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## Chapter 3

### Feedback Fundamentals

*The aim is to provide feedback that is “just in time,” “just for me,” “just for where I am in my learning process,” and “just what I need to help me move forward.”*

—John Hattie, *Visible Learning*, p. 137

With the opening quote from John Hattie in mind, read the following list and put a checkmark beside the feedback that you think works:

“You are an amazing writer!”

“If you put more effort in, you could be a good writer.”

“Please add more details in this section here, and watch your tenses.”

“Where are your paragraphs?”

“I would like this paragraph better if you indented.”

“I love the way you added voice in this piece.”

Yes, I know, I have asked you sort of a trick question. What Hattie would probably say is “none of the above,” because a more influential way to use feedback is to customize it for the student and minimize your role as all-knowing “blessor” of writing. In this chapter, we are going to zero in on four fundamentals that will help you frame feedback well in your classroom and understand the shortcomings of comments like those above.

Effective feedback is all about the timing. That is, if it’s going to have a lasting, positive effect on learning, it has to be based on a strategically timed exchange of information between the novice and the expert (Hattie & Temperley, 2007). We must first solicit and gather information from our writers, without making any assumptions or prejudgments about what we imagine they must need. We can do this in lots of ways: through conversations or conferences, through studying their writing or watching their writing work from afar, or through any other ways of first honing in on what that writer is doing, almost doing, and not yet doing. And, with this information in mind, only then deciding on the feedback that is suited for that writer, at this time.

This is not always easy work! There are many invisibles that go into designing effective feedback—intentions and decisions that can be hard to see when observing a teacher at work. If only we could get inside the mind of the teacher whose feedback always seems to be customized, spot on, and compelling! The good news is, I’ve done significant action research on my own feedback process and that of thousands of students and hundreds of teachers. I’ve distilled the invisibles into four fundamentals of feedback:



#### **Fundamental 1: Discover the Writer’s Identity**



#### **Fundamental 2: Set the Tone**



#### **Fundamental 3: Use Formative Assessment**



#### **Fundamental 4: Deliver Feedback That Has the Power of Three**

In this chapter, we will spend some time cracking open these fundamentals.



## Fundamental 1: Discover the Writer's Identity

We've talked for years in our field about the importance of the student-teacher relationship. Hattie identifies this relationship as one of the top 10 most important conditions for instruction (right next to feedback!). He describes the student-centered teacher as one who "is passionate about engaging students with what is being taught and helping them to succeed. Overall, a student-centered teacher has warmth, trust, empathy, and positive relationships." But, I've often thought, what does a "warm, trusting" relationship really mean to a writing teacher? Does that mean saying "good morning"? Using a student's name often? Smiling and being friendly? How do the best writing teachers operationalize the research on relationships to the nuances of writing?

The strongest teacher-writer relationships I have experienced and studied begin with the writers themselves, with the teacher discovering and developing the writer's identity. Let the students get the message that they possess untapped potential in learning writing. And through that belief, one of a growth mindset, every day is an opportunity for growth. Let me define what I mean by "writer's identity." To me, it's a self-concept a student has, that is comprised of current skills, curiosities, insecurities, memories, and experiences as a writer. Much like a snail carries its shell on its back, a writer has inside a shell full of interests, talents, particular likes, and dreams—and it's our job both to discover and enhance them throughout the year.

Essential to effective feedback is to *know* our young writers—who they are, what makes them tick, and how they identify their strengths and challenges. Of the four fundamentals, discovering each writer's identity is the one I hold most dear, and the one, as teachers, we need to shout about from the rooftops because it's so undervalued in American education. The heart and soul of this book rests on this fundamental, and here's why:

When I work with young writers, I am constantly amazed at just how open and aware they are of their identity—their strengths and

challenges in writing—once I’ve invited them to let down their guard with me. In a sense, this is all I need to help them develop their writing, because when a writer possesses a positive and strong writing identity, he or she is more inclined to invest in writing with passion and engagement. The writer’s identity influences every choice a writer makes, whether to invest and engage in writing, or to avoid it at all costs. Teachers can help discover this positive writing identity by first developing a positive relationship with the student. To explain this concept with more clarity, let me share the conversation I had with Max, as I worked to discover and develop his writing identity. I started out by saying, “Max, would you tell me about you as a writer?” A surprisingly simple question followed with some pretty revealing responses.

**Max:** I am not that good at writing.

**Me:** What makes you say that?

**Max:** I get bad grades. I don’t like writing. I like free writing, though, but I don’t like when teachers tell me how and what to write.

**Me:** Are there times you do like to write or places you write when it is not assigned?

**Max:** I do like to write fantasy, though, and write that all the time at home.

**Me:** Well, I believe that there is a writer within all of us, even if we don’t feel particularly strong at it. I think you may believe that too, deep down inside, because you said you like to write fantasy, you like free writing, and you write on your own. I can identify with not feeling strong about writing—I have been there myself, and even at my age I am still trying to figure that all out. But I can help you discover that writer within you.

**Max:** I like fantasy writing.

**Me:** What do you do well in fantasy writing? We can take those strengths you have in fantasy writing and bring them to the writing that you don’t have a choice in. While it may not

be instantaneous, you will see that your strengths can really help you tackle the hard parts of writing. What are your strengths in writing fantasy?

**Max:** Humor. I like to make my stories funny.

**Me:** Well, your next writing piece is opinion and you can certainly use humor to be more convincing! How about we make this a goal for you . . .

As I reflected on the conversation with Max's teachers, Nancy and Jess, who had been observing, here are some things we named as important writing identity discovery moves.

- First, we noticed the space Max had to answer comfortably and freely about both his strengths and challenges in writing.
- We also agreed that sharing my own challenges and strengths with Max made him more willing to do the same.
- Nancy and Jess pointed out that I asked the student to name precisely what he felt he did well in his preferred genre, and in so doing, I in a sense "outed" his main passion, and then used this knowledge to name a next step that would be based squarely on this strength. In other words, if I'd just let it be that Max liked fantasy writing, I might have mistakenly deduced that was the whole of his writing identity. By discovering a subset passion within that—humor writing—I helped him name a more nuanced identity, and I had a fuller sense of what he'd like to be known for as a writer.

Much like a great character in fiction (not to mention any human being!), writers are a blend of sometimes harmonious and sometimes conflicting qualities and behaviors. We often demarcate those who are "poets" or "nonfiction writers" or "funny writers" in the classroom, and what I want to show you in this section, and throughout the book, is that through dialogue and feedback, we can strengthen our students' writing by discovering and developing these idiosyncratic blends sooner.

Conversation Moves to Discover the Writer's Identity	Possible Ways to Phrase Comments to Open Up Student Writer
Give space for the writer to talk comfortably and freely about both her strengths and challenges of writing	"Tell me about you as a writer." "Would you share more about that?" "What makes you say that?"
Draw out more from the writer to discover the other dimensions of this writer	"What else?" "Tell me more . . ." "I'm curious about . . ."
Share your vulnerabilities	"I can identify . . ." "I often feel the same way . . ." "I remember a time . . ."
Offer support	"Thank you for being so open." "I can help you discover . . ." "Let's imagine ways your strengths can help you meet your challenges."

### How to Begin

You might begin this discovery work during the first week of school, by making a plan to meet with three or four students a day, so that within just a couple of weeks you have met with each one. I usually have a conversation first and ask questions that help me get to know them as people and as writers. I jot down as much as I can without sacrificing the conversational tone too much, just to be able to gather notes that I can refer to later. Some examples of language I often use in these conversations:

- Tell me about yourself as a writer . . . as a person.
- What do you consider your strengths as a writer? Your challenges?
- When has writing been a pleasing, positive, or important experience for you?
- Do you have a writing life outside of school?
- When are you most compelled to write?
- When have you seen your writing move others emotionally—maybe they laughed or cried or had an “aha!” moment or were moved to action?
- What have been some of the tough times in writing for you? Times you have felt a bit uneasy or defeated in writing?

