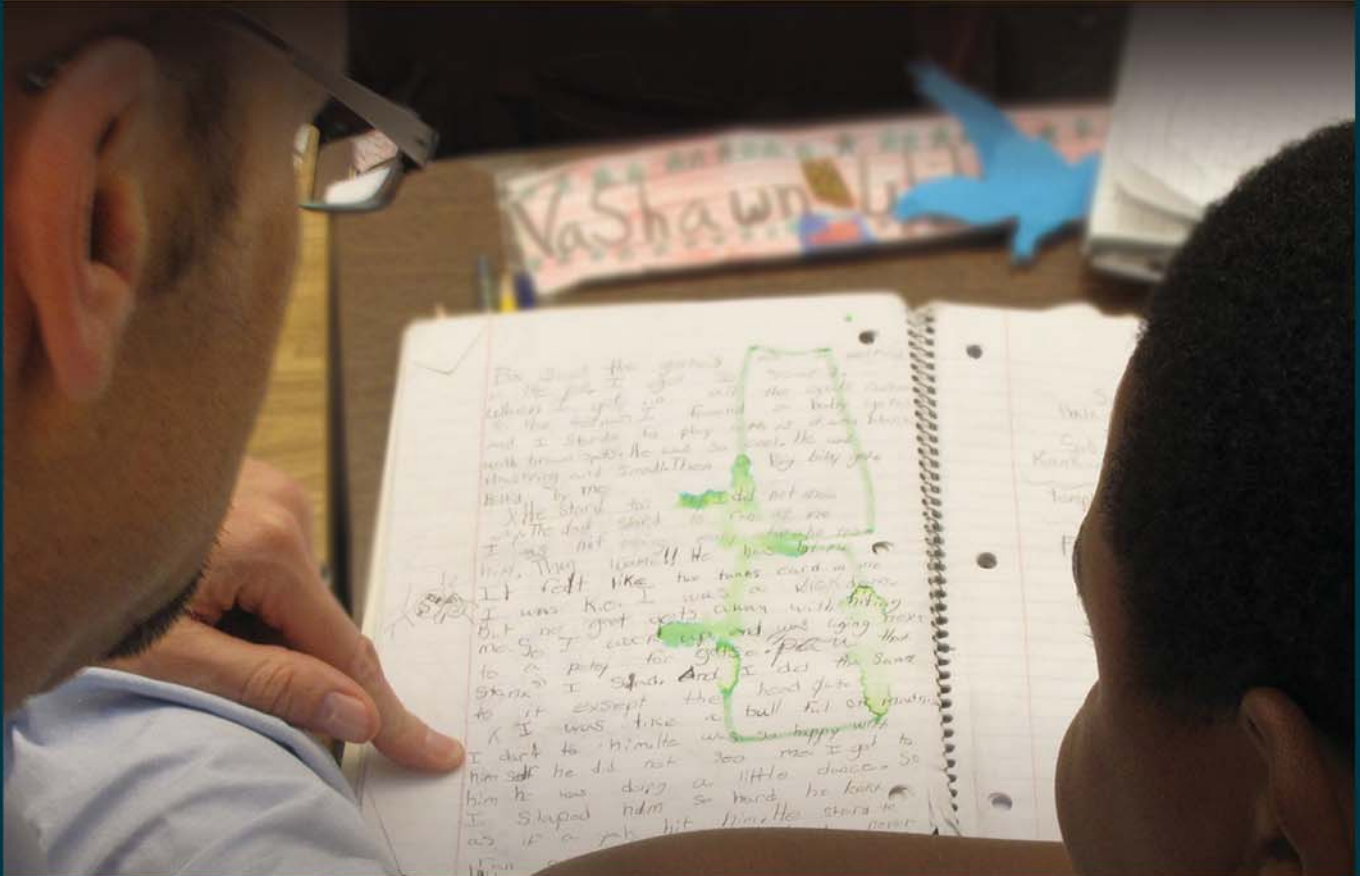


# VIDEO VIEWING GUIDE

## MARK OVERMEYER



### HOW CAN I SUPPORT YOU?

*Strategies for Effective Writing Conferences*



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# INTRODUCTION

This guide is designed to support facilitated discussions about conferences in the writing workshop.

These videos of third and fifth graders were taken at Eastridge Elementary School in the Cherry Creek School District in Aurora, Colorado. Each conference features a student in a different place in the writing process, or a student with a particular strength and need. A small-group conference and a peer conference are included on the DVD.

These video clips are meant to spark a discussion; they do not represent “perfect” conferences. A conference is first and foremost a dialogue or conversation between a writer and a reader. It is impossible to plan for the perfect conference because the teacher (the reader in the dialogue) never knows how a student (the writer in the dialogue) will respond when a suggestion is made. The hope is that these conferences will provide an opportunity for further discussions as teachers seek to become more skilled facilitators in a workshop setting.

A suggestion for viewing all videos is to ask teachers to take notes about what they notice. This will help to differentiate the viewing experience prior to the discussion—if the actual viewing is framed too narrowly (e.g., “While you watch this conference, notice how Mark supports Joshua as he adds details to his personal essay”), teachers may miss out on other parts of the conference. A viewing organizer is provided on page 12.

