. How do we dive with whales and plunge deeper into the canyons of our practice to see it in a way that we have never before seen it? How do we change our practice to protect and nurture the fragile life, the very vitality that supports our organic system? Like Earle's diving bell, peer editing and writing support groups allow writers to dive deeper than they could alone. Writers see the world of teaching practice through new eyes and, with the help of others, discover what may have been hidden in the darkness. Back on the surface, they prepare their stories for an audience of their peers and for a wider readership.

All practitioners benefit from writing about practice. Whatever the level of expertise or experience with the written word, those who dare to write for an audience see their own practice through their new critical eyes. Sharing both during the revision process and in the eventual published piece provokes change in individual practice to meet newly recognized challenges.

*So, how, finally, can we help steer the course of events...? One solution is simply to improve one's own self, and work toward a better society within existing institutions. (Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, The Evolving Self, p. 280).*

Writing about practice for publication is a medium for understanding individual practice from the inside. When we join with others in the diving bell of that inquiry process, we may discover what has been hidden in the darkness and what may be crucial to new life in our collective classrooms.

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# Revising Revision: How My Students Transformed Writers' Workshop

by

JAN MATSUOKA



The revision of writing is bittersweet, pleasure coupled with pain. Eric, my fourth-grade student in a 3/4-grade combination class at Joaquin Miller Elementary School in Oakland, California described this condition well when he wrote the following:

*When the teacher said we had to do a revision to publish a story I said 'Aw man' moaning in my head, but after my revision I said it sounds better and then I did more revisions to make the story better.*

For another student, Emilene, however, the process was pure agony:

*I don't like revision one bit even though it helps. I don't like it because it takes too long and I can never think of a better story. I actually hate to revise.*

Yet despite feelings such as Emilene's, revision is a requirement in my class if a child wants to publish a piece of writing. Over time, many students pick up on what needs to be done between first and second draft writing:

*I think that's the difference between my first and second drafts was that in the middle of the story I put more details in like what type of dog I had and what color. Jojo is a blondish brown collie and has sad brown eyes. You know more what he looks like.*  
Lena

*Whenever I rite something during Writers' Workshop, I always take my writing home, and I read it*

*over and over to myself. I even read it again to my mom, my grandma, and my dog. In my story My Grandma is the Next Michael Jordan I noticed that I used the words 'then' and 'said' too much so I took out the 'thens' and rote something esle besides 'said' like 'screamed', 'announced', and 'whistpered'.*

Mareesha

*In my story The House of the Dreaded Unknown I put an arcade in the first draft because I liked that one espicialy. In the second draft I put chess in there instead because at the time I just beat my dad in chess. I loved that the whole ending depended on the guy winning the chess game, Otherwise he was doomed. I feel sort of weird about revision because you can think about one thing and do another.*

Sean

But getting students to this point has not been easy. Revision is a difficult, but inevitably a necessary part of the writing process. A writer refining a piece of writing to uncover its essence is like a jeweler buffing a diamond to expose the luster within. Yet many students do not see it that way. They approach their work with such feelings of ownership, so sure that it is perfect the first time around, that they resist making any changes. Even after participating in countless minilessons on revision, watching others model revision, and conferencing with other students and me about an early draft of a piece, some students still recopy the original story over again, word for word.



For the teacher too, because of some students' resistance to change, revision is a difficult skill to teach. Even after over thirty years of teaching, on days when revision is the focus, I often need to go home after school and take a nap before dinner, sometimes never waking up until the next day. Nonetheless the results that spring from successful revision are worth the struggle. Listen to Melissa's ebullience:

*I feel great that I revised it because now I have a great story. I feel like a real published author. I feel like Melissa A. Rowen, author from the outside world!*

But we are hearing from Melissa at the end of the process. Along the way many students resist revision, and when they are willing to revise, they have no idea where to start. Because I find so much value in revision, I am continually working to make the process easier and clearer. Thus, when I joined a teacher research group at UC Berkeley, I was naturally drawn to the question: What revision strategies help students improve their writing during writers' workshop? In this article, I want to highlight those strategies that proved successful as I collected data for two years, working first with my fourth-grade class and most recently, with a 3/4-grade combination class.

### Defining Revision

In my research, revision has a two-pronged definition. The most common definition of revision is improving the first draft of writing and producing a final draft by subtracting, adding, or replacing words, phrases, sentences or paragraphs. Using this definition, however, the amount and nature of the revision will vary from student to student according to the ability and/or the interest of the writer. My third graders and even fourth graders with poor motor coordination make revisions directly on a first draft; if I were to ask these students to rewrite each paper, they would be overwhelmed by the task, and they would might even learn to dread writing. Most of my fourth graders, however, can write two drafts. But in any classroom, there are exceptions. One overachiever, a bright third grader and a second language learner named Alejandra, ended up with five drafts of her story, "The Dracula Puppy Who Loved Candy Instead of Blood," each draft quite different from the previous one. Passing her desk during Writers' Workshop, I rarely saw her face, only the top of her head, as she labored, pencil in hand, writing one page after another. As we conferenced, she noted parts she loved

in different drafts, and later on, cut and pasted them onto her final draft.

The second definition of revision involves a larger vision: the improvement of writing from one final draft to another, a growth over time. That's the kind of revision I was hoping to trigger as I conferenced with Sandee, a second-language student. I saw that her story, "My Trip to LA," was little more than list of events which had taken place over two weeks, all described on one page. I shared all the parts of her story I had enjoyed: the way she showed her excitement by reporting her inability to sleep the night before the trip, the certain types of cars her family had counted in order to kill the boredom of travel. As we talked about her goals for her writing in the future, she told me that she needed to be more careful about her capitals, using them at the beginning of sentences and with names.

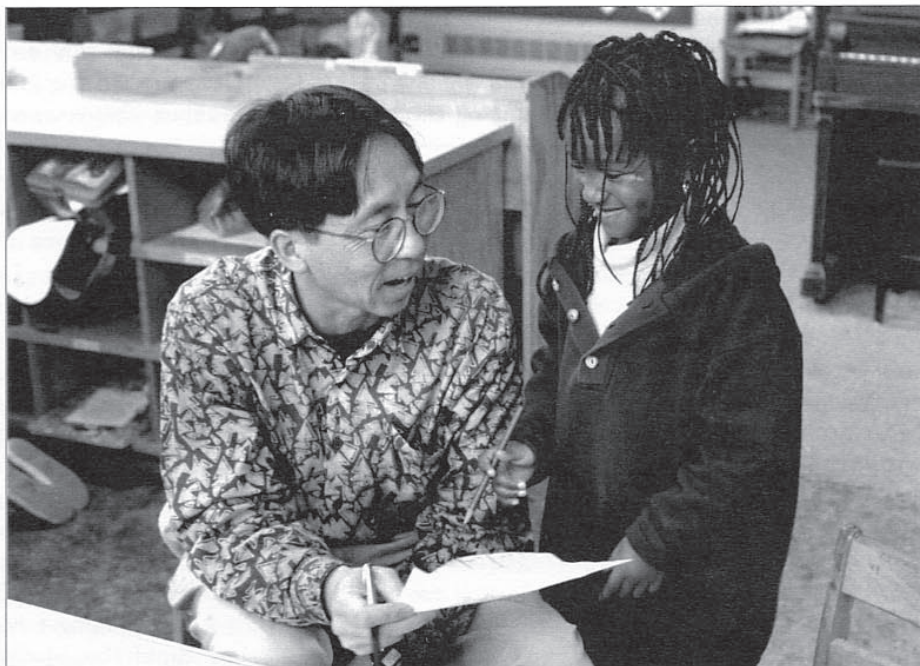
I, however, was interested in more than cosmetic changes. I told her I wanted her to have more focus in any story she wrote. She gave me her "worried-Sandee look." I could tell she was puzzled, so I made rough sketches representing events of her trip to LA, drawing chuckles from her — she never knew how poorly I drew. Making a small frame out of another piece of paper, I placed it down on one of the drawings, a sketch attempting to show Sandy as she visited her grandmother. Focus, I told her, means I want her to only tell me all the details about this memorable meeting with her grandmother and not all the other things she did on this trip. "Oh, I get it," she smiled, "like just one cartoon, not a whole bunch." There were several pieces in between before she finally wrote a masterpiece focused on a snake her family found in the backyard and the way they finally got rid of this dreadful creature, reporting in the process her Mien family's superstitions about snakes. She received an enthusiastic ovation as she shared this story in author's chair. I trace triumph on this occasion back to our discussion of how "My Trip to LA" could be revised.

### Revision in the Context of Writers' Workshop

I have adapted the work of Donald Graves and Nancie Atwell to create my own version of Writers' Workshop. The mini-lesson is a featured part of this process. I give these lessons at the very beginning of the writing hour. They are lessons dealing with all aspects of writing. I might read aloud from a picture book to generate ideas for talk about "places in the room to go



when you want to read your writing to someone," or present a lesson on how to use quotation marks when writing dialogue. I make certain that these lessons are no more than ten minutes long. I know its time to stop when I get clear clues that students are itching to write: they are toying with their pencils, rustling papers, wiggling in their chairs. Many students leap to their writing once the lesson is over.



Lessons on revision are an important part of my mini-lesson plan. In these lessons I often effectively use transparencies or copies of first and second draft writing of former students. Students note the writer's strengths and needs for improvement in the first draft, and the next day, observe what the author did to revise in the second. They can see strategies used successfully and sometimes unsuccessfully. At times, they see that the writer's first draft is better than the second. Mareesha shares her thoughts on mini-lessons in an interview:

*I personally like mini-lessons because it is interesting to know how someone else might have written. Then I think to myself, 'Wow, I could use that idea in my own writing!' It really gets my mind going and also my thinking and adds to my writing. I might even trash a sentence or two and replace it with something else.*

At the beginning of the school year, one of the more successful mini-lessons was on leads with examples of different ways an author might start the same story. I asked the students to choose a recent piece of writing and to compose another beginning. Jake made this revision:

*First draft: About two years ago we bought a house in Northstar at tahoe. We go up there every chance we get. It's a big house. It's got a loft on top*

*in case you don't know what a loft is its something I can't explain.*

*Second draft: Two years ago my mom brought up about getting another house. "But where?" we all said. Then my dad said, "I know a place. Where? we all exclaimed. At Lake Tahoe. It's a beautiful place. 0000HHH, yaaaah we said. And we jumped around, hugging each other. So we went and looked at lots of houses.*

Interviewing Jake about the differences between these two leads, he said: "After your mini-lesson, I tried writing the second beginning. I like the second one because it's more interesting. It shows our excitement over getting a house at Tahoe. And we were really excited, you know. Hey yeah, it has more showing than the first one. The first one is just a boring, like booo-ring. I don't know if anyone would read my story if they read the first one."