## What's Your Writing Identity?

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

If ...	Then ...	Comments
You write on your own time but mostly keep it to yourself, like a diary or personal collection of writing	You might be the type of writer who uses writing to learn both about yourself and the world around you.	
You write when you are upset or bothered about something to create change	You might be the type of writer who uses writing to change the world and solve problems.	
You write stories that are based on characters in your favorite books	You might be the type of writer who finds their greatest inspiration from other authors.	
You do all you can to avoid writing	You might be the type of writer who is still figuring out where writing fits into your life.	
You write to make others laugh	You might be the type of writer who uses humor not only to entertain but to change the way people think, feel, and act.	
Your sketch and writing seem to go hand in hand	You might be the type of writer who needs to envision their writing first and will help your reader envision clearly as well.	
You most often write informational text	You might be the type of writer who is looking to teach others about important topics.	
You write using technology (e.g., blog, Wattpad)	You might be the type of writer who keeps the audience/reader in the forefront of your writing process.	
You . . .	You might be . . .	

Some more space to tell me about you as a writer:



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After these conversations I dig a little deeper in the discovery process by asking writers to jot some thoughts and ideas on a writing identity form. I take some time in class to ask students to complete this thoughtfully and then schedule brief conferences to discuss it with each student over the next week, doing several conferences a day. I try to start my year with this, and then revisit it periodically throughout the year, though you can start it at any time.

Here are one writer's responses.

(1a) What's Your Writing Identity?

If...	Then...	Comments
You write on your own time but mostly keep it to yourself, like a diary or personal collection of writing	You might be the type of writer who uses writing learn both about yourself and the world around you.	Ehhh; sometimes.
You write when you are upset or bothered about something to create change	You might be the type of writer who uses writing to change the world and solve problems.	I don't really do that.
You write stories that are based on characters in your favorite books	You might be the type of writer who finds their greatest inspiration from other authors.	Kinda do that.
You do all you can to avoid writing	You might be the type of writer who is still figuring out where writing fits into your life.	☹️ I do NOT do that at all!
You write to make others laugh	You might be the type of writer who uses humor not only to entertain but to change the way people think, feel, and act.	I do that sometimes.
You sketch and writing seem to go hand in hand	You might be the type of writer who needs to envision their writing first and will help your reader envision clearly as well.	Sometimes...
You most often write informational text	You might be the type of writer who is looking to teach others about important topics.	I am not a non-fiction writer.
You write using technology (i.e. blog, wattpad)	You might be the type of writer who keeps the audience/reader in the forefront of your writing process.	I like to draft first.
You... Write comic strips	You might be... Influenced to make people laugh and to be silly.	Yeah! I am writing daily comic strips this moment!
You...	You might be...	

Some more space to tell me about you as a writer (you may use the back too):

I love this treasure—evidence of this young writer's multifaceted identity.



When I read this chart, I learn so much about this writer. Michael clearly loves to write, yet not nonfiction. He is a mixture of a full-on comic book writer, with a hint of writing for himself and a touch of writing to make others laugh. Knowing this about him can certainly help me see the broader picture of a writer, not just a third-grade student. And with this information, his teacher can—and has—taught him that the gifts he already possesses as a writer are the very things that will help him tackle his challenges.

A writer's identity is both complex and ever evolving, through new experiences, challenges, mistakes, moments of celebration, others' reactions, and practice. This evolution of identity correlates directly with an evolution in the writing itself. So you start with the writer's identity form, have a 5-minute conference to explore it, and then in the weeks that unfold from there, you use these initial insights almost as a pair of "reading glasses"—a lens on students' writing work—that informs your feedback and instruction. We'll keep looking at this ongoing process throughout this book, but for now, let's take a tour of one student writer so you can see what I mean about how far a student writer can range and develop when a teacher attends to the identity early on.

Morgan is a fifth grader, typical in many ways. In her first reflection, early in the school year, on her own writing identity, she identified the many complexities of herself as a writer. Note, though, the draw she has to writing narrative, fiction specifically.

## *Morgan's Writing Identity Evolution*

### *Better Understanding Our Writing Identities*

*Morgan Rooney, age 11*

*Morgan is the type of writer who . . .*

*Morgan is the type of writer who tends to take too long in a moment, but describe it very well. She loves using the strategy show not tell, which makes it hard to speed up a moment not so important. She enjoys a comfortable spot with no distractions. Sometimes,*

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she gets unfocused if others are detracting. She likes writing fictional/realistic fictional stories, but does not like a minimum of work to do.

Something Morgan notices she does as a writer . . .

She notices that her fictional/realistic fiction writing is more satisfying than her feature articles. This is good because she has a big imagination and loves looking to see the "what-ifs" in life. To add on, she notices even the least important parts in her writing are stretched out and become quite boring.

A writing risk/technique she wants to try is . . .

Something new she wishes to try is adding symbolism to her realistic stories. She also wants to try adding more voice into her feature articles so it won't be facts, after facts, after inferences, after facts.

This will help her become a more powerful writer because . . .

In her stories, this will help her think deeper not just as a writer but a reader. A reader because in order to know where to put symbolism, she has to know where goes, she can do this while reading. It also helps her think deeper as a writer.

Here is Morgan's first writing piece from the beginning of the year, a personal narrative.

## *A Wish Come True*

The car engine turned on.

"Finally!" I whispered to my brother, Connor. The snow outside glittered in the headlights and then fell in the dark ground. I could not wait for dinner. I sat watching the magic until my other brother Ryan nudged me hard. I gritted my teeth in pain and glared over at him.

"What do you want?" I said making it clear to sound irritated. He was clearly annoyed at my tone, he had trouble not showing it, I noted with satisfaction.

"Were you listening?" He asked all of the sudden smug. I slowly shook my head.

"Yes" I asked, uncertain why Ryan was acting this way. Uh oh. It is Christmas eve and if I am not paying attention to my parents, its coal in the stocking for me.

"Yes?" I said trying to sound calm. I want presents. But it sounds like a question. So much for being tough.

"I asked are you excited for Christmas?" Phewf! Nothing too important.

"Um . . . Of course! Mom you should know this by now! I love the family, food, fun and presents!" I was practically jumping out of my seat. Things can get me riled up. Plus, I just sat still for an hour and a half at church. I am hyper.

"I am too." She replies with a smile and faces front seat. Five minutes later we were home.

"What's that?" I ask as we get out of the car and pile into the garage. There was a note on the door.

"I call reading it" I yell out. "It says

Dear Morgan Ryan and Connor,  
 I dropped her off today  
 So she wouldn't jump out of the sleigh  
 Your parents said it was okay  
 FYI her name is Shea  
 Your parents said it was alright  
 Be sure to treat her right  
 I will be back later tonight  
 Love,  
 Santa"

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"OMG" I scream. I shout. I jump.

"What is it?" Connor asked.

"Maybe we got another Elf on the Shelf" suggested Ryan. Wow I can't believe they don't know. We all asked for it for Christmas. Time to break the news.

"I think we got a dog!" I shout. I plow through them and open the door to the basement mudroom.

Right as I ran to my basement my heart broke there was no dog. My eyes started tearing up and I choked. I said to myself why am I worried there is more rooms in this house. I sprinted to my kitchen. My eyes scan the premises. I feel like a spy being chased while looking for a special treasure. I sprint to the living room almost falling because of my socks on hardwood floor.

