Yesterday got off to a bad start. I was about to sit down for my morning bowl of cereal when I opened the refrigerator and found an unpleasant surprise. Overnight, the refrigerator’s thermostat had gone haywire and all of my breakfast staples—milk, orange juice, strawberries—had frozen solid.

When the repairman arrived this morning, he was accompanied by a trainee. As the experienced repairman diagnosed the problem and fixed the thermostat, he stopped and demonstrated each step of that process to the rookie. I later learned that this was not the trainee’s first day. Before being sent into the field, he had taken a basic training class. Having passed the class, he was now spending six weeks in the field learning firsthand from an experienced repairman before being allowed to answer calls on his own.

After the refrigerator was repaired, my wife, Kristin, and I went to a local restaurant for lunch. When the waitress took our order, we noticed that another waitress was shadowing her. It turns out that the waitress who greeted us was experienced, and she was training the new hire how to properly take an order. Over a week’s time, the new waitress would gradually take over.
While eating lunch, Kristin, a freelance writer who regularly writes for a large automaker’s in-house magazine, told me she was writing an article on what it takes to become an auto mechanic. She had learned that before becoming a certified auto mechanic, employees start by taking basic classes. Once they pass their classes, new mechanics work alongside master mechanics for an extended internship. Though the classes taken prior to the internship are helpful, she was told by a number of new mechanics she interviewed that it was seeing the master mechanics diagnose and repair problems that had best prepared them. This is why new mechanics are not awarded their own service bays until they have spent extended time watching the master mechanics doing repair demonstrations.

As the day unfolded I began to see a theme developing. In all three of these learning situations—involving the refrigerator repairman, the waitress, and the auto mechanic—the person learning the new skill benefited greatly by having the skill modeled by an expert. All three of them learned from somebody who didn’t just tell them how to do the new skill, but who also demonstrated the new skill.

Reflecting on the importance an apprenticeship plays in the learning process reminds me of what the writer Ann Berthoff once said: “We aren’t born knowing how to write, but we are born knowing how to know how.” This chapter is built on the premise that when it comes to writing, the best way to know how to know how is by seeing the writing process consistently modeled by the best writer in that classroom—the teacher. Telling the students what constitutes good writing is not enough. As apprentices, students must see the process in action. Much like the new auto mechanic, our students need to see how the work is done “in the field.” They don’t need a teacher who assigns writing; they need a teacher who demonstrates what good writers do.

When the teacher becomes a writing model by actually writing alongside the students, many benefits, for both teachers and students, emerge:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Why Teachers Should Write Alongside Their Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Benefits to Teachers</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers better understand the writing task when they do it themselves. There is no substitute for doing when it comes to understanding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers, when they write, uncover the hard parts and are thus better able to see which mini-lessons will most benefit their students. Writing done by the teacher drives better instruction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers can model that writing is challenging. This demonstrates to students that good writing is almost always the product of multiple revisions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers who complete a specific writing task develop a clearer sense of how to assess that writing task.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
It has been my experience that my students write better when I roll up my sleeves and write alongside them. With this in mind, this chapter will focus on specific modeling strategies teachers can use to help students internalize the things good writers do. It might be helpful to break these strategies into two categories: (1) modeling strategies teachers can use to promote better first-draft writing, and (2) modeling strategies teachers can use to help drive better revision.

Modeling Strategies That Promote Better First-Draft Writing

For many of my students, getting started is the hardest part of composing. Why? Because writing is hard, and beginning a writing task creates a formidable cognitive hurdle for inexperienced or reluctant writers. Unfortunately, many students continue year in and year out with the mistaken notion that writing is easy for some and difficult for others (generally speaking, they think writing is easy for the teacher and difficult for the students). My guess is that they have reached this erroneous conclusion primarily due to one of two reasons:

1. They have teachers who do not actively write. As a result, these teachers may have forgotten how hard they themselves struggled as developing writers. When teachers do not write, students lose the opportunity to see adults successfully struggle through the writing process.

or

2. They have teachers who do actively write but who have become expert at hiding the work it takes from their students. Often when teachers share their own writing, it is only after extensive revising and polishing that has been done out of the sight of the students.

Students’ anxiety is reduced when they come to understand that everyone—students, teachers, professional writers—has to work hard when they sit down to write. Even Stephen King, one of the most prolific writers working today, has to fight self-doubt when he sits down to write, as he recounts in On Writing:

*With the door shut, downloading what’s in my head directly to the page, I write as fast as I can and still remain comfortable. Writing fiction, especially a long work of fiction, can be a difficult, lonely job; it’s like crossing the Atlantic Ocean in a bathtub. There’s plenty of opportunity for self-doubt. If I write rapidly, putting down my story exactly as it comes into my mind, only looking back to check the names of my characters and the relevant parts of their back stories,*
I find that I can keep up with my original enthusiasm and at the same time outrun the self-doubt that’s always waiting to settle in. (2000, p. 209)

Rather than hide the fact that writing is a constant struggle against the “self-doubt” King refers to, teachers serve their students better when they reveal their own writing doubts. What better way to model how to handle these doubts and the various challenges of writing than to compose in front of the students? Though students already know that writing is hard, they do not realize that more experienced writers often struggle as much as they do. Our students stand a greater chance of internalizing and embracing the complexity of writing when they see their teachers struggle to internalize and embrace the complexity of writing.

Beyond the notion that writing is hard, a second reason surfaces to explain why my students have a difficult time diving into a first draft: they are often afraid their writing will be lousy. Writing is personal and risky, and many of my students are paralyzed by the notion that the writing they produce will be sub-par (especially when it comes to sharing their writing with their teacher and peers). They often feel they have nothing interesting to say, or if they do have an idea, they are unsure how to get it down on paper. My response to students faced with writing apprehension is simple and straightforward: Join the crowd.