Mini-lessons that involve my students are certainly my most successful. Often I ask students to take out a recent piece of work and make revisions right on their paper: between the lines, in the margins. I require my students to skip lines when they write during writers' workshop to facilitate these kinds of changes. I might even request two changes. Because their writing is freshly done, they have a vested inter-



est in a mini-lesson as they practice the new skill, revising on the spot. I collected the following sentences after several lessons on sentence expansion, the italicized verb phrases added during the lessons:

"He jumps on my mom's lap, *meowing for her to pet him.*"

Jesus

"Then he left, *debating if he would like the job.*"

Eugenia

"We screamed and screamed and screamed, *trying to get away.*" Lucy

The two cats lay in front of the fireplace, *licking their paws.*" Jake

#### Mini-lessons Revised

With results such as these, I thought everything was going great until two months into school when I asked my students to rank which writer's workshop activities they found most helpful. Mini-lessons received the lowest score. I was shocked — no, devastated. How could that be? I spent so much time and thought preparing for these lessons! I have a couple of students who are especially reflective about writing, so as I had lunch with them, I showed them the survey and asked them why they thought mini-lessons rated so poorly. Here are portions of that conversation:

J: Not to hurt your feelings, Mrs. M., but we do like your mini-lessons, but when I'm writing a story, I want to get to my story. I am only thinking about what I am going to write. Umm. Sorry, but sometimes I don't hear you. (Everyone laughs).

Me: Really, that's okay; don't apologize.

C: Yeah, no offense, but I kinda get ideas to make my story more exciting outside of school. Like I might see a TV program and think what a great ending and kinda of go from there.

J: Umm. He's right. You don't stop thinking of writing when school stops because you're always thinking of how you can make it better so that the kids in class would love it.

Me: So are you both saying that once you become a writer, you are even thinking about writing outside of school. You become observant about what you see, hear, ah, read?

C: Like me, like I really am serious about my writing. If I write I want something really great. I don't think everyone in our class is serious, if you know what I mean. Don't get me wrong, I'm not trying to put the other kids down. Ah, most of us like writing a lot.

Me: No, no, I don't see your comment as put-downs. You're just being honest. That's why I am interviewing you two.

J: Yeah, I want to be a writer someday. But when I was writing about my younger brother being a brat, umm, I kinda looked at him at home to see how I could improve how I wrote about him being stupid about looking at Power Rangers and karate stuff on TV and stuff. Mrs. M., you can't give a mini-lesson on that. (Laughs.)

I learned a great deal from this fascinating conversation. Becoming a real writer, a child looks not only to the classroom, but to the richness of the world. After that mini-lessons became less frequent. I spent more time conferencing with individual students and instructing small groups. But of course, I did not give up altogether. Before one mini-lesson focusing on a different kinds of genre, I blurted out something about how tired I was of giving these lessons. Wouldn't it be wonderful, I said, if one of the students gave a lesson instead! Spontaneously, Ludvig, a student from Sweden whose second language is English, raised his hand and said, "I'll give one now, Mrs. M." He raced to the front of the class and said:

Today I am going to talk about the word 'said.' When your father is mad at you, you don't use the word 'said' when you write about what he said. You use words like, 'yelled' or 'screamed.' They go better with him being mad. And when you tell someone, 'I love you', you don't say, 'I said.' (Class giggles). Umm, you use 'whispered' or 'moaned.' (Class howls.) Are there any questions? Now I want you to look at your writing that you did and change one 'said' to a more exciting word.

Ludvig bowed as he received a standing ovation.



What a precious moment Ludvig gave us. The children combed their papers and struck out the many "saids," replacing them with powerful verbs. We had a wonderful time as students shared their changes. True, I had given this lesson on "said" before, but this was a voice other than mine, it was a fresh challenge from a peer.

Right after this lesson, Kaneesha ran up to me and whispered, showing me her paper and pointing to a sentence, "Mrs. M., I use the word 'said,' but I use it like this: "'I am so tired,'" he said with his head hanging down.' Sometimes, isn't it okay to use it like this?"

"Of course! You're absolutely right!" Excited, I asked, "Do you want to give the next mini-lesson? Let's meet and talk about your lesson!" And so the idea of student mini-lessons caught on. Students signed up for times to be coached and to present to the class, some of the students even in pairs. The list of student topics looked like the following:

- Jamal: "How to Write a Longer Story"
- Dana: "Getting Ideas Right from the Classroom for Stories"
- Matt: "Handwriting"
- Katelyn: "Draw First, Then Write"
- Jason and Evan: "Writing a Story with Some one"
- Emma: "How I Check on My Spelling"

I realized that the format of my mini-lessons became a model around which the students framed theirs, even down to those revisions on the spot. But most importantly, I noticed how attentive the students in the audience were to the mini-lessons given by their peers, the variety of voices enabling them to look at their work anew. Once reluctant to revise at my direction, students were now being pushed by their peers to make changes.

#### The Teacher-Student Conference

One spur to revision that has proven successful year after year is the conference my student teacher and I have with individual students, each of us averaging three conferences per day. We focus on student work in process or on final drafts. I don't know who to credit for this form below because it wasn't one that I created, but nonetheless, I have found it invaluable in keeping a record of our conferences.

Teacher's Conference Record for _____		
Title/Date	Skills Used Correctly	Skills Taught

I have this form stapled to the right side of a writing folder with current work as a reminder of the goals a student has set for his or her writing. During these conferences, especially by the end of the first semester, we want to see the writer articulate the strengths and weaknesses of each piece. By becoming more reflective about the craft, a writer begins to internalize those skills that will allow revision throughout the writing process.

On the next page I show the form I used with Michael. We see that after Michael's first publication, "The Bloody Eve," he began to use dialogue with success and became quite adept at writing with Show Not Tell (descriptive writing). In the second conference, Michael could point out the strengths of his writing although I had to help him with areas that needed attention. Although Michael is a good writer, he is easily distracted, becoming more social with time. And thus, I needed to have more than one conference with him on The Kidnapper to keep him on track toward a final draft. When we directed him to use the computer, he was able to finally revise and publish this piece. It should be noted, however, that the form does not show the many times parent volunteers and I checked in with him, keeping him accountable for his time and work— what we call "putting on the pressure."

#### Author's Chair

Author's chair gives students a chance to read completed first and second drafts to the class. The writer receives positive comments and may solicit questions. Some students are eager to read in author's chair; others must be strongly encouraged if not exactly bribed. By circulating around listening to writing read aloud and also by investigating writing folders after school, I find many examples of superb writing that need to be shared with the whole class. I want these presented as models, but I also, of course, want to hear from students who are struggling. The purpose of author's chair is both to show off accomplishment and to get help with revision. When students are not getting useful and appropriate comments from their response groups, author's chair provides a chance for a second opinion.



This use of author's chair evolved from a conversation I had when Rene one day approached me, livid that he wasn't receiving helpful response on his writing from his peers. "How could I revise when I get dumb responses like these here?" he scowled, tossing the response sheets my way. The suggestions for improving his piece were: "Rene, you need to spell better." "You need to have more Show Not Tell." "Tell what was your mother's boyfriend's name." I told him that I agreed one hundred percent that these comments were not helpful; they were either unspecific and unconnected to the content of the piece or too specific. To appease and support Rene, I decided, right then, to put him in author's chair. Rene then shared this writing:

First Draft :

*one weekend I was learning how the bikeride. My mom's boyfriend was tecting me how to ride my Bike But I know how to ride my bike safter a wihl and I feel of my Bike and I hert my knie. It is fun to ride. I like ride my Bike at jaquin milar park and at my gradma's house and at Mrarit Collige and to Skyline Make and one more place is roberts park I like to ride my Bike at Yosemite to. I can go Blasing than a speeding boolit on my Bike at Yoseite.*

His classmates proceeded to tell what they liked about the story, what he did well. Lastly, they asked questions and suggested improvements he could make, all of which I copied down:

Tell what her boyfriend's name is.  
When did you fall?  
You need Show Not Tell.  
How badly did it hurt when you fell?  
What did they say when they're teaching you to ride the bike?  
How old were you?  
What does your bike look like?  
How did you feel when you're riding your bike?  
How many days did it take to learn?

I had Rene think overnight about what he wanted to do with all this feedback. With the permission of Rene and his responders, I then showed an overhead transparency of this list of responses with Rene again on author's chair. I reminded everyone that as the author, it was totally Rene's decision as to which questions and suggestions he wanted to address in his second draft. Realizing he had such power, he now seemed to sit taller, basking in the attention. He then responded to the responders: "I don't think it is important what my bike looks like although it was blue. Umm, I don't remember exactly what my mom and her boyfriend said or when this all happened. I will try to do the show-not-tell; that isn't hard. I have to think about the rest." Equipped with the contributions of his peers, Rene then wrote:

*I'm Learning How to Ride My Bike*

*One weekend I was learning how to ride my bike. My mom's boyfriend steve was teaching me how to ride my bike. But I know how to ride my bike a wihl. But I fell off of my bike and hret my knie reely bad. My niey hite so bad I felt like crying. My bike is blue. It is fun to ride. I like riding my bike at Joaquin Miller Park and at my gradmas house and at marit college and at rabers park and yseite. I can go faster than a speeding*

Figure 1: Conference Record for Michael

Title and Date	Skills Used Correctly	Skills Taught (1-2)
The Bloody Eye 10/1/96	1. Character's thoughts "How could he miss dinner?" 2. Tight story — good beginning, middle, and end	1. How did you feel? Show-not-tell Dialogue
Adven. of Mohawk Man & Super Cat 11/6/96	1. Good dialogue 2. SNT — "so strong that ..." "stung so hard that ..."	1. Capitalize names 2. Other words besides "then"
The Kidnapper 1/15/97	1. Strong verbs — "threw," "plunged" 2. Other words besides "then" 3. SNT — "So scared..." "screamed so loud ..."	1. Capitalize names 2. New lead besides "Hi! My name is ..."
The Kidnapper 1/23/97	1. Verbs 2. Sense of humor shows through 3. Some names capitalized 4. New lead	1. Periods at end of sentences 2. More details in one scene



*boolit on my bike.  
When I ride my bike I  
feel like I can ride my  
I bike all my life.*

From that day on, the author's chair took on a new complexion as more and more students, like Rene, requested input from the whole class. Before they took the chair for this purpose, however, I required that they receive at least two peer responses. Seated there, they would ask specific questions about a work in progress: "What should I do with my writing now?" "What title should I give my story?" "How should I end this story?" "Where should I put show-not-tell?" "Do I have too much dialogue?"

