

*Write Beside Them*

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## Praise for Penny Kittle and *Write Beside Them*

*Sometimes while reading Write Beside Them I smiled. Sometimes I nodded. Once, I was so moved by Kittle's story, her student's courage, and our profession, that my eyes filled with tears. Woven through her vivid descriptions and the persuasive explanations of her teaching practice, Kittle draws indelible portraits of her students. They, and the author's wisdom and compelling voice, make this book unforgettable. You'll have new ways to think about teaching and writing. You'll have effective strategies to try out in your classroom.*

—Tom Romano

Author of *Zigzag* and *Blending Genre, Altering Style*

*Penny Kittle joins the ranks of such wise leaders as Don Graves, Don Murray, and Nancie Atwell with this book, showing us that in an era of standards, one can still create real opportunities to write—and to learn.*

—Jim Burke

Author of *The English Teacher's Companion*, Third Edition

# *Write Beside Them*

risk, voice, and clarity in high school writing

*Penny Kittle*

HEINEMANN  
Portsmouth, NH

Heinemann  
361 Hanover Street  
Portsmouth, NH 03801-3912  
www.heinemann.com

*Offices and agents throughout the world*

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“Letter to the Editor” (March, 2007) by Logan Dwight. From *The Conway Daily Sun*. Reprinted by permission of *The Conway Daily Sun* and Logan Dwight.

#### Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Kittle, Penny.

Write beside them : risk, voice, and clarity in high school writing / Penny Kittle.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN-13: 978-0-325-01097-7 (pbk.)

ISBN-10: 0-325-01097-8 (pbk.)

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

LB1631.K54 2008

80'.0420712—DC22

2007047357

*Editor:* Lisa Luedeke

*Production:* Lynne Costa

*Cover design:* Shawn Girserger

*Interior design:* Joni Doherty

*Typesetter:* Valerie Levy / Drawing Board Studios

*Manufacturing:* Steve Bernier

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

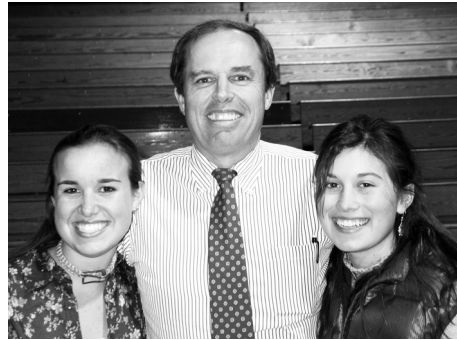
12 11 10 09 08 VP 1 2 3 4 5

I dedicate this work to the memory of

*Gary Millen*  
*1952–2006.*

He was devoted to the students  
at Kennett High School for three decades.

Gary asked difficult questions,  
pestered me for answers,  
and made me laugh.  
He made me a better teacher  
and a better person.  
Rest in peace, my friend.



*Emma McLeavey-Weeder, Gary Millen, Nicole Veilleux*

*Acknowledgments xi*

*Foreword xv*

## PART ONE: FOUNDATIONS

---

1. It's a Wonderful Life / 2
2. This I Believe / 6
3. How Writing Units Work Together: A Scaffold of Writing Instruction / 11
  - Student Focus: Josh / 17*

## PART TWO: COLLECTING THINKING

---

4. The Writer's Notebook / 22
  - What's in a writer's notebook? / 23*
5. Quick Writes / 29
  - Ten quick writes to get you started / 34*
  - Rereading quick writes: discovering what is there / 51*
  - How quick writes fit in my plan for the week / 56*
  - Final Thoughts / 56*
  - Student Focus: Rick / 58*

## PART THREE: WRITER'S WORKSHOP

---

- 6: The Opportunities in a Writer's Workshop / 62
  - The first day / 64*
  - An information guide for students and parents / 67*
  - And for all those days that follow . . . / 70*
    1. Introduce agenda for the day / 70
    2. Reading / 70
    3. Quick writes / 73
    4. Minilessons / 73
      - Reading and thinking like writers / 74*

	<i>My process in the genre we're studying</i>	/ 76
	<i>Rehearsal, rereading, and revision</i>	/ 78
	<i>Grammar and sentence structure</i>	/ 82
5.	<i>Workshop time</i>	/ 82
	<i>Room setup</i>	/ 83
	<i>Conferring</i>	/ 85
	<i>Conditions</i>	/ 86
	<i>Sample writer's conference</i>	/ 87
	<i>Writing conferences that don't work</i>	/ 89
	<i>Response groups</i>	/ 91
6.	<i>Closing each class period</i>	/ 91
	<i>Quaker Share</i>	/ 91
	<i>Symphony Share</i>	/ 92
	<i>Final Thoughts</i>	/ 92
	<i>Student Focus: Kelsey</i>	/ 96