Following are some suggested note-taking frames for teachers as they view the conferences.

- Helpful language that moved the conference along:
- Teaching moves made during the conference:
- This reminds me of a student in my class . . .
- Instead of saying \_\_\_\_\_, I might . . .
- A strength I have during conferences is . . .
- A struggle I have during conferences is . . .

## USING THIS GUIDE

The guide is organized by the title of each conference. Each conference title is followed by:

- a short description of the conference;
- suggested questions for discussion;
- suggestions for how to use student work samples after viewing a

- conference; and
- extensions (for some conferences).

Most conferences are less than five minutes, so they are easily adaptable to short, focused discussions, or they can be used as a way to start a staff discussion about a larger topic within writing instruction.

## CONFERENCES

### *Joshua: Teaching From a Student's Strengths*

In this conference, Mark is discussing a new essay Josh has been working on. He focuses on strengths Joshua has already demonstrated in previous essay drafts to move Joshua forward as a writer.

#### Questions for Discussion

1. How does Mark invite Joshua into the conference? What language does he use to create an invitation for Joshua, to indicate how he might be supported as a writer?
2. Think of the writers in your classroom. What kinds of invitational language might you use to begin a conference?
3. Mark comments about how Joshua and Edwin support each other as writers in this classroom. What rituals and routines might you set up in your classroom to encourage writers to support each other?
4. Think of a writer in your classroom. What writing strengths does he or she already exhibit that can be used again in his or her writing?

#### Using Student Work Samples After Viewing This Conference

1. Using a sticky note, mark a place where a student has done something well. Discuss with your table group or a partner how you might use this strength to encourage the student to write more.
2. Look for a student work sample that teaches you something about

- the student. How might you use this knowledge to invite the student to become a stronger writer?
3. As you look at student writing, do any common themes emerge? Are any students writing about similar themes that would allow you to think about possible peer partnerships?

## Extensions

During a mini-lesson, share a piece of student writing and point out a strength. Ask all of the students in your class to find something in their own pieces that is well-written. Model for students how they might use this strength to find another place to make their own writing better.

### *Edwin: Let the Student Take the Lead*

In this conference, Mark asks Edwin to decide how he might need writing support.

## Questions for Discussion

1. What kinds of questions might you ask students so that you can meet their needs as writers?
2. Mark knows Edwin's earlier writing. Think for a few minutes about a piece of student writing you read recently. Share with a partner what you remember about this writing. If you cannot remember something you read recently, what might you do to change your reading of student work so that you begin to connect students' past writing to current writing?

## Using Student Work Samples After Viewing This Conference

Edwin laughed when he was telling part of his story during the conference. Look through student writing samples for pieces that evoke an emotion. How might you use these samples as models for the class during mini-lessons to help them understand how emotional connections can create stronger writing?

### *Richard: Verbal Rehearsal as a Planning Tool*

During this conference, Mark encourages Richard to verbally rehearse before drafting a piece.

## Questions for Discussion

1. Consider the pieces your students are currently writing. What are some questions you can ask them during conferences that will help them to plan and organize their pieces?
2. If you use a specific planning tool or organizer to help students with their pieces, is this tool helpful? Does the tool help students become stronger writers? If not, how might you change it? If so, do all students need the tool?

## Using Student Work Samples After Viewing This Conference

As you look at student samples, is there evidence that some students might benefit from more verbal rehearsal or planning? If so, what might you do as a teacher to encourage rehearsal and planning before writing?

## Extensions

During a mini-lesson, model for students the importance of finding a topic that is “big” enough or important enough to write about. Model your thinking as you choose between two or three ideas you might consider writing about, and choose one of them for reasons you state clearly to students. As you confer with students after this mini-lesson, ask them to clarify for you whether or not they chose an appropriate topic based on its importance or relevance.

## *Angelina: Praise, Confirm, and Move On*

Mark talks with Angelina, who is a strong, independent writer.

## Questions for Discussion

1. What are your concerns about conferring with advanced writers?
2. Mark makes some suggestions about working with advanced writers during conferences. Do his suggestions match your beliefs and/or practices? What else have you tried with advanced writers, or what might you try?

## Using Student Work Samples After Viewing This Conference

1. Find examples of very strong writing in the work samples you brought today. Think about how you might enter into a conference with each of these strong students.

2. Do your strong writers have similar strengths and needs, or are they all very unique? Consider how to work with these stronger writers. Is it possible to group them together for a guided writing conference, or do they need to stay separate during conferences so that you can focus more on individual strengths and needs?

## Extension

Discuss in table groups what you might do to raise the rigor for stronger writers.

## *Matthew: Can You Describe More Here?*

In this conference, Mark is helping Matthew continue to draft his essay about going to the pool. Because Matthew chooses very specific, personal topics to support his big idea, Mark asks a lot of wondering questions to clarify his understanding before launching into a teaching point. Included in this clip is a scene where Matthew shares his work with his classmates.