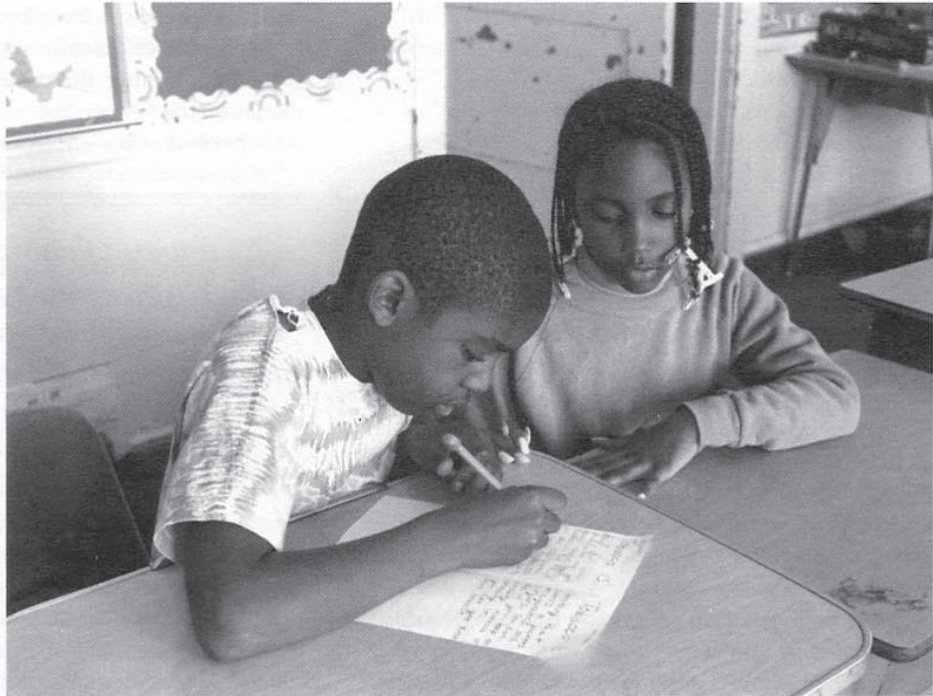
In a reflective piece, Narami, a fourth grader, expressed well the value of bringing an unfinished work to the author's chair:

*It helped to be on author's chair because other people have more ideas than one person. The class had better ideas.*

Thus, author's chair eventually became a richer pool from which students could draw ideas for change in their writing.

But my encounter with Rene lay bare another revision-related writers' workshop problem. Rene was getting "dumb responses" from some other students. This should not come as a surprise to most experienced teachers. We have noticed that the quality of response varies greatly from one student to another. How then are we to prevent the student who depends on response from others from feeling short changed?

I came on a partial answer to this question when I read an article by Donald Graves in *Instructor Magazine* entitled "Experts in Writing." Graves suggests that



there are students who have expertise in different aspects of writing in any classroom community. I was interested in this notion, as I thought it might help with the problem of inexpert response that plagued many students working on a revision. If each student had an expertise, then others could go to that person for assistance in a specific skill.

We began by generating a list of such proficiencies, using only about half:

- show-not-tell
- using complete sentences
- words besides "said"
- similes
- metaphors
- using quotes in dialogue
- other words besides 'then'
- using quotation marks
- feelings of a character
- letter writing form
- vivid verbs
- possessives
- setting a scene
- dialogue
- spelling
- transition words
- sensory details



poetry  
capitalization  
character building  
leads  
paragraphing  
great endings  
catchy titles  
humor

One day I announced that I would be interviewing students to see if they qualified to be experts. I focused on only two proficiencies that morning. They were to sign up for conferences throughout the week and bring writing samples that proved they knew a particular skill. A buzz spread around the classroom, even a "Yes!" here and there, giving me clues that they were excited about this opportunity to prove their worth; quickly students began pouring over their work, making corrections and additions. Revision was happening before my very eyes!

Sections like "show-not-tell" and "words besides 'said'" quickly filled up, and with time, the experts then began interviewing their peers, freeing me to work with students in other areas. The experts were much more stringent about qualifying their peers than I would ever have been. When one interviewee was reduced to tears, we had to have an emergency meeting of experts to talk about being supportive while still testing. They learned a new word that day: "tact!"

What then were the results of such a venture? The more competitive and competent students tried to qualify for as many areas as possible so they also became risk-takers in their writing, plunging into areas like "thoughts and feelings of the character," "setting," and "character building," around which they previously tiptoed. Ironically, proofreading and revision became natural by-products as students read and reread and rewrote portions of their papers to perform well.

Becoming an expert was also a booster for those quieter students like Leona and Jesse who were superb spellers. They were very much in demand when students needed to edit their papers for publishing. They helped each student generate a list of words that students misspelled often.

We depended less on parent volunteers for editing purposes as the students went to each other for help. Talk about building a classroom community!

To keep the experts from backsliding and falling into bad habits, I periodically asked for evidence that they were maintaining their skills. I put stars by their names on the "expert list" when they passed — more stars proved you were "too-good-to-be-true."

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*As a way of showcasing writing which other students might admire and use as models in revision, we put together a flashy bulletin board titled "The Writing Hall of Fame"...*

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I met with the more reluctant students, offering them another pair of eyes with which to comb their papers to see areas where they were strong. Sean, almost afraid of his own shadow, was thrilled to see that he always got possessives correct, a skill mastered by very few students. Sandee, like several of my second-language students, used "said" and other mundane verbs too often. With instruction from her best friend Katy, she began using the thesaurus and experimenting with word choices. Two weeks before the end of school, she became an expert in the category of "words besides said."

Because students were motivated to qualify as experts, they were more attentive when I gave my mini-lessons. They now had ears to hear and the courage to try new strategies in writing. I had to chuckle when I saw Melissa even taking notes as I spoke.

There was, however, a down side to this generally successful technique. By definition the term "expert" is exclusive. Benjamin tried again and again to qualify for "catchy titles" but he just did not seem to have the catchy title gene, producing titles like "My Cute Dog" and "My Trip to San Diego." We looked at book titles and tables of contents to see if he could understand the gist of interesting titles. We brainstormed words he could add to "My Dog" to make it more exciting. Sadly, he didn't seem to understand. I tried to find other areas of expertise without much success. I still feel badly whenever I greet him in halls this year.

#### **Writing Hall of Fame**

As a way of showcasing writing which other students might admire and use as models for revision, we put



together a flashy bulletin board titled "The Writing Hall of Fame" which was made up of snippets from such writing:

From Angela's "Home Alone": *He ran down the stairs and hopped on the couch and curled into a ball because he was so scared.*"

Dennis from "The Abduction": *It was really weird. There were different lights from green to red to purple. It looked like Christmas. All they needed was a tree.*

Erica from "The Haunted House": *The porch steps creaked when I stepped on them. The door screeched when I pushed it. I felt something brushing the side of my head.*

Jesus from "Meow, Meow": *What's weird about them (my cats) is Tippy meows like a lion and purrs like the pitter patter of a mouse's run. Mittens meows like a mouse and purrs like a volcano ready to erupt."*

Somehow, like some teacher-generated plans, the idea was easier to conceive than to carry out. Soon the board looked pathetically sparse. Before killing this project, I decided to ask three students, choosing those who were competent writers and already in the Hall of Fame, to form a committee responsible for finding treasured morsels of student writing for our Hall of Fame, whether they heard them during author's chair, while responding to writing or merely through the grapevine. Ashley, one of the committee members, announced that they would be interviewing interested applicants for the Hall of Fame. Within weeks, we started to see students taking care to write with specificity in their pieces, even rewriting, to qualify as a Hall-of-Famer.

Committee members like Jake would occasionally ask my advice:

J: Mrs. M., do you think that Eric's paragraph should qualify for the Hall of Fame?

M: What did he write?

J: He wrote, 'The boy ran as fast as a cheetah across the school yard.' The rest of us on the committee feel that it is a sentence a lot of people write. It is kinda not a new idea.

M: Well, I will go along with the committee's opinion, Jake.

J: Yeah, we got a lot of those kinds of sentences lately: We just tell them go back and change that sentence. 'Try again,' we tell them.

M: Wow. You people are tough!

Soon after this conversation, I noticed Eric revising his cheetah sentence to give it originality or, as the kids say, "make it fresh."

After turning it over to the children, the Writing Hall of Fame generated renewed interest. Some children even gave up their recess to meet with the committee. Before each writing period, one committee member announced the new Hall-of-Famer, who then read his/her qualifying sentence or paragraph. A certificate designed by a child in our class was then awarded to the new member, followed by enthusiastic applause.

### Conclusion

I have presented here some specific revision-related strategies that have evolved as I have done my research. It is my hope that teachers will be able to adapt some of these to serve their own classrooms and students. But I believe I learned more from my research than some specific classroom techniques. Reviewing what I have done over the past two years, I am struck by the fact that every time I got in a jam, it was the students who helped me out of it. I learned from them and with their help found better ways to do mini-lessons, author's chair, the Hall of Fame board and more.

As I increasingly involved my students in the teaching of writing, asking them to help me find answers to sticky pedagogical problems, they responded with enthusiasm, generosity, and wisdom. In essence, they taught me as much as I did them — teaching turned full circle.

