

# Writing How-To Books, Step by Step

BEND I





## Session 1

# Writers Study the Kind of Writing They Plan to Make

IN THIS SESSION, you'll teach students that before a writer writes, he thinks "What kind of thing am I making?" and then studies examples of whatever it is he wants to make.

### GETTING READY

- ✓ Ribbon and scissors, for a ribbon-cutting ceremony (with an upbeat musical selection in the background) (see Connection)
- ✓ Pictures of a variety of dogs large enough to be seen by children when sitting in the meeting area (see Teaching) 🐕
- ✓ Previously created "true story" (make multiple copies, enough for one per table) and "How to Draw" class texts from the *Writing for Readers* unit (see Teaching and Active Engagement)
- ✓ A child's how-to book from your collection from past years, from a student from another class, or your own child-version how-to book
- ✓ Basket of how-to books, one basket for each table. The basket can be labeled "How-To Books" and can include published texts as well as children's writing.
- ✓ Two types of prestapled how-to booklets for children to choose from on a tray at each table. You may want to offer booklets of 3 pp. and 5 pp., with 3–4 or 6–7 lines for writing, along with extra pages that children can add on (see Link). 📄
- ✓ A familiar how-to text that you have read with your class several times before beginning this unit of study and a copy of a page from it. This session uses an excerpt from *My First Soccer Game* by Alyssa Satin Capucilli (see Share).
- ✓ Chart paper and markers

DO YOU REMEMBER HOW EXCITING IT WAS, when you were little, to start a new school year? I loved the new school supplies—the pencil case, the erasers that always smelled so good, even that transparent green protractor that never seemed to have a purpose. I remember flipping through the pages of the clean new notebooks ready to be written upon. For me, the start of the year was always a time for new resolutions, for a new identity. "This year," I'd tell myself, "*This year*, I'll record all my assignments in my assignment pad. I'll write in cursive. I'll write a page a day." Underneath any particular resolve was the fervent hope that I could draw a line in the sand and start on a new and better chapter.

The new unit that starts today can become an especially big deal for your children—a whole new chapter in their writing lives—because they will be making a different kind of writing from anything they have ever made before. Whereas during the first two units they wrote stories, they now turn a new leaf and embark on how-to writing. The Common Core State Standards cluster this kind of writing (you can also call it procedural writing or functional writing or explanatory writing) under the larger category of informational writing. These standards suggest that one third of children's time across all subjects and across the entire year be devoted to informational writing. So the work that children embark on today will be important. Eventually they will transfer their skills at how-to writing into math, where they detail how they solve a problem, and to science, where their lab reports are a variation of this kind of writing.

This session creates a drumroll, then, around the fact that this is new work. Children are taught that when writers approach a piece of writing, they need to think, "What kind of writing is this?" and "How does this kind of writing go?" The fact that a writer pauses to establish the genre in which he is writing may seem obvious to you, but it is not obvious to children. Think, for example, of the fact that children will soon write all-about books, also called information books, which will present its own sorts of demands. By the time children are in first grade, all-about books contain different kinds of writing, with a dog book perhaps containing one chapter on kinds of dogs, one on the day I got my dog, and

**COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS:** W.K.2; W.K.5; W.K.8; RI.K.1; RI.K.6; RI.K.9; RI.1.6; RI.1.9; SL.K.1; SL.K.2; SL.K.3; L.K.1; L.K.2

one a how-to text such as “How to Give Your Dog a Bath.” If that child pauses at the start of each chapter to ask, “What kind of text am I making?” and realizes that “The Day I Got My Dog” is a narrative and that “How to Give Your Dog a Bath” is a how-to text, following different conventions, that will be an important feat! That work is still a stretch for most of your students, but it is helpful to teach with an awareness of what lies beyond the immediate future.

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*“The fact that a writer pauses to establish the genre in which he is writing may seem obvious to you, but it is not obvious to children.”*

You will see that this session makes no attempt to teach the characteristics of how-to writing in any explicit way. Instead, children are taught that writers study the kind of text they intend to make, noting whatever they can about that text, and then write accordingly. You leave it up to children to inquire into the characteristics of the genre and to discern that this writing is written in tiny numbered steps, that each step is accompanied by a drawing that serves to teach, and so forth. Some of your children will glean these conventions from their review of finished how-to texts; others may not (in which case you can eventually teach this more explicitly). Either way, they will thrive in the sunlight of your confidence and learn from your implicit message that it is a pleasure to work hard, with independence, on a big job and that writing contains lots of those big jobs.





# Writers Study the Kind of Writing They Plan to Make

## CONNECTION

**Create a ribbon-cutting ceremony, complete with a song and a proclamation, producing a drumroll around the transition to this new kind of writing.**

When the children arrived in the class, they noticed a big red plastic ribbon, preventing anyone from coming to the meeting area. I said nothing about this.

While children were still in their seats, I said, “Writers, this morning I need to tell you that whenever people have built a new bridge or a new library or a new sports stadium, the people organize a ribbon-cutting ceremony for opening day. Before anyone enters the new bridge or library or sports stadium, all the people gather for a ribbon-cutting ceremony. Today we start not only a new unit of study—which is a big deal—but also we start writing a whole new kind of writing! So will all of you gather at the edge of our meeting area for our ceremony?”

Once the children were standing alongside the ribbon, I suggested we sing a writing song—a variation of “If You’re Happy and You Know It, Clap Your Hands.” I suggested that for our first verse, we sing, “If you’re a writer and you know it, clap your hands.” Then “If you’re a speller,” and finally, “If you’re a storyteller.” Once the song was completed, I took hold of the largest shears I could find, and in a mayoral, commanding voice proclaimed, “Today marks the start of a new unit. As of today, our class will begin a whole new kind of writing.” Then we snipped the ribbon, and I announced, “Let the new work begin!” and children thronged to their places.

## ✿ Name the teaching point.

“Writers, today I want to teach you that just like there are different kinds of dogs, there are different kinds of writing. Before a writer writes, the writer thinks, ‘What kind of thing am I making?’”

## ◆ COACHING

*You may alter partnerships for this unit, in which case you'll need a system for conveying the new alliances to children. Partner talkative kids with quieter kids, kids who ask good questions with kids who tend to be vague, English language learners with language models. In some cases you might find triads work well, putting two children who can carry on proficiently together with a third child who can benefit from the modeling.*

## TEACHING

**Point out that there are different kinds of writing, illustrating this with enlarged versions of a familiar narrative and how-to text, suggesting children ascertain the differences.**

"What are these?" I asked, holding up pictures of dramatically different dogs. The kids agreed they were dogs, and some called out the specific breeds. I nodded. "You are right. These are all dogs, but they look really different, don't they? That's because they are different kinds of dogs."

"Let me show you something else." I revealed the familiar class story about the bee that came into our class from the previous *Writing for Readers* unit of study that the class had helped to write and, alongside it, the directions we used earlier in the year for how writers draw. "These are both pieces of writing, but they are different kinds of writing. One is a true story of one Small Moment story, and one is how-to writing, or you could call it directions. Starting today, we're going to be making how-to books." I gestured to the paper showing directions.

"Before a writer writes, the writer thinks, 'What kind of thing am I making?' And a writer studies examples of whatever he or she wants to make so the writer knows how to do this new kind of writing."

"Today I thought maybe, just maybe, you could do that work all on your own. Do you think that if I read this how-to writing to you and afterward I zip up my mouth and say *nothing*, you could turn your brain on really, really high and see if *you* can study this new kind of writing and figure out how it goes, how it is different from a story, and then do some of this writing all by yourself?"

The children were game. "This means I am not going to tell you anything about how this new kind of writing goes. I'm just going to read you some examples. I know you can do this. I'll read, and then you'll go to your writing place and make your own how-to book, all by yourself."

They agreed.

**Encourage students to choose a topic—something they will teach others to do—before channeling children to study the differences between narratives and how-to texts and to get started writing the latter.**

"Before you study how this kind of writing goes, you probably want to have a topic in mind that you will write about today. So think of something you know how to do that you could teach others. Like do you know how to braid hair, or to ride a scooter, or to give a dog a bath, or to make pancakes, or to make a goal?" I left a tiny pool of silence. "You have something in your mind? Thumbs up if you have thought of something you know how to do."

"Okay. What are you planning to teach people to do?" I asked and called on just a few children. "Are you ready to study how this kind of writing goes?"

*As children become more experienced writers, they may come to know narrative writing as simply "Small Moments," due to the emphasis over time on writing focused, detailed narratives. Depending on how your last unit unfolded, it may or may not make sense to begin referring to Small Moments now. In any case you will want to remind students what they already know about narrative writing.*

*By rattling off examples of very common, everyday things that students are experts at, we are modeling the kinds of topic choices that are available. Students don't have to dig deep to find interesting topics; the things they do every day are enough.*

# ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT

**Abstaining from citing differences, read a narrative and then two different how-to books. Channel children to discuss what they notice.**

I read part of a quick narrative and then shifted to read the “How to Draw” chart (children were familiar with this from *Writing for Readers*), touching the numbers alongside the steps and the informative pictures in a significant (“notice this”) fashion.

Then, signaling “Wait,” I brought out the work a child had done and read his writing.

# LINK

**Reiterate that writers think, “What kind of thing am I making?” and encourage children to help each other study what goes into a how-to book and then write one as best they can.**

My lips still sealed, I gestured for the children to get going. On each table, there was an example of how-to writing and some blank books. Once the children were at their tables, I said, “You can help each other figure out how this new kind of writing goes and get going writing your own.”

*You can use the “How to Draw” class text from Writing for Readers, or you may decide to choose any how-to text that you have written previously. With your class, try to choose a text where the directions have been written with one step on each page, with detailed diagrams or pictures that teach and other features of how-to writing.*

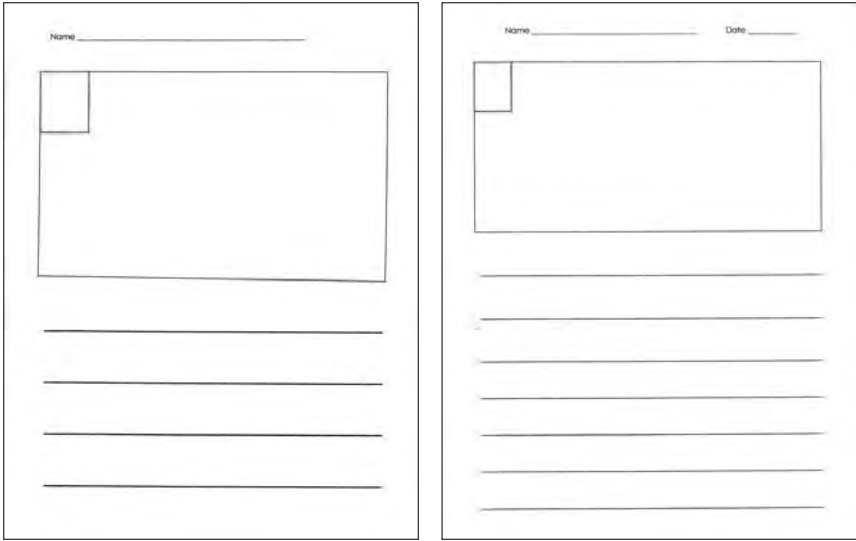


FIG. 1–1 Stapling paper like this into three-page or five-page booklets gives children quick access to the materials they need. You can observe your students at work to determine how many lines per page and how many pages per booklet to offer. Remember to teach kids to select paper that will leave an extra line or two left over, room to add more later.



