

GRADES 3 – 6

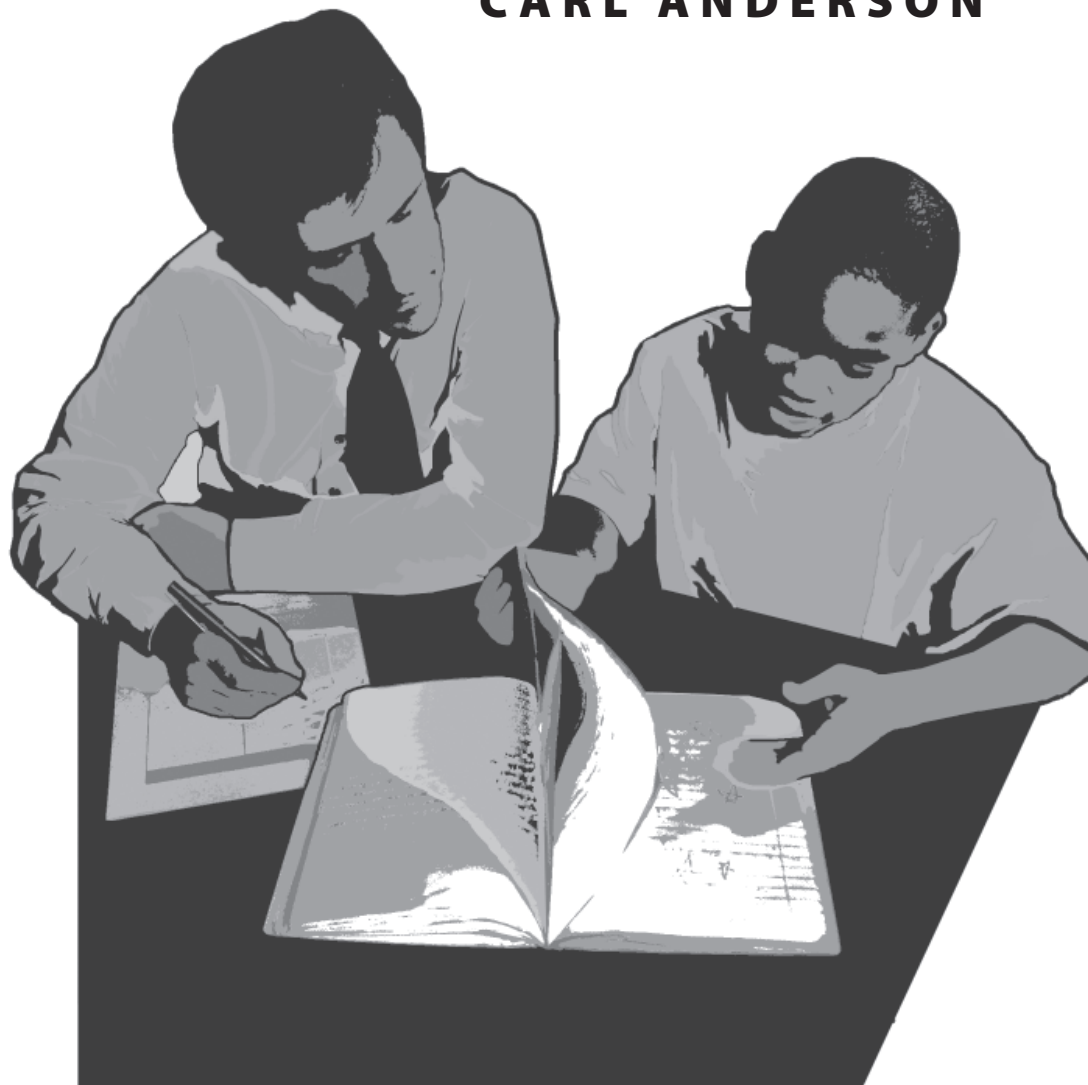
Strategic Writing Conferences

Smart Conversations That Move Young Writers Forward



drafts

CARL ANDERSON



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DEDICATION:

This book is dedicated to Lucy Calkins.