I stopped dead. [well, not exactly. I should say I slid to a stop.] There was a wish out of my wishes, hopes and dreams. Pearly white, curly fur and huge black nose and eyes. It was a picture out of a fairy-tale book. My heart melted. Happy tears formed in my eyes. In my very living room, on the autumn, sat a beautiful puppy about a sheet of paper when stretched out. You couldn't even see her tail it was wagging so hard. I had not even noticed my brothers Connor and Ryan my uncle Dave, my Dad, my Mom and my Grandma [Gammy].

"Oh my gosh!" I yell. Everyone who was there, crowded around her as she sat there with her tail wagging in her crate.

"Ouch!" I say. I stepped on something. I look down to see what I stepped on. There was a bowl that said "water" and a bowl that said "food." Underneath the bowls was a bone shaped mat.

"Mom look! I shout. "It's her food and water!" My brothers are still speechless. My Mom opens the crate and I scoop Shea up with great difficulty. I had never held a baby dog before.

I felt happiness and grateful swell up inside. I was glad I had not given up my hope and dreams for the warm cuddly forever mine pup that had started licking my chin.

"So the saying is right." I whisper to myself. I buried my face in her fur. "Never give up."

Morgan's beautiful narrative of the moment her dream came true shows so much about her writing identity: She's a storyteller at heart, a careful chooser of dialogue, a writer who reveals intentionally and carefully the inner story of herself—the main character—someone who writes from the heart with emotion and deep feeling, and so, so much more. After this, through a new type of writing, and strategic writing instruction from her teacher, we can begin to see an evolution of Morgan's writing identity. She writes a literary essay.

## *Bigger Truths About Life*

*By Morgan Rooney*

In our books we are able to interpret the hidden bigger truths in life. The title of my novel is Maniac Magee. I believe that the bigger truth about life in my text is if someone offers you something better—like help or a home, don't decline the offer thinking that it is the noble thing to do. But embrace the gift, don't take it for granted though. Jeffrey's [or Maniac's] parents died in a car crash when he was three so he never really got to know them. On top of that he got shipped to his Aunt and Uncle who despise each other but are too strict in religion to get a divorce. Then Maniac runs away from a life that could have worked out. Finally he went to live with families and people and ran and ran. This is the bigger truth that I think the author is trying to convey.

Perhaps the author was trying to convey this bigger truth. I think this because in the text, he runs away from his aunt and uncle. Chances are, if he stayed at their house, he might have had a better life and would have been healthier. Meanwhile, he ran away from home. I know this because in the text it said "And that's how the running started. Never again return to the house of two toasters. Never again to return to school." I think this connects to what the author is trying to convey because he would be an orphan unless his

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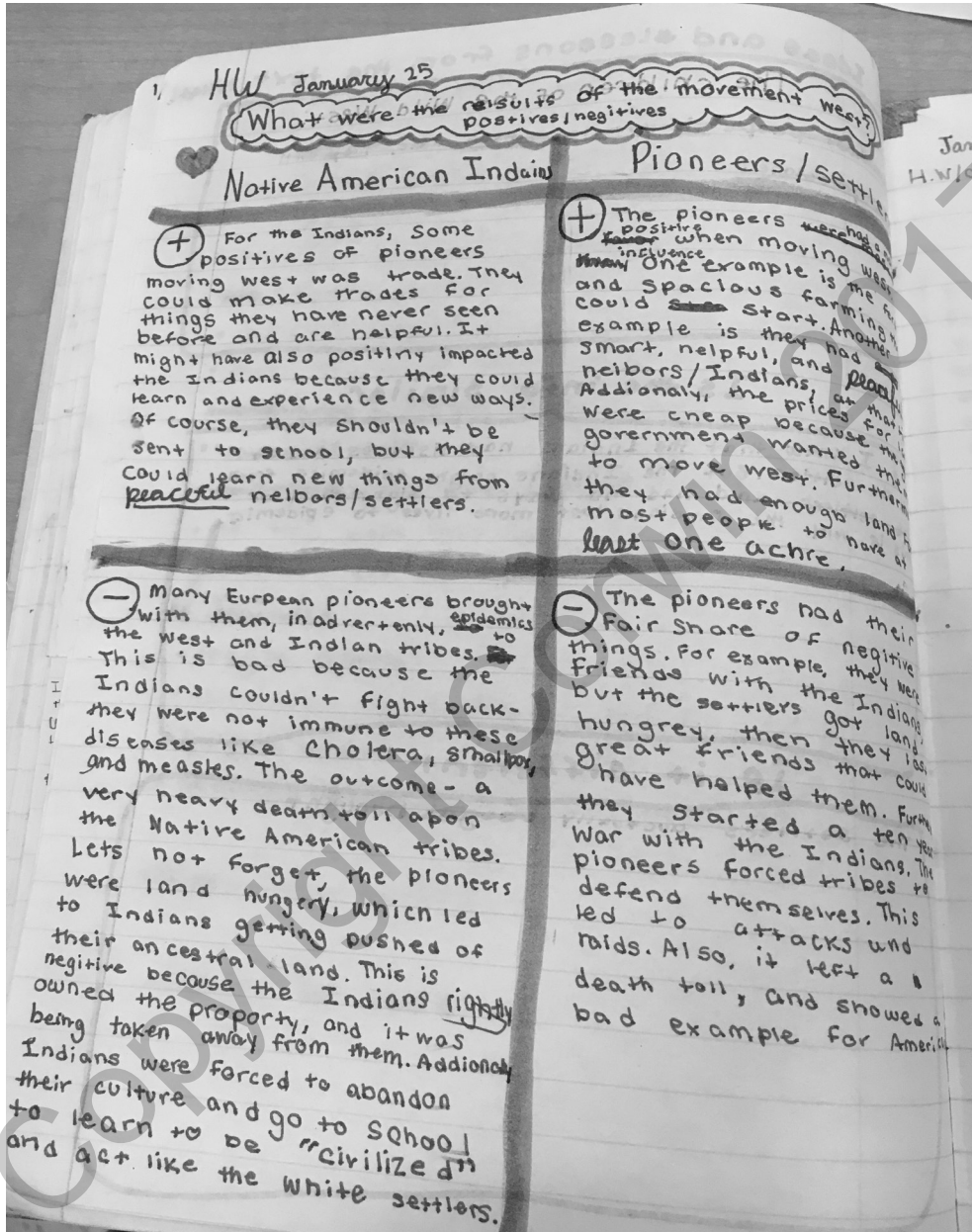
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aunt and uncle took him in. This act of kindness was a gift and a big responsibility. They could have easily turned him away.

Another reason why I think that the author is trying to convey that message is when he lived at the Beale's. Jeffrey decided that him staying there was too much trouble for the family that loved him so. So, like he did before Jeffrey ran away. I know this because in the text it said "The right thing was to make sure that the Beale's didn't get hurt any more." I think that Jeffrey was just trying to do the noble thing. However he might just hurt the Beales more. I know this because they all loved him very much. As you can see, I think that Jeffrey is trying to be noble.

All in all, I believe that Jerry Spinelli was trying to convey that it is okay to accept gifts even if you think they're not necessary. I noticed that Jeffrey is very independent. Perhaps Spinelli did this on purpose. As you can see, I think that the bigger truth to Maniac Magee was never be afraid to accept help.

The next unit was nonfiction writing on the westward expansion, and I have included some of Morgan's process, both notebook work and final product, as well as the "new" identity she discovered in herself. Even before I read the "new identity" I can see a change in Morgan's writing—she is not just a storyteller anymore. She writes as a sage of life's lessons and bigger truths in literature through interpretation, carefully chosen explanation, and insight. She also writes with a carefully researched and supported point of view in informational text that brings out her bold voice. This adds a new dimension to the writer who identified herself as a lover of fiction writing—a complexity of writing identity that shows that new writing experiences can layer on new identities.