## CONFERRING AND SMALL-GROUP WORK

# Welcome Approximations, Inviting Children into the New Work

TODAY'S CONFERRING AND SMALL-GROUP WORK will be a special pleasure because your main goal will be to rally kids' energy for the exciting new work of this unit. Give yourself a talking-to before you head out around the room. Repeat over and over to yourself, "I will not fuss over whether their work is perfect. I will celebrate approximation. I will celebrate approximation." Plan on enjoying all their mess-ups, for now. If they totally don't get how to write how-to texts, that is absolutely fine. That's why you will be teaching this unit! Imagine how impressive it will be later when you contrast their start of the unit work—today's writing and their on-demand pieces—with their end of the unit work.

So plan to travel quickly among the writers, using table compliments to sprinkle good will and confidence and excitement among them. Pull up to one table where some kids are working. You may note that a few seem oblivious to the fact that this is a new genre, with different conventions. Their writing will look exactly like it looked a week ago. Let that go, for now. Meanwhile, notice that one child is looking at—even just glancing at—the finished how-to book that you left on the table. "Oh my goodness. You all are making such wise decisions—the way you keep on studying the example and keep on noticing the ways that a how-to book is so, so different than storybooks! I am thinking and hoping that if I go to another table and then come back to this one, by then maybe some of you will be talking together while pointing to specific things you notice in your how-to book. Maybe then you can see if any one of you has already done some of the same things that you notice in your own how-to writing! I love the way you know that writers study examples of the kind of writing they want to write and then make their writing the same!"

You may want to carry some Post-its®, or better yet, Post-it flags, with you so that you can encourage children to study and notice features of published how-to texts. It will probably take some doing for you to channel children to notice things such as the format and conventions of the writing, rather than the specific content and information. The child might notice that the author of the washing your dog how-to text does

### MID-WORKSHOP TEACHING

#### Help Children Carry On with Independence

"Writers, can I stop you for a moment?" I waited until their eyes were on me. "I just want to remind you that as soon as you finish one how-to book, you can reread it to make sure it makes sense and then start another one! Don't wait! I see a few of you sitting, waiting. I think you are ready to start a new how-to book! Do it! Get another how-to booklet! You are on a roll. Don't stop now! Go get some paper. You know what to do!"

#### As Students Continue Working . . .

"In a few minutes we're going to be all out of time. Can you believe it? When I know that my writing time is almost over, I always like to do one last check to make sure that my writing makes sense, sounds right, and looks right. Right now, everybody, reread one page of your writing and ask yourself, 'Does that make sense?'" Then, noticing some writers had yet to start rereading, I said, firmly, "That's right, everybody, right now."

As children worked, I noticed that some of them were rereading their writing, but they had already put away their pens. I said, "Don't forget, you can keep your pen in your hand while you reread so you can revise your writing if you need to. Don't forget, you can use one end of the pen to read and the other end of the pen for writing!"

"Don't forget to point under each word. Check the pictures you drew. Make sure the words match what is in the pictures. If it doesn't match, change it!"

the job indoors and may wonder why she doesn't use a hose out of doors, and that sort of observation won't exactly help the youngster as she writes her how-to book on braiding hair. You may or may not address this disconnect today. There will be other ways to get at this. For children who have no trouble noticing that how-to writing uses different forms and conventions, you may want to point out that noticing what the author has done is one thing; noticing *how* and speculating *why* are even more challenging and important kinds of intellectual work.

Of course, it is one thing for you to allow kids to approximate within this genre and another for you to allow kids to sit frozen over their paper. You are not apt to find that many children struggle over topic choice, but if a few do, you will need to help them get started. One way to do this is to gather those students around the class "Flow of the Day" chart, telling them that this chart, this daily schedule, can always be a secret source of topics they could teach others. Point to the first thing on the chart. If it says, for example, "Morning Meeting," you can say to children, "I bet you could each write a How to Have a Morning Meeting book, couldn't you? Think, 'What is the first step to having a morning meeting?'" After recalling a few steps that could be included in a book about the first item in the "Flow of the Day" chart, you could progress to the second item on the chart, doing the same work with it. "You could each write a How to Have Reading Workshop book, right? What would be the first step in a reading workshop?"

If you were doing this work with a small group of children, you could then say, "Right now, pick one part of our schedule and give me a thumbs up when you've picked one. Excellent. Now turn to the person next to you and tell them the first step. 'Step one . . .'" As kids begin to name the steps for the event they chose, coach into this work. After they have named the second step, they should probably get started sketching and writing.

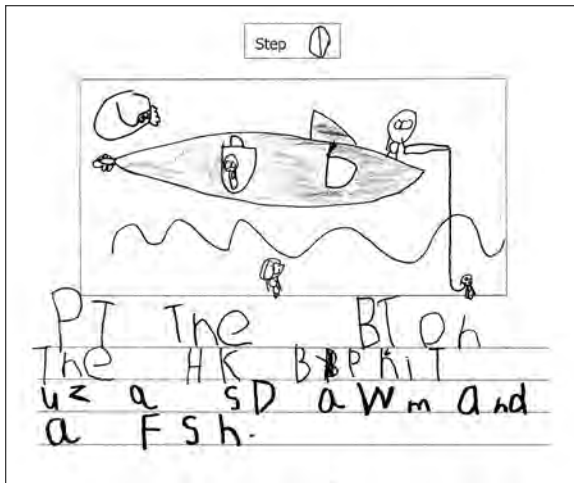
As you can imagine, it helps to carry ideas like that one in your mental pocket, so that when you observe children and decide on ways to teach them, you don't need to invent all your teaching on the spot but can draw on a repertoire of ideas for conferences and small groups. For this reason, it helps to talk with colleagues about some of the things they find themselves teaching kids during the actual workshop. If you and your colleagues share and collect ideas for conferences and small groups that will be especially helpful now, at the start of this unit, notice that those ideas will often be transferable to other units as well. For example, at the start of this unit and every unit, you can powerfully use conferences and small-group time to remind children to bring all they know from previous units into this unit. That is incredibly important instruction that has the potential to make a huge difference. (Think, for example, about whether or not, today, kids are touching and telling, using the word wall, rereading often, and so on, and think how helpful all of that skill work will be to this unit.)



Step 1: Open your drawer. And get your underwear. Step 2: Open your drawer and get your shirt. Step 3: Open your drawer and get your jeans. Step 4: Open the top drawer again and get your socks. Step 5: Get dressed!

FIG. 1–2 On the first day of the unit, many students will be excited to choose topics they know well from their own experience, and will write an entire booklet in one sitting, like this student did on "How to Get Dressed." Then, in subsequent days, they can go back and add more to each page.

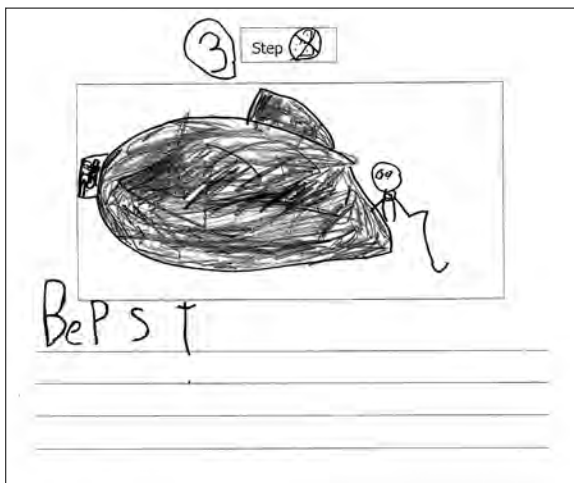




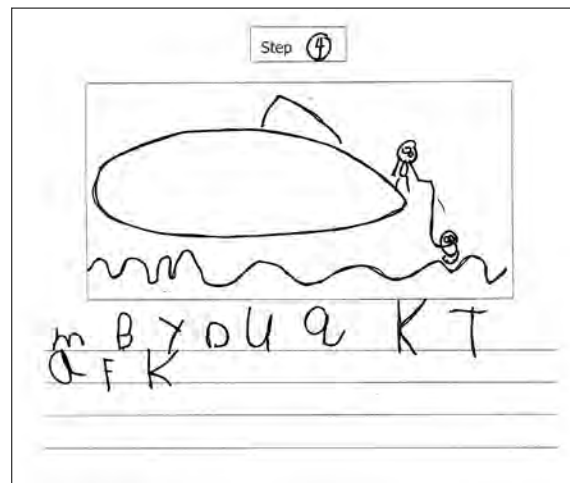
Step 1: Put the bait on the hook by pinching it.  
Use a sardine, a worm, and a fish.



Step 2: Next cast the line.



Step 3: Be patient.



Step 4: Maybe you will catch a fish.

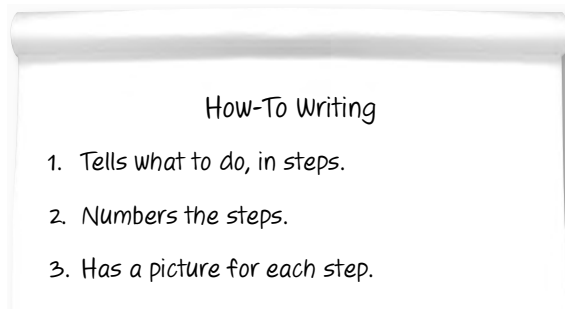
FIG. 1–3 Encourage children to listen for whatever sounds they can hear in a word and to use their alphabet charts and other resources around the room to write words as best they can. There may be students recording mostly initial and ending consonants (like this student, who wrote ‘How to Go Fishing’) right alongside students who spell mostly conventionally.