*Jan Matsuoka is a teacher consultant with the Bay Area Writing Project and teaches third and fourth grade at Joaquin Miller Elementary School in Oakland.*

# Ten Prompts to Help Turn Your Demonstration into an Article

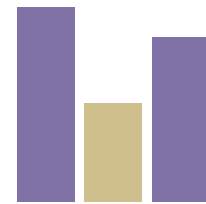
*Art Peterson*

**Summary:** *Art Peterson, senior editor at the National Writing Project, offers ten thought-provoking prompts to help turn your summer institute demonstration into a professional article.*

1. How did you get interested in this topic?
2. What is the main idea you want teachers to take away from your demonstration?
3. What are the theoretical or conceptual underpinnings for your demonstration?
4. What is special or unique about your demonstration?
5. Is your demonstration divided into segments? If so, what are the main points for each segment?
6. What stories, examples, and evidence do you have to help you make each of your points? What can be extrapolated or inferred from these examples?
7. Do you display student work during your demonstration? How does this work connect to the concepts you are presenting?
8. What questions have been asked by participants at your demonstrations? What did you learn from the questions or how did they challenge your thinking? How have you answered them?
9. How have other teachers used your ideas? What variations have they made on them?
10. What changes have you made in your demonstration over time? Why?

© 2003 National Writing Project. Available at <http://www.writingproject.org/pub/nwpr/nwp/ten-prompts.html>.





## Appendix B

Pre-retreat Materials





Professional Writing Retreats - WORK CYCLE		
September	<b>Leadership Planning</b>	Select Leadership Team for Professional Writing Retreat and have them distribute the work amongst themselves (i.e. application intake, application review, logistics coordinator, facilitators, editors, etc.).
	Application	Leadership Team begins by reviewing and updating the Professional Writing Retreat application.
October	<b>Retreat Preparations</b>	Prepare for the retreat (i.e. find a venue, catering or meal plan; plan materials).
	Advertising	Leadership Team plans advertising strategy.
	Application	Leadership Team finalizes Professional Writing Retreat application.
November	Application	Advertise Professional Writing Retreats. Talk with interested individuals.
December	Application	Advertise Professional Writing Retreats. Talk with interested individuals. Intake of applications.
	Anthology	Begin preparations for previous retreat's anthology (optional).
January	Application	Advertise Professional Writing Retreats. Talk with interested individuals. Intake of applications.
February	Anthology	Collect previous retreat's anthology pieces (optional).
	Application	Advertise Professional Writing Retreats. Talk with interested individuals. Intake of applications.
March	Anthology	Anthology team or individual begins work on production of the last retreat's anthology (optional).
	<b>Application deadline</b>	Check that all applications are complete. Prepare applications for Leadership Team to review.
April	Anthology	Finalize anthology, have someone from Leadership Team review a draft, and copy for mailing to past participants (optional).
	<b>Notification</b>	Notify all applicants of their application's status.
	Participants	Create a listserv or send everyone contact info. so they can begin communicating pre-retreat.
	Retreat Preparations	Prepare for the retreat by beginning to plan the specifics (i.e. schedule, materials, any guest speakers/editors).
May	Anthology	Mail anthologies to past participants (optional).
	Retreat Preparations	Continue to prepare for the retreat.
June July August	Final Preparations	Final preparations (i.e. review final of room list, catering contract, shuttle/transport schedule, etc.).
	Final Planning	Leadership Team and/or facilitators meet a day in advance in order to plan the final details for the retreat.
	<b>Professional Writing Retreat</b>	Retreat is held for 3–4 days.
	Debrief	Debrief Professional Writing Retreat on the final day of the retreat or schedule a meeting time to debrief soon after.
	Expenses	Review and pay invoices.

# Sample Flyer

## Writing Project Site Name **Professional Writing Retreats**

LOCATION

CITY

DATE(S)

Insert  
Image  
Here

**T**he NWP Professional Writing Retreats support one of NWP's founding principles: teachers of writing should write. The retreats highlight the value of teachers writing about their practice and create the time and support for this work. Writing from the retreats finds its way into local, regional, and national publications, making visible the beliefs and practices of writing project teachers to a broad audience of teachers, administrators, legislators, and policymakers.

The retreats also demonstrate a model that has proven particularly successful in supporting teachers in writing about their practice. Through participation in the retreats, teacher-consultants and site leaders return to their sites with a new understanding of the importance of this kind of writing and with the potential to develop similar retreats for their colleagues. This model has been used widely in NWP programs and networks as well as by local sites.

The retreats focus on professional writing, such as:

- Classroom case studies
- Writing about inservice programs
- Narratives of school/teaching life
- Ethnographies
- Annotated professional bibliographies
- Opinion pieces about issues in the teaching of writing.

The NWP now sponsors two qualitatively different retreats. Retreat A will continue to serve participants who are in the process of writing first drafts. Retreat B is tailored to the needs of writers with a completed draft who are ready to tackle final editing and preparation for publication.

### **DETAILS**

The retreat is limited to 15 participants. Participation in the retreat(s) is by application only. The pool of participants chosen will be as representative as possible of the geographic, racial, and ethnic diversity of the writing project. It will include teacher-consultants and site leaders—kindergarten through university—with a range of writing interests, experience, and content-area knowledge.

### **COSTS**

*Example:* Your writing project site will cover the cost of double-occupancy rooms and meals. Participants are responsible for travel costs and incidentals.

### **TO APPLY**

For an application or more information, please visit/email...



# Sample Application

WRITING PROJECT NAME  
**Professional Writing Retreat**  
*Application*

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Writing Project Site \_\_\_\_\_  
Home Address \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Home Phone \_\_\_\_\_  
Work Address \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Work Phone \_\_\_\_\_  
Department/Grade/Subject Area \_\_\_\_\_  
Email \_\_\_\_\_ Fax \_\_\_\_\_

**On a separate piece of paper, please submit an application of no more than two pages in which you respond to the following:**

## WRITING RETREAT A

1. At what school do you currently work? Which department?
2. What has been your writing experience and what is your interest in participating in the retreat?
3. What are you planning to write about? If you are considering more than one idea at this point, briefly describe each one.
4. How would you describe the potential relevance of your writing to your colleagues, your local writing project site, or your school community?

## WRITING RETREAT B

1. At what school do you currently work? Which department?
2. What has been your writing experience and what is your interest in participating in the retreat?
3. Provide a brief summary of your draft.
4. Tell us about your publication goals for your manuscript. Are there specific journals or other publications that you are interested in? What kind of assistance do you anticipate needing?
5. How would you describe the potential relevance of your article to your colleagues, your local writing project site, or your school community?
6. Include with your application a copy of your completed manuscript draft.

Please mail or fax your application to the below address by Month 00, Year:

NAME  
YOUR ADDRESS  
YOUR PHONE; YOUR FAX  
YOUR EMAIL

**DEADLINE: Month 00, Year**

# Sample Letter of Acceptance

Month 00, Year

Dear Writing Retreat Participant,

On behalf of the [Your Writing Project] and this year's facilitators, I am pleased to welcome you as a participant to the Professional Writing Retreat in [Location]. This year's group is made up of teachers at all grade levels, elementary through university. Thanks to the interests and talents of this stellar group, the retreat is sure to be a successful and productive one.

Your retreat leaders include [name, leadership role] and [name, leadership role]. We will be joined by [name of any guest presenters/editors]. The retreat is designed to meet the needs of participants at all stages of the writing process. You will have large blocks of time to write, respond to each other's writing, and meet with the whole group as well.

In order to make the best use of your time, please bring the following:

- All materials you may need in order to make as much progress on your work as possible. This may include books and references, student work, field notes, transcripts, bibliographies, drafts, and anything else you can think of. We urge you to bring more rather than less, since you won't be able to access your classroom. You never know what you may need to cure writer's block!
- A laptop, if you have one. [Describe here what types of technology and/or supplies will also be available on site.]
- If you aren't bringing a computer, consider downloading your work onto a flash drive (small drives that use a USB port) to bring to the retreat, or bring a CD or floppy disk.

Enclosed are [#] articles for you to read prior to the retreat:

[Article 1]

[Article 2]

[Article 3] and

[Article 4]

Also enclosed are directions and suggestions for making your travel arrangements. Please read these as soon as possible and provide information about your travel to [contact name]. Again, a very warm welcome from [your name]. If you have questions, please don't hesitate to contact [name] at [phone number and/or email].

Sincerely,

Name

Leadership Role

# Sample Information Sheet

Insert  
Image  
Here

## WRITING PROJECT NAME Professional Writing Retreat Month 00–00, Year

### Accommodations

-----  
The Professional Writing Retreat will take place at [Retreat Venue, City, State]. You will be sharing a room with a writing project colleague. The venue provides the same room amenities as a regular cabin/hotel.

Retreat Venue  
Street Address  
City, ST Zip Code  
Phone Number  
Web Site Address

### Schedule

-----  
The Professional Writing Retreat begins at 0:00 a.m./p.m. on Day, Month 00.  
The Retreat concludes at 0:00 a.m./p.m. on Day, Month 00.

### Weather

-----  
Average daytime temperatures are in the 00's and evening temperatures in the 00's. [Any additional notes re: meeting space and/or sleeping rooms (i.e. air conditioning, lots of bugs, casual dress, etc.).]

### Travel

-----  
[Note any specific details here (i.e. carpool arrangements, distance, landmarks, etc.).]

### RSVP

-----  
[OPTIONAL] Once you have booked your travel, but no later than Month 00, Year, please send your itinerary to [contact name] with the form on the next page either by email (email address), or by fax (000-000-0000).

### Technology / Supplies Available

-----  
[List all technology / supplies here]

# Sample RSVP Form

## WRITING PROJECT NAME Professional Writing Retreat Month 00–00, Year

\*\*\* Return this form to [Contact Name] by Day, Month 00.\*\*\*

NAME\_\_\_\_\_

PHONE\_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

EMAIL\_\_\_\_\_

### TRAVEL ITINERARY

[Insert information you may need to collect depending on travel needs of participants.]

### TECH NEEDS

I am bringing my own laptop to the retreat.