Morgan's self-chosen note-taking process to prepare for her informational piece

# A Not So Perfect America

## Inspired by the westward expansion of America

By Morgan Rooney

### Introduction

Have you ever wondered if you were being told the truth about America's history? I mean, it seems too good to be true. Many people when talking about America's history, explain victorious battles and great freedom. Not the flaws and mistakes of the past. As a result, people see America as somewhat perfect. However, this was not always the case. When European settlers moved west, the movement disturbed Native American Indian's lives. Luckily, the Indians were helpful and peaceful to the settlers. Until broken promises and greed swept the nation-and the settlers took advantage.

### Taking advantage

The trail of tears was a historic "trail" that is the tragic beaten track that the Native Americans endured during the sorrowful force out of their land. The trail of tears, however, is not a single route or geographic name. The thing is, when the Native Americans arrived from the trail of tears, the land was barren and desolated. The settlers didn't just take advantage of Indians, but stripped them of their rights and identities to.

### Taking rights

After the Native American Indians were reallocated, the government and settlers figured they should do a "favor" to the Native Americans by "correcting" their personal souls. First, they shipped all the little Indian children to boarding school. Typically the boarding schools required the children to only speak english and change their name to sound American. They were forced to shed their identities and throw away their cultures and religions. Additionally, they were involuntarily enforced to practice



christianism. Some people may believe that the settlers made an honest mistake and were only trying to do them a favor but in the end, the settlers stripped Indians of their identities and rights, and led Indian culture to extinction. The settlers stole the rights of the Native Americans and returned unfair treatment. Now the Indians were fighting back.

#### Taking charge to get it back

Meanwhile, not all tribes surrendered the land peacefully. Out the five biggest tribes, two of them rebelled back. A common claim is "Ha! See that! The Indians fought back! Who is the bad guy now?" but consider this, as much as tribal leaders opposed war, there was nothing else to do! They were suffering european diseases that they had no immunity to. They were also freezing to death and hungry. Chief Joseph (Chief Hin-mah-too-yah-lat-kekt) was a well-respected leader of some Nez Percé Indians. Tired from war he sadly spoke these words: "I am tired of fighting . . . Hear me, my Chiefs! I am tired; my heart is sick and sad. From where the sun now stands I will fight no more forever."

#### In the end

Without a doubt, the settlers actions were false against the Indians. In the end, the Native American culture was almost extinct. Despite the fact our country and world should be well aware of discrimination and persecution, it still is an active issue in life today. We didn't learn our lesson from this era, and we obviously didn't learn from other eras like the world war II, the civil war and other sad times. I think we can all agree the right thing to do in general would be to work out things together. Not selfishly barge into someone's life and change it forever. Would you like it if someone did that to you?

Notice how Morgan's identity has evolved. She is "now the type of person who loves to write many genres including informational." She adds: "I have grown so much more since the beginning of the year. I now am able to plan out my writing pieces, when before I didn't truly get the point of planning, which made it useless to me. I now am able to plan out my writing pieces which allows me to know what I am going to say which makes my writing powerful."

## Morgan's *NEW* Writing Identity

*Better understanding  
our writing identities*

*Morgan Rooney, age 11*

*I am now the type of writer who ...*

I used to be the type of writer who did not really like writing informational articles and essays at all. Meanwhile, I am now the type of person who loves to write many genres including informational. I think it is fun to come up with a fictional plot too. I make sure in my informative writing that I don't repeat my facts and come up with new ways to present them. Sometimes in my non-fiction writing I have trouble incorporating text evidence because I like to put so much of my thought in. However I know that it is very important to merge the two and keep a balance. Text evidence gives proof of your belief so I should put more in in order to keep my facts reliable. Fiction is fun because being creative is what really matters and there are no rules to your imagination.

*I am now a powerful writer because ...*

I have grown so much more since the beginning of the year. I now am able to plan out my writing pieces, when before I didn't truly get the point of planning, which made it useless to me. I now am able to plan out my writing pieces which allows me to know what I am going to say which makes my writing powerful. Additionally, I am a powerful writer because I put in a lot of feeling, voice and powerful words that grab the reader's attention like gullible and hazardous. This allows the reader to think deeper and for the author (me!) to push myself to find higher-level words.

## Sabian's Writing Identity Evolution

Sabian's teacher describes him: "He is a tad of a perfectionist, almost where he gets too nervous about his work. We have been working on loosening him up! He has really developed this year, though—from an anxious reader/writer to one who is willing to dive in, get messy, and make mistakes!" Look at the difference in his reflections on his writing identity. His first is slightly self-critical, yet his second shows this incredible insight into writing using the metaphors of *statue* and *clay*.

Sabian's earliest writer's identity reflection:

I am the kind of writer who . . .

I like to over elaborate my work without it being needed, leaving my response without a purpose. Lately, I have been trying to stop that by timing myself in the time expected that it should be finished. My first copy of work tends to have no understanding. As I edit, it becomes understandable. I work my hardest to do my work the best I can. I used to think I needed to write lengthy responses when really, that doesn't matter. Now I know it's the quality that counts. Once I learned that, I have been trying to create my responses with quality instead of length.

Sabian's latest writer's identity reflection:

I am now the kind of writer who . . .

Before, I used to take hours of my time to make my work perfect. Now, I am able to turn in a response without being worried about how good or bad it might

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turn out to be. I realized that having a perfect response does not matter, the thought put in it is what makes it uniquely my own. One thing I tended to do in the past was make my response as if it were a statue, perfect. Now, I know that a response doesn't have to be perfect to be good. This made me think that a writing piece should act as if it were a piece of clay. For example, when playing with clay you are in charge of mold/build of it to look the way you want it to, and then when you're done you can change it. On the other hand, a statue gets built and it never changes. I think this can relate to writing because when you write a response you are in charge of what you want to make. And every response you write should be uniquely and wonderfully your own. When I came in as a writer in 5th grade I was very worried because when I went to write a response I wanted it to be perfect, nothing else. Now, I am a very confident writer.

### Sierra's Writing Identity Evolution

Another example of how a writing identity evolves comes from Sierra. She says she likes to write true stories but embellish them "to make them interesting and cooler." She prefers to write for herself, however, without too many limitations. Little do we know, from this description, how nervous she was about sharing her writing. With time and lots of writing, in personal narrative, argument, and informational pieces, as well as plenty of reflection, risk taking, choice making, goal setting, and support from her teacher and fellow writers, Sierra's identity has evolved. When we hear from her in response to her "new writing identity," we see that Sierra has a newfound confidence about sharing her writing with her classmates.

Earlier in the year:

## Identifying Who We Are as Writers

By Sierra Lamonte



I am the kind of writer who . . .

I like to express myself when I write and just go with the flow and not have just one set plan. I like it when I can just sit and write not having a specific assignment and just being able to free write. I'm not the best at writing for a long time I usually write until I run out of ideas. It is harder for me to be productive well I write if the room is loud or even if there is just a few people taking. I definitely do my best work when it's quiet and I'm not distracted.

Something I notice I do as a writer . . .

I like to write about real things that have happened to me but exaggerate on them to make them for interesting and cooler. I also know that I have trouble writing limits or a required amount because

I usually just like to write as much as I can express not more or less because then my ideas get mixed up and changed.

A writing risk/technique I want to try is . . .

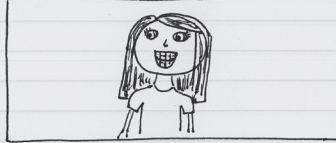
I want to try to be more expressive of my opinion and not be afraid to say what I am thinking. I will put more of my ideas in my work but I will still incorporate text evidence. I believe that will make my work more persuasive.