#### PART FOUR: THINKING THROUGH GENRE

---

7.	<i>The Art of Story</i>	/ 102
	<i>How to begin: the first week of class</i>	/ 104
	<i>Why two full units on story?</i>	/ 106
	<i>Using storyboards</i>	/ 114
	<i>Students pursuing their own topics</i>	/ 119
	<i>How minilessons happen</i>	/ 124
	<i>Final Thoughts</i>	/ 128
8.	<i>The Art of Persuasion</i>	/ 130
	<i>Using an editorial as a mentor text</i>	/ 133
	<i>Unit planning</i>	/ 138
	<i>The teacher's model of process</i>	/ 139
	<i>Commentary</i>	/ 143
	<i>Letters</i>	/ 143
	<i>Final thoughts</i>	/ 146
	<i>Student focus: Phillip</i>	/ 147
9.	<i>Seeking Balance: Writing About Literature and Writing About Life</i>	/ 151
	<i>Writing with students about literature</i>	/ 154
	<i>Introduction A</i>	/ 156
	<i>Introduction B</i>	/ 156
	<i>Final thoughts</i>	/ 157
10.	<i>Finding Form for Ideas: Blending Genres</i>	/ 159
	<i>Blending genres</i>	/ 164
	<i>What doesn't work</i>	/ 167
	<i>A launch into multigenre</i>	/ 169

*Final Thoughts* / 171  
*Youth: The Truth About Elementary School* / 173  
*Student focus: Aaron* / 184

PART FIVE: MECHANICS

11. Grammar, Punctuation, and What Keeps Me Up at Night / 190  
*Patience and repetition* / 191  
*Teaching mechanics* / 193  
*Sentence combining* / 194  
*Possessive nouns* / 196  
*Learning to listen to writing* / 198  
*Parallel sentence structure* / 199  
*Breaking the rules* / 200  
*Correcting grammar on drafts: my texts and theirs* / 201  
*Student focus: Kristen* / 203

PART SIX: ASSESSMENT

---

12. Leading Students to Reflection and Independence / 208  
*Teaching content and craft distinctions* / 209  
*Showing how to evaluate student work* / 210  
*Feedback on drafts* / 211  
*Feedback in conference* / 218  
*End notes and student self-evaluation* / 218  
*Ongoing revision: the opportunity to improve* / 221  
*The final portfolio* / 223  
*Weighting the course grade* / 228  
*Student focus: Shaina* / 230

13. In the End, What Writing Is For . . . / 234

*Works Cited and Consulted* 237  
*Index* 241

APPENDIX (ON DVD)

---

*Study Guide*  
*Answers to Frequently Asked Questions About Teaching Writing*  
*Professional Development*  
*Student Samples of Writing You Can Use in Class as Model Texts*  
*“Of Time and Rivers” by Josh Bossie*  
*“The House on the Hill” by Elizabeth Howland*

*“To Whom it May Concern”* by Logan Dwight  
*“Blank Checks and Party Hats: Unworthy Charity”* by Elizabeth Howland  
*“Three Day Trip”* by Kayla Locke  
*“Last Will and Testament”* by anonymous  
*“The Perfect—Not-So-Perfect—Woman”* by Hattie Perkins  
*“14 Black Birch Lane”* by Shaina Procopio  
*“Chemical Equations”* by Sarah Morrison  
*“What Boys Are Like”* by anonymous  
*“Little Pink Shoes”* by Marissa  
*Williams College Reference Letter* by Kathleen Maynard  
*“The Garden, Sisterhood, and Growing Up”* by Jackie Savard  
*“The North Country”* by Sean Donovan  
*“Collection of a Pianist”* by Sarah Chant (a multigenre project)

*Penny Kittle Writing Used in Class During the Work on This Book*

*“what remains”* (student focus: Josh chapter)  
*“Combing Through”* (sentence combining and in writers’ group)  
*“What Forty Cents Can Buy You in November”* (argument)  
*“Warrant Article #7”* (argument)  
*“High School”* (quick writes lesson)  
*“Spinning Wheels”* (used in narrative unit)  
*“Yambill Street”* (used in place narrative unit)  
*“une petite fille”* (narrative snapshot moment)

*Reproducible Forms I Use in My Workshop*

*Qualities of writing by genre:*

*Writing Argument Qualities*

*Writing Commentary (Op-Ed) Qualities*

*Writing Narrative Qualities*

## Acknowledgments

*All my life I have worked with youth.  
I have begged for them and fought for them and lived for them and in them.  
My story is their story.*

—MARY MCLEOD BETHUNE

I've had lots of support in the writing of this book. I want to first thank my students: present and past. Every one of you has brought gifts in my life. Many continue to sustain me. I still marvel at the writing you've done, the honesty and commitment you've shown, and the risks you were willing to take. Thank you for giving me work I can share with others and for showing up each day willing to try. Go and live the lives you've imagined.

