

Conferencing on Strategies

Bronx Bridges High School

Why	To help students become more self-directed
When	During large writing projects
What's included	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Conferencing protocols• Strategy Support form (abridged)

The Problem

How do we help students become more self-directed, making better use of the resources available to them, rather than giving up or immediately relying on the teacher?

The Change Idea

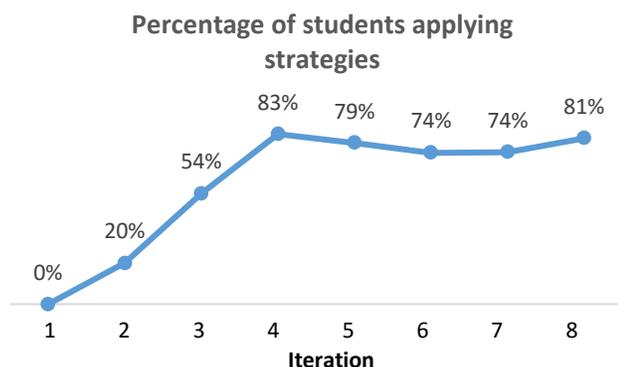
We created a one-on-one student conferencing protocol for meeting with students about writing. This protocol is focused on having students self-identify their struggles in writing and then articulate a strategy to improve.

The Rationale

We have noticed that when students struggle at our school, they often give up or immediately go to a teacher for help. We wanted to help students develop more resilience and self-regulation. We believed that conferencing on strategies would help students to build the habit of trying out strategies when struggling rather than giving up or depending on others.

The Impact So Far

Student completion rates of writing assignments have improved this year and they are working independently for longer stretches of time. Additionally, students' awareness of writing strategies has increased, as seen qualitatively by conferencing conversations.



Student Anecdote

In the beginning of the year, Rosa would often say “What do I do? What do I do?” It was a question she would ask multiple times in a row – often interrupting teachers conferencing with other students—instead of making an effort to read the directions on her own. She also struggled to write independently for more than two or three sentences at a time.*

Using the conferencing protocol, Rosa’s teachers noticed she was not using the Writing Strategy Support Form to identify possible strategies. To make the tool more accessible, her teachers created a shorter version of the tool. This enabled Rosa to select a particular strategy and then to reflect on it at the end of class. By the end of the year, Rosa was working independently during timed writing sessions, and during revision and editing time. During conferences with teachers, Rosa was able to identify one or more strategies that she was using or had used. Her questions also grew more specific in nature; instead of asking, “What do I do?” she asked whether an analogy she wanted to make in her essay made sense. By the end of the fifth unit, she had increased her grade by 8 points on a 30-point rubric (15 to 23), using several different revision strategies to improve the coherency of her writing, and self-checking to make sure she responded to all aspects of the prompt.

** Name changed to protect the identity of the student.*

How is this implemented at Bronx Bridges?

Step 1: Introduction and framing

- The teacher introduces the purpose of conferencing, explaining it pushes students to use strategies when they are struggling and to observe their own improvement. The teacher then reviews the conferencing schedule so the student knows what to expect during a conference.
- The student asks questions and make comments.

Step 2: Initial conference

- The teacher meets with students for approximately 3–5 minutes and takes notes (see Protocol and Note Catcher).
 - Students identify a struggle and strategy. Student records these and verbalizes next steps.
 - The teacher provides writing score for the focus area (e.g. development) at the end of the conference.
 - Teachers use strategy support form (Google Form) if students struggle to identify a strategy.
- **Tip:** We found conferences to be most productive during work time on extended projects. Most of us also have co-teachers in our classes, and we would structure conferences so that one teacher conferenced while the other circulated. We always designed a conferencing schedule ahead of time.

Step 3: Follow-up conference

- 1-2 days after the initial conference, the teacher meets with the student a second time.
- Start the follow-up reflection on previous use of strategy.
 - If the student is still struggling with the strategy, reflect on why and how to move forward.
 - If the student is having success, identify a new struggle and appropriate strategy to help.
- Provide a new updated writing score at the end of the conference.
- Conduct additional follow-up conferences as needed.

