When I began teaching writing workshop, I developed a writing center because I had read about it in a book. Little did I know, then, that when students are surrounded by the supplies of writers they begin to act like writers. Little did I know, then, that the simple development of a writing center made the entire classroom feel like a place to write. Little did I know, then, of the importance of making a physical writing space. I didn’t learn these lessons until I had been out of the classroom for four years as a writing coach and experienced the inspiration from a writing center on a personal level.

When I decided to venture out of the classroom as a writing coach to see what life was like for students across grade levels, I assumed I would return to the classroom the following year. I made the same assumption for another three years. With that assumption came a hole-in-the-wall office that I never made my own. I simply plopped in my computer and my teaching license, and the hole-in-the-wall office became a place to stop, dump materials, check e-mail, and gather materials for the next classroom.

Then I realized I needed to make it my own. A place I would feel like a writer. A place I would want to write. A place I would be a writer. A place that has tracks of my life and where I could find meaning. I began by collecting baskets and containers that would become homes for writing supplies. I added inspiring words and images, photographs and books, and soon a place was created that made me want to write the moment I opened the door. Our classrooms should be this kind of place for students. The moment they walk in the door, they should itch to write. An important way to inspire this feeling is by creating a writing center. Following is a list of items that I feel motivate and inspire writers:

**Calendar:** A wall calendar is a useful addition to any writing center. In the primary grades, it can be used to mark publishing days and celebrations. For upper-grade writing workshops, draft due dates and upcoming project start dates can be added. Some older students may also wish to have a copy of their own so they can determine when they will finish drafting or revising to make the deadline. This is especially important as students work on independent writing projects. Calendars are a way to help students learn to manage their time to complete projects by a deadline.

**Date stamp:** After many headaches from attempting to help kindergarten writers date their work, my colleagues and I put a date stamp in the writing center. In the spirit of brutal honesty, it was mass chaos! Dates were stamped everywhere! The tables and chairs were covered! Stories were covered! Kindergartners were covered! Thankfully, because of quick reflexes, the teacher and I avoided being covered! We quickly regrouped and offered a mini-lesson about the date stamp the following day (and now this same lesson is given before the introduction of the date stamp), and I’m happy to report the date stamp was controlled! Older writers also benefit from a date stamp, simply because it feels official and writer-like. Today, I’m an advocate for date stamps because it is important to know when students work on a piece of writing, and date stamps are a useful way to get this information onto drafts, while helping students to develop a writer’s persona.

**Highlighters:** These are a wonderful revision tool, when students learn to use them sparingly. Coloring an entire draft with a highlighter is not useful, yet when students use highlighters to track particular craft moves or conventions, then concrete evidence emerges about their use of these techniques. It
doesn’t take long for a student to realize that they’ve only used one ending punctuation mark throughout a friendly letter or that they have three pages of dialogue in a personal narrative. (Colored pencils are another option for the writing center instead of, or in addition to, highlighters.)

**Inspiring words and images:** It doesn’t take much effort to hang an inspirational poster or photograph near the writing center. In fact, the part of the writing center that my students commented on more than anything else was the quotes that changed periodically above the supplies. I was always impressed that my students noticed when new inspirational words were posted. Finding inspirational quotes about writing is easy; just take a moment to Google “writing quotes.” An even easier avenue would be to use the quotes in this book.

**Mistake remover:** To help prevent frustration during publishing, erasers and correction fluids are another asset to any writing center. It is shocking to see how many more conventions are corrected when students have access to correction fluid and snazzy erasers.

**Paper choices:** Writing centers in primary classrooms should be filled with a variety of paper choices. Different sizes of picture boxes, lines, and paper all help to inspire young writers to tell their stories well. In upper grades, a variety of draft paper is helpful. Draft paper options could include college-ruled or wide-ruled notebook paper, legal pads, or steno pads. If computers are available, students could have the option to type their drafts instead of handwriting them.

**Resources:** Dictionaries, thesauruses, rhyming dictionaries, and grammar handbooks are all appropriate to keep in the writing center.

**Sticky notes:** Sticky notes are like sprinkling magic writing dust on students. Students who refuse to revise will sing a different tune when given a sticky note. A variety of sizes are optimal. Here’s a suggestion: try a jumbo sticky note. If you are considering supporting details in a letter to the editor, then use sticky tabs to flag the points to support a position. Sticky notes are a good item to put on supply lists. Look for them in discount and dollar stores.

**Writing implements:** Part of a teacher’s job is to help students develop a sense of responsibility. Some teachers focus on whether the student has something to write with as the way to help students develop responsibility. Early in my career, I quit fighting this battle. I decided it was most important for my students to write during writing workshop, and if they didn’t have a writing implement, I would give them one. After losing hundreds (perhaps thousands) of pens and pencils, I learned a few tricks of the trade to keep them around.

I found buying pencils with a witty phrase such as “Help, I’ve been kidnapped from Room B34!” helped to ensure that the pencils stayed in the room—or were returned (usually by the student) within a few minutes. Another way to mark writing implements is to create a masking-tape flag atop the pen, which helps them to stay in the classroom. One year, a creative student used silk flowers and florist tape to create a “pot” of flower pens for our writing center. By wrapping a silk flower to the pen with florist tape, a unique pen was created, and students had a visual reminder that they were borrowing a pen. She filled a flowerpot with beans and stuck in the pens.

**Other supplies:** Staplers, staples, paper clips, scissors, tape, and glue sticks are all useful in a writing center.

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**Challenge:** Evaluate your writing center. Make changes necessary so it inspires students to write. If you’re really looking to lift the level of your writing center, enlist the help of your students to organize it. Give them the supplies, containers, and a location for the writing center. Then, step back and watch it come to life as they organize, containerize, and label the supplies. If students are invested in creating
it, then they are even more empowered by it. Another idea for organizing supplies is to create “mini-
centers” for each group of students. Put necessary items together that can be used by a small group of students. This eliminates some movement to and from a classroom writing center.

**Reflective Practice:**
- What supplies inspire you to write?
- What items in your writing center empower students to live like writers?