This will help me become a more powerful writer because . . .

I won't be scared to really put my all into my work and try my hardest to make it the best quality it can be. I think that the first step to becoming a good writer is to explore your abilities what you can do and how you can get better and that is what I'm going to do so I'm not afraid if people will think it's good or not.

Later in the year:

## My New Writing Identity



### I am NOW the kind of writer who...

Try's to explore and do my best at whatever is being thrown my way. I won't any more just settle for the minimum, and don't feel completely done until I push for the maximum. I enjoy taking the full journey of writing because when you think about it in the big run, you only get the chance to explore this writing piece once so why not go for it with the best of your ability.

One thing I noticed from my identity from the bigenning of the year was I said I was scared my work wouldn't be good enough so I just wouldn't share. Now I know I can feel confident because I take pride and try my hardest on all my work.

### I am now a more powerful writer because...

I know I don't really have to fit a mold but I can write more freely. I don't have to necessarily have to think about doing it right but kind of doing it how I'm comfortable.

In the beggining of the year we did a publishing party for our personal narratives and I was very scared to share my piece. When it was my turn to share I read it quick and quietly just to get it over with. Now I found a great new confidence and excitement to share my work. I think I got it because I try my hardest on my work and know that my teachers and class are supporting me all through my learning journey no matter what.

## Lily's Writing Identity Evolution

Earlier in the year:

*Lily*

is the kind of writer who is capable of writing in a mannerly time, has good grammar/punctuation, and can write good dialogue. However, sometimes she tends to keep one moment a little bit too long, and lacks suspense and interest. A risk/technique she wants to try is not being afraid to take pieces out of her writing that she knows aren't really necessary. To add on, something she notices she does as a reader is sometimes take a little too much time deciding on little moments. On the other hand, she also brainstorms ideas and is good at writing down ideas before hand. She will do this by writing down in her notebook the bigger focus and ways she might write, for example, techniques and such.

Later in the year:

## *Lily's New Writing Identity!*

*I am the new type of writer who . . .*

Writing is a form of creativity and your perspective of life. When you write, you express yourself, your emotions, your ups, your downs, your life. When I think of writing I don't think of the thing that I try to do a bit of everyday, but I think of what I put my time and energy towards. If I fall, I get back up. This leads me to believe that I am the type of writer who can be strong and come back stronger. I can also write words with power and make others feel something, perhaps even consider my point of view. I can also spread emotion towards the reader.

*(Continued)*

(Continued)

I can do this because I have determination and because I want to do this. A thing that always helps me get better and stronger is for other writers that have gone through what I have to help me and give me advice. Although they never give me answers, they give me the sugar to sweeten my batter. Writing gives me a voice to take a stand and tell others what I believe in. Writing gives me wings to open up and soar.

\* \* \*

#### Feedback Fundamental: Set the Tone



Alejandro



Casey



Tia

<http://resources.corwin.com/McGee-Feedback>

To read a QR code, you must have a smartphone or tablet with a camera. We recommend that you download a QR code reader app that is made specifically for your phone or tablet brand.

These writing samples and reflections show the growth of both the writing across the year and the writer's identity. They are tied together on the journey of growth, and develop in relation to one another. If we are looking for the writing to improve by leaps and bounds, we must also, simultaneously and inexplicably, nurture the writer's identity. As the first feedback fundamental, discovering and building the writer's identity cannot be underrated. Throughout the rest of this book, we will explore the feedback you might use that has the dual purpose of developing writers' identities and also the writing itself. Before we go there, the second fundamental begs our attention and is one of the most helpful tools in discovering and building a writer's identity.



### Fundamental 2: Set the Tone

The tone of feedback can enrich or spoil the feedback experience for our writers. It's that simple. In fact, the words you speak may mean nothing without the right tone. Although tone is one of those things that is hard to define, it is my Fundamental 2 for good reason! I know effective tone when I hear it, see it, or feel it, and I am guessing you do as well. The sections that follow describe some of the key tenets of establishing an effective tone with your learners; to view video footage of effective tone in action, use the QR codes that appear in the left margin and on the companion website at <http://resources.corwin.com/McGee-Feedback>.



Think about your own self as a learner. If someone says something in a tone that is rushed, sarcastic, bored, frustrated, or otherwise negative it can make you raise the barricades to protect yourself from the feedback headed your way, right? On the other hand, tone that is warm, interested, concerned, invested, or otherwise positive opens up your heart and head to feedback.

I have experienced the same with student writers. If I am giving feedback and I am not 100% present and invested, my feedback is not nearly as well received. On the flip side, even if I cannot find just the right words, as long as my tone is warm and invested, I find my feedback is more welcomed. Remember the conference I referenced above with Max? The tone was open, warm, comfortable, and an important factor in how I was able to discover his writing identity.

Although there is no agreed-upon definition of tone that is universally accepted in terms of education, I've developed a working definition to use in my work with writers: Tone is the quality, manner, or style one uses when eliciting and giving feedback.

When we consider tone, we understand it can go either way—it can be useful or detrimental. It can nurture or impair a relationship. Words alone cannot convey tone—it is the sound of the words, the language of the body, the smallest gestures, the tiniest look in one's eye. All of these qualities blend to create tone.

Since tone seems to be this invisible yet powerful quality, seemingly unexplored, I decided to do some informal research on it with colleagues. We wanted to be able to name what qualities create a tone that supports a writer's identity and helps the writer strengthen his or her writing. We set ourselves up with an inquiry: What qualities describe the tone of an impactful conference? What was important to establish that tone?

Let's visit Max's conference once again to notice the tone. I realize a transcript is not the ideal vehicle for sharing tone, so let me set the scene a bit more to help you envision the conversation. Perhaps you will read this with the same questions we did: What qualities describe the tone of the conference? What was important to establish the tone?

I start by asking Max if I could join him so we could work together. He agrees, and I smile and thank him for the time. We chat for a

moment about something other than writing. And then I simply ask him to tell me about himself as a writer.

**Max:** I am not that good at writing.

**Me:** What makes you say that?

**Max:** I get bad grades. I don't like writing. I like free writing, though, but I don't like when teachers tell me how and what to write. I do like to write fantasy, though, and do that all the time at home.

**Me:** Well, I believe that there is a writer within all of us, even if we don't feel particularly strong at it. I think you may believe that too, deep down inside, because you said you like to write fantasy, you like free writing, and you write on your own. I can identify with not feeling strong about writing—I have been there myself, and even at my age I am still trying to figure that all out. But I can help you discover that writer within you.

**Max:** I like fantasy writing.

**Me:** What do you do well in fantasy writing? We can take those strengths you have in fantasy writing and bring them to the writing that you don't have a choice in. While it may not be instantaneous, you will see that your strengths can really help you tackle the hard parts of writing. What are your strengths in writing fantasy?

**Max:** Humor. I like to make my stories funny.

**Me:** Well, your next writing piece is opinion and you can certainly use humor to be more convincing! How about we make this a goal for you . . .

**Max:** Sure sounds good. I think it should be that I should use humor in my next writing piece. Not sure how to say that, though.

**Me:** How about I give you some words for that? (I jot down the goal on a sticky note and give it to him.) How does this sound? "To use humor to be more convincing in my opinion piece."

**Max:** I like it. And I don't stay focused when I am supposed to be writing. I have to work on that too.

- Me:** Oh! Okay, sounds like we need two goals, then. Let's also write a goal so you can work on staying focused longer.
- Max:** I like to get up a lot. And talk to people a lot. And sometimes I don't write as much as I should.
- Me:** All right, that is another important thing to work on. How about you jot those goals down, one on each page, and start coming up with a few ways you can meet those goals?
- Max:** Sure. I already know a bunch of things I can do to stay more focused on my writing. (He starts to write these down.)
- Me:** What we did here was important work. You opened up with me to look at your strengths and struggles, and I am grateful for that. From that we planned writing goals that you and your teacher will spend a whole lot more time discussing. Know that what we did here is not just for writing. You can use your strengths to set goals for anything you want to do.