Step 4: Documentation and reflection

- Teachers collect final writing scores and record strategy use and improvement
- Teachers note feedback for students for next round of conferencing

How do we know this is an improvement?

In order to understand the impact of this practice, we tracked the following:

Outcome Measures

- Percentage of students applying strategies
- Percentage of students persisting through a rigorous task

Process Measures

- Which strategies students chose to try from the strategy support form
- Number of students conferencing
- Teacher time

Learnings and Adaptations

Tips to avoid common pitfalls

Preview the conferencing questions and set expectations

By communicating to students that they are required to select and implement at least one writing strategy, students are much more likely to implement one. An easy way of ensuring that students selected a strategy was to use the Do Now as a time for students to set a writing goal, and select a specific strategy to achieve that goal.

Provide lower-level or struggling students with a shorter list of strategies to select from

Some students, particularly beginner English Language Learners, felt overwhelmed by the variety of strategies listed and discussed on the Google Form. By providing them with a shorter, more focused version of the form (aligned to the particular task the students were working on), students were able to select a strategy, use the strategy, and reflect on how the strategy helped them to complete the writing task.

Use Google Forms to remind students of the strategy they selected.

We noticed that students were much more likely to use a strategy if they were reminded. The Google Form's automatic email reminds students of the strategy they selected, and also provides them with a record of the strategies that they have tried. Students were able to look to this email (or their Do Now response) when they became stuck in class.

Potential adaptations

Use timed, in-class writing to create first drafts. Then provide feedback to students on their effort level.

In this adaptation, students completed outlines prior to the timed, in-class writing and then select from differentiated tools to write their essays (including paragraph frames, sentence starters, and lists of transitional words). Students were told that their first drafts would be graded according to a rubric, and also graded for effort during the timed writing. This pushed most students to write more consistently during the timed, in-class writing. By producing a more complete first draft, teachers had the opportunity to provide feedback to students through comments and rubric-aligned grades.

Have students justify grade increases using language from the rubric. Students completed a rubric in which they entered the grade they received on their first draft, and then provided reasons (using the language of the rubric) for any grade increases. Students were able to see how much their writing improved through the revision and editing process. In one class, students' scores increased an average of four points on a thirty-point rubric (an average increase of 14%).

Have students practice revising and editing on different essays. Teachers printed out hard copies of essays for students to practice implementing revising and editing strategies on. It proved incredibly helpful!

Initial Conferencing Protocol

- A. Describe what you are working on.
- B. *[If needed]* What could you improve about _____?
1. **What are you struggling with?** *[If you receive a nothing, go to the questions above]*
 - Can you read this part to me?
 - What about this is difficult for you? / Why is this difficult for you?
 2. **What strategies have you tried so far? / What have you tried so far to help you with _____?**
 - Did it help you with _____?
 3. **What strategies will you use to help you? / What plan will you use to help you?**
 - What resources or tools are you going to use to help you with _____?
 4. **After our conference, what will you do next?**

Date	Name of Student	Struggle/Issue	Strategy the student will use

Second Round Conferencing Protocol

1. Last time we met, we discussed a writing strategy. You said you would _____ . Have you used this strategy? Tell me how you have used the strategy.
2. Show me how you used the strategy in _____ (describe a writing piece).

If student is facing same struggle, ask...	If student is facing a different struggle, ask...
How did you use this strategy the other day after we talked?	What are you struggling with now in _____ (describe a writing piece)?
How could you use this strategy again in paragraph _____?	What strategies have you tried so far? / What have you tried so far to help you with _____? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did it help you with _____?
What can you do to remember to use this strategy in the future?	What strategies will you use to help you? / What plan will you use to help you? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What resources or tools are you going to use to help you with _____?
After our conference, what will you do next?	After our conference, what will you do next?

Do Now

What is one strategy you can use today in class to revise your essay?

- Read your teacher's comments and reflect on them: what do you need to do to make your paper better?
- Add more evidence and examples to your body paragraphs.
- Use a thesaurus or the word wall to add more powerful words and/or vocabulary words from the unit.
- Use the BBHS Informative Essay Writing Strategy Support Form to find another revision strategy.

SUBMIT