YES\_\_\_\_\_

NO\_\_\_\_\_

I am bringing my own portable printer to the retreat

YES\_\_\_\_\_

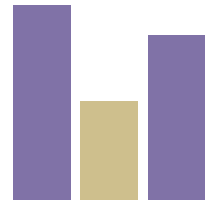
NO\_\_\_\_\_

### ADDITIONAL NEEDS

Do you have any additional needs (e.g. dietary preferences, medical restrictions)?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Return this form to [contact name] at:  
\*\*\* [email address] or fax it to [000-000-0000] by [date].\*\*\*



## Appendix C

On-Site Retreat Materials





# Sample Daily Schedule

Professional Writing Retreat - Venue Name, City, State						
SCHEDULE, Month 00-00, Year						
	Day, Month, Date, Year	Day, Month, Date, Year	Day, Month, Date, Year	Day, Month, Date, Year	Day, Month, Date, Year	
		Breakfast				
8:00		Announce & Discuss Writing Groups	Group / Writing Time	Group / Writing Time	Anthology Discussion	
8:30		Group / Writing Time			Check in	Continuation of Community Works-in-Progress
9:00			Publishing your Writing / Closing			
9:30			Box Lunches Ready			
10:00			Early Lunch - Departure			
10:30						
11:00						
11:30						
12:00	Lunch					
12:30						
1:00	Arrivals & Settling In	Writing for NWP Publication	Group / Writing Time	Group / Writing Time		
1:30		Group / Writing Time				Check in
2:00						
2:30						
3:00						
3:30						
4:00	Welcome and Introductions History & Purposes of the Retreat Orientation to Retreat Location Review Retreat Agenda	Check in				
4:30						
5:00						
5:30						
6:00	Dinner					
6:30						
7:00	Writing Activity Participants Discuss What They'll Be Working On	Free / Writing Time	Community Works-in-Progress Readings			
7:30						
8:00						



# Sample Response-Group Protocol for Short, First-Draft Writing

*Developed by the Boston Writing Project*

## **Recommended for:**

- early drafts
- inexperienced writers
- providing a balance between positive feedback and suggestions for revision.

## **Procedure:**

1. The writer reads the paper and does not comment until after the other group members have commented.
2. The responders begin by addressing these two areas:
  - What was the strongest or most positive aspect of the piece? This includes commenting on particularly striking words, images, constructions, etc., as well as global positive aspects.
  - Did you find any part, word, or assumption confusing? Is there something the writer assumed you knew that you didn't know?
3. How would you go about expanding this piece of writing?
4. Are there questions of mechanics, grammar, spelling, or usage that should be corrected?

# Sample Response-Group Protocol for Mid-draft Writing

*Developed by the Boston Writing Project*

## **Recommended for:**

- writer-directed response
- groups of four writers sharing brief works within an hour's time.

## **Procedure:**

1. The group assigns a facilitator and timekeeper for each round.
2. The first writer talks a little about the writing and identifies the kind of feedback that would be most helpful.  
(3 minutes) Examples:
  - “I would like to hear anything positive that you have to say about this piece.”
  - “I know what’s good about this piece. Please raise some questions for me to think about.”
  - “I’d like to hear both the strengths of the piece and questions that will lead me into a revision.”
3. The writer reads the work-in-progress aloud while the responders listen and make notes. (3 minutes)
4. The facilitator leads the discussion around the feedback that the writer requested while the writer listens and makes notes. (9 minutes)
5. The group repeats the process for each manuscript.

# Sample “Overhearing” Response-Group Protocol for Longer Manuscripts

*Developed by the Boston Writing Project*

1. Prior to the peer response session, each writer provides a copy of the manuscript for each of the responders with a brief written or oral introduction that includes the following points:
  - What stage of development does the writer perceive the manuscript to be in?
  - What are its strengths? Where does the writer need help?
  - What kind of feedback would the writer like?
2. At the start of the session, group members select a timekeeper and facilitator for each round.
3. The peer editors talk together about the manuscript while the writer “overhears” without joining in. They talk about the strengths as they see them and about what they see as the next steps for the manuscript (within the parameters of the feedback requested by the writer).
4. The writer responds to the “overheard” conversation in a general discussion about the manuscript led by the appointed facilitator.
5. The group repeats the process for each manuscript.

# The Key to the Watchwords

When the editors at the National Writing Project consider works for publication, we look for certain ingredients that we have found common to what we consider “good writing.” We’ve developed an unofficial checklist to help us pull out these ingredients, and we’ve given each of them a label. Our seven “watchwords” are *focus*, *voice*, *credible detail*, *benefit*, *change*, *warts* (from Oliver Cromwell’s fabled remark to his portrait artist, “Paint me warts and all.”), and *complexity*.

Following is a short description of each:

1. **Focus.** A successful piece is generally rooted in a key idea that keeps coming up, providing connection for a piece and establishing its coherence. A writer who cannot provide a succinct answer to the question, “What is this piece about?” should consider that he or she may need to sharpen the focus.
2. **Voice.** We want to find a person behind the pen. Writing with strong voice gives readers a sense of the author and, like a narrator in a work of fiction, the author’s voice contributes to the overall presentation, adding depth beyond what the words say. Voice takes many forms, and, in our publications, one does not get points off for using “I.”
3. **Credible Detail.** As most of the articles we publish are written by teachers for teachers, we like details that give readers the sense of being in the classroom. We consider the inclusion of student writing credible detail, but such detail can be conveyed in even simple ways such as that in the following example from a *Quarterly* article:  
*... when students begin “toying with their pencils, rustling papers, and wiggling in their chairs,” it is a clear sign that it is time for us to stop talking and allow students to write.*
4. **Benefit.** The question we ask here is “Why should anyone read this?” We want a reader to bring from the reading of an article a new concept, a fresh perspective, or a practical tip that can be used in the classroom. Benefits may derive from the description of specific teaching practices; they can also be of a more global nature.
5. **Change.** We encourage teachers to tell their stories, and an element common to most stories is change. In a narrative, readers expect the protagonist to end up figuratively at a different place. In the narratives we present, we like readers to understand how and why the writer has altered a teaching practice.
6. **Warts.** A common deficiency in the manuscripts we receive is that they admit to no weaknesses, hence they are not believable. Writers should feel free to examine both strengths and weaknesses. A writer who is willing to confess failures will win a reader’s trust; hence descriptions of that writer’s successes are eminently more believable.
7. **Complexity.** A piece of writing that raises considerations as well as answers others is the kind of paper that will captivate and intrigue readers. Complexity can also be thought of as depth.

# Publishing and Research Resources for Teachers

*Developed for the Teacher Inquiry Communities Network by Ann Dobie*

The list of journals presented here is selective, not comprehensive, and is offered with the hope of helping teacher-writers discover the wealth of publishing opportunities available for their work as well as the wealth of resources available for research. Before submitting an article, writers should consult each journal's submission guidelines, which are often available online.

**NOTE:** NWP maintains this list on its website under the Resources section of the Teacher Inquiries Communities Network.

## Academic Journals

### Across the Discipline

Dept. of Writing and Linguistics

Georgia Southern University

PO Box 8026

Statesboro, GA 30460

Web: <http://wac.colostate.edu/atd/>

Editors: Michael Pemberton

Email: [michaelp@georgia.southern.edu](mailto:michaelp@georgia.southern.edu)

### inside english

English Department

Fullerton College

321 E. Chapman Ave.

Fullerton, CA 92832

Web: <http://www.ecctyc.org/InsideEnglish/index.htm>

Editor: Darren Chiang-Schultheiss

Email: [insideenglish@ecctyc.org](mailto:insideenglish@ecctyc.org)

### Arizona Quarterly: A Journal of American Literatures, Culture, and Theory

Department of English

1731 East Second Street

University of Arizona

Tucson, AZ 85721-0014

Web: <http://www.u.arizona.edu/~azq/>

Editor: Edgar A. Dryden

Email: [azq@u.arizona.edu](mailto:azq@u.arizona.edu)

### Journal of Advanced Composition

Campus Box 4240

Illinois State University

Normal, IL 61790-4240

Web: <http://jac.gsu.edu/>

Editor: Lynn Worsham

Email: [lworsha@ilstu.edu](mailto:lworsha@ilstu.edu)

### Composition Studies

Texas Christian University

Department of English

TCU Box 297270

Fort Worth, TX 76129

Web: <http://www.compositionstudies.tcu.edu/>

Editors: Carrie Leverenz and Brad Lucas

Email: [compositionstudies@tcu.edu](mailto:compositionstudies@tcu.edu)

### Journal of Basic Writing

New York City College of Technology, CUNY

300 Jay Street—Namm 32

Brooklyn, NY 11201

Web: <http://www.asu.edu/clas/english/composition/cbw/jbw.html>

Co-Editors: Bonne August and Rebecca Mlynarczyk

Email: [baugust@citytech.cuny.edu](mailto:baugust@citytech.cuny.edu), [rmlynarczyk@juno.com](mailto:rmlynarczyk@juno.com)

**Journal of College Writing**

Department of English, Box 86C

Xavier University of Louisiana

1 Drexel Drive

New Orleans, LA 70122

Web: <http://webusers.xula.edu/ngreene/>

Editor: Nicole P. Greene

Email: [ngreene@xula.edu](mailto:ngreene@xula.edu)

**Journal of Curriculum and Teaching Dialogue**

800 South Main St.

James Madison University

MSC 1908

Harrisonburg, VA 22807

Web: <http://www.aatchome.org/AATC/Journal.htm>

Editor: Barbara S. Stein

Email: [ctdjournal@jmu.edu](mailto:ctdjournal@jmu.edu)

**The Journal of Developmental Education**

National Center for Developmental Education

Appalachian State University

PO Box 32098

Boone, NC 28608

Web: <http://www.ncde.appstate.edu/journal.htm>

Editor: Not listed

Email: [calderwoodbj@appstate.edu](mailto:calderwoodbj@appstate.edu)

**Journal of Teaching Writing**

Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis

425 University Blvd.

Indianapolis, IN 46202

Web: <http://www.iupui.edu/~jtw/>

Editor: Barbara L. Cambridge

Email: [jtw@iupui.edu](mailto:jtw@iupui.edu)

**Rhetoric Review**

Department of English

The University of Arizona

Tucson, AZ 85721-0067

Web: <http://www.rhetoricreview.com/>

Editor: Theresa Enos

Email: [enos@u.arizona.edu](mailto:enos@u.arizona.edu)