DEDICATED TO TEACHERS

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An imprint of Heinemann
361 Hanover Street
Portsmouth, NH 03801
firsthand.heinemann.com

Offices and agents throughout the world

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Anderson, Carl, 1960-

Strategic writing conferences: smart conversations that move young writers forward / by Carl Anderson.

v. cm.

Contents: Topics

ISBN-13: 978-0-325-01201-8 (set)	ISBN-10: 0-325-01201-6 (set)
ISBN-13: 978-0-325-02629-9 (v. 1)	ISBN-10: 0-325-02629-7 (v. 1)
ISBN-13: 978-0-325-02630-5 (v. 2)	ISBN-10: 0-325-02630-0 (v. 2)
ISBN-13: 978-0-325-02631-2 (v. 3)	ISBN-10: 0-325-02631-9 (v. 3)

1. English language—Composition and exercises—Study and teaching (Elementary) 2. Creative writing (Elementary education) I. Title.

LB1576.A61594 2009

372.62'3044—dc22

2008034944

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ISBN 13: 978-0-325-02630-5

ISBN 10: 0-325-02630-0

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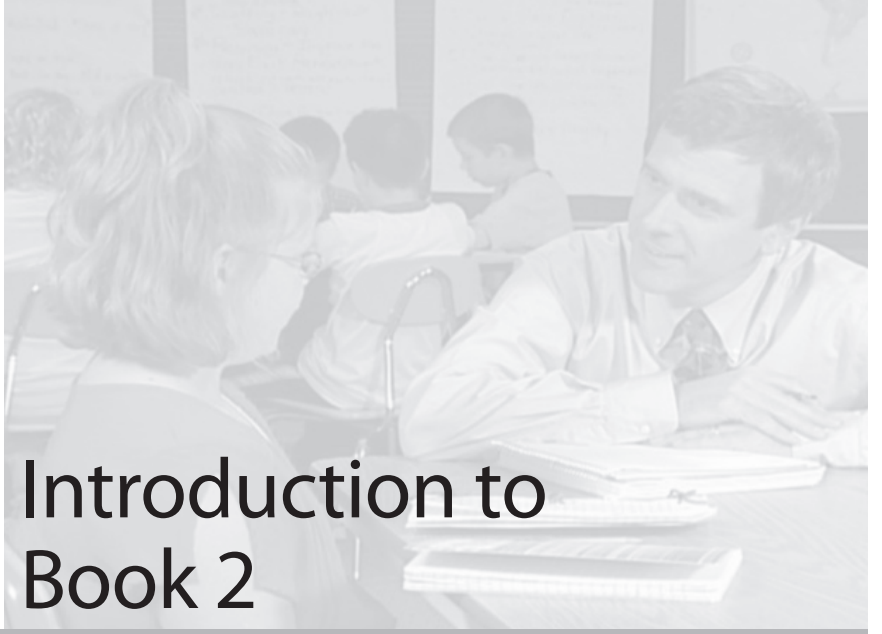
Smart Conversations That Move Young Writers Forward

ISBN 13: 978-0-325-01201-8

ISBN 10: 0-325-01201-6

Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper

13 12 11 10 09 ML 1 2 3 4 5



Introduction to Book 2

THE CONFERENCES in Book 2: *Drafts* are designed to help students with the drafting stage of the writing process—thinking about audience, getting started with a draft, crafting leads, crafting narrative scenes, crafting nonfiction sections, and crafting endings. You’ll find conferences that correspond to all these kinds of drafting work in the six parts of this book.

Part 1: Thinking about Audience

Students need to learn to identify the audience for their drafts. When they understand that writing is an act of communication between themselves and their intended audience, they can write more effective drafts that speak to the reader. The conferences in Part 1: Thinking about Audience help you teach students to identify and write for specific audiences: classmates, community members, and print and online readers.