Students do not understand that most first-draft writing, for everyone, is lousy. But a good writer recognizes that a lot of lousy first-draft writing must be done before better writing can occur. To help get students over the fear of failure, I begin our writing year by sharing the following poem:

Don’t Be Afraid to Fail
Author unknown

You’ve failed many times, although you may not remember.
You fell down the first time you tried to walk.
You almost drowned the first time you tried to swim, didn’t you?
Did you hit the ball the first time you swung a bat?
Heavy hitters, the ones who hit the most home runs, also strike...
out a lot.
English novelist
John Creasey got
752 rejection slips
before he published
564 books.
Babe Ruth struck out
1,330 times,
but he also hit 714 home runs.
Don’t worry about failure.
Worry about the
chances you miss
when you don’t
even try.

After sharing the poem I remind my students that Peter Elbow (1998) once said a person’s best writing is often mixed up with his worst. I tell them it is a requirement in my class to produce a lot of bad writing. From bad writing, I tell them, the seeds of good writing will eventually grow. Bad writing is necessary before good writing emerges. To better encourage them to take risks in first-draft writing and to understand that first- and second-draft writing are not the same thing, I share with them the chart depicted in Figure 3.1.

This chart, developed by my friend and mentor Mary K. Healy, who was an early leader in the Bay Area Writing Project, reinforces the idea that before writers can get it right they first have to get it down. Ralph Fletcher, in What a Writer Needs (1993), calls getting the first draft down “the sneeze.” He encourages students to blast out their thoughts without fear of how the writing will turn out. Once students recognize that first-draft writing is tentative and exploratory in nature, their trepidations begin to dissipate. This is the first step in breaking down their reticence.

Figure 3.1 MK’s first- vs. second-draft comparison chart

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First-Draft Writing</th>
<th>Second-Draft Writing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Down” draft (get it down)</td>
<td>“Up” draft (fix it up)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Done to work out what one thinks or understands</td>
<td>Done to demonstrate “final” thinking on a topic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is tentative and exploratory in form</td>
<td>Done with careful attention to content and mechanics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Done for self or trusted reader</td>
<td>Is handed in with previous draft</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receives response but no grade</td>
<td>Is often assessed/graded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Response comes from:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self</td>
<td>Self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peers</td>
<td>Peers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>Teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>Parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>Friends</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Beyond getting students to embrace the difficulty of writing and helping them accept the notion that it’s okay for first-draft writing to be lousy, here are five additional ideas to consider. When implemented, these ideas help lower student anxiety about first-draft writing.

1. Move Beyond the ‘Grecian Urn Approach’

I remember clearly the moment in my first year of teaching when I was preparing to assign my students an analytical essay on the novel they had just finished reading. Because this was the first big essay I was teaching, I felt unsure how to explain the assignment. When I shared my hesitance with the veteran teacher next door, she told me that my students would write better essays if I wrote a sample essay first—a model—and then shared it with them. This sounded reasonable to me, so the night before assigning the essay, I sat down at home and carefully wrote a draft. Because I wanted to make sure my students had a good model, I then spent some time revising it. And then I revised it a few more times. Since my writing would serve as THE MODEL, I wanted to make sure the students saw a highly polished final product—something to which, if they set their writing hearts to it, they could aspire.

Unfortunately, that’s not how it turned out. My model seemed to scare my students away as much as it inspired better writing. I had succumbed to what Ron Strahl, the director of the South Basin Writing Project, calls the “Grecian Urn Approach.” It’s the idea that simply showing students a Grecian urn will be enough to inspire them to produce Grecian urns of their own. There is only one problem with the “Grecian Urn Approach”: it doesn’t work.

What I have now come to realize is that the value is not in showing my students the Grecian urn; the value is in showing them the process, step-by-step, that is used to construct the urn. When I brought in my model essay for my students, I was doing nothing more than showing them the Grecian urn. However, I had hidden from them the most valuable part—the steps, often torturous, I took to get to the polished product. I would have been better off helping my students to understand the process of writing by showing them the steps in my process. Modeling is particularly important in the first-draft stage, when reluctant writers are more likely to give writing a shot if they see that struggling with the complexity of the process is normal for all writers—even for their teacher. Handing out polished final drafts at the beginning of the school year does not sharpen my students’ writing skills; the polishing of my students’ writing begins when I explicitly write, step-by-step, alongside my students.

When I assign a complex writing task now, I write alongside my students. While I write, I project my work on a screen for all to see. I am fortunate enough to have a projection system that allows my writing (either handwritten or typed on a computer) to be projected on a large screen in front of the classroom. Before I had this system, I simply composed on transparencies on an overhead projector. When I write with my students, I demonstrate the messiness of first-draft writing by doing all the things writers do when they put their...
initial sneeze onto paper (e.g., stop and start, cross words out, consider different approaches). I think out loud as I begin composing and ask students to chart the number of decisions I make while writing my first paragraph. Most important, I model letting go of the idea that this first draft has to be the best thing I have ever written, reminding them constantly that lousy first-draft writing is a prerequisite for this class.

Instead of presenting my students with a polished, finished product, students are given an extensive look at the many steps that go into creating a polished, finished product. Rather than show them an urn, I show students the steps involved in creating the urn. There is a big difference between the two.

2. Adopt a 4:1 Grading Philosophy

Another way to encourage students to start writing is to let them know up front that you, the teacher, will not be grading everything they write. I cannot think of one approach more likely to freeze an adolescent writer in his tracks than knowing that whatever he puts down on paper will be scored. Imagine being a painter and every time you try a new medium or new brush stroke technique someone looms over you with a grade book. Imagine picking up a new musical instrument and every time you experimentally hit an incorrect note someone records your shortcomings. This approach is ridiculous. Every painter and every musician has good days and has bad days. This is true for writers as well—especially for those trying to gain a footing in the skill. In fact, going through numerous writing experiences, both good and bad, are prerequisites to elevating a novice’s writing.

