How to Organize Online Classroom or Schoolwide Writing Contests
6+1 Trait® Writing Workshop on Tuesday, April 21, 2020

Key Decisions for Online Contest

1. **Determine a narrow, manageable writing skills focus/goal**. It should be:
   * Based on a strong rubric
   * Connected to your standards

In the workshop, we suggested teachers base their goal on a specific writing skill or proficiency that they have already used. A fairly comprehensive list of skills that can be framed as writing goals are laid out in the 6+1 Trait® Writing rubrics. We recommended teachers select a row from rubric, e.g., details, evidence, and support (row B) in our rubrics. We also recommended that teachers not use the language from any provided rubric "as is," but pare down the language to a level of complexity that your students can handle, and adapt the language to use vocabulary your students recognize (i.e., that you've taught them).

Resources:
   * Trait rubrics (sent with this attachment)
   * Your standards

2. **Develop appropriate, student-friendly scoring criteria.**
In the workshop, we recommended K-2 teachers develop a three-point rubric focused on the writing goal; for other grades, 4-, 5-, or 6-point rubrics might be more appropriate. This is a teacher judgment call based on students' experiences. Even-numbered rubrics are preferred because they compel a choice between higher and lower ends of spectrum. A few examples of student-friendly rubrics are in the slides. We also suggested that teachers develop additional options for scoring, such as most popular, most unusual/creative, or most improved entry – even best drawing . These options help students feel included and can be especially motivating. For these, create a simple scale to capture this indicator or ask student judges to nominate one or more for these additional options.

Resource:
   * Student-friendly rubric examples (sent with this attachment) [Note: these and the teacher rubrics are being refined, as we do every two years, and we will send you the revisions]

3. **Design a prompt/task.**
We outlined options for a prompt. It is most important that your prompt be clear, engaging, and feasible for students to work on successfully. We recommended you decide on an appropriate length – even a paragraph can be a great, quick way to "test the waters" for contests! Other choices include whether the prompt is open, e.g., a short story, or more specified. It should be a text type in which you wish to see student growth, and it can be based on a published text students read and respond to or focus on writing in a discipline, e.g., an imagined editorial that might have appeared in the past, related to a historical event. If it is specified, it should be clearly written. In the workshop, we provided examples of the RAFT strategy for writing prompts, which helps students understand the importance of the writer's role and the audience as well as the format, topic, and purpose of their writing. RAFTs can also be used to help students deconstruct or write prompts. In addition to the

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examples in the slide deck, there are tons of instructions and examples available online if you Google "RAFT writing strategy," "RAFT writing examples," etc.

Resources:
- http://www.readwritethink.org/professional-development/strategy-guides/using-raft-writing-strategy-30625.html
- https://www.readingrockets.org/strategies/raft

4. Develop submission rules.
We suggested that teachers need to decide if the submission process will be staged, e.g., get focused peer/family feedback on draft before submitting. Teachers should request that students submit their entries with a self-evaluation that includes a score and rationale.

5. Decide on a judging process.
Teachers will need to determine if judges will be invited or that all students do some judging. Note they can judge a small number, and then a panel can judge the next level. This can be a winnowing process, with you making the final judgment. Decide if student judges will have to demonstrate "qualifications" by showing they can score within a certain range of accuracy (we can help with this!). All submissions should include a self-evaluation with a score and rationale. Also, entries should be judged <u>anonymously</u>. All student judges should provide a score and a rationale and should be reviewed by the teacher.

6. Preparing and supporting students.
Students need to understand the writing skills goal, especially what it looks like in writing. To do this, it is important to engage them in:
- Studying mentor text(s) that exemplify the writing skills goal
- Reviewing strong and weak examples of student (or teacher) examples. (Hint: Teachers can write crummy first drafts that are woefully weak in the writing skills goal, then ask students for feedback. ☺)
- Modeling revision (see above)

To support students, teachers may also wish to:
- Provide frequent encouragement during the writing period
- Monitor and report on progress, e.g., how many submissions or peer reviews per day
- Give prizes to all who participate

Research-based strategies that can be built into an online writing contest
- Teach students to write for a variety of purposes – and targets
- Assign students specific, attainable goals
- Provide teacher and peer feedback focused on a specific goal or objective
- Teach students how to assess and reflect on their own and their peers' writing
- Engage students in reading, analyzing, and emulating models
- Support student collaboration
- Use technology as an instructional support
- Create an engaged community of writers; extend it beyond the classroom

Research Sources

Graham, S., Bollinger, A., Booth Olson, C., D'Aoust, C., MacArthur, C., McCutchen, D., & Olinghouse, N. (2012). *Teaching elementary school students to be effective writers: A practice guide* (NCEE 2012- 4058). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved from https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/PracticeGuide/17.

Graham, S., Bruch, J., Fitzgerald, J., Friedrich, L., Furgeson, J., Greene, K., Kim, J., Lyskawa, J., Olson, C.B., & Smither Wulsin, C. (2016). *Teaching secondary students to write effectively* (NCEE 2017-4002). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance (NCEE), Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved from https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/PracticeGuide/22.

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Graham, S., & Perin, D. (2007). *Writing next: Effective strategies to improve writing of adolescents in middle and high schools – A report to Carnegie Corporation of New York*. Washington, DC: Alliance for Excellent Education. Retrieved from https://www.carnegie.org/publications/writing-next-effective-strategies-to-improve-writing-of-adolescents-in-middle-and-high-schools/.

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