

Literacy Tips



Tips for middle school educators on various topics such as grammar, writing, reading, spelling, vocabulary, cooperative learning and more.

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Tip #15: Modeling the Masters

Many teachers are using *Daily Oral Language* as a means to teach grammar. Editing two sentences a day seems like it should have merit, but why do our students still have difficulty editing their own work? Why aren't these skills transferring?

I believe that a more powerful way to teach grammar, usage, and mechanics is to model the masters. Students need authentic practice when it comes to editing. They need to be editing their own writing so there is a built-in purpose for the activity. They will want their message to be clear, and they will want to look smart on paper. Consider having your students start each day by modeling the masters. You will be surprised how students begin infusing these editing skills and sentence patterns in their own writing as time goes on.

Use the Alaska State Performance Standards and *Daily Oral Language* as sources for determining the editing skills to address. Then find an example of powerful writing from a young adult novel or from the literature anthology that uses the editing skill you plan to teach. Display the model sentence on the overhead projector. Use this as mentor text. Take the time to go through a think aloud helping the students notice the conventions used in the sentence. Then write your own original sentence based on the model. Show your students how you first think of a subject for your writing and then follow the pattern as closely as you can.

Finally, have students write their own original sentence based on the model. Remember to take the time to share student writing and check to make sure students have used the correct conventions. In a short amount of time you will have 1) exposed students to an author and his/her writing, 2) introduced an editing skill and/or sentence pattern, 3) allowed time for individual writing, and 4) acknowledged strong writing examples from your own class.

When introducing this routine to your class, use the *Write Source 2000* handbook. You will find an excellent sequence of directions and possible model sentences on pp. 132-133. In the accompanying grade level binders, there is more practice available. In the 7th grade binder, use the blackline masters on pp. 148-149 and in the 8th grade binder use the blackline masters on pp. 141-142. You will also find sentence modeling exercises in the new 8th grade Inside Writing unit on sentences. (These materials were sent out to your schools this week. Be on the lookout for them!)

After you have exhausted these resources, you will need to be searching for your own mentor text. I am looking for possible published materials that might provide this for us like *Sentence Composing for Middle School: A Worktext on Sentence Variety and Maturity* by Don Killgallon. Also think about having



students help you with this search from their own recreational reading. Give extra credit points to students who provide you with mentor text. Can't find mentor text from which to model a particular skill? Write up one of your own!

Example

I know I need to teach how to punctuate using conjunctive adverbs like however. I don't have the time today to find mentor text from a novel, so I go to the *Write Source 2000* handbook and borrow from it. I use p. 393 in the Proofreader's Guide which explains conjunctive adverbs and gives an example.

Mentor text from p. 393:

I apologized for the robot's slipup; however, Mrs. Crabb continued to scream about careless teenagers and dumb machines.

My original sentence:

I apologized for my dog's accident; however, my dad continued to yell about walking dogs and accepting responsibility.

Try writing a however sentence for yourself. Look how easily you learn where to place the semicolon and the comma. Most often our students just don't notice these small conventions like writing teachers do. We need to make them aware of these conventions and how they work. Once you empower your students with this knowledge, you can bet they are going to try using it in emails, essays, and other communication. Our kids want to sound and look smart. I know they will use it!

One last thought

Because students have trouble noticing the small conventions, make them more aware by reading aloud the punctuation. When you read and your students read the however sentences aloud, be sure to read them like this:

"I apologized for my dog's accident semi-colon however comma my dad continued to yell about walking dogs and accepting responsibility." I ignored reading aloud the apostrophe in dog's because that is not the new skill that I am focusing on.