Students will become more open to writing when they know that not everything they will write will be scrutinized under the grading microscope. I will discuss assessment in greater detail in Chapter 7, but let me preview that chapter here by suggesting two guiding assessment philosophies in my classroom that encourage adolescents to start writing:

1. Students need coaches more than they need critics. As a result, I do not grade everything they write. As a general rule of thumb, students are asked to write four times more than I can physically assess. In the initial writing stages, I concentrate on being a coach, not a grader.
2. First drafts should not be graded. Outside of timed writing, I never grade first drafts. Students are given credit, not grades, for their effort in first drafts. Once they have written a number of different pieces (usually between three and five), students select one of their pieces to move into the revision process. This paper will eventually be assessed at a determined point in the process—not always at the end. Sometimes, for example, I might stop the paper before it has gone completely through the process so that I can score the degree of revision; other times I will grade after the editing process.
Having students write more than I can grade gives them permission to write crummy first drafts; this, in turn, lowers their anxiety, freeing them up to get started. Again, tips on providing feedback that drives better writing will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 7.

3. **Talk the Paper Out**

Sydney Sheldon, author of a number of very long best sellers, “writes” his novels by first dictating them into a tape recorder. When he is finished talking a novel out, he has the dictation typed up, and it is at this time that he begins his revision process. I think of Sheldon’s process every time a student says to me, “I know what I want to say, but I don’t know how to start writing it.” At this point I encourage my students to verbalize their thinking, to talk out their essays. For some of my students it’s easier to start talking the paper out than it is to start writing it.

At the beginning of the year I have every student talk out at least one paper, usually by asking them to tell an autobiographical story. I model this by first talking out my own story. As I talk, I model taking notes about the key points using the screen for everyone to see. I then pair students, and as one is talking out his or her story, the other takes careful notes. When the first student is finished talking, the partner hands over the notes. These notes serve as an outline for the first student’s essay. The roles are then reversed.

After this assignment, students can sign out the classroom’s handheld tape recorder if they have an easier time getting started by first dictating what it is they want to write.

4. **Model How to Create a Map Before Writing**

Similar to the way the ABC (and D) exercise (discussed in Chapter 2) helps a student chart her writing course for on-demand writing, taking time to map their thoughts will help many of my students to write better first drafts. To help facilitate this thinking process, I often provide students with various graphic organizers to help them with their mapping. In Figure 3.2, for example, you will see Katherine’s writing map, created in response to the question, “Who shares responsibility for the deaths of Romeo and Juliet?” This map then becomes an outline for a literary analysis essay.

In Figure 3.3, you will find a graphic organizer completed by Beatriz when her ninth-grade class read *Animal Farm*. The class was asked, “Which animals played key roles in the liberties being lost on the farm?” In this particular organizer, Beatriz was asked to choose which animals were culpable and to support each choice with passages from the text. This organizer served as an outline for Beatriz’s essay (after she had chosen the order of her response).

When my students take the time to organize their thoughts before writing, they almost always write more fluent first drafts.
### Who is responsible for the deaths of Romeo and Juliet?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Friar Laurence</th>
<th>Nurse</th>
<th>Paris</th>
<th>Apothecary</th>
<th>Old Man Capulet</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Benvolio</strong></td>
<td>Benvenuto</td>
<td>Rome</td>
<td>Juliet</td>
<td>Paris</td>
<td>Primo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Friar Laurence</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>Nurse</td>
<td></td>
<td>Apothecary</td>
<td>Old Man Capulet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Nurse</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Paris</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Apologet</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Old Man Capulet</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Why Responsible?</th>
<th>Benvenuto was always aware of the grudge between the Capulets and the Montagues. When he tried to help Romeo, he knew that it was an attack. He was responsible for taking Romeo to the party. He is responsible for the deaths of Romeo and Juliet.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Friar Laurence tried to stop it. The nurse was responsible. Because she knew too much and didn't try to stop it. She knew that Romeo was among the Montagues and that all this was teenagers' hormones thinking. She is not to blame for what happened. He is in a way responsible for the deaths of the two lovers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Paris: It wasn't his fault that he was in love with Juliet but after killing his change to gain her love, Paris goes against her father. He is responsible for the death of the two lovers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Apothecary: Not having any intention to hurt Romeo or Juliet, he sold the potion to Romeo, He was in need of the money when he sold it but he is responsible for the death of the two lovers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Old Man Capulet: In a way, old man Capulet forced Juliet to use Friar Laurence's potion. The man Capulet put her against the wall when he said that she was to marry Paris or else she will be destroyed. Juliet could not bare living without Romeo or being a servant to her family.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Textual evidence**

Act III, IV

"In one respect I respect the fair Rosaline whom thou so loves without the admixture of reason,; she is so beautiful, and with no external eye, compare her face with that I shall show, And I make that think my submission."  

Act III, IV 1

"This mark, Romeo, and a Montague, the only secret of your great enemy."  

Act III, IV 2

"What makes you change your mind now? Tell me the reason, I do spy a kind of hope, which proves as troth as execution."  

Act IV

"Dear lady, I do spy a kind of hope, which proves as troth as execution."  

Act IV 1

"Then tell us what you say unto mine Spirit, the others I will answer, the rest is beyond my strength."

Act V

"And that we have a custom to have no life."

---

*Figure 3.2 Student writing map: Who is responsible for R/J deaths?*
It is important to note that I do not simply begin the year by handing these organizers to my students and asking them to complete them. When introducing them, I complete the organizers myself (as I, too, write the essay) so that they can hear the thinking that goes into creating effective writing maps.

5. Allow for Choice Within Given Topics or Discourses

Almost every state has writing standards that spell out which discourses students will be expected to write. One way to encourage students to begin writ-

Figure 3.3 Animal Farm

target notes

It is important to note that I do not simply begin the year by handing these organizers to my students and asking them to complete them. When introducing them, I complete the organizers myself (as I, too, write the essay) so that they can hear the thinking that goes into creating effective writing maps.