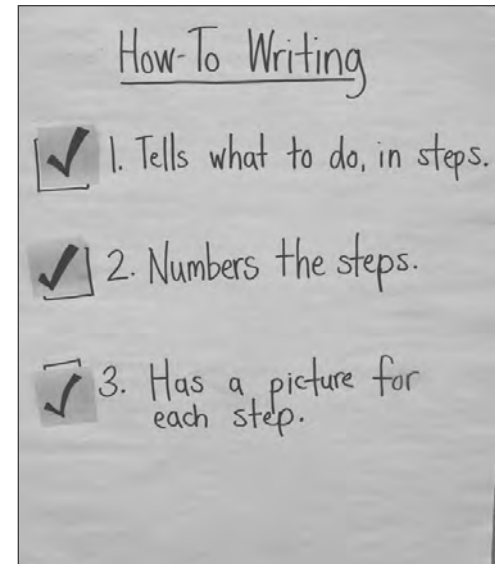
## Compare How-To Writing with Familiar True Stories and Notice Differences

**Collect and list a few especially important differences between narrative and how-to writing.**

After convening children in the meeting area, I said, “Will someone tell me a way that how-to writing is different than story writing?” I taped a photocopied page from a familiar how-to book, *My First Soccer Game*, to a piece of chart paper, turning the easel so that children could see it from their writing spots where they were still seated. As a few children offered up something about how-to writing, I drew an arrow to the photocopied how-to text to highlight the feature they mentioned. “How-to books have numbers!” exclaimed one student. Using a big marker, I wrote, “Numbers the steps” off to the side of the copied page and drew an arrow pointing to one of the numbered steps. Soon we’d made this chart, with arrows pointing to the parts of the page the children referred to.



“As we learn more about how-to writing, we will talk more about how writers go about making books like this to teach people how to do many things.”



Charts are more memorable and meaningful for kids when you create them together. Often you can simply write the chart along with kids. In this case, the chart was prepared ahead of time, minus the checkmarks on Post-its. Then the Post-its were added as the children discussed each item. Notice that the chart leaves room to add more.

# Use What You Already Know

*Touch and Tell the Steps across the Pages*



**Y**ESTERDAY YOUR EMPHASIS was on the fact that writers think, “What kind of thing am I making?” and realize that just as there are different kinds of dogs, there are also different kinds of writing. You invited youngsters to look hard at a piece of writing, thinking, “How does this piece of writing go?” and you channeled them to study examples of how-to writing to identify features of the new genre. Some of them will have done this successfully, and some will need your help. Today you provide that help in a way that suggests you are merely compiling all that they noticed from their careful study.

As you do this, remember the advice from Stephen Covey: first things first. Your goal is not to deluge children with an overwhelmingly large inventory of every conceivable trait of procedural writing. So this means you will not want to ask repeatedly, “What else do you notice that authors of how-to writing do? What else? What else?” For example, writers of how-to books often include little warnings or cautionary notes. There is no reason to mention this now, and in fact doing so takes the wind out of a later minilesson.

You can collect answers from children while still shaping the eventual list that is being created by asking children to turn and talk about their observations, eavesdropping, and then calling on children whose observations seem to be especially foundational. You can also add more observations to the list you collect. “Did some of you also notice that . . . ?” you can say, and then have a chance to articulate whatever you wish your children might have contributed.

As you talk about the characteristics of how-to writing, you’ll be weaving in examples of this writing, helping to prime the pump so that children generate topics they will be writing about today. Some children may not have finished yesterday’s how-to book and may need to return to it, but in general, your expectation can be that children will write at least one of these books each day. Whereas many will start the unit off by writing a few words for each step in the process, before long you’ll be expecting closer to two or three sentences for each step.

**IN THIS SESSION**, you’ll teach students to draw on what they already know about planning, touching, and telling the steps of their how-to books across pages.

### GETTING READY

- ✓ Booklets (with extra pages that children can add on) in a tray on each table. On each page, there will be a box for children to number the steps.
- ✓ Children will come to the meeting area with their writing folders today (see Connection).
- ✓ “How-To Writing” anchor chart, created in Session 1 (see Connection and Share)
- ✓ How-to writing piece from a student, either one that you have saved from a previous year or from a student in another class or Cooper Loyal’s piece on the CD (see Connection and Share)
- ✓ Students’ writing from the previous session (see Connection)
- ✓ Enlarged version of the booklets the children are using for shared writing. You can prepare half sheets of chart paper with a box for sketching and lines for writing to look just like the paper the children use (see Teaching).

**COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS:** W.K.2; W.K.5; W.1.2; RI.K.1; SL.K.1; SL.K.4; SL.K.5; L.K.1.e,f; L.K.2



## MINILESSON

# Use What You Already Know

*Touch and Tell the Steps across the Pages*

## CONNECTION

**Today, call children to the meeting area with writing folders in hand. If this is new to your class, ask the children to sit on top of their folders to reduce distraction. Remind children of the list they made about how-to writing, and then read another piece and ask them to check whether it matches those descriptors.**

"Writers, remember at the end of yesterday's writing workshop, when we studied *My First Soccer Game*, you made a chart listing what you noticed about how-to writing?

"I'm going to read a piece of writing that a writer in another class wrote, and I want you and your partner to notice whether this piece of how-to writing has all these things." I reread the chart.

"Ready?" I held up a book, reading the cover title: 'How to Play Kickball.' "The author of this book is Cooper Loyal." Then, turning pages, I read:

*Step 1—Make sure you make the teams.*

*Step 2—When the ball comes, kick it. If someone catches you ball you're OUT! But if no one catches your ball you're safe!*

*Step 3—When it is three outs go in the field to catch a ball.*

*Step 4—If you catch a ball the other person is out!*

*Step 5—Good catch. Thanks.*

(See Figure 2–1.)

## ◆ COACHING

*Anchor charts are meant to be referred to again and again. They should become an active teaching tool and not merely decoration for the walls of your classroom.*

### How-To Writing

1. Tells what to do, in steps.
2. Numbers the steps.
3. Has a picture for each step.

*You can substitute a different example of how-to writing here, if you wish. It is helpful to find examples on topics that are familiar to the children, making it easier for them to understand the content.*

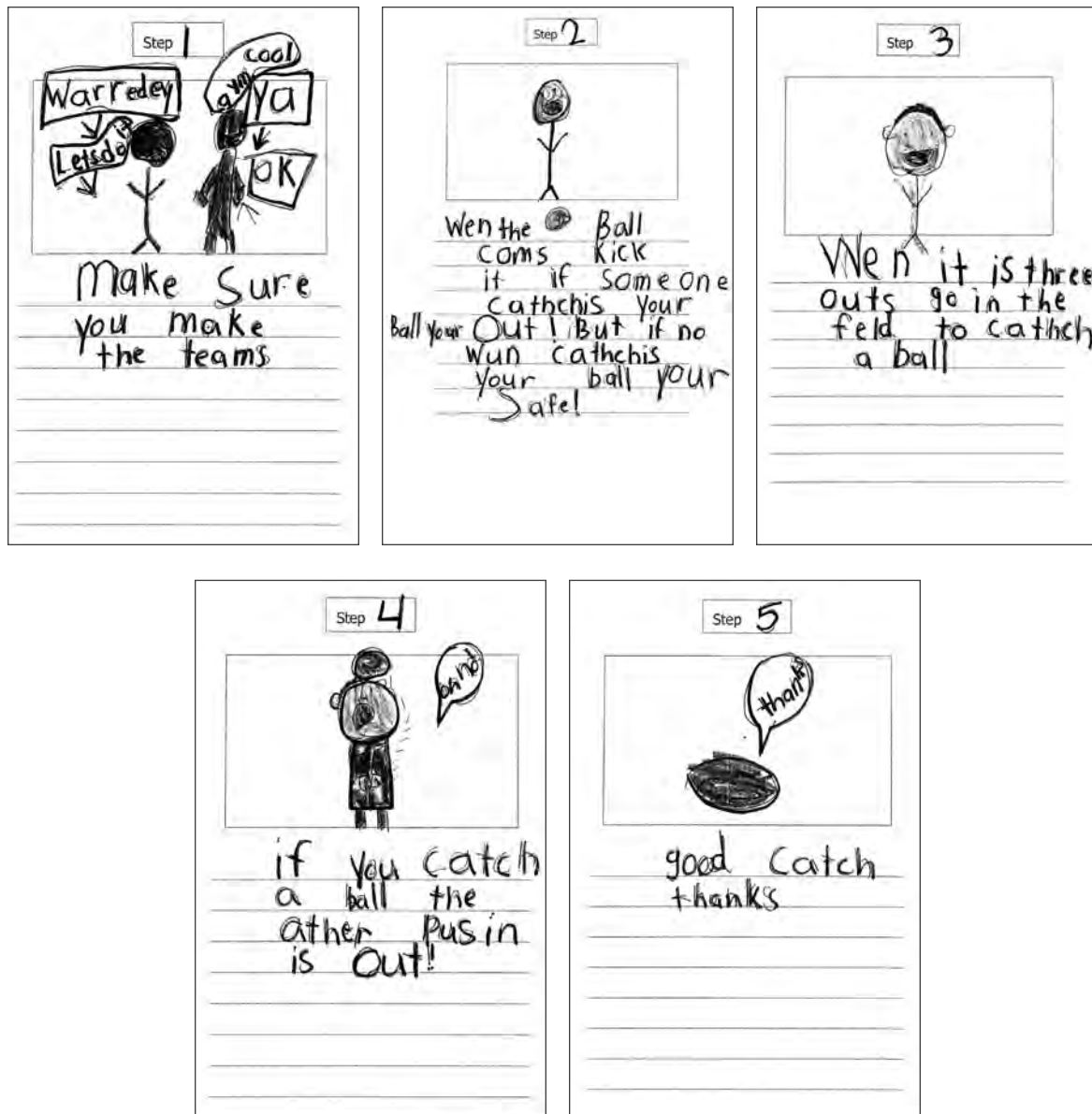


FIG. 2-1 Cooper writes his steps across pages, numbering each step, and includes a picture for each step. He also does more, including warnings, dialogue bubbles, and sentence variety. For now, you don't need to highlight everything—save some for later in the unit.

"Did this tell what to do, in steps? Thumbs up or thumbs down. Did Cooper number the steps? Did he include a picture for each step?" The children agreed he had done these things.

**Ask children to contrast the book *they* wrote the previous day to the list of descriptors, encouraging them to revise today so their book fits the bill as a how-to book.**

"Right now, please look at the book *you* wrote yesterday, and see if you already did the things on our chart, or if those are things you are going to do today." I gave them time to do this.

"Can I see thumbs up for how many of you *already* put the first step, then the next, then the next in your first how-to book?" Many children gestured thumbs up that they had done this already. "Today you can fix up or finish yesterday's book and write a new how-to book! Who knows what you will teach people to do today? Tell each other your ideas."

After a moment of buzz, I said, "Terrific. If I take your books home tonight, I'll learn how to make brownies and to play basketball and to ride a scooter and to make a friend! I'm going to have a busy night!"

#### ✿ Name the teaching point.

"Today I want to teach you that when you write a how-to book, there are *new* things to do," and I gestured to the how-to chart, "but it also helps to use some of the *old* techniques you *already* learned when you were writing stories. You *still* say what you are going to write across the pages—touch and tell—and you *still* draw the pictures, saying the words that go with a picture. Only this time, each picture and page is another step."