Part 2: Getting Started

Before writers put pen to paper, or fingers to keyboard, they make important decisions about their draft. One of these decisions is about how they will structure the draft—what sections it will contain and the order to put them in. Another decision in narrative genres is about who will “tell” the story—a character or a narrator. The ten conferences in Part 2: Getting Started help you teach students how to make their own decisions about their writing. Most of the conferences give strategies for planning the structure of a draft, in both narrative and nonfiction genres, and improving these plans.

Attention is also given to teaching students how to decide who will “tell” their stories.

Part 3: Crafting Leads

The first part of a draft—the lead—plays a special role in a piece of writing. Hopefully, the lead catches the reader’s interest so he will want to read the rest. Most important, the lead helps the reader begin to construct meaning. The conferences in Part 3: Crafting Leads help you teach students the basics of lead writing in both narrative and nonfiction genres. Students develop a repertoire of seven lead types, such as a character background or setting lead, that they can draw from when they’re writing.

Part 4: Crafting Narrative Scenes

The basic component of a narrative is the *scene*. A story can comprise a single scene—which Lucy Calkins and her colleagues (2003, 2006) call a “small moment”—or several scenes. The eleven conferences in Part 4: Crafting Narrative Scenes help you teach students how to write well-developed scenes. More than half of the conferences focus on writing scenes with a range of precise narrative details. The other conferences teach students how to use precise words, similes, and time transitions between and within scenes in their writing. Students also learn when and how to summarize a scene.

Part 5: Crafting Nonfiction Sections

Many nonfiction genres, such as a feature article, personal essay, or opinion-editorial piece, contain a series of sections, each one of which develops a point the writer is making about the topic. The conferences in Part 5: Crafting Nonfiction Sections help you teach students how to write well-developed nonfiction sections. Students learn how to guide a reader into a section with a topic sentence and to develop the section with a range of precise details. They also gain a repertoire of kinds of nonfiction sections, including background, how-to, or mini-narrative sections, and the knowledge of why and when to include them in a draft. In addition, they acquire strategies for transitioning the reader from section to section.

Part 6: Crafting Endings

The last part of a draft—the ending—brings closure. A strong ending means the reader finishes reading with the author’s meaning in mind. The conferences in Part 6: Crafting Endings help you teach students how to write different kinds of endings, for both narrative and nonfiction pieces.

Diagnostic Guide for Book 2: *Drafts*

The Diagnostic Guide is designed to help you locate a conference that addresses a student’s particular area of need. The guide lists areas of need that a student may have when she’s thinking about audience; getting started with a draft; and crafting leads, narrative scenes, nonfiction sections, and endings.

Part One: Thinking about Audience

WHAT YOU FIND	CONFERENCES THAT CAN HELP	Page
The student... ... doesn’t have a clear idea of the audience for his piece.	1. Writing with Classmates as an Audience *	9
... has written a piece that would appeal to an audience beyond his circle of friends, relatives, and acquaintances inside and outside of school.	2. Writing with Community Members as an Audience	12
	3. Writing with Print or Online Readers as an Audience	15

Part Two: Getting Started

WHAT YOU FIND	CONFERENCES THAT CAN HELP	Page
The student... ... is drafting a story without making a plan, but the draft is undeveloped, and the parts may be in an order that doesn’t make sense.	4. Talking Out a Story	19
	5. Making a Basic Plan *	23
... has written a “bed-to-bed” or “all-about” entry (an entry in which a student tells every detail that she can remember about an experience).	6. Focusing a Bed-to-Bed Story *	27
	7. Using a Timeline	30
... has made a story plan that includes several scenes but lacks details.	8. Writing a Detailed Plan	34
... is confused about how to proceed from a seed entry about a fictional character to a draft of a fictional story.	9. Thinking about a Story’s Problem and Solution	38
... has written a plan for a story, but has included unnecessary scenes and/or may need to include additional scenes. He hasn’t indicated which scenes are especially important to the story.	10. Revising a Plan	42

A conference with an * is one of Carl’s Classics.