**Southern Humanities Review**

9088 Haley Center

Auburn University

Auburn, AL 36849-5202

Web: <http://www.auburn.edu/english/shr/home.htm>

Editors: Dan Latimer and Virginia M. Kouidis

Email: [shrengl@auburn.edu](mailto:shrengl@auburn.edu)

**Southern Literary Journal**

CB#3520 Greenlaw Hall

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Chapel Hill, NC 27599-3520

Web: <http://www.unc.edu/depts/slj/>

Editors: Fred Hobson and Minrose Gwin

Email: [slj@unc.edu](mailto:slj@unc.edu)

**The WAC Journal**

Plymouth State University

Website: <http://wac.colostate.edu/journal/>

Editor: Roy Andrews

Email: [roya@mail.plymouth.edu](mailto:roya@mail.plymouth.edu)

**WPA: Writing Program Administration**

Michigan Technological University

Department of Humanities

1400 Townsend Drive

Houghton, MI 49931-1295

Web: <http://www.english.ilstu.edu/Hesse/journal.htm>

## **Writing on the Edge: A Journal About Writing and Teaching Writing**

Campus Writing Center

University of California-Davis

Davis, CA 95616

Web: <http://www.english.ucdavis.edu/compos/woe/>

Editor: John Boe

Email: [jdboe@ucdavis.edu](mailto:jdboe@ucdavis.edu)

## **NCTE Affiliate Publications**

Many of NCTE's local, state, regional, and provincial affiliates have publications, such as CATE's *California English* and VATE's *Virginia English Bulletin*. To find out more, visit the NCTE Local, State, Regional, and Provincial Affiliates Web page and then link to affiliates in your area: <http://www.ncte.org/groups/affiliates/lists/107922.htm>

### **NCTE Assemblies**

NCTE Assemblies are special-interest groups working to improve the teaching and learning of English language arts in specific areas. Below are journals associated with specific assemblies.

#### **The Alan Review**

Assembly on Literature for Adolescents

English Department

Arizona State University

P.O. Box 870302

Tempe, AZ 85287-0302

Web: <http://scholar.lib.vt.edu/ejournals/ALAN/>

Editors: James Blasingame and Lori A. Goodson

Email: [James.Blasingame@asu.edu](mailto:James.Blasingame@asu.edu), [lagoodson@cox.net](mailto:lagoodson@cox.net)

#### **ALCA-Lines**

Assembly on the Literature and Culture of Appalachia

English Department

Ferrum College

Box 100

Ferrum, VA 24088

Web: <http://www.ferrum.edu/alca>

Editor: Tina L. Hanlon

Email: [thanlon@ferrum.edu](mailto:thanlon@ferrum.edu)

#### **Communications: Journalism Education Today**

Journalism Education Association

Kansas State University

103 Kedzie Hall

Manhattan, KS 66506-1501

Web: <http://www.jea.org/> (<http://www.jea.org/resources/periodicals/currentcjet.html>)

Editor: Bradley Wilson

Email: [wilsonbrad@aol.com](mailto:wilsonbrad@aol.com)

#### **The Journal of Children's Literature**

Children's Literature Assembly

Only electronic submissions accepted.

Web: <http://www.childrensliteratureassembly.org/> (<http://www.childrensliteratureassembly.org/journal3.htm>)

Editors: Cyndi Giorgis and April Bedford

Email: [jcl@unlv.edu](mailto:jcl@unlv.edu)

#### **Journal of the Assembly for Expanded Perspectives on Learning** (*continued on next page*)

Assembly for Expanded Perspectives on Learning

Send submissions to:

Linda T. Calendrillo

College of Arts and Sciences

Valdosta State University

Biology/Chemistry Building

Valdosta, GA 31698



**Journal of the Assembly for Expanded Perspectives on Learning** (*continued from previous page*)

Assembly for Expanded Perspectives on Learning

Send editorial inquiries to:

Kristie S. Fleckenstein

Department of English

Florida State University

Tallahassee, FL 32306

Web: <http://aepl.iweb.bsu.edu/jaepl/>

Co-Editors: Kristie S. Fleckenstein and Linda T. Calendrillo

Email: [kfleckenstein@english.fsu.edu](mailto:kfleckenstein@english.fsu.edu), [ltcalend@valdosta.edu](mailto:ltcalend@valdosta.edu)

**Notes on American Literature** (previously titled This Is Just to Say)

Assembly on American Literature

Mabel Khawaja

English Department

Hampton University

Hampton, VA 23668

Phone: 757-727-5709

Editor: Mabel Khawaja

Email: [mabel.khawaja@hamptonu.edu](mailto:mabel.khawaja@hamptonu.edu)

**Willa Journal**

Women in Literature and Life Assembly

Mary E. Styslinger, Ph.D.

Associate Professor, English Education

Department of Instruction and Teacher Education

#232 Wardlaw

The University of South Carolina

Columbia, SC 29208

Web: <http://www.luc.edu/orgs/willa/willahome.html>

Co-Editors: Nancy McCracken and Mary E. Styslinger

Email: [nmcc@kent.edu](mailto:nmcc@kent.edu), [mstyslin@gwm.sc.edu](mailto:mstyslin@gwm.sc.edu)

**The Writing Center Journal**

International Writing Centers Association

Electronic submissions only

Web: <http://www.ou.edu/wcj/>

Editor: Neal Lerner and Beth Boquet

Email: [nlerner@mit.edu](mailto:nlerner@mit.edu), [eboquet@mail.fairfield.edu](mailto:eboquet@mail.fairfield.edu)

**NCTE Publications**

Below are publications from the National Council of Teachers of English and related associations. For up-to-date information about NCTE publications, visit the journals section of their website: <http://www.ncte.org/pubs/journals>

**Classroom Notes Plus**

1111 W. Kenyon Rd.

Urbana, IL 61801

Project Coordinator: Felice A. Kaufmann

Email: [notesplus@ncte.org](mailto:notesplus@ncte.org)

**College Composition and Communication**

Department of English

Northern Illinois University

Reavis Hall 216B

DeKalb, IL 60115

Web: <http://www.ncte.org/pubs/journals/cc>

Editor: Deborah H. Holdstein

Email: [ccc@niu.edu](mailto:ccc@niu.edu)

**College English**

Department of English

Indiana University

Ballantine Hall 442

1020 E. Kirkwood Ave.

Bloomington, IN 47405-7103

Web: <http://www.ncte.org/pubs/journals/ce>

Editor: John Schilb

Email: [JSchilb@indiana.edu](mailto:JSchilb@indiana.edu)

## **English Education**

Georgia Southern University  
Dept. of Curriculum, Foundations, and Reading  
P.O. Box 8144  
Statesboro, GA 30460  
Web: <http://www.ncte.org/pubs/journals/ee>  
Editor: Michael Moore  
Email: [Englisheducation@georgiasouthern.edu](mailto:Englisheducation@georgiasouthern.edu)

## **English Journal**

English Department  
Colorado State University  
1773 Campus Delivery  
Fort Collins, CO 80523-3097  
Web: <http://www.ncte.org/pubs/journals/ej> (<http://www.englishjournal.colostate.edu/>)  
Editor: Louann Reid  
Email: [English-journal@colostate.edu](mailto:English-journal@colostate.edu)

## **English Leadership Quarterly**

Conference on English Leadership  
P.O. Box 142  
Cambridge Springs, PA 16404  
Web: <http://www.ncte.org/pubs/journals/elq>  
Editor: Bonita Wilcox  
E-mail: [blwilcox@hughes.net](mailto:blwilcox@hughes.net)

## **Language Arts**

Language Arts Editorial Office  
The Ohio State University  
333 Arps Hall  
1945 N. High Street  
Columbus, OH 43210  
Web: <http://www.ncte.org/pubs/journals/la>  
Editors: Laurie Katz  
Email: [langarts@osu.edu](mailto:langarts@osu.edu)

## **Research in the Teaching of English**

School of Education, Sproul Hall  
University of California  
Riverside, CA 92521-0128  
Web: <http://www.ncte.org/pubs/journals/rte>  
Editor: Melanie Sperling  
Email: [RTE-Submissions@ucr.edu](mailto:RTE-Submissions@ucr.edu)

## **Talking Points (Whole Language Umbrella)**

Towson University  
Elementary Education  
8000 York Road  
Towson, MD 21252-0001  
Web: <http://www.ncte.org/pubs/journals/tp>  
Co-Editors: Bess Altwerger and Prisca Martens  
Email: [baltwerger@towson.edu](mailto:baltwerger@towson.edu), [pmartens@towson.edu](mailto:pmartens@towson.edu)

## **Teaching English in the Two-Year College**

Miami University Middletown  
E. University Boulevard  
Middletown, OH 45042  
Web: <http://www.ncte.org/pubs/journals/tetyc>  
Editor: Jeff Sommers  
Email: [Sommerjd@muohio.edu](mailto:Sommerjd@muohio.edu)

## **Voices from the Middle**

The University of Texas at San Antonio  
6900 North Loop 1604 West  
San Antonio, TX 78249  
Web: <http://www.ncte.org/pubs/journals/vm>  
Editors: Roxanne Henkin, Janis Harmon, and Elizabeth Pate  
Email: [voices@utsa.edu](mailto:voices@utsa.edu)

“Publishing and Research Resources for Teachers” was developed by Ann Dobie working with the **Teacher Inquiry Communities (TIC) Network**. TIC links writing project sites interested in developing leadership and resources for teacher inquiry. The network provides support at various stages of the inquiry process, increases the opportunity for sustained dialogue among sites developing teacher research, and expands dissemination opportunities for studies of practice. Find out more about TIC at: <http://www.writingproject.org/Programs/tic/index.html>.

# Tips for Publishing: Bringing Classroom Practices, Reflections, and Research to Print

*Written for the Teacher Inquiry Communities Network in July 2004 by Ann Dobie*

**Summary:** *The Teacher Inquiry Communities (TIC) Network has created tips to help teachers develop and submit materials for publishing. They cover how to develop articles, how to prepare your manuscript, what a query letter should look like, different types of publications, and more.*

Writing has its own rewards, but there are times when writers want the added bonus of sharing with others what they have written. Submitting a manuscript for consideration by an editor or a review committee, however, can be an unnerving experience. It means handing over something precious to a group of strangers who may or may not appreciate it. In the end, though, taking that leap is important. Submissions that get rejected (and *all* writers receive rejections) are sometimes returned with comments, helping the writer refine his or her skills. And submissions that are published bring writers the satisfaction of discovering an audience far beyond their own front doors.