My family surrounds me with love and respect. I couldn't write without them. My son, Cam, was a student in my writing class last spring. He let me inside his writing process and inside several remarkable texts. His attention and support in class was a gift I won't forget, and while his intelligence improved my teaching at several points, it was his wit that brightened the room. My daughter, Hannah, is a marvelous, smart writer, and I have learned much about feedback through working with her. She wraps herself around a book; I want to write well enough to be that book. My husband, Pat, is my best friend. He asks important questions and supports my thinking. He brings oatmeal with brown sugar to my desk on Saturday morning and listens as I write out loud on our walks through the neighborhood. Best of all, he says, "I don't want to see you leave this couch all day today; just write," when he knows I'm feeling the pressure of a deadline.

I want to thank all of you who listened to my presentations at conferences and in school districts over the last few years. Your laughter and clear thinking kept me energized. Your tough questions helped me articulate my thinking, and it led to many of the sections in this book. Thank you for asking and for listening as I worked through an answer. I meet such incredible teachers in every state at every grade level, from those just beginning this work to those who have been in it for decades. The teachers I know are rigorous and kind, determined and

deliberate in teaching. The teachers I know do not leave children behind. Your fingerprints are on this book. Keep asking the tough questions, and then go and write your own book—I know you have much to teach me.

I would also like to thank:

*Don Graves*—my friend and my mentor. Your loving friendship is a constant in my life. Thank you for walks in the woods behind your house and deep talk. Thank you for being the generous spirit of twin crafts: teaching and writing. Thank you for the books you place in my hands, the drafts you share of your poetry, the music and photos you offer after every grand excursion. I learn in your shadow, and it is warm here beside you.

*Don Murray*—for help with the first drafts of my thinking for this book and for your friendship. Your writing was brave and simple and true. Thank you for the spring course, S.O.F.T., and your phone calls. I have only watched one person compose a text in front of me and it was you. I miss you.

*Tom Newkirk*—for the boys and literacy course at UNH. Thanks for asking such important questions, for encouraging me to find answers to my own, and for asking us all to pay attention to the emotional life of boys in our classrooms. As a mother of a son, I thank you.

*Tom Romano*—for hurried conversations and funny emails, for your passion and generosity and friendship, for making your writing process transparent and sharing the results. And last, for your work in multigenre, which has given me some of my most precious teaching moments.

*Jim Burke*—for being the dynamic, where-the-hell-do-you-find-the-time Superteacher that keeps me running just to watch you sprint ahead. Your taunting emails made me howl with laughter. One warning: Someday we shall meet on the tennis court, Jim, and I will take you out.

*Kylene Beers*—it all goes back to you, baby. I know I've thanked you before, but I have to here because publishing that first piece I wrote, "Writing Giants, Columbine, and the Queen of Route 16" in *Voices from the Middle* made me believe I was writer. And from that belief came this book. You are the smart, funny professional we all strive to be in this work and your vision sustains so many of us. Thank you.

*Lois Bridges*—I miss you, editor and friend. Your understanding of what I wanted to say and how I might say it helped me see this book before it was. You held my hand as I made those first halting steps as a writer. I find myself still reaching for your guidance.

*Heinemann*—Angela Dion, Lesa Scott, Vicki Boyd, and Leigh Peake: for being smart, dynamic professionals and for the welcome and enthusiasm for writing and teaching that I feel from each of you.

*Kevin Carlson*—thank you for all of the time and enthusiasm you brought to filming and editing this project. Your talent with image is remarkable. Thank

you for treating my classroom with such care and each of my students with such respect.

*Lisa Luedeke*—thank you for a million Post-its. My book became stronger because you took the time to dig for what mattered and helped me say what I couldn't quite articulate.

*Lynne Costa*—for your attention to all the fine details of production. Thank you!

*Carrie Costello, Ed Fayle, Ryan Mahan: the writers*—Here we are four books later. You can all write circles around me: It's about time the rest of the world found out.

*Jack Loynd, Kevin Richard, Steve Woodcock, Neal Moylan, Amy Burnap*—You are what it means to care enough to get the work done for every kid, every time. I admire your honesty and compassion more than I say.

*Jason Wood*—for long conversations about literature and writing and for sharing your passion for this work.

*And as always, to my parents, Ted and Barbara Ostrem*—You are storytellers and cheerleaders. Thank you for supporting all I do.

Thanks to the New Hampshire Writers' Project out of Southern New Hampshire University. The quick write exercise in Chapter 5 first appeared in *NH Writer*, a publication of the New Hampshire Writers' Project.

In this book Penny Kittle speaks of the Durham “Dons” (Murray and Graves) who have inspired her. The two Dons—which makes it sound like some kind of mafia family, which at times it has felt like, with various *capos* and *consiglieres* making their pilgrimages to Mill Pond Road or to the famous corner table at the Bagelry where Don Murray held court. In the summer there would be Tom Romano, such an addict of Newick’s seafood that we all think he should be issued a punch card—buy four lobsters, and your fifth one is free. Ralph Fletcher would wander in to talk baseball and writing; Linda Rief could be spotted making an after-school trip to the Durham Market Place (alias “The Dump”), where she might bump into Boston College Writing Director Lad Tobin. (Linda taught most of our kids.) And so on.