5. Allow for Choice Within Given Topics or Discourses

Almost every state has writing standards that spell out which discourses students will be expected to write. One way to encourage students to begin writ-
ing in these discourses is to give them choices within each discourse. For example, I recently visited a history class that had completed a unit titled, “Was the United States justified in invading Iraq?” The teacher had a list of “players” who held various opinions about America’s involvement (see Figure 3.4). Students were asked to choose a player and to write a persuasive piece from the point of view of that person. Because they were given some choice, they were much more willing to invest the necessary time and effort into their papers. On the due date, students stood up and read their papers to the class from the point of view of the person they had chosen. It created quite an interesting oral collage of opinions.

Although the choice in the Iraq assignment was limited, it helped motivate students to begin writing. Additional ideas for giving students more open choices and for generating interesting writing topics will be discussed in detail in Chapter 5.

I have found these five steps ([1] moving beyond the Grecian urn, [2] adopting a 4:1 philosophy, [3] talking the paper out, [4] modeling map making, and [5] providing students with choices) helpful in getting students on track when faced with first-draft writing. Now let’s turn our attention to modeling strategies that teachers can use to help drive better revision.

### Modeling Strategies to Help Drive Better Revision

E. B. White once said, “The best writing is rewriting.” Unfortunately, many of my students come to me with an “I wrote it once; I’m done” philosophy. I immediately start to break this notion down with an activity I learned from Patti Stock, the former director of the National Writing Project. Standing in front of the class, I tell students that when I say, “Go,” I want them to observe my behavior carefully and continue to do so until I say the word “Stop.” After I say, “Stop,” they are to write one sentence describing what they have just witnessed. When the students are ready I pause in the doorway of the classroom, say, “Go,” and then stride across the classroom and sit down in my chair. Once seated, I say, “Stop,” and ask the students to write down their one-sentence observations.

When they finish writing, we snake around the room and each student reads his or her sentence aloud. This is always fun because in a room of thirty...
students, no two answers are the same. This establishes the idea that writing is artistic. I tell the students that if we all sat around and made ceramic pots, they would all be different as well, that each of us would put our own artistic touch to the pots. The same is true with writing, I tell them. Writing is artistic, and through this exercise I want them to see themselves as artists when they sit down to write.

After we share the sentences on the first day of this activity, I have students hold on to them until the second day. When they return on day two I have them take out their sentences and I do a mini-lesson on the importance of strong verbs. I share the sentence I wrote on day one: “The teacher walked across the room and sat in the chair.” Then I revise my own sentence by making my verbs stronger: “The teacher strode across the room and plopped in his chair.” By replacing weak verbs with strong verbs I elevated my sentence. I ask the students to consider revising to upgrade their verbs (which presents a great opportunity to introduce the thesaurus). When they have added strong verbs to their sentences, I tell them to hold on to their papers until day three. When the students return on day three I conduct a new mini-lesson (e.g., turning a simple sentence into a complex sentence) and have them revise their sentences again. I repeat this process for five days until each student has five rewrites. Here, for example, are Alex’s five sentences:

Monday: The teacher walked across the room and sat into the chair.
Tuesday: The teacher sauntered across the room and sat into the chair.
Wednesday: The teacher sauntered across the room and collapsed into the chair.
Thursday: The teacher, Mr. Gallagher, sauntered across the room and collapsed into the chair.
Friday: Tired and cranky, Mr. Gallagher sauntered across the room and collapsed into the chair.

This lesson only takes five minutes a day, but by the end of the first week I have established E. B. White’s idea that the best writing is rewriting and that any student serious about creating worthwhile writing needs to understand the futility of an “I wrote it once; I’m done” mentality.

**Pimp My Write**

With the importance of rewriting established, I ask my students to write for fifteen minutes about something that bothers them. Below is my first-draft sneeze on this topic (written in front of the students):

**Draft 1**

The way some things are packaged bothers me. For example, it is physically impossible to open a pack of graham crackers without splitting the entire cello-
I defy you to open a box of cereal without mangling the bag. Cheese-its? Forget opening those with your bare hands. But when it comes down to torturous packaging, one product hovers above all: the packaging of CDs. I hate CD packaging.

It wasn’t always this difficult to listen to music. For those of us who grew up listening to records, we simply made a quick tear on the side of the album, and presto! In five seconds the record was in your hands, ready to be played. Today, you have a horrendous fight on your hands to get that little CD out of its packaging.

I am thoroughly convinced that the person who designed CD packaging also designed the bank vault at Fort Knox, where the nation’s gold supply is kept. That’s because I can’t get to the CD—the packaging is impenetrable.

Pretty good job of modeling a lousy first draft, wouldn’t you say? Before students start thinking about a second draft, I ask them how many of them seen the MTV show Pimp My Ride. (For the uninitiated, Pimp My Ride is a show in which someone who drives a junky car is chosen and their car is completely “pimped,” or customized. The remodeling is often extreme. For example, one person, a surfer, had the trunk of his car fitted with a customized clothes dryer so as not to have to drive home in wet swimming trunks. The remodelers do not stop at customizing the trunk, however; they continue “pimping” the car until it is overhauled bumper to bumper.) Most of my students have seen this show, and it doesn’t take much to get them to enthusiastically discuss their favorite episodes. They are amazed at how junky cars can be transformed into a beautiful new “whips.”