## TEACHING

**While writing a class text, demonstrate how to make a how-to text, first coming up with a topic, then saying each step while touching one page at a time, and then sketching.**

"Let's write a how-to book together, about something we all know how to do, so that we can practice touching and telling with how-to writing, because before now we only did that with stories. I was thinking that all of us know how to have a fire drill, because we had one just the other day. So let's get out how-to paper and remember that we first touch and tell, only this time we are telling what to do, in steps. Watch how I touch and tell the first steps of a fire drill, and then you can touch and tell the next steps."

I put my hand on my chin and pondered for a moment. "I better first remember how the fire drill goes." I looked up in the air, pulling a memory from the sky, and then, as I recalled the sequence silently to myself, I registered each step on another finger. I took hold of an enlarged chart paper booklet, touched the first page and wrote-in-the-air "How to Have a Fire Drill." Then I touched the next page and said, "Step 1. When the bells ring, it is time for a fire drill." Moving to the next page, I said, "Step 2. Then you get your jacket and get in line."

*This connection is highly engaging: rather than simply looking at a text, children are asked to be active by giving a thumbs-up and by talking briefly with a partner. These added levels of scaffolding are helpful when children need extra support with new or challenging information.*

*Sharing and mentioning a variety of kinds of how-to books helps. If you only highlight how-to books about sports, then you are more likely to see only sports books, and the same holds for other topics.*

*It's helpful to use expression in your voice, as well as gestures, to emphasize the language, "Step 1 . . . step 2 . . ." Putting the emphasis on this language will help your children hear and understand that this type of writing is different than writing a narrative.*

### **Debrief. Name what you just did as a writer.**

“Writers, did you see how I named the first steps in the fire drill, just touching the page and telling what I would write on that page? I used touch and tell, just like we used that strategy for true stories about Small Moments.”

## **ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT**

### **Invite writers to add the last couple of steps to the class how-to book, writing-in-the-air on imaginary booklets.**

“Writers, it’s your turn now to try doing the same for a few of the steps. Can you tell your partner what could be the next steps that you can add to our ‘How to Have a Fire Drill’ book? Partner 1, pretend you are holding a booklet, and turn the pages back to the very, very start of your imaginary booklet.” I waited. “Are you on the title page? Starting with the title, tell all the steps, including the ones we just said, and then keep going, past where I stopped. Do all the steps ‘til you get to the class standing outside, okay? Partner 1, hold your imaginary booklet, point to the cover, and start!”

As I approached Sofia, she was saying to Preston, “Step 4. You walk outside and line up across the street.”

To the whole class, I said, “Once you’ve touched and told up to the part where the class is outside, pass the imaginary booklet to your partner and let Partner 2 give the steps for coming back inside.”

Preston pretended to touch the page and said, “Next, listen for the whistle and come back in the school.” I moved quickly to listen in to other partnerships.

## **LINK**

### **Remind writers that after rehearsing the entire booklet, they go back to page 1, sketch, and write.**

“Writers, when you are writing, after you touch and tell the pages, you will want to go back to page one and touch that page, say the words to yourself, and then draw the picture for that step. Remember, as you draw the picture, it helps to say in your mind what you will write!”

I wrote “1” in the box at the top of the first page and then quickly made a sketch for the first step, saying the words as I did this, and then quickly wrote the words.

“Writers, we all just worked together on “How to Have a Fire Drill,” but does that mean you all have to write a how-to book about fire drills? No! Of course not! You can write a book that teaches people to do anything you know how to do. Thumbs up if you have your idea for what you will teach in today’s how-to book.” The children signaled. “Thumbs up if you are ready to touch and tell your own how-to book across the pages?” Again, most signaled yes. “Fantastic. There are new booklets waiting for you in baskets at each of your tables. Some of you may still need to finish yesterday’s book, so do that first. As soon as you get back to your writing spot, you can get started! Off you go.”

*Imaginary booklets are quick and ready to go, with no additional materials for children to manage at the meeting area. (Remember, they are already sitting on their writing folders.) An alternative would be to provide blank booklets, as a more tactile way to practice today’s work.*



## Varying Small-Group Methods and Structures

**Y**OU SAY TO THE KIDS, “Off you go!” and of course, it’s not only the kids who get started. You do as well. For a moment, you’ll want to just watch as they make their way from the meeting area to their work places. Be mindful that this is a moment for you to do some important assessment. By this point in the year, all your children should be able to make the transition from the meeting area to their writing places, from listening to writing, without needing an intervention. If they seem to need you to run from one child to another, giving individual jump starts, that’s a problem.

So watch them get started, and if you see that there are many in the classroom who have become so dependent on you that they just sit at their writing spots, waiting for you to get to them and say, “What are you going to write?” and then, “Great, put that down,” then you’ll want to decide on some actions to take to support greater independence. That action can provide more or less scaffolding. The least scaffolded response would be a voiceover, delivered to the whole class as children work (or don’t work, as the case may be). “Writers, I should see all of you rereading what you wrote yesterday and then either finishing that book or starting on a new one.” Another way to nudge writers to get started is to move quickly among the children, using nonverbal cues to signal, “Get started.” A tap on one child’s page, a gesture that says, “Get writing” delivered to another, a firm “Now” to a third.

If children need yet more help, you might try table conferences. Pull up a chair alongside a table full of writers, and be sure they do not stop to talk to you but instead continue their work. “Just ignore me and get going. I want to study the way you work,” you can say, holding your clipboard at the ready. If few actually are working, then you probably want a small-group conversation. “Writers, I’m confused. Why aren’t you writing?” The conversation may need to become a little lesson on getting yourself started in your writing.

Once all your writers are writing, you’ll be able to decide what to do. It can help to quickly consider your options. Do you want to confer individually or lead small groups? If you feel that many kids are needing some help, choose the latter. Then you can think,

### MID-WORKSHOP TEACHING **Writers Need Not Sound Out Every Word; Some Words They Know in a Snap**

“Writers, I love seeing that some of you are remembering that you don’t need to stretch out every word. Some words you just know in a snap. Like, let’s say you want to write that when the fire drill bell rings, you stand *in* line. Right now, with your finger-pen, write *in* on your hand.

“How many of you said, ‘*In*. I know *in*,’ and you just wrote it? Good for you. And did some of you say, ‘*In*. That’s on our word wall,’ and glance up at the word wall? Good for you! As you keep working, I know you’ll be stretching some words out. And other words, you’ll know in a snap!”

### ***As Students Continue Working . . .***

“Don’t forget to reread your writing, and ask yourself, ‘Will someone else be able to read this?’”

“Writers, I love all the different how-to books I am seeing. Listen to some of them: ‘How to Set the Table,’ ‘How to Play Laser Tag,’ ‘How to Ice Skate,’ ‘How To Make Hot Chocolate.’ And there are many more. Can you believe how many things we will be able to do after we read each other’s how-to books?”

“Can I tell you about a problem that Jennifer solved by working hard at it? She is writing a book about how to be a good friend. She didn’t have enough paper for her steps, so she went to the writing center, got two more sheets of paper, took apart her booklet, added in more paper, wrote her two more steps, and then stapled her book back together! Good problem-solving work, right?”



“What are four or five possible topics I could teach in small groups?” Or you can think, “What are several possible methods I could use to lead small groups?”

Let’s say you decide to go with some different methods. You should have a bunch of these at your fingertips. For example, one method for teaching a small group is to confer with one child and then gather a group of kids together to say, “Can I show you what so-and-so just did that some of the rest of you might try?” Then you need to story-tell the sequential story of what you helped the one child to do, only we generally take ourselves out of that story so that instead of saying, “Then I told her to reread her writing,” say, “Then she decided she’d reread her writing.”

A second method for leading small groups revolves around the use of a mentor text. You can convene a group of writers and say, “One of the things that I do a lot as a writer, and I know most writers do, is that I study examples of the kind of writing I’m trying to make. So I thought maybe the group of us could study this how-to book, and you guys could try to figure out some things *you* could do to make your books really, really special.”

Another way of leading small groups may involve treating these as essentially peer-response groups. You could gather several partnerships and set children up to alternate

reading their writing aloud and giving each other feedback. If you decide to do so, you could channel children to give feedback on specific things, such as on each other’s teaching pictures or on the clarity of the directions. You could, over time, work with children so that they anticipate that when you listen to their small group or partner conversations, you’ll use gestures to signal ways they can improve the conversations. You can teach them that whenever you point to the paper, this is meant as a signal for them to reference the writing more exactly. When you point to a person other than the speaker, this is a signal to let that other person join into the conversation. Children, of course, will enjoy helping you devise signals for all that you might want to say to a small group, and in doing so, they rehearse ways to improve their conversations.

Then, too, small groups can be designed as inquiry groups, with writers bringing their work to the group and expecting to lay their work out and study what they have done and what others have done. When doing this, students can look across the work that several children did, identifying an instance where one writer did one thing or another especially well, and they can talk about what made that work exemplary. Of course, the natural next step is for children to help each other emulate the successful model.



## Checking Your Writing against the Anchor Chart

**Remind writers that earlier they had looked at student writing to see ways it aligned to the list of characteristics of how-to writing. Do this again, with the day's new writing.**

"Writers, earlier today we looked at Cooper's book to see whether it had all the characteristics of the how-to writing we studied. Look at the new writing you did today, and see if it matches all that we have observed about how-to writing. As I read each item from our chart, will you and your partner point to places in your writing where you did that item from our chart? And if you haven't yet done some of this, you can work together to do it now." I then read from this list, pausing between each item."

### How-To Writing

1. Tells what to do, in steps.
2. Numbers the steps.
3. Has a picture for each step.

**As children reread their how-to books to check for each item on the chart, I stood up from my chair to read over their shoulders. I made a short list of things that I noticed could use improving. Once we'd moved through all three items on the chart, I said,**

"You are really thinking like writers now, rereading your own work! Now, I noticed that almost everybody had steps, and numbers, and almost everybody had pictures for each step, BUT I also noticed that sometimes the pictures didn't really show much action. For example, look at Cooper Loval's book again. See how the people in his pictures are just standing there? You can't really tell what they are doing, can you? I think it would help a lot if every picture actually showed what the people were doing, don't you? Writers, right now, will you add to one of your pictures to make sure that really shows exactly what is happening? Try moving the arms or legs, add objects if you need to, or draw where the person is. You should probably use labels, too, to help us learn from your pictures."