... has written all of her previous stories in first person because she can't imagine doing otherwise, not because she has weighed the pros and cons of this choice.	11. Telling a Story in First or Third Person	46
... has developed her topic for a nonfiction piece in her notebook but is confused about how to begin writing her draft.	12. Planning Nonfiction Across Several Pages 13. Writing a Flowchart for Nonfiction	51 54

Part Three: Crafting Leads

WHAT YOU FIND	CONFERENCES THAT CAN HELP	Page
The student...		
... is writing a story that starts with a scene that is not essential to the story.	14. Starting with an Important Scene ✱	63
... has started with a scene that's essential to the story, but this first scene lacks tension or interest because it doesn't establish the problem or conflict, include information about the characters, or describe the setting.	15. Creating Tension 16. Writing Character Background 17. Describing the Setting	67 71 77
... introduces the reader to his nonfiction topic in his lead, but not the point he is going to make about it.	18. Basic Nonfiction Lead	83
... can write basic nonfiction leads but doesn't yet have other kinds of nonfiction leads in his repertoire.	19. Writing a Scene for Nonfiction 20. Writing a Comparison for Nonfiction	87 93

Part Four: Crafting Narrative Scenes

WHAT YOU FIND	CONFERENCES THAT CAN HELP	Page
The student...		
... is beginning to write focused narratives but has written mostly general details.	21. Precise Details: Actions, Dialogue, and Thoughts ✱ 22. Writing Dialogue 23. Showing—and Telling—Character Feelings and Thoughts 24. Describing Character Actions	99 103 107 111
... uses the basic repertoire of narrative details in his writing—character actions, dialogue, character thoughts and feelings—and can grow by adding other kinds of details to his repertoire.	25. Using Defining Details to Create a Vivid Character 26. Weaving in Setting Details	115 120
... writes using general words in his stories that make it hard to “see” a detailed picture of the characters, setting, and events.	27. Using Exact Words ✱ 28. Using Simile	126 131
... relies heavily on the transition “then” to signal changes between and within scenes.	29. Using Time Transitions ✱	138
... develops every scene in his story, even ones that don't play a crucial role.	30. Summarizing—Not Stretching—a Scene	143

Part Five: Crafting Nonfiction Sections

WHAT YOU FIND	CONFERENCES THAT CAN HELP	
The student...		Page
... is writing a section that is a series of details but lacks a topic sentence that gives an overview of the section.	31. Topic and Detail Sentences	149
... writes about a topic that will be unfamiliar to the intended audience.	32. Defining Unfamiliar Terms 37. Writing a Background Section	154 177
... is unsure how to use the material she gathered in an interview effectively in her draft.	33. Quoting Experts	158
... writes with an impersonal tone, similar to an encyclopedia entry.	34. Giving Voice to Nonfiction by Addressing the Reader 35. Giving Voice to Nonfiction by Commenting on Facts	162 166
... writes without using transitions from section to section, and consequently his draft is confusing to readers.	36. Using Paragraphs and Headings	171
... is writing a draft that would benefit from a narrative procedure (how-to section).	38. Writing a How-To Section	182
... has developed a point in a nonfiction piece with a narrative section, but the section is too long and overwhelms the piece.	39. Writing a Mini-Narrative Section	185

Part Six: Crafting Endings

WHAT YOU FIND	CONFERENCES THAT CAN HELP	
The student...		Page
... has ended with a scene that doesn't seem connected to the meaning of the story or has ended without communicating meaning explicitly.	40. Writing a Scene That's Integral to the Story ✱ 41. Writing a Reflection	193 197
... doesn't know how to end nonfiction pieces, and has ended his piece superficially or awkwardly.	42. Leaving the Reader Thinking 43. Connecting to the Reader's Life	202 206

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Crafting a Lead by Starting with an Important Scene

WHAT YOU FIND

The student who could be helped by this conference is writing a story that starts with a scene that:

- is not essential to the story.
- does not contribute to the point she wants to make.