I tell my students that we are going to start our own show, entitled Pimp My Write. Much like the artists who take a junky car and make it much better, we are going to do the same thing with our junky first drafts. Just as there are a number of ways of transforming a car, I tell them, there are an equal number of ways of transforming an essay. I place a crummy first draft of mine up on the screen so the entire class can see my “pimping” process, and as I begin my revision, I think aloud. During the think-aloud I make sure I alert the students to the four major ways a writer can transform an essay (dubbed “STAR” by Richard Cornwell, a colleague in the South Basin Writing Project):

**S**ubstitute
**T**ake things out
**A**dd
**R**earrange

When introducing STAR, I had the class brainstorm specific actions a writer might undertake for each letter of the acronym. I helped them shape the language as we brainstormed, and we produced the following list:
With the steps of STAR in mind and still in front of my students, I create a second draft of my CD essay, again thinking aloud, discussing my revision decisions. Here is the second draft of the CD essay:

Draft 2

The way some things are packaged irks me.

For example, it is physically impossible to open a pack of graham crackers without splitting the entire cellophane wrapper. I defy you to open a box of Life cereal without mangling the bag. Cheese-its? Forget it! You cannot open those with your bare hands unless you have been working out daily with The Rock and have been gulping a daily dose of Barry Bonds’ steroids. But when it comes down to torturous packaging, one product wins the grand prize: CD packaging.

It is so hard to open a CD that I am thoroughly convinced that the person who designed CD packaging also designed the bank vault at Fort Knox, where the nation’s gold supply is kept. That’s because I can’t get to the CD—the packaging is impenetrable.

It wasn’t always this difficult to listen to music. For those of us who grew up listening to records, we simply made a quick tear on the side of the album, and presto!—in five seconds you were holding Led Zeppelin in your hands, ready to be played. Today, you have to have the patience of Mother Teresa to get that little CD out of its packaging. If you stick to it, you may finally get the CD out—the only problem is that by the time you finally get to the actual CD, chances are you will have aged so much that your musical tastes will have changed.

This second draft is an improvement on the first draft and models all four elements of revision: (1) substituting, (2) taking things out, (3) adding, and (4) rearranging. To help students see that I revised using all four elements, I distribute copies of both of my drafts. Through whole-class discussion, we review and mark up the draft, indicating specifically where I used each STAR element. Figure 3.5 depicts my draft after the class discussion. The handwritten letters show where each element of STAR was used.
After I have modeled this process, I ask the students to use the same process. I pass back their first drafts written about something that bothers them and ask them to “make them better.” For many students, “make them better” is often interpreted as recopying them neatly or typing them up. I caution them not to make this mistake by explaining that making your paper better is not the same thing as making it correct. I tell them, “We will work on correctness later. Right now I want you to revise your paper, like I did. When you finish your second draft, you should be able to point to specific places in your essay that show how your second draft is better than your first. The ‘stuff’ of your second-draft essay should be better than what is found in your first draft. When you lay your second draft down next to your first draft, you should be able to show the reader where your paper has moved. Your second draft should move away from your first draft in a way that makes it better. As

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mr. Gallagher’s 1st draft</th>
<th>Mr. Gallagher’s 2nd draft</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The way some things are packaged bothers me. For example, it is physically impossible to open a pack of Graham crackers without splitting the entire cellophane wrapper. I defy you to open a box of cereal without mangling the bag. Cheese-its? Forget opening those with your bare hands. But when it comes down to torturous packaging, one product hovers above all: the packaging of CDs. I hate CD packaging.</td>
<td>The way some things are packaged irritates me. For example, it is physically impossible to open a pack of Graham crackers without splitting the entire cellophane wrapper. I defy you to open a box of Life cereal without mangling the bag. Cheese-its? Forget it! You cannot open those with your bare hands unless you have been working out daily with The Rock and have been guzzling daily doses of Barry Bonds’ steroids. But when it comes down to torturous packaging, one product wins the grand prize: CD packaging.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It wasn’t always this difficult to listen to music. For those of us who grew up listening to records, we simply made a quick tear on the side of the album, and presto! In five seconds the record was in your hands, ready to be played. Today, you have a horrendous fight on your hands to get that little CD out of its packaging.</td>
<td>It is so hard to open a CD that I am thoroughly convinced that the person who designed CD packaging also designed the bank vault at Fort Knox, where the nation’s gold supply is kept. That’s because I can’t get to the CD—the packaging is impenetrable.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am thoroughly convinced that the person who designed CD packaging also designed the bank vault at Fort Knox, where the nation’s gold supply is kept. That’s because I can’t get to the CD—the packaging is impenetrable.</td>
<td>It wasn’t always this difficult to listen to music. For those of us who grew up listening to records, we simply made a quick tear on the side of the album, and presto! In five seconds you were holding Led Zeppelin in your hands, ready to be played. Today, you have to have the patience of Mother Theresa to get that little CD out of its packaging. If you stick to it, you may finally get the CD out—the only problem is that by the time you finally get to the actual CD, chances are you will have aged so much that your musical tastes will have changed.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Figure 3.5 Students recognize STAR in my CD revision

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you revise, consider the four things good writers do (STAR) when they rewrite.”

After students have written second drafts, I have them repeat the process that they had done earlier with my model. They lay their two drafts next to each other and indicate which STAR steps they employed to improve their initial drafts. In Figure 3.6 you will see a first and second draft written by Jimena, a freshman, and her markings of the four STAR elements she used while moving her first draft through revision.

