

Writer's Workshop

For Ages 8-12 years

How to implement
an effective writing
program in
the classroom.



By David Holmsen

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Teachers' Notes

This book provides a step-by-step guide for teachers who wish to implement an effective writing program using the Writer's Workshop framework. This framework involves five steps entitled: Mini-Lessons, Checking The Status, Hot Penning, Writing Time, and Reflection And Sharing. Writer's Workshop sessions must be predictable to be successful. Following the above format will help facilitators of the program build confidence in their students and reduce failure caused by self-doubt that we hear through, "I don't know what to write about", "My writing is not good enough", "I have no real reason to write."

Writer's Workshop encourages teachers to shy away from the dictatorial constraints found in traditional writing models and instead create an environment that respects and treats students, not as young children, but as budding authors. Writer's Workshop grants student autonomy over their writing, to do things like choose what they want to write about and choose if and when they want to publish. Story completion is not mandatory in Writer's Workshop and starting at any point in the framework is acceptable. This open approach to writing mimics what real writers do naturally. Students then have authentic reasons to write, and will enjoy doing so many, perhaps, for the first time.

Your first Writer's Workshop session should be centred on the structure of the lessons. Developing better writers takes time, so patience is a necessary component in implementation. Once you and the students are comfortable and settled with the process, you will begin to notice a significant rise in student interest in writing and the quality of their work.

All age and grade levels can benefit from the Writer's Workshop philosophy and structure. Specific Mini-Lessons are tied to age appropriate standards and outcomes. Differentiation takes place naturally as students work independently. Even the youngest of writers can find authenticity in their writing.

Teachers are encouraged to read through the entire book first to give themselves a holistic view of what's involved in setting up and managing Writer's Workshop.

Writer's Workshop Versus Traditional Writing Methods

Writer's Workshop is inherently different from a traditional writing lesson that might be more familiar to you. Traditional models of teaching writing have limitations, and do not give students an authentic reason to write. Traditional models of teaching writing ask students to write on artificially created scenarios and expect students to complete a piece of writing by the end of the lesson or even worse - finish it for homework. Developing writing behaviours, strategies and processes are largely ignored in the clamber to get students to produce a polished piece of writing to be assessed. Writing traditionally is a linear experience, where the teacher controls everything, including the order, purpose and goal. Writing ceases to become personal or worthwhile in such a model. Writer's Workshop offers immediate relief from this tired and largely inefficient model.

Traditional Approach	Writer's Workshop
teacher orientated	student centred
lacks authenticity	naturally authentic
lack of real choice	allows genuine choice
time restriction	unlimited time to write
final product assessed	writing process is celebrated
emphasis on publishing	predictable lesson structure
less differential	writers are celebrated



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- Goal setting is an important part of Writer's Workshop. When students are about to return to their seats ask them to verbalise what they are planning to do with their writing time. In the role of a facilitator, goals are continuously set, monitored and revised in consultation with the student. On page 12 is a Writing Survey sample that will help students set meaningful goals by reflecting on their respective strengths and weaknesses.



Getting students on board is key to running an effective Writer's Workshop.

Tips!

- » Collaborate with the students to help create the Writer's Workshop rules.
- » Ask students what they think about their writing (Writing Survey page 12).
- » Invite students to make useful posters about writing.
- » Ask the Principal (and other teachers) to join you for a Hot Penning session (see page 19).
- » Make each writing session as rewarding and as fun as you can.
- » Let the students read and discuss their work with each other as often as possible.
- » Empower writers with genuine options and choice.
- » Invite an author to talk to the class about writing.
- » Recognise the students publicly by handing out Weekly Merit Cards to the best workers.
- » Be excited and enthusiastic and your students will be too!