My colleagues and I reflected on transcripts with Max and 20 other students. We looked at them as we tried to answer our inquiry questions (*What qualities describe the tone of the conference? What was important to establish the tone?*). After much discussion, we came up with a list of five qualities of tone that lead to optimal feedback and learning. I encourage you to keep these in mind in your own practice.

### Five Qualities of Tone for Effective Feedback

**Acceptance:** When we sit side by side with a young writer and, through our tone, share that we accept them for who they are, their strengths and challenges, the learner feels free from judgment. When hearing a tone of acceptance, writers are more apt to feel comfortable sharing, and as a result, we will receive information from them to design our feedback.



When teachers use a patient, admiring tone, students adopt it too when they give peers feedback.

In Max's conference, the tone of acceptance made Max feel comfortable enough to share that he did not feel like he was a strong writer. This gave us the opportunity to take the next steps of goal setting. I tried to set that tone by sitting side by side as though we were a team working together. I smiled, nodded, listened, and let Max lead the conversation. All of this, the teachers and I believe, set the tone of acceptance.

**Patience:** Every teacher needs patience because coaching writing can be frustrating, and developing writing can be vexing for the writer. When our tone communicates patience, it helps everyone work through the frustration. Being patient is also a powerful way to model growth mindset thinking, because it demonstrates for the learner that roadblocks and mistakes are not “bad” but just challenges that take time to work through. By contrast, a tone of impatience is often a form of anger and can easily shut down a writer. Patience helps writers move through the sticky parts.

One thing that was not evident in the transcript on the previous pages was that Max was distracted. He looked around a lot and seemed disengaged at times. You may also have noticed the conversation seemed to have wrapped up around the first goal, and Max jumped in with another and ways to meet that goal. An impatient response might have been, “If you know how to stay focused on your writing, why don't you?” Because of patience, Max took the lead in the conversation and ended up with two important goals.

**Admiration:** When we admire, we look at something with wonder and awe (Goldberg, 2015). We admire through many different lenses to see more clearly the gifts and strengths of a writer. We can acknowledge the writer's gifts and strengths—so very often young writers are not aware of these strengths or how to use them.

This was exactly the case with Max. He was certainly open to sharing his strengths, and could identify them readily, but he was quite surprised to learn that he could use those strengths in writing something other than fantasy. With this as a goal, he was now more invested than before our conversation. Admiring his strengths led us to this opportunity.

**Openness:** When we approach a conversation with a tone of being okay with whatever may come, we take an important step

in making the feedback about the student, not about ourselves. Feedback for students starts with the students first. And through the openness of listening, we discover things we may or may not have expected.

**Gratitude:** When we show a disposition of appreciation for a writer's attempts to write, for their gifts and challenges, for their efforts and decisions, we look at both the writing and the writer in a precious way. When there is a tone of gratitude, there is also a feeling of acknowledgement of what has been done. Appreciation in the face of struggle is also a strong way of acknowledging and using a growth mindset—we show appreciation for the hard parts, mistakes, and difficulties because this is where learning happens.

Gratitude was evident at the end of the conversation when I thanked Max for opening up. That, my colleagues thought, acknowledged the willingness to share struggles so that hopefully Max will be that open again in the future. It also made us, as teachers, feel thankful for the time and learning about Max that he offered. We learned much about him and also about our teaching. The biggest learning: *Feedback is first about listening.*

### Establish a Listening Tone

Listening cannot be underestimated. All five of the qualities of effective tone—acceptance, patience, admiration, openness, and gratitude—boil down to listening first, next, and throughout. I have not once regretted listening to a student before giving feedback, though I have regretted offering feedback before listening! Listening means we stop talking for a moment, we put our own expectations to the side, and we let the student talk. We may listen more deeply by asking clarifying questions. By listening we equip ourselves with plenty of information to design effective feedback. We can set a listening tone through our words, actions, and reactions.



© Rick Harrington Photography

For me, listening is harder than talking. I need a few go-to phrases and reminders to help me maintain that listening tone in my words, actions, and reactions. I have collected a few here that I find useful when setting a listening tone.

In our words	<p>"Tell me about . . ."</p> <p>"Would you share . . . ?"</p> <p>"I am interested in hearing . . ."</p> <p>"I am curious about . . ."</p> <p>"I'm listening . . ."</p>
In our actions	<p>Sit side by side.</p> <p>Make eye contact.</p> <p>Put the writing in between.</p> <p>Nod.</p> <p>React with honesty—laugh, sigh, pause.</p>
In our reactions	<p>"Would you tell me more about . . . ?"</p> <p>"Wait, did you just say?"</p> <p>"So are you saying . . . ?" (paraphrase)</p> <p>"Say more about that."</p> <p>"I am confused . . ."</p>

### Maintaining a Listening Tone When Adding a Focus

Sometimes we want to be even more focused on what we intend to give feedback on. Sitting and gathering information from a student without a clear-cut focus serves its purpose, yet at other times we need to find out more about specific writing choices or struggles. While having a focus does not stand in the way of being open to listening, doing both requires a delicate balance. We want to be sure we are supporting students with important choices and next steps, yet we want our writers to be able to express themselves openly and know we are hearing them. I find this challenging. I put together some wording (see the next page) that helps me, sort of like a cheat-sheet, for those more focused feedback junctures. I anticipated a few of the common conversations and included wording that I have heard teachers use that really seem to fit the tone of listening.

## Language That Fosters a Supportive Tone

Focus	Phrases That Help the Writer Be Open to Feedback	Follow-Up Phrases to Invite the Writer to Select a Strategic Option
Generating ideas	<p>"Tell me about some of the ideas you were working on."</p> <p>"How were you able to come up with those?"</p> <p>"How have you been working on these ideas?"</p> <p>"What else do you imagine doing?"</p> <p>"What else?"</p>	<p>"Something I have tried that you may want to try . . ."</p> <p>"Something you mentioned made me think about . . ."</p> <p>"Let's study this together and see . . ."</p>
Choosing how to structure writing	<p>"Tell me about your ideas and how you plan on structuring them."</p> <p>"What are the structures you may try out? What are some others?"</p> <p>"How is the structure supporting your greater purpose?"</p>	<p>"Some other structures you may be interested in . . ."</p> <p>"I use this structure when . . . and this structure when . . . Which will work for your writing?"</p>
Making the most of writing time	<p>"What's been challenging for you in writing all you can?"</p> <p>"What do you find works best in writing for as long as you can?"</p> <p>"What do you need in place to do your best writing?"</p>	<p>"Sometimes that happens to me and here's what I do . . ."</p> <p>"I know another student who has worked through similar challenges. Let's talk to . . ."</p> <p>"Here's what I need to do my best writing . . ."</p>
Choosing how to publish	<p>"Who is your main audience for this piece? How would they most likely want to hear it?"</p> <p>"What technologies have you seen used with this type of writing?"</p> <p>"In what ways do you hope to impact others with this writing?"</p>	<p>"I've noticed that audience often reads _____. Let's see how that will work."</p> <p>"Some technologies I have seen used are . . . Let's check a few of those out and see what fits best."</p> <p>"We can choose multiple platforms to fit different audiences. Let's imagine a few."</p>



## Why So Many Suggestions for Teacher Wording?

Many of the tools I shared in this section on tone come from conversations I have heard between teachers and students. I am intentionally sharing wording not because I believe that teachers cannot uncover their own, but because research has shown that most of us give feedback as praise or paired with praise (Hattie, 2012). We know, from earlier in the chapter, that this praise is the least useful form of feedback. So, to replace the habit of praising, we simply need to find other wording. My intention is, with the many tools in this section, that we move from praise wording to feedback wording, instantly making our feedback that much more effective.