*The Share is an opportunity to deepen the work that children have done so far. Yes, nearly all your children will be drawing and/or writing steps by now. But with how much detail? And did they reread their work to make sure it all makes sense? You can adapt this Share session to highlight work that your particular students will benefit from.*

# Writers Become Readers, Asking, “Can I Follow This?”



**T**HINK FOR A MOMENT about the way you learn skills, for example, the skills you have been learning about teaching writing as you work through these books. Presumably, when you started the first few sessions of the first book, you taught a full writing workshop. You gathered children, gave them a minilesson, sent them off to write, worked with individuals and small groups, and then convened the children. Now you continue to do all those things, but thinking about writing instruction is much more nuanced. You are aware of the differences between minilessons in which you use your writing as an example and those in which you rely on a child’s piece of writing. You are aware that sometimes a minilesson ends with children getting started writing while they are still on the rug, and sometimes you send children off to work on their writing. And so on.

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*“This minilesson is the cornerstone of the unit.  
Prepare yourself to have a lot of fun, to let your  
children collapse into giggles.”*

In the same way, children will have been using fundamental skills repeatedly. For example, a month or so ago, at the start of the *Writing for Readers* unit, children learned that writers reread. They learned that writers use one end of the pencil to write, then flip the pencil over and use the other end of the pencil as a pointer to help with reading. Today you return to the concept that writers reread, only this time, your focus is less on the word work of rereading one’s own writing and more on the work of comprehension and monitoring for sense, and you will teach the specific ways writers reread how-to writing.

This is a favorite minilesson. It was a mainstay in the first edition of *Units of Study for K–2 Writers*. In many ways, it is the cornerstone of this unit. Enjoy it. Prepare yourself to have a lot of fun, to let your children collapse into giggles.

**IN THIS SESSION**, you’ll teach students that writers reread their writing as they go, making changes along the way.

## GETTING READY

- ✓ An example of student writing, displayed for the class to see (see Connection)
- ✓ Students’ writing folders, from the previous session, and pencils (see Connection)
- ✓ An example of student writing where the steps in the how-to are unclear or difficult to follow (see Teaching)
- ✓ Chart paper and markers for rewriting part of a how-to booklet (see Active Engagement)
- ✓ “How-To Writing” anchor chart from previous sessions on display

**COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS:** W.K.2; W.K.5; RI.K.1; RI.K.2; RFS.K.1; RFS.K.2; SL.K.1; SL.K.2; SL.K.3; SL.K.6; L.K.1; L.K.2



## MINILESSON

# Writers Become Readers, Asking, “Can I Follow This?”

## CONNECTION

**Celebrate one child who reread her how-to book, reminding all students of the importance of rereading.**

“Writers, yesterday I saw Sofia writing her how-to book, and do you know what she did? She wrote one of her steps, and then after she wrote that step, that page, she flipped her magic pencil over to the other end and used it as a pointer to help her reread her writing.

“Sofia, I’ve got your book displayed on the easel. Can you come up and show the class how you reread your writing?” Sofia scrambled up to the front of the meeting area and used her pencil’s eraser to tap out her words. (See Figure 3–1 on p. 21.)

*Step 1—First take the cover and pull up. Make sure you hold with two hands.*

*Step 2—Then you smooth it out to make it smoother.*

*Step 3—Next take the blanket and pull it up with two hands.*

*Step 4—Then put the pillow up with two hands. Stuff it up.*

*Step 5—Put the stuffed animal on.*

“Writers, you see how Sofia crossed words out and added in more words? What happened is that she reread her book and realized, ‘Hey, wait a minute. I could say more!’ Then she added the missing parts. That’s good work, Sofia, to remember what you learned earlier about writers needing to become readers and about revision. You remembered that work from when you were working on your true stories last month!”

**Bring home the importance of rereading by asking students to reread their writing from the day before, making small revisions as they go.**

Right now, will each of you get out the books you wrote yesterday? Use the eraser end of your pencils to reread just a page of your books, for now, and then if something is missing, do like Sofia did, and flip your pencils back to the writing end and fix things up.”

## ◆ COACHING

*You may have noticed that in minilessons where students will use a piece of their own writing, we usually ask them to bring their entire writing folder to the meeting area, even when only one booklet is needed. Many teachers find that a consistent routine for bringing work to the meeting area helps to move things along and avoids confusion. Alternatively, you could direct children to bring one how-to booklet instead of the folder.*

*There are many different ways you can have students share their writing during a minilesson. Sometimes it is enough for a student to just read their writing aloud. However, in this instance, it was important that the rest of the class actually see Sofia’s writing, as well as the way she used her eraser to tap out the words as she read. Pages can be pulled apart and displayed side by side. Or if you have a document camera, simply use that to enlarge the writing.*

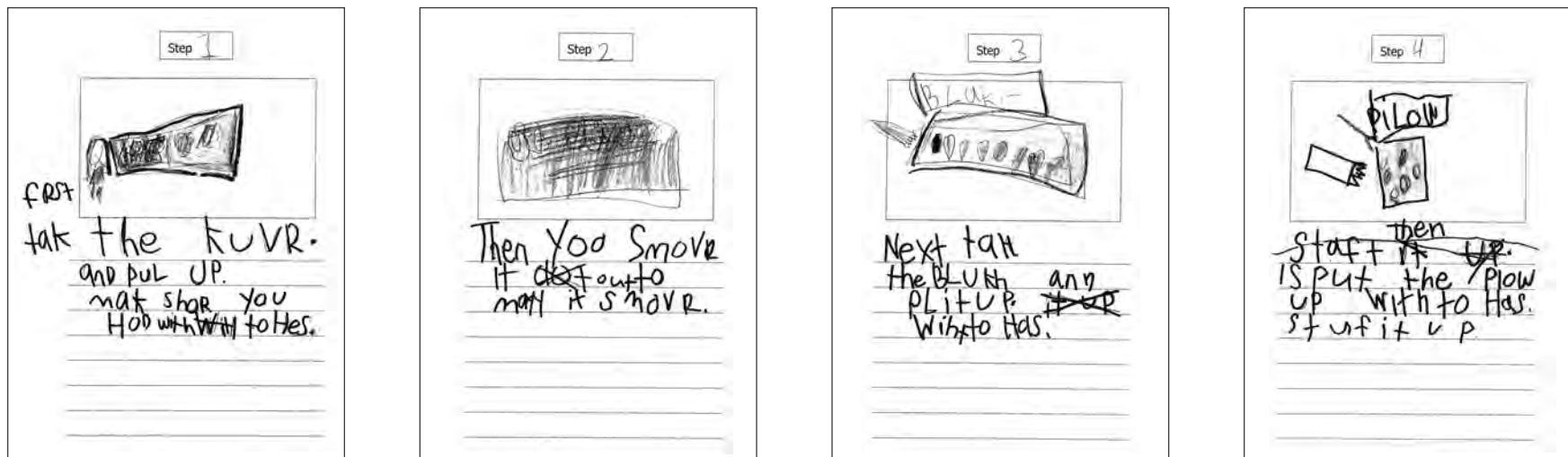


FIG. 3-1 Sofia revises her book on how to make a bed by simply crossing out the parts she'd like to change.

For a moment, children worked. I signaled that those who finished before the others could move on to their second pages.

#### ✿ Name the teaching point.

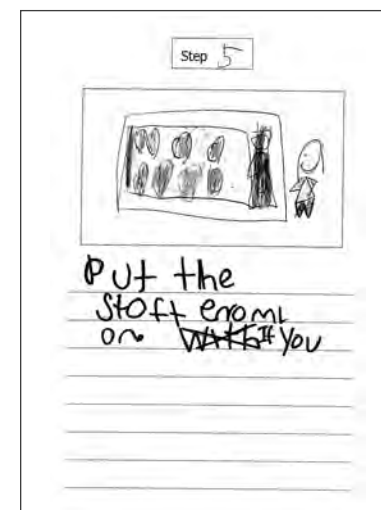
"Today I want to teach you that how-to writers don't just reread the words, touching them with a finger or a pencil. How-to writers *also* reread to check that their writing makes sense. To do that kind of rereading, writers reread to a partner or to themselves and make sure it is easy to follow the steps.

## TEACHING

**Demonstrate what it means to check your directions with a partner, noticing whether the directions make sense or need to be revised for clarity.**

"The best way to check whether your directions will make sense is to read them to someone who will try to follow the steps, to do whatever you are teaching (for real or for pretend). If the partner can't figure out what you mean, if he or she can't figure out what to do, that means your directions don't *quite* work, and then you can revise them.

"Let's try reading the words of one of your books and see if we can follow those words, okay? Sam is writing a how-to book on doing a somersault. He'll read it to me, and let's all see if I can follow his directions." I brought Sam to sit on a chair beside my chair.



"Sam will read me his book (just the start—it isn't done), and I'll do whatever his book tells me to do. Writers, when you do this kind of reading—when you read directions—instead of reading the book straight through, it helps to read one step and then do that step, then read the next step, and then do that step."

Sam read, "First put your head down and your legs up." I looked at him, as if asking "*What?*" He reread, "First put your head down," and, still sitting on a chair at the front of the meeting area, I tucked my chin toward my chest." Then Sam read, "And your legs up." (Remember, I was still on the chair!) "Okay, my head is down, but hmm, my legs go up? To somersault?" I raised my feet so they stuck straight out from the chair. A bit puzzled, I said, "Okay, keep reading."

Sam had by now covered his eyes in dismay, though we could all see his huge grin. He read his next page, starting to giggle: "Then turn over."

"Turn over? I'll hurt myself!"

**When the writer of confusing directions makes verbal revisions, capitalize on this, and name that, yes, after checking for clarity, writers often revise.**

Sam started to protest that when he had told me to put my head down, he meant I needed to put my head *on the floor* and that of course I needed to get off the chair to do so, but I returned to the role of teacher rather than gymnast to be. "Are you saying, Sam, that now you realize you need to make revisions to your directions?" When he nodded vigorously, I said, "That's what happens when you reread your writing to a partner and see the way that person struggles to follow what you have written."

## ACTING ENGAGEMENT

**Ask children to think with their partners about ways to revise the original instructions. Attempt to follow the revised instructions, highlighting the idea that being specific makes directions easier to follow.**

"Tell your partner how you might start a book on doing somersaults that could maybe work better," I said, and the room erupted into conversation.

Convening the class, I called, "Okay, let's try out another set of directions for doing a somersault. Just tell me the new steps, and I'll follow them."

This time the first step was "Sit on the floor."

"Okay, first you sit on the floor." After I clamored off the chair, I wrote on a piece of chart paper, "1. First, sit on the floor." "Okay, I've done that. What's next?"

"Put your head on the floor." I touched my face to the floor, not putting my head in the proper position.

Another child called, “No! Put the *top* of your head . . .”

I pointed out, “That’s a smart revision! Put *the top of your head* on the floor.” On the chart paper, I wrote, “2. Put the top of your head on the floor.”

“You are getting better at realizing the details your readers will need. We’ll stop here for now. This is such smart work! You are thinking about your readers and writing steps that will help them.”