In recent years Penny Kittle would join this group, the Queen of Route 16, arriving in her Cooper Mini, a good likelihood that there was a speeding ticket in the glove compartment. A tall woman, she would extract herself from the Cooper with the grace of the athlete she still is, and join us to talk about writing and teaching. We all knew she was working on a BIG book about writing, and we had read her early work, marveling at her storytelling skill. But nothing had prepared us for the book you are now holding. Nothing.

I finished reading it this afternoon, and I am still in its spell. It touches a spot in me that few books of any kind can reach, and I feel at a loss to explain this effect. There is, to be sure, the practical help it will give to high school writing teachers—her careful delineation of a high school curriculum, her use of free writes to help students find topics, her insightful descriptions of her conferences, and most powerfully, the way she uses mentor texts and insights from her own writing process. Many of these practices have been described by others (the Dons, Romano, Nancie Atwell, Lucy Calkins, Carl Anderson, Kim Stafford, Randy Bomer, Katie Wood Ray, and others), and she doesn’t cover up her borrowings. But she transforms as she assimilates, a process described by the great essayist Montaigne in an unforgettable metaphor:

Bees ransack flowers here and flowers there; but then they make their own honey, which is entirely theirs and no longer thyme or marjoram. Similarly the boy will transform his borrowing; he will confound their forms so that the end-product is entirely his. . . .

In reading this book, one feels this ransacking quality; Penny is open to the best practice of the past thirty years, melding it all into an approach that is truly her own.

This book will also be an excellent antidote to at least two trends in writing instruction. She shows beyond dispute that effective writing instruction cannot follow any formula, be packaged into any rubric, fit some invariable plan—and, as we all know, these systems and packages are everywhere, seductively promising to take weight off the teacher’s back. I think this book also raises questions about the place of a writing class in high school. The course she describes is, keep this in mind, a *senior elective*, shoehorned into the English curriculum. And why shouldn’t all students get this rich opportunity? The answer is that writing still remains colonized in literature classes. With the wide world to explain and explore, why should literary analysis dominate high school writing? When will writing get parity with literature?

She has titled her book *Write Beside Them*, and it took me almost to the end of my reading to pick up the double meaning—and that may be the key to the power of this book. She *writes beside* her students, about complex issues in her life, among them a haunting memory of the death of a friend in a car accident (I literally had to stop reading for a while after that piece). In doing so she clearly models techniques but more important, she creates emotional space for students to write about what matters to them. The individual student portraits she creates for the book will inspire—and break your heart.

And she is right beside them, even in the photographs throughout the book, at their side—a listener, advocate, coach, sometimes comedian, sometimes drill sergeant. She is interested in the lives they lead and deeply respectful of the weight adolescents sometimes carry. She shows us how to break through the gridlock, those treaties of nonengagement so common in high schools. She understands that there is no reason for students to engage with school if they see no purpose in what they are taught, no connection to their lives.

I am writing this foreword on a December day, with snow falling, as it did a year ago when Don Murray passed away. My office actually looks out on his former house (like I say, Durham is a small place). The house has been repainted a pastel purple that does not exist in nature. What I wouldn’t give for five minutes of Minnie Mae Murray’s unvarnished commentary on the color choice. So many conversations that can’t happen.

I wish Don could have read this book in its finished form and felt his animating spirit in it. When he read something really great, he often wouldn't say much. He'd just give his giant head a shake of amazement, a seal of approval to indicate it was the real deal, that it had heart and craft. He would have loved this book.

And so will you.

—Tom Newkirk  
December 2007

# PART ONE

## FOUNDATIONS



## CHAPTER ONE

# *It's a Wonderful Life*

*I love writing.*

*I love the swirl and swing of words as they tangle with human emotions.*

—JAMES MICHENER

---

I awake before dawn. It's 4:45 A.M. and I won't be returning to sleep. My mind buzzes with plans for the day: a poem by Billy Collins, a sketch in our writer's notebooks, listening to two students read recently completed pieces, time to write. I'm ready before I need to be. I can't wait; and it's March even. It's true that I'm a bit of a caffeine hound, but the bigger truth is that teaching writing is a joyful way to spend my days.

I'm forty-five. If you'd told me in my first year of teaching that I'd feel this way so many years and students and grade levels and states later, I'd have laughed that snorting kind of laugh that people find amusing. But I'm content here in this land of teenagers. I sing on my way to work. I'll be writing with my students today: composing, rehearsing, thinking, crafting. I'll be playing with words in a line, listening to students try to make sense of experience, and I'll be surprised to look up and realize we're out of time.

