

Teaching Middle School Writers: Teaching Take-Aways from “Students Speak Out on Writing”

Ten Tips for Interviewing Students About Their Writing Lives

When we interview students about their writing lives, we gain insight that can help us plan instruction that motivates these young writers and improves their writing craft and technique. Here are suggestions that work for me.

- Explain why you’ll be jotting down notes during the interview.
- Be an interested and tuned-in listener, for this encourages students to be candid and share their thoughts and feelings.
- Start with three to four questions that you ask of each student so that you can compare responses and reactions. (Use the interview questions on the DVD or create your own.)
- Be ready to pose follow-up questions that help the student think, rethink, and elaborate on his or her responses.
- Avoid interpreting comments during the interview. You’re there to gather information and maintain a positive atmosphere.
- Ask the student if he or she has any additional thoughts to share.
- Read over your notes. What aspects of writing/topics made the student animated? Running with the positive connections is key.
- Make note of students who you feel will need your instructional support. Jot down the stage of the writing process they seem most unsure of if you have discovered this.
- Wrap-up by thanking the student for sharing his or her thoughts and feelings.
- Decide if there are students you’d like to interview again. Base your decisions on students’ responses: Ask yourself: Is there something that concerns me about this student? What information don’t I have? Do I need to try to find the causes of

negative attitudes toward writing? Do I need more information in order to support this student?

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