The tips below are to help you develop and submit materials for publishing. They cover how to develop articles, how to prepare your manuscript, what a query letter should look like, different types of publications, and more. Bringing your classroom practices, reflections, and research to print doesn't need to be daunting, but it will need planning and patience.

## Related Resources

- Publishing and Research Resources for Teachers
- Electronic Journals Featuring Educational Research
- Ten Prompts to Help Turn Your Demonstration into an Article

## Developing Articles for Publication

Publishing is not just what happens after a text is completed; it begins with an awareness of the possibility for publication. The suggestions that follow will help you think *publication* even when you don't have an article ready to be mailed out.

- **Keep a “possible articles” file.** Write down ideas that come up while you are working on other tasks. These ideas can be the basis for articles.
- **Read journals.** Stay current in your field and develop a sense of what is being published. Reading articles can also generate ideas for your own writing.
- **Join or start a writing group.** Participating in a writing group can provide valuable feedback and ongoing support.
- **Stay alert for classroom ideas that could become articles.** Think of problems in your classroom as opportunities for writing and research.

- **Keep a teaching journal or log.** Review your journal or log periodically for potential article ideas. In addition to specific topics, themes or threads may develop over time that you might want to explore in writing.
- **Draft a program proposal or paper to deliver at a conference.** Audience response to conference papers often helps presenters see where revision is needed.
- **Consider reports and papers as potential articles.** Many teachers write reports for work or papers for courses. Consider reworking these texts into articles.

## Consider Different Types of Publishing

There are many forms of publishing, including alternative forms, that can be helpful to writers.

- **Read your work at a meeting or conference.** This is a good way to get feedback from colleagues, and it can help sharpen your research and writing skills for print publication. Start with small or local meetings, and branch out to larger statewide or national meetings.
- **Publish it yourself.** With a computer and a printer, this method is easy to do, but distribution is a challenge unless you are circulating the material among members of a small group. Nevertheless, with a little computer skill you can produce a handsome text. Although self-publishing is looked down on by some people, Chaucer, Virginia Woolf, Mark Twain, and Edgar Allan Poe all did it. You can, too!
- **Publish in nonrefereed publications.** Some examples include newsletters, newspapers, or nonrefereed journals.
- **Submit to local newsletters, journals, or newspapers.** Clubs, school departments, and other organizations often have newsletters, and their editors are usually looking for copy.
- **Publish in an online journal.** Although print journals are still the norm, the number of electronic journals is increasing.
- **Publish in refereed journals.** Seeing your name in the table of contents of a prestigious journal is one of the most professionally rewarding types of publishing. Your work will be reviewed by colleagues who can respond to your ideas; it will also place you in a professional dialogue with people who are interested in the same issues you are.

## Before Submitting Your Manuscript

How you approach getting a piece of writing published will vary with the publication and the genre, but below are some general steps that you can adapt for your own purposes.



- **Study the publication thoroughly before sending a query letter or article.** Read articles in the publication and know what a typical article is like, not only in terms of the subject, but also in terms of length, style, format, graphics, etc. A subtle but important point to remember is that editors think their publications are special, and they want to know that you chose their publication because you know and like it.
- **Check for specific publication requirements before submitting.** You should check online or look on an inside cover of the journal to see if there is specific information about:
  - editorial policies
  - readership or audience
  - length of submissions accepted (approximate word count or number of pages)
  - types of works accepted
  - how to submit
  - the review process
  - how acknowledgments and acceptances are handled
  - how many copies to send
  - mailing information (or online submission policy)
  - documentation style used by the journal (i.e., *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*, *Chicago Manual of Style*)
  - any other requirements.
- **Send a one-page query letter.** For professional articles, one way to get out of the “slush pile” is to send the editor a one-page query letter. Don’t send the query, however, unless you are ready to send the manuscript. Unlike manuscript submissions (see below), you can send as many query letters as you like at the same time. The query letter should never be longer than one and one-half pages (preferably one page). The standard formula for a query letter is:
  - first paragraph: a brief description of your article
  - second paragraph: a brief identification of the article’s audience
  - third paragraph: a request for permission to send the complete manuscript
  - fourth paragraph: a brief description of you, including your position and some of the journals in which you’ve been published.

If you get a positive response to a query letter, you may call the editor if you have questions or issues to resolve. Do not call if you have not received an answer to your letter.

## Submitting Your Manuscript

Submitting a professional-looking manuscript is important for getting your manuscript read. Below are some tips for what to include with your manuscript and guidelines for the submission process. For submissions to online journals, check each publication’s submission policy. Many request that you email your manuscript as an attachment. Unlike query letters, manuscripts should not be submitted to more than one journal or publisher at a time.

- **Get the attention of an editor with a strong letter and article.** One editor said, “A writer has to prove immediately to an editor that he or she can write well.” That means the first few pages of the manuscript must be good, and all additional text (such as the cover letter) must be good, too.
- **Submit a manuscript that looks professional.** Whatever eases the work for the editor is helpful to you. Use black ink or toner. Use white 20-pound paper (this is the weight most photocopy centers use). Do not use onionskin, carbon tissue paper, or erasable bond paper. They tear and smudge. This may seem obvious, but clean manuscripts are submitted less often than you would think. Text should be double spaced and printed on one side only. Fonts should be no larger than 12 points. Left- and right-hand margins should be one-and-one-quarter-inches wide. Top and bottom margins should be no smaller than one inch. Make sure there are no handwritten inserts or corrections. Number all pages consecutively, putting your last name along with the page number in the upper right-hand corner (e.g., Smith p. 2).
- **Include a title page on the manuscript.** Center the title of the article in the middle of the page with the name and address of the editor and journal or publisher in the upper left-hand corner and your name and address in the lower left-hand corner.
- **Include a cover letter.** Your cover letter introduces your work, but it should be no longer than a single page.
- **Enclose a self-addressed stamped envelope for the editor’s reply.** Make sure your self-addressed stamped envelope (SASE) has enough postage for the return of your manuscript. It is a good idea to put your email address on the title page for those editors who prefer to communicate with you electronically.
- **Mail the manuscript.** Make sure to include the correct number of copies and package it so everything arrives undamaged. The U.S. Postal Service recommends any collection of paper over one inch thick (or more than one pound) be mailed in a box, not an envelope. Priority mail envelopes and boxes are available at most post offices. Padded envelopes also work well. Make sure the manuscript fits snugly.
- **Wait.** Don’t follow up too quickly when you fail to get an answer right away. Allow at least eight weeks for journal submissions (unless you receive notification that it will be longer) before you write to ask what’s going on or withdraw the manuscript. Some publications, such as *Language Arts*, can take up to six months to make a decision.

## Getting Published

Celebrate your acceptances! Celebrate your publication!

- Send copies to interested colleagues.
- Send copies to school administrators.
- Send copies to all your friends.
- Have a publishing party or reading with your colleagues.
- Have a reading, workshop, or discussion with your colleagues.
- Bring copies to conferences and pass them out to interested colleagues.
- Speak at local clubs about the topic of your article.

# Teacher and Professor Manuscript Guidelines Megalist

This highly biased list is by no means exhaustive, and it was put together to reflect the needs of past retreat participants. If there's something you feel should be here, feel free to send me new names: [rgarciag@yahoo.com](mailto:rgarciag@yahoo.com)

## Assistant/Associate Professors

### Refereed Journals

*AERA Journal* Page

<http://aera.net/publications/?id=308>

*The Journal of Educational Research* Guidelines for Authors

<http://www.heldref.org/jermanu.php>

*The Journal of Experimental Education* Manuscript Guidelines

<http://www.heldref.org/jexpemanu.php>

*Reading And Writing Quarterly* (follow *Authors* link to guidelines)

<http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals/journal.asp?issn=1057-3569&subcategory=ED200000>

*Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies* (follow *Authors* link to guidelines)

<http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals/journal.asp?issn=1071-4413&subcategory=ED200000>

*Changing English: Studies in Culture and Education* (follow *Authors* link to guidelines)

<http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals/journal.asp?issn=1358-684X&subcategory=ED600000>

*Educational Action Research* (follow *Authors* link to guidelines)

<http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals/journal.asp?issn=0965-0792&subcategory=ED200000>

*Pedagogy Culture and Society* (follow *Authors* link to guidelines)

<http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals/journal.asp?issn=1468-1366&subcategory=ED200000>

*Journal of Peace Education* (follow *Authors* link to guidelines)

<http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals/journal.asp?issn=1740-0201&subcategory=ED200000>

*Teaching Education* (follow *Authors* link to guidelines)

<http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals/journal.asp?issn=1047-6210&subcategory=ED800000>

IRA's *Reading Research Quarterly* Submission Guidelines

[http://www.reading.org/publications/for\\_authors/rrq.html](http://www.reading.org/publications/for_authors/rrq.html)

## **Publishing Your Dissertation**

Corwin Press Prospectus Guidelines

<http://www.corwinpress.com/corwin/CPpublishing.aspx>

Delta Systems (published *What Teachers Need To Know About Language*)

Contact their submissions department directly. No guidelines are posted at their website: [acquisitions@delta-systems.com](mailto:acquisitions@delta-systems.com)

815-363-7897 Ext. 20

NCTE Book Submission Guidelines

<http://www.ncte.org/pubs/publish/books/122687.htm>

Instructions for IRA Authors

[http://www.reading.org/downloads/publications/books/author\\_instructions.pdf](http://www.reading.org/downloads/publications/books/author_instructions.pdf)

## **Edited Volumes**

Routledge Author Guidelines

<http://www.routledge.com/proposal.asp>

## Teachers

### **Journals**

IRA's *Reading Research Quarterly*

[http://www.reading.org/publications/for\\_authors/rrq.html](http://www.reading.org/publications/for_authors/rrq.html)

IRA's *The Reading Teacher* and *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy* Guidelines

[http://www.reading.org/publications/for\\_authors/rt\\_jaal.html](http://www.reading.org/publications/for_authors/rt_jaal.html)

NCTE *Language Arts* Call for Manuscripts

<http://www.ncte.org/pubs/journals/la/write>

NCTE *English Journal* Call for Manuscripts

<http://www.ncte.org/pubs/journals/ej>

NCTE *Voices From The Middle* Call for Manuscripts

<http://www.ncte.org/pubs/journals/vm>

## **Big Publishing Houses**

Heinemann Proposal Guidelines

[http://books.heinemann.com/shared/onlineresources/submission\\_guide.pdf](http://books.heinemann.com/shared/onlineresources/submission_guide.pdf)

## Scholastic Theory and Practice Series Proposal Guidelines

<http://teacher.scholastic.com/products/theoryandpractice/submitanidea.htm>

## Longman English as a Second Language Proposal Guidelines (click on link to Author Page)

<http://www.longman.com/ae/ushome/>

## Allyn and Bacon Literacy Instruction & Special Education Manuscript Guidelines

<http://www.ablongman.com/html/author/md.html>

## Great Source Manuscript Guidelines (affiliated with Houghton Mifflin)

A K–6 professional development and teaching resources company, best known for their Writing With Traits Series.