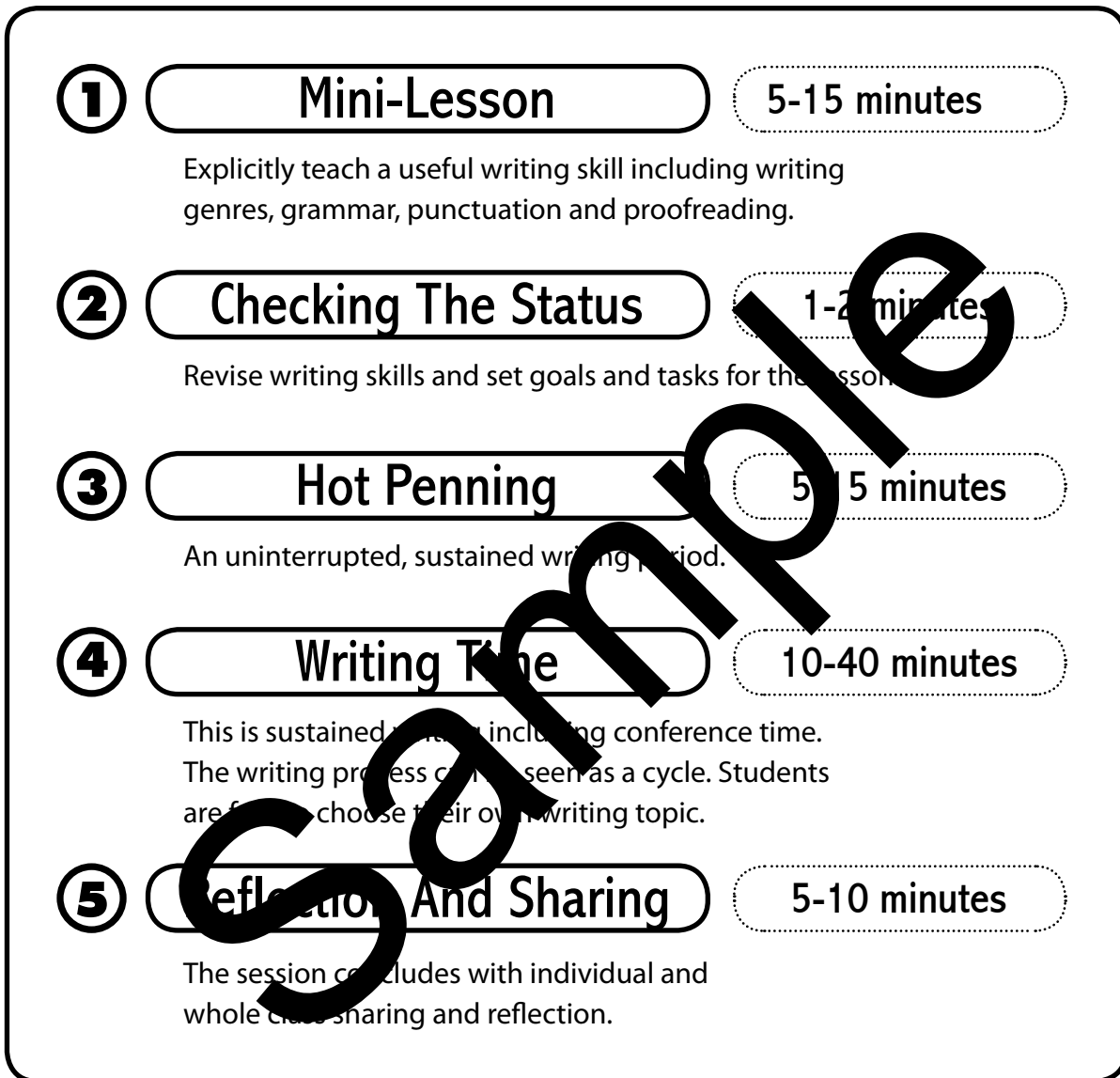
Helping students to understand the importance of writing is key to setting up an effective Writer's Workshop.

WRITING WELL IS A DIFFICULT SKILL TO MASTER. HOWEVER, IT'S NO DIFFERENT TO LEARNING ANY OTHER SKILL, IN THAT, IF YOU PRACTISE ENOUGH, IMPROVEMENT IS INEVITABLE. WRITING DOES WONDERS...