## LINK

**Tell children they’ll need to decide what they will do, knowing many will recruit a partner to help them reread to check that the partner can follow the text.**

“Writers, writing time is really your work time. Today as you work, think about everything you have learned so far.” I gestured to our anchor chart to remind children of some of the key points. “You can be the boss of writing time and decide what you need to do to be sure you have a whole folder full of great how-to writing. Let’s just think about what you *could* decide to do today. Who has an idea of what you could do?”

Sam suggested, “I could write an *even better* book on somersaults and headstands too ‘cause I know how to do them.”

I nodded, agreeing that writers could write whole new books. “And if you do that, write the directions so I won’t fall and break my head, okay? So you might write whole new books. What else might you do today?”

One writer piped in with “Reread?” I practically fell off my chair over the brilliance of her suggestion. “You aren’t going to need a teacher anymore. You are learning to teach yourselves. How totally cool that you take the stuff we did with Sam’s book and imagine doing it with your own books. Do you mean you might bring your book to someone in the class and say, ‘Will you try to do what I say?’ and then watch whether they get as confused as I did?” The children nodded vigorously.

“Might you even *revise* your book to make it clearer? That would be *so* grown-up.” The kids were definite that they’d absolutely do that.

“Oh my goodness. So get going. Don’t waste a second. I gotta see this.”



## Anticipate that Some Children Will Need Scaffolds and Supports to Access High-Level Work

THE MOST PRESSING THING YOU WILL NOTICE TODAY is that some children will quite rightly tell you they can't follow each other's directions. "I can't ski in this room, can I?" they'll say. You will need to show children that they can read each other's directions and *imagine* following them. If the directions say, "Break an egg on the edge of the bowl," the reader can grasp an imaginary egg and break it on the edge of the imaginary bowl. If the directions say, "When the person in line in front of you gets on the ski lift, push yourself forward quickly so that you are standing in the place where the lift will get you," then perhaps the actor is a finger puppet made from your two fingers, who pushes forward on imaginary skis. The important thing to realize is that the process of reading directions is a stop and go activity. The reader reads a step, then does the step—really doing it or imagining doing it. Then the reader presses on, reading the next step. This sort of reading can be done in a way that reveals potential problems in a draft.

While children read their how-to writing to each other and work to address the problems they see, you will want to also read their writing and think about how you can address the problems *you* see. Whereas the kids will address problems by adding words to their pages, you'll address problems with small-group work, mid-workshop teaching points, and minilessons you write on your own to address issues that we never imagined.

For example, if you find that your children are choosing topics such as "when I went to my grandma's house" that don't set them up to write procedural pieces, then you will want to spend more time immersing them in the sounds of procedural writing. This means it will be important for you to read how-to writing aloud. Don't talk this reading to death. Just read and immerse your children in the language of the genre. Meanwhile, find opportunities to give the class oral directions. "Today we're going to make bracelets. Let me teach you how. Listen. I'm going to give you all the how-to directions now. You'll see my directions will be like a how-to book. First, you . . ." Meanwhile, help children develop lists of topics that match the genre and key phrases they can use at the start of these texts that help to angle their writing. For example, you might have these words, hanging prominently in your classroom: "Do you want to know how to . . . ? I will teach you. First you . . ."

### MID-WORKSHOP TEACHING **Say It a Different Way if Your Partner Doesn't Understand**

Near the end of writing time, I spoke up loudly, getting the children's attention. "Writers," I said, "eyes on me. When you read the directions from your how-to book to your partner, and your partner says, 'Wait, I'm confused. I can't follow these directions,' that's your signal that you have to do something. Do you just leave it the way it is and go on? No! Of course not. Here's a tip: try saying it a different way, and then ask your partner, 'Does it make sense now?'" Then take your pen and cross out the old writing and put in the new way of saying whatever was confusing."

It may be that in your class there are one or two children that need extra special help getting started. Perhaps these are children who are just learning to speak English, or perhaps these are children who are extremely reluctant to take risks for fear of getting it wrong. In any case, the heaviest scaffolding you could provide might be to offer up the class how-to book to these few individuals to write as their own. You might say, "Remember how we wrote 'How to Have a Fire Drill' together yesterday? Well, guess what? The kids who come to this school next year are not going to know how to have a fire drill, and it would be great to have that written as a book. Would you each be willing to write that book for them? You could help each other." By offering each child a blank booklet and encouraging them to say those familiar fire drill steps aloud, you're helping them transfer familiar language and vocabulary from one context (whole-class, shared writing) to another (on their own in a small booklet). Encourage them to put it in their own words and draw their own pictures now that they have their own small booklet to write "How to Have a Fire Drill." As soon as they are up and running, leave them to continue, not without letting them know that they can write their next how-to book on any topic they choose!





## SHARE

# Envisioning the Steps in a How-to Book and Revising if They Don't Make Sense

**Ask children to join you in listening and mentally following one child's directions.**

"Today I saw something really terrific. Listen to this. I saw many of you reading directions not only to your partner, *but also to yourselves!* You reread what you wrote and thought, 'If I follow my own directions, will they work?' I have asked Nicole to read her how-to book to us. As she reads, let's close our eyes and see if we can picture ourselves doing each of these steps."

Nicole read her writing.

Nicole

How to Plant a Flower

1. First dig a hole.

Then put the seeds in the hole.

2. Cover the hole with dirt. Water your flowers.

3. Then give your flower some sunlight and take care of your flower.

4. Talk to your flower. Then your flower will grow.

Nicole hadn't yet finished the book, but she told her classmates what she planned to write on the final page: "One day it will start to grow." "Thumbs up if you were able to see the steps of that happening." Thumbs went up across the room. "I feel ready to plant a flower right now!"

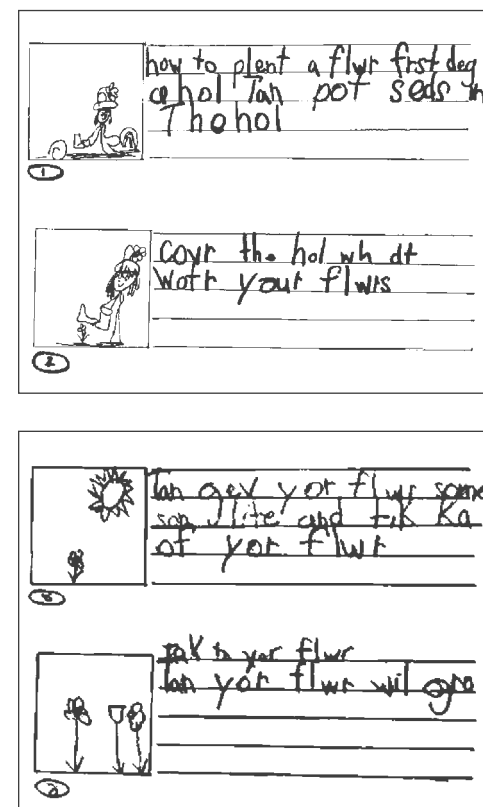


FIG. 3-2 Nicole's writing is easy to follow, in part because she writes more than one sentence for each step. This simple strategy could be tucked into small-group, conferring, or even a Mid-Workshop Teaching point or share.

**Ask children to turn to their partners and read aloud. The listener will try to imagine doing the steps.**

"Writers, would you get with your partners? Partner 1, read your book to Partner 2, just like Nicole read her book to us. And Partner 1, listen and see if you can picture yourself doing each step. Are the directions clear? Do you know what to do first and next and next?"

I listened in as Troyquon turned to his partner, Rachel, and began to read:

*A Cook Book How to Make Pizza*

*Step One: Throw up the dough.*

*Step Two: Spin the dough in your fingers.*

*Step Three: Pat the dough into a flat circle.*

*Step Four: Put tomatoes onto the dough.*

*Put the dough into the pan.*

Rachel interrupted after Troyquon read Step Three. "A flat circle? How will it look like a pizza, not a donut?"

**Help writers realize that if listeners aren't able to follow the steps in a how-to book, revision is necessary.**

I agreed. "Rachel is asking a good question. That's so helpful, isn't it Troyquon? With that help, you can go back and reread and think, 'Have I told her enough?'"

Troyquon looked dubious about reconsidering his text, and it was time for the share session to end. Seizing the moment, I said, "I'll tell you what—why don't I take your directions home and try following them. I'd love to eat some pizza tonight!"

Troyquon took a sticky note and carefully wrote his telephone number. "If you need me, call me."

I convened the class. "Class, I'm going to follow Troyquon's pizza recipe tonight. I have a Post-it with his phone number in case it doesn't work. Will you listen and tell me if you think I'll need to call him?" I read Troyquon's piece to the class. "Thumbs up if you think I'll need to call him." Most of the kids raised their thumbs. "Hmm. Well, I'll give it a try and let all of you know tomorrow if I get stuck!" I made a mental note to follow up with this during morning meeting the next day.

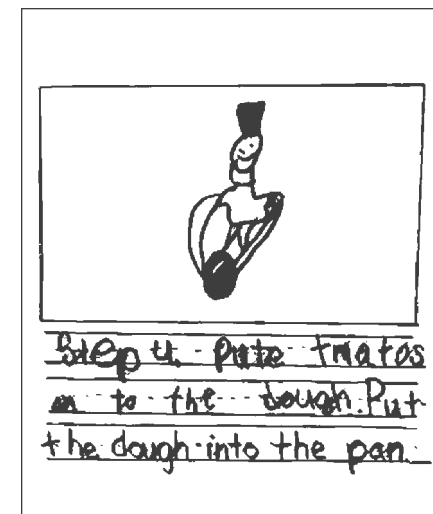
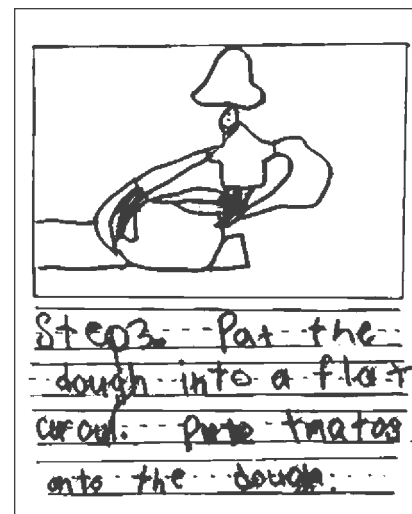
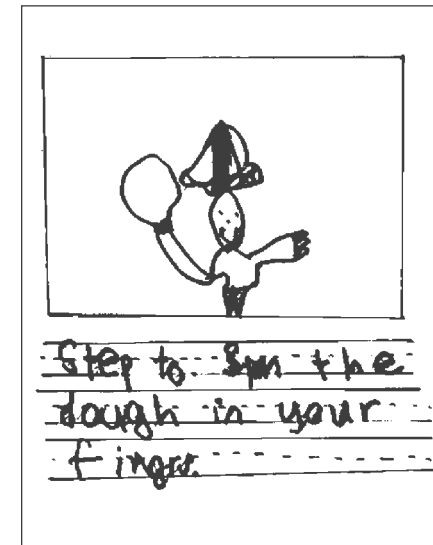
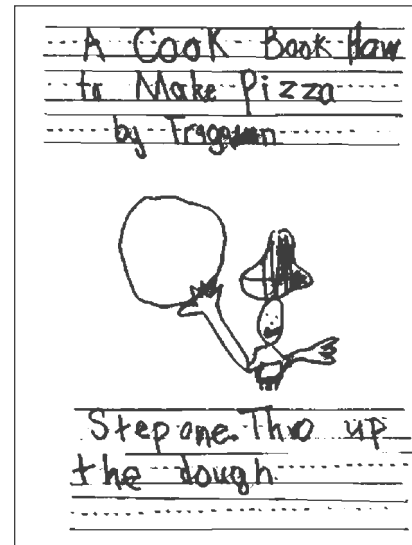


FIG. 3-3 Troyquon's pictures are nearly as helpful as the words for readers to understand his directions.