<http://www.greatsource.com/store/ProductCatalogController?cmd=LP&nextPage=GreatSource/gsMainTemplate.jsp?displayMainCell=manuscriptguidelines.jsp&displayRightNav=blank>

## Sopris West New Product Proposal Guidelines (publishers of *Step-Up-To-Writing*)

[http://www.sopriswest.com/contact\\_manuscript.asp](http://www.sopriswest.com/contact_manuscript.asp)

## Small Publishing Houses

Teachers and Writers Collaborative is evidently not looking for new manuscripts (at least from nonmembers) but here's their email, in case you want to persevere: [info@twc.org](mailto:info@twc.org)

Atwood Publishing "Our traditional area is teaching enhancement. We also have a new diversity series, and a new teaching techniques/strategies series."

<http://www.atwoodpublishing.com/authorguide/Guidelines.pdf>

New Society "A progressive publishing company that specializes in books for activists, books that contribute in fundamental ways to building an ecologically sustainable and just society."

<http://www.newsociety.com/NSPeditorialguidelines.php>

Five Star Publications "A small press and publishing services company."

<http://www.fivestarpublishings.com/traditionalpub.php>

## Publishing Houses Specializing in Supplementary Curriculum Materials

Pieces of Learning "Publisher of supplemental materials in all areas of literacy."

Their guidelines are brief: "Include a one page specific answer to the question: 'Who needs this book and why?' along with all contact information. Also include a 100-word description to use in catalog/web site publicity. Once it has been looked over we will contact you as to whether we would like to look at the entire manuscript." Email: [piecesoflearning@verizon.net](mailto:piecesoflearning@verizon.net)

Evan-Moor Publishers of "creative, practical, age-appropriate resources that support and enrich the curriculum." Email them directly about manuscript submission: [editorial@evan-moor.com](mailto:editorial@evan-moor.com), but first see if your work fits their publication type: <http://www.evan-moor.com/catalog/curr.asp?CID=20>



# Electronic Journals Featuring Educational Research

## *Teacher Inquiry Communities Network*

**Summary:** To help teachers stay current with the latest research in the field, the TIC Network has compiled a comprehensive list of online educational journals from the United States, Canada, United Kingdom, and Australia that feature teacher research. Visit this list online at <http://www.writingproject.org/cs/nwpp/print/nwpr/465>.

The Teacher Inquiry Communities (TIC) Network (<http://www.writingproject.org/cs/nwpp/print/nwpr/4>) is interested in supporting and promoting teacher research in its many forms and venues. We recognize that part of that work entails staying current with the latest research in the field. Many of us rely on print publications for this kind of information, but there are also an increasing number of electronic journals that provide easy access to research from any computer, whether from home or school. We urge you to find your favorites, and please let us know about your evaluations of particular e-journals through the TIC Discussion Forum (<http://www.writingproject.org/cs/nwpp/print/nwpr/4?x-t=discussions.view>).

### **The ALAN Review (Assembly on Literature for Adolescents) [USA]**

<http://scholar.lib.vt.edu/ejournals/ALAN/alan-review.html>

### **Action Research International [Australia]**

<http://www.scu.edu.au/schools/>

### **Australian Educational Computing [Australia]**

<http://www.acce.edu.au/journal>

### **Australian Journal of Educational Technology [Australia]**

<http://www.ascilite.org.au/ajet/ajet.html>

### **Bilingual Research Journal [USA]**

<http://brj.asu.edu/>

### **Computers and Composition: An International Journal for Teachers of Writing [USA]**

<http://computersandcomposition.osu.edu/default.html>

### **Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood [UK]**

<http://www.wwwords.co.uk/ciec/>

### **Contemporary Issues in Technology and Teacher Education [USA]**

<http://www.citejournal.org>

**Current Issues in Education [USA]**

<http://cie.ed.asu.edu/>

**Early Childhood Research & Practice [USA]**

<http://www.ecrp.uiuc.edu/>

**Education Next [USA]**

<http://www.educationnext.org>

**Education Research and Perspectives [Australia]**

<http://www.education.uwa.edu.au/research/journals>

**Education Review [USA]**

<http://edrev.asu.edu/index.html>

**Educational Researcher [USA]**

<http://www.aera.net/publications/?id=317>

**Electronic Journal for the Integration of Technology in Education [USA]**

<http://ejite.isu.edu>

**Electronic Magazine of Multicultural Education [USA]**

<http://www.eastern.edu/publications>

**Essays in Education [USA]**

<http://www.usca.edu/essays/>

**Florida Journal of Educational Research [USA]**

<http://www.coedu.usf.edu/fjer/>

**International Journal of Education & the Arts [USA]**

<http://ijea.asu.edu>

**International Journal of Educational Technology [USA]**

<http://smi.curtin.edu.au/ijet/>

**Journal of American Indian Education [USA]**

<http://jaie.asu.edu>

**Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication [USA]**

<http://jcmc.indiana.edu/>

**Journal of Interactive Media in Education [UK]**

<http://www.jime.open.ac.uk>

**Journal of Research for Educational Leaders, The [USA]**

<http://www.education.uiowa.edu/jrel/>

**Journal of Scholarship of Teaching and Learning [USA]**

<http://www.iupui.edu/~josotl/>

**Kairos: A Journal for Teachers of Writing in Webbed Environments [USA]**

<http://english.ttu.edu/kairos>

**Networks: An Online Journal for Teacher Research [Canada]**

<http://education.ucsc.edu/faculty/gwells/networks/>

**The Ontario Action Researcher [Canada]**

<http://www.nipissingu.ca/oar/>

**The Qualitative Report [USA]**

<http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR>

**Reading Online: An Electronic Journal of the International Reading**

<http://www.readingonline.org>

**Rethinking Schools**

<http://www.rethinkingschools.org>

**Voices from the Field [USA]**

<http://www.lab.brown.edu/voices/>

**The Weaver: A Forum for New Ideas in Educational Research [Australia]**

<http://www.latrobe.edu.au/graded/weaverindex.html>

**Visit the TIC resource Web page**

<http://writingproject.org/Programs/tic/resources.html>



## Appendix D

Retreat Anthology Materials







# Guidelines for Anthology Coordinators

## *Suggestions from the Previous Coordinators*

### Making the process efficient...

#### **For coordinators:**

- Work with the NWP Writing Retreat contact to get the updated contact information for all retreat participants.
- Obtain copies of previous anthologies from the NWP contact to use as a reference while working on the new anthology.
- Make sure every coordinator's computer has a virus scan program. Previous coordinators have experienced computer crashes due to viruses, not necessarily from anthology documents, but during the time they were working on the anthology.

#### **For NWP staff:**

- The NWP contact will send email reminders to all retreat participants a month before the anthology deadline and then a week before the deadline.
- After the anthology deadline, the NWP contact will forward the anthology coordinators all anthology submissions received.

### What anthology coordinators in the past have done...

- Collaborated on arranging the pieces in a logical order via email. Each of the coordinators read and thought about ways to organize themes, dividers, photos, etc., then negotiated about what the final categories should be.
- Completed minor editing that caught obvious typos, missing words, etc. (One of the coordinators might be designated for this task.) Reformatted electronic documents into the requested manuscript form if they arrived in other formats. (This part can be time-consuming!)
- Created a master electronic copy with all page numbering.
- Created a table of contents.
- Wrote an introduction and a poem for the anthology
- Included a list of all retreat participants to acknowledge those who did not send a manuscript for the anthology.
- Printed and sent a hard copy of the final document to NWP contact.
- Collaborated with NWP contact to design the cover, using digital photos taken at the retreat.

#### **What anthology coordinators did not do:**

- Revise/edit content in any way.

# Guidelines for the Production of the Professional Writing Retreat Anthology

**F**ormat the anthology as needed, adhering as closely as possible to the original submission guidelines (12 pt. font, Times New Roman, single-spaced paragraphs, double space in between paragraphs, 1" margin on top and bottom, 1.25" margin on sides). You are welcome to insert author information, summaries, photos, etc.

Please collate the anthology in the following order:

**Cover** – This is entirely up to the anthology coordinators' abilities and creativity. If you have questions, feel free to contact your NWP contact. If you have a specific color or paper type you are interested in having the cover printed on, please let your NWP contact know this information.

**Title Page** – Please include the following information:

Title of anthology

Dates of retreat

**Dedication/Thanks Page (optional)** – This page is optional and should be kept concise.

**Table of Contents** – List every part of the anthology, including titles of articles, authors of articles, and writing project sites for each author. (*See example for ideas.*)

**Preface** – Be sure to list your preface in the table of contents.

**Retreat Participant List** – List all participants of the retreat and their respective writing project site affiliation. Title the page with the following, centered:

**NWP Professional Writing Retreat**

**Dates of Retreat**

**Location of Retreat**

**Articles** – Format the articles submitted as needed to \*fit.

\*Anthologies should be 100 pages or less. Please consult your NWP contact if you will surpass 100 pages.

# Sample Table of Contents

## Table of Contents

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Shirley Brown, Philadelphia Writing Project	15–17
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Jane Connealy, Nebraska Writing Project	18–21
 <b>Reflections of a Distracted Teacher</b>	
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 <b>Breathing Life into a Dream: Bringing an Embedded Institute to Central High</b>	
Susan Friendson, Rhode Island Writing Project	37–43
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