**Surface Versus Deep Revision**

When students understand the importance of revision and the elements involved in moving an initial draft to a better place, I use the *Pimp My Ride* metaphor again to introduce the idea that within the STAR framework, there are two levels of revision—surface revision and deep revision. When
overhauling a car, there are surface-level improvements and deep-level improvements:

**Surface-Level Improvements**
as Seen on *Pimp My Ride*
- Giving the car a new paint job
- Reupholstering the ceiling lining
- Replacing the tires

**Deep-Level Improvements**
as Seen on *Pimp My Ride*
- Ripping out the back seats and replacing them with a movie projection system
- Putting a more powerful engine in the car
- Outfitting the car with hydraulics

We can make these same levels of improvement with our writing. I introduce this concept by sharing the following chart:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Levels of Revision</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Surface</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changing a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• word</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• phrase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• sentence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I then bring out my two drafts of the CD packaging essay and as a class we examine my revisions through a new lens by asking ourselves which revisions were surface and which revisions were deep. I record their responses on a t-chart up on the screen. An example of a class chart follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Examples of Surface Revision in the CD Essay</th>
<th>Examples of Deep Revision in the CD Essay</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Substituted words</td>
<td>Isolated the first sentence into its own paragraph for effect.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• “bothers” became “irked”</td>
<td>Added significant development, moving the piece from two paragraphs to three.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Took things out</td>
<td>Rearranged the sequence of the piece, moving paragraph two in the first draft to the last paragraph in draft two.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• removed the sentence: “I hate CD packaging.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Added details</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Life cereal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The Rock/Barry Bonds’ steroids</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Led Zeppelin</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rearranged sentences</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• combined two sentences to create the following sentence: “You cannot open those with your bare hands unless you have been working out with The Rock and have been gulping a daily dose of Barry Bonds’ steroids.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Students are then asked to revisit their own drafts and chart the levels of their own revisions. In Figure 3.7 you will see Jimena’s reflection on her levels of revision.
Let’s conclude this chapter with specific classroom strategies I have found helpful in moving students through both surface revisions and deep revisions. Here are four strategies that promote better surface revision.

**Surface Revision Through Sentence Branching**

Many first-draft papers have a lack of rhythm. I will often read papers that have the same monotonous structure: Six words, period. Eight words, period. Six words, period. Seven words, period. With such a lack of sentence variety, a droning sensation sets in.

To get more sophisticated sentence variety from students, I teach them the three places a sentence can be branched: front, middle, and end. Take the following simple sentence, for example:

**I drove my car to the beach.**

By adding blank lines to indicate the branches, I show my students visually where each of the three branches my be added to this sentence:

______, I drove my car to the beach.
I drove my car, ______, to the beach.
I drove my car to the beach, ______.
Taking each sentence, I have the class brainstorm possible front, middle, and end branches. For example:

**Front branch:**
Hurriedly, I drove my car to the beach.
After getting off work, I drove my car to the beach.
With my girlfriend sitting next to me, I drove my car to the beach.

**Middle branch:**
I drove my car, radio blasting, to the beach.
I drove my car, a ’68 Chevy, to the beach.
I drove my car, without a driver’s license, to the beach.

**End branch:**
I drove my car to the beach, hoping to find a good parking spot.
I drove my car to the beach, unaware of the policeman behind me.
I drove my car to the beach, praying the waves would be good.

To introduce this strategy in a longer piece of writing, I put up a first draft of my writing on the overhead and have the students identify the simple sentences. (To help this process I pick a draft where I have intentionally written many simple sentences.) We pick a sentence in the sample draft and I begin molding it in front of the class, connecting various branches to see what effects they create. After turning simple sentences into sentences that contain various branches, I have students revisit their second drafts and highlight their simple sentences. This gives them an instant visual of what kind of sentence variety they have (or don’t have) in their papers. They then begin creating more sophisticated sentences in their own drafts.

In *Image Grammar*, Harry Noden identifies a number of ways to modify sentences. Playing off the metaphor of writers as artists, Noden identifies the following “brush strokes” as methods writers use to enliven sentences:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Brush Stroke</th>
<th>Basic Sentence</th>
<th>Revised with Brush Stroke</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Paint with participles.</td>
<td>The player dribbled through the defense to make the winning basket.</td>
<td>Slicing and dicing, the player dribbled through the defense to make the winning basket.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paint with absolutes (a two-word combination—a noun and an ing or ed verb).</td>
<td>The surfer braved the cold water.</td>
<td>Lips trembling, knees knocking, the surfer braved the cold water.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paint with appositives (a noun that adds a second meaning to the preceding noun).</td>
<td>John surprisingly voted for the Republican candidate.</td>
<td>John, a Democrat, surprisingly voted for the Republican candidate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paint with adjectives shifted out of order.</td>
<td>The sleek, long, red automobile was beautiful.</td>
<td>The red automobile, sleek and long, was beautiful.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Chapter 3: Beyond the Grecian Urn

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Surface Revision Through Elimination of Some “Be” Verbs

It’s a cliché, but it’s true: weak verbs drive weak sentences. Conversely, strong verbs drive strong sentences. One way to improve student drafts instantly is by having them replace weak verbs with stronger verbs. When I introduce this idea I start with the “be” verbs:

be
being
is
am
are
was
were

Considering the following sentence and its revision:

The clouds were in the sky.
The clouds hung in the sky.

Replacing the “be” verb (“was”) with a stronger verb (“hung”) instantly elevates this sentence. Using a stronger verb also drives the revision to produce a more active sentence.

I begin by having students find the “be” verbs in a piece of my writing. After I model how to replace some of them with stronger verbs, I have students search out their “be” verbs in their first drafts and challenge them to replace some of them with stronger verbs.

Surface Revision Through Use of Synonyms for “Said”

When students use dialogue in their papers, they often lazily resort to the word “said” when it comes to attribution. Consider how the different attributions in the following sentences bring different shades of meaning into each sentence:

The man said, “I am next in line.”
The man bellowed, “I am next in line.”
The man whined, “I am next in line.”
The man threatened, “I am next in line.”
The man admonished, “I am next in line.”

When dialogue is present, have students create different shades of meaning for “said.” To find lists of synonyms, Google the phrase “synonyms for said.”
Surface Revision Through Limiting Dead Words

Over the course of my years of teaching, I have generated a list of “dead” words—words that my students overuse to the point that they lose their meaning. Here is my dead word list:

- good
- very
- thing(s)
- really
- a lot
- etc.
- gonna
- got
- kind of
- like
- so + well (at beginning of sentences)
- totally
- I think
- I feel
- I believe
- in my opinion
- in conclusion
- +
- @
- &
- #

For example, a student might write, “The pizza was good.” I ask my students for suggestions to replace the dead word “good”:

- The pizza was scrumptious.
- The pizza was delicious.
- The pizza was mouth watering.
- The pizza was delectable.
- The pizza was fresh.