## Questions for Discussion

1. When you are unclear about the content of a student's piece, is there language you can use to help the student understand that you are trying to clarify rather than evaluate? Did you notice helpful language in the conference, or would you have framed the conference in a different way?
2. During the sharing time, Mark asks Matthew to share and gives the rest of the students something to listen for. What might you ask students to listen for while others share their pieces?
3. What are some routines you have used during sharing time that can also make this a teaching and learning time?
4. How might you change your sharing time to include more opportunities for teaching and learning?

## Using Student Work Samples After Viewing This Conference

1. Read several student work samples and consider ways to cue students during sharing time to listen for strengths in particular pieces of writing. What might you ask the other students to listen for while these writers share?
2. As you read student drafts, look for places where students might need to clarify their meaning. Consider how you might enter into a conference with each of these students.

## *Azizbek: Scaffolding Language for English Language Learners*

In this conference, Mark works with Azizbek, an English language learner who is planning and drafting a personal narrative. You might notice that Azizbek is speaking and writing in the present tense, whereas Mark clarifies the story using verbs in the past tense. Azizbek is new to English, so Mark makes the choice not to correct these past-and-present-tense issues; he simply models the correct tense instead. This decision is based on how teachers work with English language learners according to their level of English proficiency.

### Questions for Discussion

1. What types of questions and language cues seem to support English language learners the most?
2. How might English language learners use pictures to create meaning in your writing classroom? Think about how they can use pictures in different genre studies during the year.

### Using Student Work Samples After Viewing This Conference

1. When you examine writing samples from English language learners, make a list of things they know and things they seem to be ready to learn.
2. Consider what questions you might ask English language learners during a conference. Can the writer respond to open-ended questions (e.g., “What happened next?”), or do you have to support the writer with more closed questions (e.g., “Did you stay at your friend’s house or did you go home?”)?

### Extension

If you have a large numbers of English language learners in your classroom, or if you are working with them in a small group, develop language objectives—not just writing objectives—for a writing unit. This will help you to plan more intentionally about how you will use reading, writing, speaking, and listening during your writing lessons.

Examples of possible language objectives for a personal narrative unit follow:

#### *Speaking*

- Students will tell a story out loud to a partner in preparation for writing.
- Students will share a story from a series of sequenced labeled

pictures, using transition words to move from scene to scene.

### ***Listening***

- Students will listen to sample personal narratives told by other students and read aloud by the teacher. They will listen for genre-specific language during the read-aloud (e.g., sequenced events, descriptions, and transition words).

### ***Reading***

- Students will read their own work and edit for specific skills taught in previous mini-lessons.
- Students will read personal narrative model texts and notice how these narratives are organized in scenes.
- Students will read personal narrative model texts and notice how a writer uses description to clarify a story.

### ***Writing***

- Students will plan, draft, revise, and edit their own personal narratives.

## ***Group Conference: Zooming In and Saving Time***

Mark works with a small group of fifth graders who all have a similar teaching need during a personal narrative unit. Mark refers to a story map, which is a visual representation using quickly sketched scenes in a style reminiscent of a comic book. All of the students were asked to sketch a sequence of events in their writer's notebooks using a series of five to ten boxes.

### **Questions for Discussion**

1. What are the advantages and disadvantages of a small-group conference?
2. How would you prepare differently for a small-group conference than you would for a one-on-one conference?
3. Based on your current writers, what kinds of groups might you pull together in your classroom if you wanted to try this type of conference?
4. Is there a place for small-group editing conferences, where students are asked to edit their own work for capitalization, punctuation, grammar, and spelling errors? Or should this kind of conference be used only for revision work, where students try to improve their writing by paying attention to word choice, focus, organization, and writing crafts?
5. Mark uses his own writing as an example for students in this video

clip. How might you use your own writing in student conferences to help clarify a teaching point? Is there a particular piece of writing you have in your notebook right now that might illuminate a teaching point for some of your writers?

### Using Student Work Samples After Viewing This Conference

Look for common teaching points in your students' writing. Stack pieces with similar teaching points together and think about how you might work with this group of students as they revise.

## BONUS FOOTAGE

### *Peer Conference: What Do You Think I Should Do Here?*

In this conference, fifth grader Alysha seeks support from Julian as she shares her personal narrative draft.

### Questions for Discussion

1. What are the advantages and disadvantages of peer conferences?
2. What would need to be in place in your classroom for peer conferences to be successful?

### Using Student Work Samples After Viewing This Conference

Read student work samples with the goal of finding peer partners who might work well together.

# ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

Most of the conferences in this DVD happen to be with boys. Consider some of the following questions as you think about boy writers in your classroom:

1. As you reflect about conferring with boys, do you notice any particular strategies that work with boy writers, particularly those who are resistant to the writing process?
2. Mark notes that Edwin and Joshua are friends, and that they often write about each other. Do you have any students in your class right now who might benefit from writing about similar topics?

# Viewing Organizer

**Helpful language that moved the conference along:**

**Teaching moves made during the conference:**

**This reminds me of a student in my class . . .**

**Instead of saying \_\_\_\_\_, I might . . .**

**A strength I have during conferences is . . .**

**A struggle I have during conferences is . . .**