This book is about teaching writing and the gritty particulars of teaching adolescents. But it is also the planning, the thinking, the writing, the journey: all I've been putting into my teaching for the last two decades. This is the book I wanted when I was first given ninth graders and a list of novels to teach. This is a book of vision and hope and joy, but it is also a book of genre units and minilessons and actual conferences with students.

I've been fascinated by the teaching of writing for years. I've read many books and listened to many brilliant people, but sometimes I feel I've learned only one thing: If you want better writers, all of the power lies within *you*. It's all about teaching. In study after study when researchers took all of the fac-

tors that can impact student achievement—from parental income to school resources to parental support to per pupil spending in a school district—the factor that had a greater impact than all of the others *combined* was the effectiveness of the classroom teacher.

By saying that, I do not discount the impact those other factors do have on our classrooms and our students, but simply to remind you that your skills and expertise are more powerful. In my current work as a K–12 literacy coach in the poorest area of our county in New Hampshire, we have real challenges. Some students live in homes with dirt floors. One parent said to me, “Why should she graduate from this place? None of us ever did.” We can’t fix that attitude, but we also can’t despair, throw up our hands, or ever say “There’s nothing I can do,” because teachers are more powerful than parent pressure, any textbook, workbook, curricula, or central office directive. Teachers are more powerful than The Elementary and Secondary Education Act, otherwise known as No Child Left Behind. Teachers make the difference, not tests. What power—what opportunity—lies in our hands.

*“Trust the process. If the process is sound, the product improves.”*

—WILLIAM ZINSSER

Because I know this, standardized tests will not rule my world. Politicians will not tell me how to do my job. I’ve read the research; I know what matters. My teaching of writing rests on the work Don Murray began in the ’60s in college classrooms and Don Graves continued in the ’70s in elementary classrooms. In the last ten years we’ve seen a push toward uniformity and product-centered

standards, but if we shift back to what the Dons discovered is most important in the teaching of writing, writing improves. We have to focus on the process of writing and help students discover its power to improve their work.

Writing is the “neglected R” according to the National Writing Panel Report (CEEB 2003). Our students are not writing well, not writing enough. I see my colleagues scrambling to get students to write and revise, and frankly, to care. But despair creeps upon teachers like water advances on the sand. Why aren’t students motivated? Why won’t they revise? How come after all the time I put into commenting on that paper, he just turns to the last page to find the grade?

If you ask them, they’ll tell you. We aren’t tapping into their passions. Last fall one of my former students, Patrick Haime, went to the University of New Hampshire to major in writing. In his freshman composition class he was asked to write his literacy biography. He wrote about his love affair with books as a child, and then this:

---

My childhood love of books fizzled when I entered junior high—all of a sudden I was in an environment where I had hours and hours of required reading, so much homework about boring subjects that I had no time to read what I wanted to read. With this went the writing—we never had “freewrite” time anymore, I always had to try to write what the teacher wanted, the “right” thing, what needed to be done for the grade. Creativity was gone.

This repression of creativity continued until my senior year in high school. I walked into my Essay Writing class expecting more of the same: “That’s the *wrong* way to write, write like *this*, we’ll be reading what we *have* to read!” I was dead wrong.

Penny Kittle was my tall, goofy, funny teacher who knew what she was talking about. This one had actually written books—a published author! I expected the worst—“She must know the right way to write,” I thought in my head. But no. For 10 minutes out of each 90 minute class, we read a book. *Any book*. A comic book, magazine, anything. You could read Aldous Huxley or Roald Dahl or Stephen King or Carl Jung. And when we wrote, it was about what we wanted to write about. “Defend an opinion,” not “Explain why Nathaniel Hawthorne yada yada yada . . .” Mrs. Kittle emphasized embracing your *own* literacy; owning what you write, reading what you want. This experience was so new and fresh to me . . . but yet it reminded me . . . of how I’d felt as a kid. I read for fun, I wrote because I wanted to. This class renewed my excitement, my feel for writing and that childlike wonder that I used to feel. It was as if when I entered seventh grade, someone boarded up all my creativity and ideas, dammed up that huge stream of consciousness and personality. When I entered Essay Writing, that dam exploded, and all those ideas and thoughts and observations and my yearning to read and write and experience the world like I once did with that joy of being a kid shot out of my head and into the pages and into my life . . . I felt good again.

---

When Pat sent this to me one afternoon I had only one thing to say.  
Goofy?

Actually, I told him how hard it is for teachers to hang on to what they know is right about teaching when criticism comes from every corner and test scores get the most attention in town. Nurturing a creative spirit and unleashing a vibrant mind is every teacher’s dream; we just get constrained by government mandates and decisions we can’t control. It’s not an excuse; it’s life in too many of our schools. I’m just too old to take it anymore. I won’t be ruled by tests I don’t believe in. I won’t be told how to teach writing by people who never write.