- » writing improves the way in which we communicate with each other;
- » writing is a great way to develop creativity, perspective and tolerance;
- » writing improves spelling, grammar and punctuation;
- » writing is a great way to promote reading;
- » writing is a great way to assess spelling, reading, writing and handwriting;
- » writing is a great 'jumping off point' for classroom discussions on a range of diverse topics;
- » writing improves memory retention – we remember more of what we write than what we say. Writing slows down our thinking so that we can articulate our ideas and points;
- » writing helps us to make sense of our thoughts and feelings.

The Structure Of Writer's Workshop

Writer's Workshop is structured around the explicit teaching of writing skills, immediately followed by a period of sustained writing. The lessons follow a specific progression with variable timings between each, which can be modified depending on the ages and needs of the students.



This structure allows you to establish a predictable routine. Students will feel better about writing sessions because they know what is going to happen each time. This helps build confidence.

It's important to keep in mind that when writing, there are a number of skills that come together at the same time, such as: sequencing, spelling, creativity and text structure. The structure of Writer's Workshop allows these elements to be better taught. Through the Mini-Lesson and conferencing, the teacher can act more as a facilitator rather than someone who is the central part of the lesson and the only source of information for students. Making the most of these 'teachable moments' individualises the lesson and differentiates between each student so that teachers can cater for individual needs.

3

Hot Penning

5-15 minutes

Following Checking The Status, students move back to their seats to commence Hot Penning. Hot Penning is a sustained, uninterrupted writing period when the whole class writes continuously, in silence. The students write at their own level and on something that interests them. Hot Penning is an effective way to promote sustained writing. It gets the students immediately settled and writing.

- | | |
|---|------------------------|
| ① | Mini-Lesson |
| ② | Checking The Status |
| ③ | Hot Penning |
| ④ | Writing Time |
| ⑤ | Reflection And Sharing |



Key Points

- » Hot Penning is flexible enough that it can be done at anytime during the day. You'll find that some times work better than others and this depends on timetabling and curriculum commitments. Implement some Hot Penning at the beginning of a writing lesson (best time), straight after lunch, at the start of the day, at the end of the day as a flier, or anytime when you have a spare 10 minutes or so. There is a good case to substitute Drop Everything And Read (D.E.A.R.) time for Hot Penning as it's a more encompassing learning experience involving reading, writing, spelling, and silent reading. Hot Penning can last anywhere between 5 to 20 minutes. You know that students are in the 'zone' when they are feverishly writing in silence. Their eyes are fixed to their papers and minds are in overdrive with ideas and things to write about. When the silence is broken and Hot Penning has ended, the regular writing lesson can commence. Regular writing lessons include movement around the class, peer discussion and teacher conferencing. If you are doing these things, you are no longer Hot Penning.
- » Ideally students should be writing for a purpose every day in one form or another. Hot Penning can be used to fill in the gaps of the day so at least some sort of meaningful writing has taken place. You will find that if you have set up an enjoyable and positive routine, students will develop a more natural desire to improve the quality and quantity of their writing.

You know that students are in the 'zone' when they are feverishly writing in silence.

DISPLAY HOT PENNING RULES AROUND THE CLASSROOM.





Suggested Rules

- "Get all the equipment that you need before you start."
- "Stay in one spot the entire time."
- "Write quietly, uninterrupted and by yourself."
- "Choose your own topic."
- "Do your best with spelling, grammar, punctuation and neatness."
- "Everyone in the room must write."
- "No interruptions of any sort."



Hot Penning

What's so hot?

- » It gets students in the writing zone.
- » It gives the usually reluctant writers a kick start by providing them with support to get their mojo happening.
- » It has flexibility – stop or start whenever you want or need to. It can be done at anytime and in any place.
- » All that's needed is a humble piece of paper and a pencil and you're in business.
- » Great modelling - all good writers do it.
- » Self-differentiation - anyone of any age or ability can join in.

THE NEXT THREE PAGES ARE PHOTOCOPIABLE. PAGES 24-25 ARE FOR YOU TO DISPLAY IN THE CLASSROOM. PAGES 26-28 ARE THE LUCKY DIP WRITING CARDS.



PLEASE

Do Not

Disturb Us 

We Are ALL

Hot Renning!