All of these sentences are improvements. If time permits, I might ask them to revisit the sentence again with a focus on replacing the “be” verb (e.g., “The pizza tasted fresh”), or have them revisit it again with sentence branching in mind (e.g., “The pizza, piping hot from the oven, tasted fresh” or “Piping hot from the oven, the pizza tasted fresh”).

Replacing dead words in a second draft often raises the level of the paper. However, a word of caution: it is important that students not concern themselves with dead words during the initial drafting stage. To illustrate this, I show them a first draft of my writing that contains dead words. This is normal, I tell them. In fact, I add, I do not think about dead words while I am drafting because doing so inhibits my creativity and motivation. I have a strict rule: Dead-word hunts are reserved for late drafts only. I will not hunt for dead words in my own writing until after I have moved through a number of drafts. It is also important to note that dead words are always permissible in dialogue or in any piece where the writer is trying to capture the authenticity of speech.

Modeling Deep Revision

I begin nudging students toward deep revision after they gain confidence in surface revision strategies. Julie Lecesne-Switzer, a colleague in the South Basin Writing Project, discusses deep revision with her students in terms of the following priorities:
Priorities in Revision

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Priorities in Revision</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Content</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elaboration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language Use</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following sections describe four strategies that have proved helpful in getting students to revise with these priorities in mind.

Modeling Deep Revision by Changing the Content

One frequent problem with first-draft writing is that it is often too broad and unfocused. One remedy for this is to have students revise, as Ralph Fletcher suggests in *What a Writer Needs* (1993), with the intent of writing smaller. This does not mean reducing the size of your handwriting or font; writing smaller means focusing on and illuminating something small in the story as a means of helping the reader understand the big picture. To introduce this idea to my students, I share the following two pieces of writing about the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Center. I ask them to read the two pieces and tell me which one they feel is the better piece of writing:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Version One</th>
<th>Version Two</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>At 8:46 AM (local time), the terrorists piloted the first plane into the north tower of the World Trade Center in New York City. The huge twin towers (completed 1970–72) were designed by Minoru Yamasaki (1912–1986). At 1,368 ft (417 m) and 1,362 ft (415 m) tall, they were the world’s tallest buildings until surpassed in 1973 by the Sears Towers in Chicago. The towers were notable for the relationship of their simple, light embellishment to their underlying structure. In 1993 a bomb planted by terrorists exploded in the underground garage, killing several people and injuring some 1,000. A much more massive attack occurred on Sept. 11, 2001, when first One World Trade Center and then Two World Trade Center were struck by hijacked commercial airliners deliberately flown into them. Shortly thereafter both of the heavily damaged towers, as well as adjacent buildings, collapsed into enormous piles of debris. The attacks—the deadliest terrorist assault in history—claimed the lives of some 2,800 victims. Thousands more were injured.</td>
<td>With Tommy Knox (who died in the World Trade Center) it was often the little things. The way he put toothpaste on his wife’s toothbrush when he got up before her, almost every day. He’d leave it on the vanity ready for her before he left his home in Hoboken for his job as a broker at Cantor Fitzgerald. Or perhaps it was how he made the oldest gag in the book funny again. At weddings, parties, any place, really, he slapped in a set of grotesque false teeth and worked the room in his gregarious, antic style, which never failed to make everyone laugh. The youngest of six children, Mr. Knox, who was 31, was always the first to grab the attention of his siblings’ 11 children at family get-togethers with a joke or some routine to keep them laughing. Or maybe it was the way he listened—attentive, alert, compassionate. “I guess it was all the little things,” said his wife, Nancy Knox. “All these little, special things that made Tommy who he was and made us all love him.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The following is a transcript of an audiotaped discussion I had about the two pieces with my second-period class (I am KG):
KG: Why did you like the second piece better? Why is it more powerful?

Gerardo: It flows better and gives us a sense of what the people were actually like.

Brenda: Version one just describes what happened.

KG: How can version two be more powerful? Look at version one—2,800 people died! In version two, only one person died. How can that be more powerful?

Katherine: The second one gives you little details that make you care.

KG: Right. (KG covers the essay so the students can no longer see it.) Without looking at the second version, what detail sticks in your head about Tommy Knox?

Luis: He put toothpaste on his wife’s toothbrush every day.

Linda: He made everybody laugh.

KG: How old was he?

Many students: Thirty-one.

KG: That’s young, right? Maybe not by your standards, but by mine it is.

Students: (laughter)

KG: Notice how the small details carry more power than the large details.

Small details make it personal. As you begin writing today, remember this. Try to write small whenever possible.

Once students understand the power of writing smaller, I have them choose a piece of their own writing they feel might be too broad. With the September 11 example in mind, I challenge them to write a “smaller” version of their piece. Additional discussion on moving students into more powerful, “smaller” writing is found in Chapter 5.

Modeling Deep Revision Through Elaboration:
Creating a Question Flood

To help students who have written underdeveloped first drafts, I ask them to submit their papers to a question flood. I model a question flood, starting by showing students the following five-minute draft, which I have intentionally underwritten:

I have a really embarrassing story to tell you. I was on a television game show and I was playing for big money. At exactly the wrong moment, my brain froze. I said something really embarrassing, right in front of twenty million Americans (not to mention my fiancée, who was in the studio audience). Though it happened a long time ago, thinking about it today still causes me embarrassment.

I place the draft on the overhead, and as a class, I have students brainstorm questions that have been left unanswered in my initial draft. In Figure 3.8, you can see that Alicia has flooded my paper with thirteen questions. Though I certainly will not respond to every single question written on my
draft, enough good questions have been generated to give me some new direction when it comes to revising my story. I rewrite the draft in front of the students, integrating answers to some of their questions. After seeing how this process drives better writing, students trade papers and repeat the process.

