

# *How This Book Works for Writing Teachers of All Stripes*

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This book is a collection of many wonderful things created by some out-of-this-world teachers and a few of my own designs. It is more than any one teacher can do in a year, so I hereby bless you to use its chapters in any order you wish, at any pace you need. I also wrote it so that it really can work for teachers in a range of school settings and writing frameworks. At the end of the day, programs and pedagogies don't teach, teachers do. As I hope this book will prove, what matters most is the clarity of the instruction, the authenticity and sheer hours of writing, and the quality of the feedback to student writers. These attributes can occur in many classroom environments. Following are a few suggestions for ideas most ripe for transplanting.



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## If You Currently Use a Writing Program

Many of us work in schools that have purchased a writing program. What typifies these resources is that so much is already decided for the teacher and students, including writing topics, structures, and elaboration techniques. Overall, the program's materials drive the expectations and outcomes.

| Common Challenges   | Use This Book to Augment . . .   |
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| Prescriptive programs may teach writing as a process, but sometimes in implementation, the process becomes lockstep rather than recursive in nature, and students are shepherded from one phase to another with little sense of choice or agency. | Students' understanding of writing as a process of planning, drafting, revising, and editing, and the idea that <i>they</i> as writers choose strategies to use at each phase.   |
| Prescriptive approaches by design do not encourage creative risk taking by writers, because the topics, structures, and final writing product are predetermined.  | Students' risk taking with content, craft, and expression of style, even when writing in a low-choice context.   |
| Programs may have clear goals, tasks, expectations for success, and rubrics to guide student writers' learning, but lack instruction and mindset around helping students to define goals unique to them.  | Students' motivation to set personal, meaningful goals within the expectations of the program, unit, or writing task.  |
| Students are expected to proceed at the same pace, attending to the same thing, and even if there is some differentiation guidance it is far from the differentiation and student-driven choice afforded by a workshop model.                     | Students' choices and adaptations within the expectations of the program, unit, or writing task.   |
| The teacher is often expected to correct the grammar and conventions for accuracy, and these corrections are evident in the final piece.  | Students' reflecting on the writing mechanics and conventions they applied as part of the same process of reflection when they name what they learned from the experience that can be used in other writing pieces and settings. |

## If You Currently Use an Organic Approach

An organic approach is one in which the students have most of the ownership over what happens in a writing experience. In essence, it's the writing workshop model, and sometimes called "process writing." The teachers may not have many concrete resources except themselves, their students, and some general unit plans.

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| With students at various stages of planning, drafting, revising, and editing writing, teachers may fall into an "air-traffic controller" mode instead of acting as mentor providing valuable feedback at each stage. | Feedback that is attuned to process of writing and that helps students apply strategies for planning, drafting, revising, and editing.  |
| Grades, outside pressures, and curriculum demands can undermine the spirit of creative risk taking in a classroom writing environment, which in turn can undermine young writers' motivation.                        | Instruction and feedback that encourages students' risk taking with content, craft, and expression of style even if the lessons/units you implement focus on particular genres or skills.   |
| Goal setting sometimes takes on a generic or perfunctory quality, and relates to trying a new genre or getting a piece done on time.   | An increase in students' motivation to set personal, meaningful goals and to work to meet those goals, both writing- and writer-centered, and celebrate their personal growth through reflection.   |
| Writing workshop/organic models operate most successfully with a high degree of student choice, but teachers may not recognize the degree to which they are still making too many of the decisions.                  | Student choice that arises from within the learner rather than in response to a menu of options you provide. Students choose what to work on in terms of topic, structure, grammar, conventions, elaboration details, and sometimes even genre. |