My students and I are the most powerful forces in my classroom, not the tests. I’m learning every day, every class, with every student. They still drive my teaching, planning, and thinking. I’ve heard lots of ideas on how to teach writing, seen plenty of curriculum guides and model writing units to transplant to the copy machine, but for all of those experts, I’m still the one who knows my stu-

dents best. I stand today on the discoveries of Don Murray, Don Graves, Lucy Calkins, Tom Newkirk, Nancie Atwell, Linda Rief, Katie Wood Ray, Randy Bomer, and Tom Romano as well as the hundreds of colleagues I've listened to at conferences and whose writing I've admired from afar. Each day I just try to get a little closer to what my students need.

We wrestle with writing together in a high school writing workshop.  
Come inside.

## PATIENCE AND REPETITION

It all begins with attitude. I used to see myself as a toy doll with a pull string, robotically repeating the same rules over and over: “*Its*” is the possessive without an apostrophe; two complete thoughts are not connected with a comma; we put the punctuation inside the quotation marks in America. And still they made the errors. As each class revealed the same mistakes semester after semester, I was tempted to bark, “Why don’t you know this by now? What have others been teaching you?” But you can imagine how effective that would be. Now I begin each semester with a little self-talk. *Patience, Penny. Quit being a know-it-all. No one likes that prim little, bun-wearing, English Teacher alter ego. And worse yet, she’s not a very good teacher: No one listens to nagging.* I take a breath and start at the beginning.

I think of grammar, I tell my students, as a list of expectations and clarity that most readers know; we measure the credibility of the writer by adherence to this code. As Joan Didion says, it is a piano she plays by ear. There is a sound to sentences that make up our writing and grammar mistakes are the misplayed notes we hear and want corrected. Of course, as readers we expect some variations, particularly in poetry, but most writing should adhere to this code we know by heart. I can feel an incomplete sentence because I’m listening to your text. The problem is many of you don’t listen to your own writing, and worst yet, you don’t know the code. I say you can’t misplace an apostrophe in a possessive noun and expect most readers not to notice, and you laugh at me. It is a tough sell because *you* don’t notice. None of your friends notice. But I can sell you with this reminder: Adults notice, colleges notice, your grandparents notice. Your boss will notice. And in your life this semester one person who matters a lot to you will notice: the one who determines your final grade. I don’t expect you to know all of the rules now, but with daily, short practice, you will. I promise. And if you don’t, I have this jolly little event I call “grammar lunch” where

you bring food to my room and we practice. I'm not kidding. You will leave my classroom at the end of the semester as Grammar Kings and Queens, able to slay a comma splice with one swift slice of your punctuation sword. (You can imagine their raised eyebrows. They're asking for a pass to get to guidance and transfer out of my class, right?)

I get students to really pay attention to mechanics by holding to this standard that I explain during our first week of class: It is impossible to get an A on a paper that has more than a few mistakes. Remember, I teach seniors. I don't think I can hand out exceptional grades for shoddy work, even if it is beautiful prose that captivates me. Polish matters. I stick to this, although I do allow students to revise and improve their work to raise the final grade on a paper. This standard allows me to really push kids who are driven by grades, but are not used to editing their work. I win by getting students to reread and rework their ideas, but also to understand why they are making convention errors in the first place.

*Disengaged students have little use for grades or other methods typically used to motivate students. If high school students are not concerned about pleasing their teachers or don't value success in school, the threat of low grades or failing state tests has no impact and is of no value in engaging them.*

—BROWNSTEIN, DiMARTINO,  
AND MILES 2007

But we all know there are plenty of students not at all driven by grades.

They need to know that a real audience notices and cares about the polish of a piece of writing. I work hard at this. We create class books that stay in my classroom long after students have moved on: They see the books created by former students (and, of course, it is the student photos that get their attention first). They want to look good and leave something behind that is sharp. As my colleague Ed says, you might spend a lot of time picking out the pants and shirt when you're going out for the evening, then the right shoes and perhaps an earring that looks good, but if your tie is crooked, people notice. The little details distract from the whole package. We work hard to get the details right, so the reader can live in the story without the distractions. I create binders

of student work by genre that students read to think about structure and ideas during writing workshop. They know their work might be seen again and again in the years to come and they like that, but they also are challenged to produce graceful work because of it.

My goal is not catching students making mistakes and penalizing them; it is motivating them to listen and learn. Patience is important here because they are going to make the same errors many times before they begin to change. I

wish they'd be transformed after my first brilliant lesson, but often I continue to work with mechanics all semester. My goal is lasting understanding. To get there I challenge their thinking with practice and variation.

I ask them to question every single mark of convention that they put on the page. I want them rereading a sentence with an apostrophe to determine if the word with the apostrophe is a contraction or a possessive noun. I want them rereading for usage whenever they encounter a homonym and I show them how to do this in a minilesson. I do not spend time on spelling with a whole class since most have mastered it (or use spell-checker), and it is rare when I need to address it on a final draft. I also review capitalization only rarely, since again, only a few students don't know most of the particulars by now. But if they don't know it, we study it; each semester I determine areas of study in mechanics based on the errors most students are making in class.