Modeling Deep Revision Through Reorganization

Once students have completed a draft, I give them scissors and mandate that they cut their essays into pieces by paragraph. This activity forces students to consider rearranging the order of information in their essays. I cut up my own essay and model rearranging the pieces, thinking aloud regarding what effect might be created if I move this piece here or that piece there. Some students are initially taken aback by this activity, but I like the physical act of cutting up our writing because it sends a strong message to the students that we, as writers, should not fall in love with the ordering in our first drafts. When students cut their essays into segments and shift the pieces around, they are forced to consider various organizational structures. This, again, reemphasizes the artistic side of being a writer.

Deep Revision Through the Use of Language: Finding Your Voice

Have you ever been bored reading a stack of your students’ essays only to have one jump out that you really enjoy reading? When this happens to me, I ask myself, “What is it about this paper that makes it stand out from the rest? What illuminates it?” Often the answer is one word: voice. Vibrant student papers are filled with rich voice—you can hear the authors in their papers. Peter Elbow, in *Writing with Power*, writes:

*In essence, writing with voice is writing into which someone has breathed. It has that fluency, rhythm, and liveliness that exist naturally in speech of most*
people when they are enjoying a conversation. Moreover, writing with real voice has the power to make you pay attention and understand—the words go deep. (1998, p. 299)

When I come across a piece of writing with strong voice, whether written by a student of mine or by a professional writer, I share it with my students. Sometimes I will rewrite the passage without voice to show the contrast. Below, for example, is an excerpt from Brianna, a ninth-grade student, who had written about a frustrating trip to the movies. Paired with Brianna’s excerpt is my rewrite, written with its voice removed:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Brianna’s Excerpt</th>
<th>Revised Without Voice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“That’ll be ten dollars,” you hear the cashier demand. Ten dollars! Can you believe it? Ten dollars to see a movie that is not really original. Ten dollars to see some hour-and-a-half-knock-off-wannabe-remake. “Digitally remastered!” my rear end. I am paying ten dollars to see a new version of Cinderella so that I can see that her foot isn’t white; it’s peach. All of these waste-of-time remakes are exactly the same characters and plotlines as they were twenty years ago. The only new things about them are the one-hit-wonder actors doing what they call “acting” in front of cheesy green screens. Whatever happened to the classics?</td>
<td>Recently I went to the theater to see a digitally remastered new version of Cinderella. When I paid for my ticket, I was shocked that they were charging ten dollars! Ten dollars to see a movie that is not even original. Like many of the remakes out there today, the stories are the same as they were twenty years ago. They don’t even get very good actors. These remakes make me miss the classics.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When students were asked which one was better, they unanimously chose Brianna’s piece. This led to a rich discussion on the importance voice can play in elevating an essay. Unlike the voiceless example, Brianna’s writing has the power to make you pay attention.

I might also add that students are much more likely to write with a rich voice when they care about their writing topic. The importance of providing students leeway when choosing writing topics will be discussed further in Chapter 5.

“What Are You Doing Here?”

I like teaching ninth graders because they sometimes come up with the wackiest notions. Early in this school year one of my freshmen, Christina, asked, “Mr. Gallagher, I heard that you have written a couple of books. Is that true?”

“Yes,” I answered.

“If that’s true, what are you doing here?” she asked, genuinely curious about why a writer could be found teaching in an urban high school.

Christina’s question is revealing—it tells me that many of my students have developed the notion that writers exist “out there” in the world somewhere. She reminds me that my students have not completely accepted the
idea that they, themselves, are writers, too. She also reminds me that my students need to be taught that writing well is not something reserved solely for those who write books, but that all students, with the right motivation and work ethic, can become writers. Honing writing skills is not something that only writers should do; practicing writing is a worthwhile pursuit for anyone wishing to lead a literate life. I want my students to stop thinking of writers as “them” and to start thinking of writers as “us.”

To do so, I need to work from the first day of school to demystify their notions of what real writers do. I do this by modeling my own writing for my students, by writing alongside them, by making visible all the difficulties and rewards that come with the act of writing. It is important for teachers to write, Donald Murray says, so they understand the process of writing from within. They should know the territory intellectually and emotionally: how you have to think to write, how you feel when writing. Teachers of writers do not have to be great writers, but they should have frequent and recent experience in writing. The best preparation for the writing class, workshop, or conference is at least a few minutes at the writing desk, saying what you did not expect to say. If you experience the despair, the joy, the failure, the success, the work, the fun, the drudgery, the surprise of writing you will be able to understand the composing experiences of your students and therefore help them understand how they are learning to write. (2004, p. 74)

If You Are Going to Walk the Walk . . .

As we write alongside our students, we can serve as writing models in one other way—by continually speaking the language of writers. If you want to teach surfing, for example, you must use the language of surfers. If you want to teach lacrosse, you must use the language of lacrosse. Writing has its own language as well. In writing classrooms you will hear both teachers and students using words like recursive, revision, discourse, and author’s purpose. Peter Johnston, in Choice Words, reminds us that the language we use in our classrooms is “constitutive.” In other words, “Children grow into the intellectual life around them” (2004, p. 2). If we want our students to grow into being writers we should speak the language of writers to them. Talking like writers, argues Johnston, helps to “position” our students as writers. In Appendix 5 you’ll see a glossary of some of the writing terms used frequently in my classroom.

This chapter has advanced the idea that students are more likely to develop as writers when teachers lead by example. When we compose alongside our students, when we speak the language of writers, when we make the struggle all writers face visible, we demystify the process, thus making writing more approachable for students. Once my students begin internalizing the writing practices I have modeled for them, it becomes time to expand the modeling by having them closely examine what professional writers do.