

WHEN YOU BEGIN TO PLAN...

Essential 1: Create the Conditions for Writing

What does it mean to bring something down to its essentials? I liken it to a capsule wardrobe and the spare beauty of wearing fewer pieces. These wardrobe staples coordinate well with one another, building outfits for most occasions with ease. Those who embrace this minimalist approach to fashion attest that they wear what they love and have more time to do what they love. This analogy may at first blush seem superficial, but it's about literally and figuratively clearing the space and time for what matters. The seven essentials of Writer's Workshop can act as a capsule wardrobe of key moves and structures so writers thrive. Fair warning, though—it requires a willingness to declutter your writing instruction.

IN THIS ESSENTIAL

The Conditions for Writing

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7 Essentials

1. Create the Conditions For Writing

2. Offer the Space to Create

3. Stick to Daily Structures

4. Use the Writing Process

5. Mentor Writers Through Modeling

6. Use Goals and Strategies to Orient Teaching

7. Use Partnerships to Uplift Student Voice

The Conditions for Writing

At the beginning of my career I clung to the belief that my job was to assign writing and correct it. Students would improve by studying my red pen comments and edits. They would notice proper grammar, spelling, and sentence construction, and then mimic my changes. I soon learned this was not the best way. Instead, I shifted to a few conditions that could fit into the palm of my hand, conditions that placed writers at the center.

This first essential, Create the Conditions for Writing, sets up the other six. I start here because when we teach with a clear set of conditions, we create an environment for writers to thrive. These conditions, or beliefs about writers and writing, define the Workshop. Everything we do for and with students is reflected within these conditions.

I like to keep these conditions nearby and in view by placing them on my conferring tools or computer screen. Below you will see the five conditions that I believe should frame every Workshop.

This first essential sets up the other six.

Conditions

✓ Protected Time for Writing

✓ Use of a Writing Process

✓ Ongoing Feedback

✓ Meaningful Writing

✓ Establishing a Community of Writers

Protected Time for Writing

In order for writers to become stronger, they need to, well, write. Just like any skill, we become better as we do it. Daily writing time, where students have pencil-to-paper (or fingers to keyboard) to compose and revise, is essential to a writer's growth. The average time for first grade and above is 30 minutes per day. This composing time is in addition to modeling and other types of writing instruction. Research recommends that writing instruction and writing composition should take a combined one hour in total (30 minutes in kindergarten). This requires commitment—making sure it is scheduled in, protected, and prioritized. It may also require some creativity in finding the time when schedules are created.



Set aside 30 minutes for kindergarten and 60 minutes for all other grades to write.