John Jerome's quote at the opening of this chapter speaks to the subtlety of punctuation: It creates the scaffolding for building the beauty of a piece of writing, but it should sit in the background as screws do in a handcrafted maple bed frame. Punctuation as fastener, indeed. I teach students how to listen to their writing through reading their work out loud. I want them to hear how a piece reads and how it might read: the risks that are possible and the rhythm that is expected. Readers want the smooth hum of a British racing car taking a corner on a mountain pass, not the lurching and bumping about of a misfiring engine. I ask questions, "Is this how you want your work to read?" and I read it back exactly as it is punctuated. Readers often won't stand for anything less than cruising, I say, so tune up this piece.

## SENTENCE COMBINING

It begins with determining a need. I look at what students are writing and go after the big ideas first. We almost always begin with sentence structure. Years of cryptic notes in the margins of student papers—“run-on,” “frag,” and “c-splice”—have not resulted in lasting learning if you’ve noticed. Many students just recognize something is wrong, not how to fix it. So we begin with sentence combining. I often lift a sentence or two from a student’s writing and use it to teach crafty ways to punctuate. Attitude matters here: It is never “look what someone did wrong,” but rather, “look at the possibilities we have with these ideas and the myriad of ways this could be structured.” We experiment with punctuation in our writing notebooks. Recently sentence combining was listed as one of ten strategies that make a difference in student writing (Graham and Perin 2006). Without explicit teaching of the possibilities, there is only correction and frustration, for both the student and teacher. With focused teaching on sentence work, students improve.

I put the following four sentences on the board. (I use myself or a student in class as the content since they are typically more alert when it is all about them.)

*Mrs. Kittle teaches English.*

*She has taught for two decades and in lots of grade levels.*

*She loves teaching.*

*This year she teaches writing to seniors at Kennett High School.*

I show them how I might combine the ideas into one sentence by making some ideas subordinate to others. One example: *Mrs. Kittle, who has taught for two decades in lots of grade levels, loves teaching writing to seniors at Kennett High School.* We then talk about other possibilities for combining.

- *Mrs. Kittle loves teaching—even after two decades and lots of grade levels—and this year she’s teaching writing to seniors at Kennett.*
- *This year Mrs. Kittle is teaching writing at Kennett; she loves teaching seniors and brings two decades of experience to the classroom.*

I give them language for this through my discussion of a possibility. *I can use a semicolon in the second example because there are two main ideas in complete thoughts that are closely related. Semicolons can’t connect just anything; they must*

connect ideas that are related to each other. I remind them of the independent and dependent clauses, and so on. It is important to establish this language, so I can use it efficiently in individual writing conferences.

Another way we look at sentence combining is through the lens of voice. I want my students manipulating structure, but I don't want them losing their voices in the process. I tell them the previous example isn't how I would relay this information; it doesn't sound like me. So we practice telling the same information in our own voice.

- ♦ *Mrs. Kittle is one of those crazy old teachers who still loves teaching—every day, every class, every student. She's been teaching writing for two decades now in all kinds of grade levels, but has found a home with Kennett seniors.*

We can spend five minutes on this in class—one combination a day like lightweight training—and build punctuation muscles in the process. I take a student and list a few things about him: *Jeff is an only child. He is a wicked cool baseball player. He lives in Redstone. His pitching put our team in the state championship this year.* The students create their own combinations and we share. Try it. Come up with three ways to combine those four ideas. It is problem solving and thinking and it reveals a lot of what our students don't understand about punctuation. Students are happy to take over this teaching once they understand it—either creating combinations for us to work with or in leading class discussions of possibility.

We need these daily conversations about grammar and punctuation because students won't get this anywhere else. And I'm sorry to say, they won't get it from the “context of their writing” alone. I often hear teachers say, “I teach conventions in context,” which I agree is more effective than the old grammar texts we once used, but it just isn't enough for me. I can't spend as much time on mechanics as I need to in order to move a writer during our writing conferences. I have to work on ideas and organization and voice and word choice and encouraging a writer to move forward with a little fledgling of an idea. I can't spend every conference teaching parallel sentence structure or comma splices or I'll risk having the student think that is all I care about. (And yet if I am focused on ideas and voice and I never get to mechanics, they'll be sure to think it doesn't matter.) So, left with those realities, I do both. I teach and practice with the whole class, then reinforce what we're studying in conferences when I can. Like this: Imagine you're eavesdropping on my conference with Chris during workshop.

Chris has written, *I played hockey for five years with my younger brother; who is better than me.*

Now first I talk about the writing piece and the help he needs from me, as usual. Then before I leave I say, “Tell me about how you used the semicolon in this sentence, Chris. What do you know about a semicolon?”