### Fundamental 3: Use Formative Assessment

*Formative assessment*, one of those terms often tossed around in education, is worth defining here, in relation to feedback. P. D. Pearson keeps it simple: “Formative assessment is responsive teaching.” James Popham calls it “a planned process in which assessment-elicited evidence of students’ status is used by teachers to adjust their ongoing instructional procedures or by students to adjust their current learning tactics” (2008). In other words, formative assessment is the work we do as teachers to gather evidence about students’ learning to tailor our teaching accordingly. It is powerful work! An analysis of thousands of studies of formative assessment have concluded that effectively using formative assessment can essentially double the rate of student learning, no matter the instructional approach (Popham, 2011). What’s more, feedback cannot be effective without it. In order to choose the type of feedback we give, we must know where students are in terms of their learning, down to very specific details, and use that knowledge to customize our feedback.

Surprisingly, I have noticed that many teachers use ongoing formative assessment without even realizing it. If you are focusing on the writer, and eliciting information, data, or feedback from them, you are engaging in formative assessment. In other words, if you look at what writers are doing and make instructional decisions based on what you see, you are using formative assessment. Indeed, it is that simple, and yet it can also become more sophisticated and impactful



## Tips for Goal-Centered Conferencing and Structuring Feedback Time

A Common Conference Structure	Suggested Phrases (you will never use everything here)
Ask about writer's goal(s) (first 1–2 minutes)	<p>"What is the goal you are working on?"</p> <p>"What progress have you made?"</p> <p>"What has been challenging?"</p> <p>"Would you show me where you . . . ?"</p> <p>"What's your larger intention in writing?"</p> <p>"What investments have you made?"</p>
Name what is working in reaching that goal (1 minute)	<p>"What I am noticing is . . ."</p> <p>"Ways that I see you reaching your goal are . . ."</p> <p>"What seems to be working is . . ."</p> <p>"The steps I see you took are . . ."</p>
Suggest next steps toward that goal (1–2 minutes)	<p>"Some next steps are . . ."</p> <p>"You are ready for . . ."</p> <p>"I imagine where you could go next is . . ."</p> <p>"At this point you may want to try . . ."</p>
<i>Optional:</i> Model those next steps (1–2 minutes)	<p>"Here's what that can look like . . ."</p> <p>"Watch me as I . . ."</p> <p>"Here's a quick how-to . . ."</p>
<i>Optional:</i> Coach (1–2 minutes)	<p>"Want to give it a whirl? I'll stick with you while you do."</p> <p>"Talk through what you are imagining . . ."</p> <p>"What are you going to try first? And then?"</p> <p>[or maybe whisper in as the student writes with quick comments of encouragement and advice]</p>



when done intentionally. Let's explore formative assessment's details to make it even more practical when designing feedback.

First, to be clear, summative assessment and formative assessment are quite different. In Chapter 2 we talked about the difference between grades and feedback. Those grades are a form of summative assessment—once given, specifically on a report card, the assessment process is over. This is usually a grade on a test, a rubric, a performance scale, or other similar grading tools. Formative assessment, on the other hand, expects that the teacher takes the information he or she learned about the student(s) and uses it to design instruction. I feel strongly, as do others (Black & Wiliam 2001; Miller 2011; Popham 2011), that formative assessment is rarely used for grading purposes. If we compare these two forms of assessment to punctuation, summative assessment is like a period while formative assessment is like an ellipse. A period marks the end of something, where an ellipse suggests there is more to follow. Feedback needs formative assessment more than it does summative assessment.

To paint a clearer picture of what formative assessment can look like in writing, I'd like to share my first few moments with Malaky, an eighth grader. First, I admired (Goldberg, 2015) Malaky from afar. I noticed his writerly actions and choices—he sat with his head close to the paper, pencil in hand, scratching out word after word, about five or six words in all. I then took a seat next to him and glanced over his writing. I noticed each word he crossed out was the same: *then*. I asked him, "What are you revising here, Malaky? Would you share what you are thinking about and doing?" He paused from his work and shared, "I realize that practically every sentence I have written here sounds almost the same. I begin with the word *then* and then tell what happened. It sounds repetitive and I want to change it up a bit."

At this point I could have jumped in and offered some ways of mixing up the sentence structure. Instead, I chose to gather a little more information. I looked at his sentence structure a little more closely and noticed that all of his sentences were simple sentences. I also asked him, "What do you want the reader to think or feel? This can help you choose ways to revise sentences." To this Malaky responded,

“This story I am telling is really funny, but I don’t think it is coming off that way.” He was right. His story was hard to follow and the humor was hard to find. With this information in mind, I decided to teach a bit about setting up humor in a story, with a “punchline” sort of structure. I chose to do this because, from the information I gathered about Malaky and his writing, work on sentence structure was not the support he needed at the moment. Perhaps a little down the road, but in this case, sentence structure was not going to help him make this story clear and funny.



By spending a moment to formatively assess not just the writing but also the writer’s intent, I was able to make a more careful and customized teaching decision. Here is the process I usually follow. The first three steps are where I am formatively assessing; the last two steps are what I do to teach after I formatively assess.

There are a few important moves that made formative assessment practical and student-centered:

1. Observing, or admiring (Goldberg, 2015), from afar to gather information about the writer.

2. Gathering information without judgment and as objectively as possible, without acting on assumptions or on what that day's lesson happened to be.
3. Looking for what that writer needs right now.
4. Taking a look at student writing and following up with some conversation and questions.
5. Sitting with a student and asking her about her writing, her process, and herself as a writer.

### *Helpful Language for Formative Assessment*

- The goals you are focusing on are \_\_\_\_\_. Would you share what is working and what's been tricky?
- Tell me about what you most want in your writing. How is that going?
- Who is your audience, and what are you trying to get them to think/feel/learn?
- What is taking up your attention right now in your writing? Tell me more about that . . .
- What is it you are working on? How can I support you?

Following this process day after day, student after student, can have a powerful impact on writers and their writing. It also may be challenging as a teacher to keep all that assessment information straight and use it to preplan. You may want to consider keeping formative assessment notes. Following is a sample of these notes across the first 10 days of an opinion writing unit from Pam Koutrakos about her third-grade student, Lindsay.

Each day includes notes on her formative assessment using different sources such as a pre-unit writing sample, a conference, a notebook check, and small-group work.

Pam includes what she taught Lindsay (TP stands for teaching point) so she can check in on this progress during her next opportunity for formative assessment.

NAME: Lindsay		UNIT: opinion unit
STUDENT GOALS: Transitions to help writing flow		
TEACHER GOALS: * Elaboration *		
DATE: 12/1 writing sample	RESEARCH: <u>preassessment</u> + Includer opening, 1 body TP, closing, reasons aligned to big idea	NEXT STEPS: * Elaboration Study Group *
DATE: 12/9 conference	RESEARCH: wrote long & strong, kept to + one topic. TP: when re-reading entries, think, "what big idea do I have about this topic?"	NEXT STEPS: Boxer & bullets to organize thinking and leave space for lots of evidence.
DATE: 12/11 notebook check	RESEARCH: <u>notebook check in</u> entries all focused on one topic - saying same reason over & over using different words. TP: opinion writers make their ideas truly separate by thinking "what is another, different, reason to prove my point?"	NEXT STEPS: * "Ballers" strategy group *
DATE: 12/12 strategy group	RESEARCH: <u>elaboration S.G.</u> + one way we can set ourselves up for success is to make sure each bullet point is TP: ① aligned to topic/big idea ② truly separate from each other	NEXT STEPS: ++ did very well! able to go back & change reasons; create distinct bullets

Pam notices what Lindsay is doing, almost doing, and not yet doing, and includes that information in both the "+" area and the next steps box.