CONFERENCE PURPOSE

Teach the student to write a story by starting with an essential scene.

MODEL TEXT

Shortcut by Donald Crews or another story that begins with an essential scene

I SEE THAT YOU'RE STARTING YOUR STORY WITH A SCENE, WHICH IS ONE way that writers write a *lead*. A lead is the first part of a story. It draws in the reader, gets the reader interested, and tells what the story is about. Based on what you've told me your story is about, I don't think the scene you've chosen to start with is a lead. It doesn't help tell your point. I want to talk about how to decide what scene to start a story with.

Share a Model Text

Let's take a look at the lead of Donald Crews' *Shortcut*.

We looked
We listened
We decided to take
the shortcut home.
We should have taken the road.
But it was late, and it was
getting dark, so we
started down the track.

Just like you, Crews begins his story with a scene, one in which the children make a decision to walk along the railroad tracks to get home. This scene shows how the kids get on the train tracks, which is important because they get themselves into a dangerous situation later in the story and nearly get hit by a train. The scene helps us understand the message Crews wants us to think about: to think twice before we decide to do something dangerous. In this

first scene, the kids *don't* think twice, and we learn what happens because of that.

Crews could have chosen to start his book with a scene that was earlier that day—perhaps the kids were visiting friends, perhaps they were picking berries. He didn't start with a scene earlier in the day, though, because whatever the kids did then isn't important to the story. Whatever they might have been doing—visiting friends, picking berries—it wouldn't help us understand his message.

Explain a Strategy

Sometimes writers need to rethink the scene they want to start with. Sometimes we have to *cut*, that is, cross out, the first scene we have written—and sometimes we even cut the first few scenes we have written—because we realize that the scene isn't an important part of the story we want to tell. It does not help get our message across to the reader.

Coach the Student

I'd like to help you revise your draft by thinking about which scenes are essential to your story and would make a good lead.

- ▶ What point are you trying to get across to your reader? What do you want the reader to know or feel at the end?
- ▶ How does this first scene help you get across your point?
- ▶ Is there a scene that would be a better lead because it shows the reader what your story is about?

Link to the Student's Writing

You now have a good idea of which scene makes the most sense to start with. Remember, when you start with a scene, pick one that's important to your story, one that plays a part in helping the reader understand your message.

FOLLOW-UP

As students develop as writers, show how writers sometimes write several scenes that precede the main action of the story, but these scenes still contribute to the story. For example, in the picture book *Saturdays and Teacakes*, author Lester Laminack tells the story of a visit to his grandmother's house. Laminack begins the story by telling about his long bicycle ride to his grandmother's house. He tells this in such a way that we learn about young Lester, the time period (the 1960s), and the setting (rural Alabama).

SOURCES

This conference, and the many other conferences in *Strategic Writing Conferences* that focus on narrative craft, has been inspired by many educators. This conference, in particular, was inspired by Ralph Fletcher's comment in a workshop I attended fifteen years ago that writers start their stories "at the waterfall, not twenty miles upstream." Ralph has written brilliantly about narrative craft in his books *What a Writer Needs* (1993), and with his co-author, JoAnn Portalupi, *Craft Lessons* (1998) and *Teaching the Qualities of Writing* (2004). Barry Lane's book *After THE END: Teaching and Learning Creative Revision* (1992) has been helpful to me and to many other teachers. Katherine Bomer's wonderful book on memoir, *Writing a Life: Teaching Memoir to Sharpen Insight, Shape Meaning—and Triumph Over Tests* (2005), has also inspired me. More recently, Lucy Calkins and colleagues from the Teacher's College Reading and Writing Project (TCRWP) have written about teaching narrative craft in *Units of Study for Teaching Writing, Grades 3-5* (2006).

We looked
We listened
We decided to take
the shortcut home.
We should have taken the road.
But it was late, and it was
getting dark, so we
started down the track.

– from *Shortcut* by Donald Crews