# Answering Your Partner's Questions



**T**RY WRITING IN A WAY that allows someone else to learn from you. You'll find it is not easy! Certainly you have probably found lots of times when this book is not as clear as you wish it was. "Huh?" you ask. "What are you saying?"

It is especially challenging for a five- or six-year-old to write clear directions for someone else because children at this age are egocentric. They tend to see the world through their own eyes and not imagine that others see something different. It was but a few years ago when these children were toddlers who would cover their eyes up and say, "You can't see me." They'd be standing in full view in front of us, but because their eyes were covered and they couldn't see us, they assumed that in fact *they* were invisible!

It is a very big deal, then, to ask children to write in ways that take into account what others need to know to fully comprehend a message. The words of your minilesson won't be enough to make children able to imagine another person's perspective. Instead, you will want to use your minilessons to channel children to engage in repeated practice, doing the sorts of things that will (after repeated practice) eventually allow them to walk in the shoes of someone else—in this case, a reader.

The great news is that you have the one most important scaffold for this sort of intellectual education right at hand: a partner. The great psychologist Lev Vygotsky had it right when he suggested that learners can first do with the help of someone else what they can eventually do on their own. The goal of today's minilesson, then, is not so much to inform students about a new concept as to create for them another opportunity to experience another person's perspective.

**IN THIS SESSION**, you'll teach students that writing partners help each other make how-to books clearer and easier to follow.

## GETTING READY

- ✓ An enlarged version of the text used for demonstration in Session 2 ("How to Have a Fire Drill") (see Connection)
- ✓ A loaf of bread, jars of peanut butter and jelly, a plate, and a plastic knife or spoon (see Teaching)
- ✓ A book you have written on how to make a peanut butter and jelly sandwich (which you'll pretend to have found on your desk that morning). Include the following steps, deliberately leaving the directions open to misunderstanding (see Teaching).
  1. Get the jar of peanut butter.
  2. Put it on the bread.
  3. Now get the jelly.
- ✓ "How-To Writing" anchor chart from previous sessions on display

**COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS:** W.K.2; W.K.5; RI.K.1; SL.K.1.a; SL.K.2; SL.K.3; SL.K.6; L.K.1.d; L.K.1; L.K.2



## MINILESSON

# Answering Your Partner's Questions

## CONNECTION

**Once you have a captive audience, reread your how-to book in front of the kids. This provides a novel way to remind children of relevant prior instruction.**

When the children gathered, I made myself busy rereading our class how-to book, "How to Have a Fire Drill." I first flipped my pencil around and used the eraser end to reread, pointing to each word, fixing up a small thing or two as I reread. Then I started to reread a second time, acting out the steps as I read them. Partway through this, I feigned finally noticing that the kids were all waiting for me.

"Oh, so sorry. I didn't notice that you were all here. I was so busy rereading. Readers, I know some of you have been rereading your how-to books too. How many of you have reread them with your magic pencil, touching each word and fixing things up if you see that you left something out?" The children signaled that they had, and I nodded, then added, "How many of you reread your book to someone else, checking to see if they could follow your directions?" Again, many children signaled that they had done that.

### ✿ Name the teaching point.

"Well, today I want to tell you that writers feel really lucky if they have readers who not only try to follow their directions, but who also speak up, saying things like 'I'm confused' or 'Can you explain that more clearly?' when they need to do so."

## TEACHING

**Remind students that writing partners are wonderful helpers.**

"Have you ever noticed that inside many books there is a section where the writer says, 'My thanks go to so-and-so, who helped me with this book.' Some of you are probably going to end up wanting to write one of those thank-you sections inside the cover of some of your books, because your partner is a really good writing helper."

## ◆ COACHING

*By modeling for the class how I reread with my magic pencil, making revisions as I go, I am showing them that these habits are a way of life. All writers reread their writing and make revisions. It's not enough for us to simply tell them to do it—we need to show them how we do it, too.*

"I've written a book that I want to put in the school library for all the kids to read, but it isn't quite finished yet. I was hoping you could all help me finish it today. I'm going to show you how to be a helper for me, so that you can be great helpers for each other."

**Recruit a child to play the role of your writing partner. Coach the child to act out the steps of a how-to book and give suggestions for making it stronger.**

"But before I ask for everybody's help, I would really love a partner, a helper, who tries to follow my directions and who also has the courage to tell me (nicely) places where my book is a little confusing. Would one of you be willing to be my writing partner?"

I soon had a partner, Julissa, sitting next to me at the front of the room. "I'll read the book to you. Do you want to follow it in your mind or for real (because my book is one you could do for real)"? My partner shrugged, unclear, so I laid the loaf of bread, jars of peanut butter and jelly, plate, and plastic knife I'd earlier tucked behind my chair before them. "Okay, I'll read my steps, you follow the steps—and tell me if you are ever confused."

Then I said to the rest of the class, "Julissa is my writing partner right now, but all of you can join along. Will you all pretend you have an imaginary loaf of bread, and imaginary jars of peanut butter and jelly in front of you and try following this book too?"

Then I read (hoping to confuse the kids).

1. Get the jar of peanut butter.
2. Put it on the bread. (I expect kids to put the jar on the loaf.)
3. Now get the jelly.

By now, some kids were laughing. I looked startled. "What are you saying? My directions weren't clear enough for you?"

**Tell students that writers use their partners' feedback to revise their books for clarity.**

The kids let on that the directions were confusing. "What?" I asked. "Julissa, you are my writing partner. You will tell me the truth, right? Does my how-to teach you all the steps? Does it make sense?" Julissa giggled and said, "No, it doesn't. You told us to put the *jar* on the bread!"

I pretended that this was a major realization for me. "Oh, I see. It is confusing. Let me try those directions again, changing them to clear up your confusion." This time I said aloud:

*When we teach people to do something—to swim or to teach or to write procedural texts—one of the difficulties is that we need to decide what matters. What skills do we want to be sure learners develop? It'd be easy to teach writers details about the features one finds in How-To texts. The trick is to steer our teaching away from Trivial Pursuits! Here, we have decided that we really want children to grasp the idea that How-To books are written for readers who read sequenced, clear directions.*

*Be sure to choose a topic that is meaningful and familiar to your students. Whether you decide to write "How to Clean a Guinea Pig Cage" or "How to Make Chocolate Pudding," the essence of this lesson is the same.*

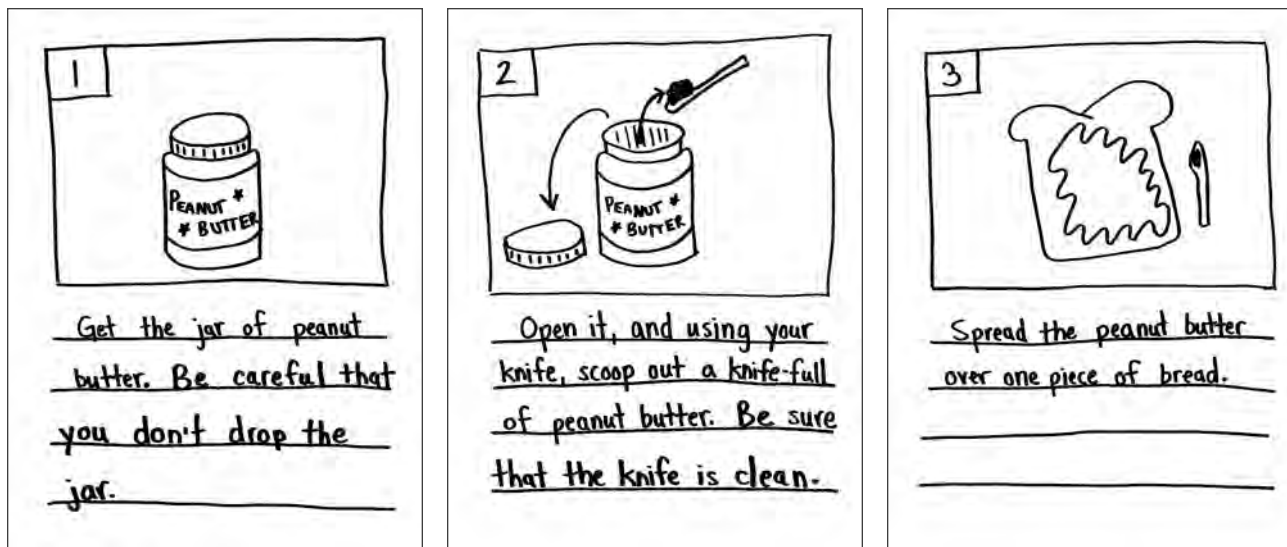


FIG. 4-1 This chart-sized how-to book will become a shared text the class adds to throughout the unit. Using the method of shared writing, the kids will contribute the ideas for the writing, and the teacher will take the role of scribe (though we often restate or add to children's contributions as we go). Thus the shared text that is created is a joint effort, a collaboration between teacher and students.

This time, the kids had more success. I paused. "I'm not going to finish all these directions, but I just have to tell you that tonight, I'm going to add a new section to my book. I'm going to say, 'My thanks go to my writing partner and my readers, who helped me know parts of my first draft that were confusing.' Thanks so much for helping me.

"Writers, did you see how helpful it was to have a partner who was brave and honest with me. She let me know that my writing was confusing and I needed to explain things more clearly, didn't she?"

## ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT

**Ask students to generate ideas about how to be helpful partners.**

Julissa returned to her seat to join the class. "Writers, right now turn to your partner to talk about ways you can be even more helpful to each other."

The room erupted in conversation, and I listened in. Lexi was in the middle of her conversation with Oliver. "You are a good partner when you tell me I left out a word. 'Cause I said 'I poured the into Daisy's bowl,' and I forgot to write 'dog food.'"