He repeats what he’s learned in class: It combines two complete ideas that are closely related. I say, “Show me the two complete ideas.” He can find only one. Then we talk about his other options, like using a conjunction and a comma, so that the sentence will be correct.

I can’t have that short conventions conference with him if I haven’t built the foundation in daily class practice. I used to get frustrated when I tried to approach conventions in conference because it was never short and easy to do so. We know we can’t confer for twenty minutes with one student, and we certainly don’t want to lecture about conventions and move on. No one learns that way. I’ve found the combination of whole-class foundation building and in-context reinforcement works. Combine it with expecting all finished writing to be “darn near perfect” and most students really start to change their writing habits.

I have been amazed at the lack of conventions muscles my students have. They’ll tell me no one has taught them these things before, but I don’t believe it. I have great respect for teachers at all grade levels. I know we’re all out there teaching, but almost all of my students haven’t *learned* enough about grammar and punctuation before their senior year. Perhaps that is because it isn’t taught enough or practiced enough, but raging about teachers who don’t work hard enough never helps me. I just make sure they learn it from me.

## POSSESSIVE NOUNS

Learning takes practice. How much? Here’s an example of work with one class on possessive nouns. I kept track of the steps I took to reach mastery with most students in one class in one semester.

1. The need for initial practice was determined based on repeated errors in essays. All students struggling with single possessives, plural possessives, and contractions. Corrections were made on drafts of essays (in context) and individual conferences were held with many as we worked on our first piece of writing, but final drafts showed little improvement.

2. I introduced a study of apostrophe use with four sentences: one with no apostrophe—a PN (plural noun), one with a SPN (singular possessive noun), one with a PPN (plural possessive noun), and finally one with a C (contraction of noun + is) because my students often spell contractions as plural nouns.

Students practiced with a second set of sentences in writer's notebook (not graded) as I walked around to see how they were doing. Many errors.

3. I teach this each day of this first week of our study with sample fill-in-the-blank sentences like these:

boys (PN) boys' (PPN) boy's (SPN) boy's (C)

- *If the boys     in class don't stop talking, I'm going to sing for them. PN*
- *The boys'     papers were filled with humor and made Mrs. Kittle laugh. PPN*
- *One boy's     story of winning the soccer tournament had a very crafty ending. SPN*
- *You know the boy's     going to be late when he's still toasting his bagel as morning announcements start. C*

Notice that our initial practice involves only four choices, which makes this task easy. I soon make six sentences with the same four choices, requiring more thinking. We review the answers together briefly and move on with our work for the day. This is a five-minute exercise at most, and students begin to develop confidence quickly. Soon I can assign a pair of students to create the sentences for the class each day and others to lead the discussion of answers. Students begin to notice apostrophes in model texts we use in our genre study.

4. I begin class with a quick quiz after two weeks. In this particular class the results were: 25 percent solid understanding, 65 percent developing understanding, 10 percent no understanding. I'm discouraged, but not surprised.

5. I continue discussing corrections in conference on essays (in context). I find that even with good intentions I get involved in the piece of writing and often just don't have time to also work on the conventions. This reminds me of why I must do some of the work with the whole class or it won't get done at all.

6. I continue to review this skill once a week for two more weeks. I create review groups of mixed abilities with at least one student with a solid understanding assigned to each group. Students are given several sets of sentences and work through the same process and thinking, but turn in one paper with all four names on it and share a classwork grade for this activity. Cooperative work

allows me to circle and listen, while allowing students to have another teacher. The truth is, they're just more attentive to each other than they are to me. I can't imagine why.

7. After five weeks of work focused on possessive nouns and sentence combining, I create a quiz with many variables and much greater difficulty. Results are better: 52 percent solid understanding, 22 percent developing understanding, 19 percent with only half correct, but I still consider that little to no understanding, and one student missed almost all of the questions. (He and I schedule a grammar lunch for the next day. Grammar lunch sounds like torture, I know, but I keep candy in my office and students are usually willing to stop by for help as we eat. I also have scheduled times before and after school when students can count on me for individual help.)

8. At this point our class study ends. I will review this once every two weeks or so (retention theory) while I also continue to work with the few individuals who really need it in conference. All of my students think differently about possessives at this point and often notice errors in their own work without me. They also get high fives for finding an error on a sign in town or in the paper.

This isn't a plan that I can give you for your class, since your class may have better or worse skills than mine did this semester, but I can tell you it takes this kind of effort in order for many students to finally learn the rules. I watch my students, read their drafts, and decide on a grammar or mechanics study based on what they're able to do as writers. One semester it was dialogue and homonyms first, then possessives, with lots of sentence structure all semester long. They still weren't completely independent by the time they left me, but thankfully, that was an unusual group. With a strong class the year before we zipped through every review with ease and speed and they had it.



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