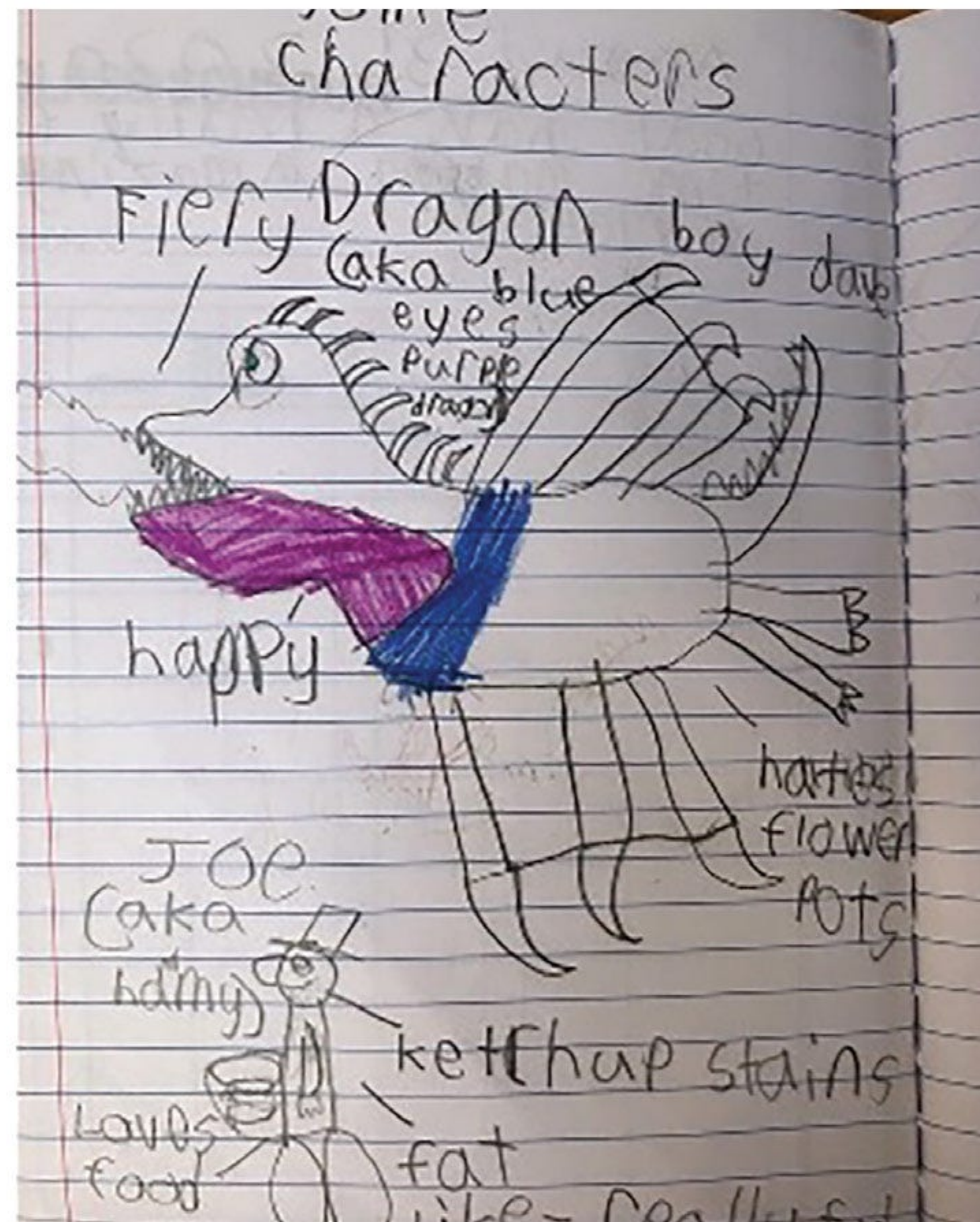


Kindergarten, "I made a queen and a crown. I made a lava shirt and long sleeves."

Use of a Writing Process

Writing, as we all know, is a process. It takes time to move from idea inception to final product. Writing instruction is also complex. Using a writing process provides a structure that streamlines instruction and promotes students' independence. Research demonstrates that when students engage in a writing process, they have a greater understanding of what's needed to develop writing that communicates their intentions.

While there is no one way to go through the writing process, most include generating ideas, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing. Writing is crafted and reworked to refine all of the complexities that make a piece of writing. Writing and writers grow when the process is wholly understood and embraced. For some writing pieces, the process will be completed in one sitting. For other writing pieces, the process extends over days or weeks. The process also varies based on the age of the writer and their developmental stage of writing. For more on the writing process for primary and upper grades, take a look at Essential 4.



Writer's Notebook planning for fantasy writing, Third grade

Ongoing Feedback

Carving out time for students to write and using a writing process are parts of the equation. It is essential that in addition to writing lots and lots, each writer is part of a cycle of feedback. In each stage of the writing process, whether generating ideas or editing, writers grow when there is a writing mentor to help them in each part of the process. It is very similar to a watercolor workshop I took. The role of the mentor-painter was to look at our paintings in progress, and model next steps for us, while also naming what was working. We were all in different stages of our paintings, some of us moving more quickly than others, and the mentor-artist would meet us wherever we were. She offered feedback at any point in the creation process. Similarly, we hold that same role in the writing classroom, offering feedback throughout the process, not just at the end.

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Meaningful Writing

Meaningful writing starts within the writer’s head and heart, from their own experiences, knowledge, and desires, and then through experimentation, revision, feedback, and editing. They share their voice the best they can on the page. It is a process of creation, not unlike creating a piece of visual art. And through this creation process, the writer refines their writing skill set. With many opportunities to engage in meaningful writing, students get the sheer practice and experience that sets them up to become highly proficient writers. The research base is clear: these students perform better on their standardized tests. Furthermore, through frequent writing, students discover their own writing voice and identity. They learn to write for different audiences—from their peers to their parents to the test evaluator. They try out different genres and write for many reasons—to teach others, to share stories, to convince.

Rick Riordan is a pioneer. He made the first, as I like to call it, special kid series. Basically, he made the idea of a regular kid having awesome super powers. The daringness of pioneering a genre, for goodness sake, is just amazing. Second, the realness of the book ties right in with our world. Percy takes on "half human and half greek god" things is quirky and comical. Also, this book series has way more plot twists than a usual book, but just enough to make it unique. These are just a few things in the series blends into the mix. But even how good a book is that has, move over Percy Jackson on the back, I say, Percy ain't goin' nowhere.

Book Review, Sixth grade

Establishing a Community of Writers

Creating a piece of writing is in the hands of the writer. There is truth to the cliché of the author writing in a cabin in the woods, and yet it is also true that writers throughout time have needed community. In the classroom, being part of a community where others are taking part in the same experience can make a world of difference to the young writer. There is companionship in writing alongside others and perhaps most importantly, students can draw upon the collective knowledge of the group. A thriving workshop community provides:

- Shared goals, a place to set personal goals, and the support in reaching them
- Social connections
- Opportunities to offer feedback and receive feedback from an authentic audience
- Shared values of growth and mutual development
- A problem-solving approach to challenges
- Time for reflection that leads to next steps

The rest of the essentials in this book are built upon these conditions. Each essential is full of practical ways to build a Writer's Workshop with these conditions. Let's begin by looking at how to build classroom spaces that unleash the writer within.

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Research Made Real

Graham et al., (2012) have articulated clearly in their research that certain conditions create thriving writers. A few include:

- Daily time for writing
- Writing for a variety of purposes
- Utilizing the writing process
- Creating an engaged community of writers

Reflect on the Conditions

Take a few moments to reflect on these conditions and how they are evident in your setting. Think about how to cast them as conditions with which you teach. Use the chart on page 23 to take stock of where you are and where you want to go. If the conditions in action are exactly where you want them to be, your next step may simply be to preserve that. If they are not, make a plan to bolster those conditions that are underdeveloped. If there are many to work on, prioritize what you will do first. Remember, this is a tool to plan for growth—if you are just beginning with Workshop, embrace the wide-open space for defining those first and next steps.



Tool: Conditions Plan of Action

Conditions	Examples of Conditions in Action	Next Steps
<i>Protected Time for Writing</i>		
<i>Writing Process</i>		
<i>Ongoing Feedback</i>		
<i>Meaningful Writing</i>		
<i>Community of Writers</i>		