Pam also keeps notes on the progress toward the goal.

To put these notes in context, Lindsay wrote a personal essay about her adoration of fudge. She chose that topic herself from a few different, self-generated ideas as part of a unit of study on opinion writing. My favorite part, the closing, said, "I adore fudge. Fudge comes in so many different flavors. That's why I say, after reading this essay, you should go out and get some fudge to eat. Carrie Underwood once said, 'sometimes a girl's gotta have some chocolate' and I totally agree with that!"

Notice how tailored Pam's teaching was, according to her notes, and how student-focused her formative assessment is. We can infer from Pam's notes that Lindsay's learning progressed across the 2 weeks of feedback and the feedback matched that progression closely. So, as you work to strengthen the feedback fundamental of formative assessment, following are some pointers so that you may find success similar to Pam's.

## Pointers for Formative Assessment

- Help students to set goals and assess progress toward those goals (see Chapter 5 for goal setting).
- Hold off from grading and simply gather information through studying writing, admiring the student from afar, and talking to the student.
- Jot down what you notice writers doing, almost doing, and not yet doing to help plan next steps.
- Formatively assess often, ideally 4 times a week or more, to check in on where they are in their learning. Not every moment of formative assessment is followed with feedback from you. You can decide when. I find it best to offer feedback about 2–3 times per week. These are often 2–3 minutes of feedback (see Chapter 4 on structures of efficient feedback).
- Jot down both the information you gathered and the feedback you gave and what the writer was able to do with that feedback.

Once we have a handle on where our students are and what sort of feedback we can offer them, it is time to consider the next feedback fundamental: choosing and using the right type of feedback.



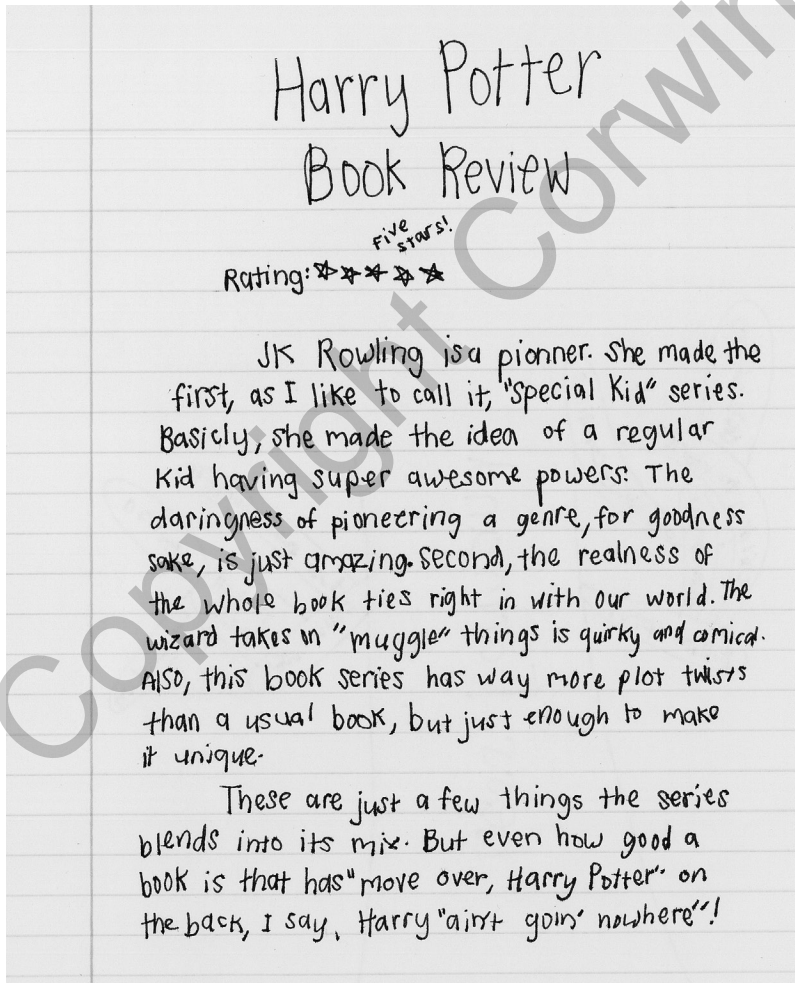
### Fundamental 4: Deliver Feedback That Has the Power of Three

As we explore the fundamentals of feedback, it is important to continue to dig into the specifics of feedback. Not all feedback is built alike, and the impact of different types of feedback can vary. Let's take a moment to explore the feedback that research has proven impactful and also take a look at the feedback that is not as useful.

Our feedback always includes these three attributes and steadfastly remains:

1. writing (or writer) focused,
2. based on goals or intentions, and
3. explicit in naming strengths and next steps.

Let's try it out with a writing sample from Zack. Notice that by looking at a piece of student writing, we are addressing the first attribute of effective feedback—**writing-focused**. Now, let's imagine that Zack's goal was to use text evidence to be more convincing. We would keep that in mind as we read his piece and look out for convincing text evidence, and therefore be **basing our feedback on goals or intentions**.



Harry Potter  
Book Review

Rating: ★★★★★  
Five stars!

J.K. Rowling is a pioneer. She made the first, as I like to call it, "Special Kid" series. Basically, she made the idea of a regular kid having super awesome powers. The daringness of pioneering a genre, for goodness sake, is just amazing. Second, the realness of the whole book ties right in with our world. The wizard takes in "muggle" things is quirky and comical. Also, this book series has way more plot twists than a usual book, but just enough to make it unique.

These are just a few things the series blends into its mix. But even how good a book is that has "move over, Harry Potter" on the back, I say, Harry "ain't goin' nowhere"!

As I read this piece, I notice that Zack has not used text evidence much to make his case. He does, however, set up the use of text evidence with a solid reason to back up his claim. For example, when Zack writes, “Also, this book series has way more plot twists than a usual book, but just enough to make it unique,” I can imagine a piece of text evidence following this statement. So my feedback may sound like:

**I name a strength:** *Zack, as I think about your goal of adding text evidence, I have a few thoughts. First, I notice that you have a strong way of setting up text evidence by listing out the reasons to prove your claim of “J. K. Rowling is a pioneer.” Because you listed your reasons so clearly, you are ready to pull in some specific text evidence. Let me show you how.*

**And next steps:** *There are a few steps I take when including text evidence. First, I read one of my reasons I wrote to back up my claim. Next, I think, “What part of the book can help me prove or explain this reason?” After that I go back into the book and reread that part. Finally, I either summarize or quote that part directly right after my reason.*

*Now, you try, Zack. Let’s walk through these steps together.*

Notice that this feedback includes both the strengths—what is working—and the next steps to meet the goal. No, not every experience giving feedback is that simple and straightforward (see Chapter 5 for more complex examples). Nevertheless, we strive to use writing-focused, strength-based, goal-centered feedback as often as we can. Sometimes, however, feedback may still not have the impact we are hoping for unless the writer is feeling open and comfortable about receiving this feedback.





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## Wrapping It Up

Most of all, no matter the setting, it is important that the four fundamentals are an integral part of all writing feedback we give. Without knowledge of the writer's identity, just the right tone, formative assessment, the feedback that has the power of three, our feedback can fall short. It is a constant area of growth for me, and I hope that as you explore the many resources that follow, you hold with you the fundamentals of feedback.