Oliver nodded. “*And* tell Daisy is a dog. ‘Cause they might think it is your *sister* eating dog food!” The two pantomimed eating yucky dog food, and I noted to myself that at some point I’d tell them that laughing together also makes for a good partnership.

## LINK

**Remind children that they’ll not only get suggestions from partners, but they’ll also revise to respond to those suggestions.**

“Today when you are with your partner, you can listen closely to your partner’s how-to book and really act it out, step by step. When you aren’t quite sure what to do to act it out, ask your partner to say more. You could say, ‘What do I need to do next?’ or ‘I’m confused. Can you say more?’

“The important thing will not just be to listen to a partner’s questions and confusions, but also to realize that when the partner is confused, that is a signal that you need to revise your book to make it clear. How many of you remember about adding extra pages to a book?” They signaled yes. “How many of you think you could use arrows to squeeze more information into the right spots in your books?” Again, many signaled yes. “You can add sentences, or even whole pages to your how-to book, just like I did when you guys asked me questions!”

**Create a drumroll around the upcoming end of this bend in the unit, and rally kids to start new books sometime today.**

“Writers, you probably will begin by revising the books you have already written, but then you will definitely start a new book. Pretty soon, we’re going to come to the end of this part of our unit, and we’re going to celebrate by laying *all* your how-to books out, like in a museum. You are definitely going to want to have a whole bunch finished. So get started, quick as a wink.”

*If you worry that this will be an invitation to chaos, you can settle for asking writers to read directions to themselves and imagine what their readers will make of each step. But we recommend letting other kids try out the directions.*



## Conferring with Writing Partners

AS YOU'LL REMEMBER, just as minilessons follow a particular template, so, too, do conferences. At the start of a conference, you will generally want to do some quick research to learn what the writer is working on. That research usually begins with a bit of observation and listening. Of course, the observation and listening is especially easy when a writer is working with a partner, since this externalizes what children are doing and thinking. For example, when I pulled alongside Melissa and her partner, Nicole, I first listened long enough to learn that the girls were trying to figure out how to try out Melissa's directions for making chocolate lollipops. Nicole had a pout on her face, and she threw up her hands with exasperation.

"So, writers, can you fill me in on what you are doing now?" I asked.

Nicole said, "I am supposed to try Melissa's directions, but she doesn't have the chocolate, so I don't know how to do it."

Melissa responded, "I'm reading my writing and Nicole is doing my directions, but she's not doing them."

"I can't! I don't have the chocolate!" Nicole explained.

Listening to the two, it was of course immediately apparent to me that they were struggling a bit, but frankly, I was also pleased. It had been a day or two since I'd taught them to try out each other's and their own directions, and these two girls had initiated doing this work on their own. This made it easy to move on to the next stage of a conference, supporting the writers by naming something that they had tried.

"I can see you guys are frustrated, but you know what? You are trying to do something really smart—testing out the directions to see if they work. And the really important thing is that even though it was a few days ago when I taught you to do this, you haven't forgotten and haven't needed me to remind you that this is a strategy you can use any day. You're doing it all by yourself."

Then I added what was essentially the teaching point for this conference. "But do you remember how, in the minilesson, I said that sometimes we are going to need to *pretend* that we are following the directions? Writers have to do that a lot. When I wrote about peanut butter and jelly, I had to pretend, so I could get the exact words down."

### MID-WORKSHOP TEACHING **Writers Not Only Revise Old Books; They Also Write New Books**

"Writers, I'm glad you have been revising. This classroom has felt like a carpentry shop with kids taping strips of paper into their books and stapling new pages into books. Give yourselves a pat on the back if you have done some revision to make your writing even more clear for your readers.

"Although I am glad you've done some revision, I also want to remind you that you need to get started on another book. A good way to know if you are ready to start another book is to use our chart as a checklist." I pointed to our anchor chart.

#### How-To Writing

1. Tells what to do, in steps.
2. Numbers the steps.
3. Has a picture for each step.

(continues)



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"If you have done all these things, then chances are, you are probably ready to start another book! For just a second, let's remember all the things that you know how to do that you could teach others. How many of you know how to do something related to sports. Like, maybe you know how to throw a Frisbee, maybe you know how to do a headstand, or maybe you know how to arm wrestle. If you know something related to a sport, you could write about that. All of you know something related to school. You know how to count and how to count by twos and how to add and take away, right? If you have little brothers or sisters, they do not know those things, and you could be their math professor. Or you could write a book teaching some little kid in your life how to read. Give me a thumbs up if you have an idea for a how-to book that you will get started on right this second." The children signaled, and I said, "Fast! We only have fifteen more minutes."

Knowing it was now time to teach, and deciding to teach through guided practice, I said, "Nicole, let's both be readers, and we'll listen to Melissa's directions and *pretend* we're making chocolate lollipops in our minds. Let's see if we can let the words help us create a picture (just like when we read about being at the ocean and create the picture). Let's try together, okay?"

Melissa began, "Melt the chocolate."

"Okay, so Nicole and I are going to pretend now. Nicole, let's do it. I held up my hands as though ready to grab something out of the air, but then stopped. I looked up into space as if trying to conjure up an image. "I'm having a hard time getting a picture in my mind. I can't make a picture of how to melt it. Do you put it in your hands like when you put snow in your hands and it melts?" Then I turned to my coreader and said,

"How about you, Nicole? Do Melissa's words tell you enough to be able to imagine how to do this?"

Nicole said, "No. How does it melt? Do you light a fire?"

"You have to put the chocolate over hot water to melt it," Melissa clarified.

"*Oh!* Now I can picture how you do it! First, you put the chocolate over the hot water and that is how you melt it," I restated the first step in Melissa's directions, adding the new information.

"Melissa, keep reading. Read the next step." As she read it, I said, "Nicole, try to imagine what her words are saying in your mind. Then you can tell Melissa what you see, and she can check whether her directions are doing the job."

Melissa continued, "Put the melted chocolate in the mold."

I looked over at Nicole to see if she seemed to be making a mental picture and asked what she was seeing. She said, "I'm pouring it in. It is spilling all over."

I gave her a thumbs up. Melissa, however, added. "Wait. You have to get a spoon and put the chocolate in the mold slowly with a spoon."

"What a smart revision you just thought of! Later you better put that down!"

By this point, it was time to end the conference, so I did as I generally do at the end of a conference. I quickly debriefed, reminding the girls of the strategy we used to link it to the writing work they would do in the future. "So, Melissa, now you need to go back and reread your first page, trying to make a movie in your mind of it—'Melt the chocolate'—and see if you can remember what you need to do differently on that first page so that readers will be able to make a movie in their minds of the whole thing. Then reread the next page, and so on."



SHARE

## Extended Writing Time

**Cancel the share so there is more writing time, and rally kids to write fast and furious. Do this in ways that make a statement about the need to produce new writing often.**

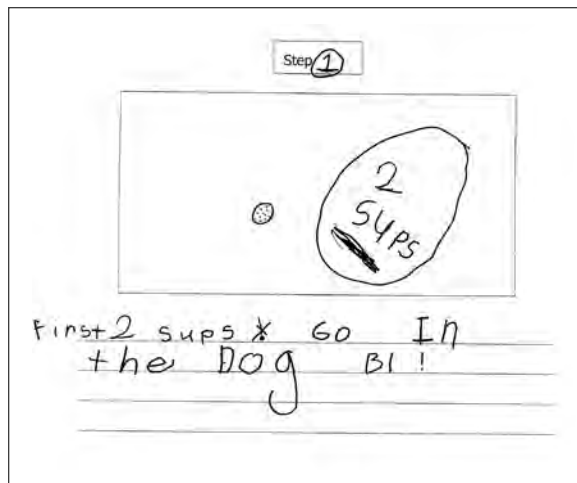
"Writers, we spent so much time helping each other and revising today that many of you haven't yet gotten very far in your new books. We wouldn't want today to go by without tons of writing, so let's work right past the share, to the very end of writing time. That gives you five more precious minutes for writing, so work fast as a bunny, and see how much you can get done in five minutes. Then, after five more minutes, we'll show each other how much we wrote today. You ready? On your mark, get set, go!"

As children wrote, I called out some voiceovers (like those shown at right).

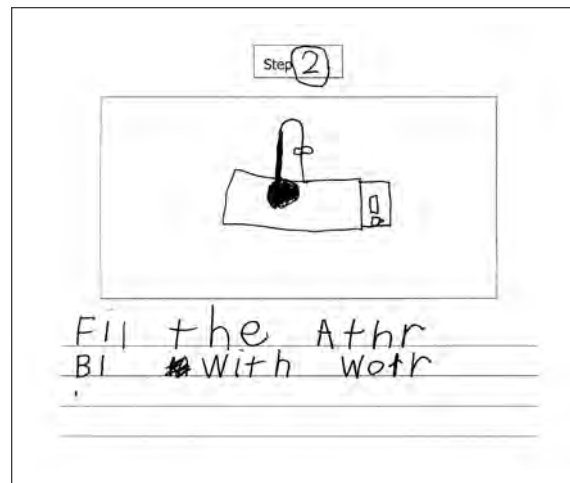
"Just because you are writing fast, you won't want to skip the details that really help people know what you mean."

"If you are writing just one sentence for each step, push yourself to say more, to add at least one more sentence to each step."

After children wrote, fast and furious, for five minutes, I said, "Holy moly! You all wrote so much! Show each other what you accomplished, and let's hear you complimenting each other. I should hear you saying things like, 'Great job. You really worked hard!'"



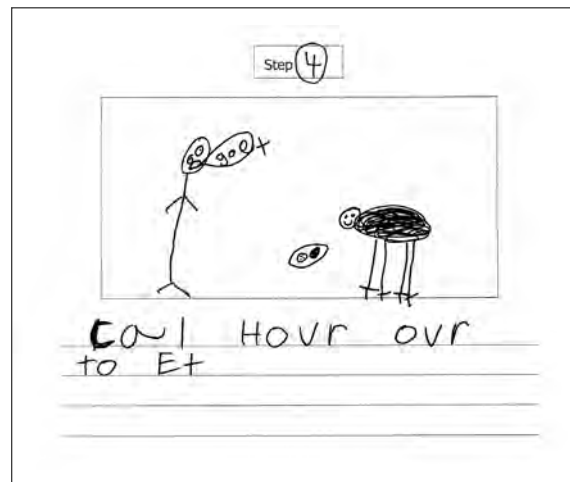
Step 1: First 2 cups go in the dog bowl!



Step 2: Fill the other bowl with water.



Step 3: Put the bowls on the mat.



Step 4: Call her over to eat.

FIG. 4-2 Encourage children to make pictures that teach the most important information, as this student has done.