

## Introduction to Language Minilessons

*“Grammar instruction in the studies reviewed involved the explicit and systematic teaching of the parts of speech and the structure of sentences. The meta-analysis found an effect for this type of instruction for students across a full range of ability, but surprisingly, this effect was negative ...Such findings raise serious questions about some educators’ enthusiasm for traditional grammar instruction as a focus of writing instruction for adolescents.”*

■ *Writing Next* (Graham and Perin 2007)

These mini units of study are based on the work of Jeff Anderson (*Everyday Editing; Mechanically Inclined*). They are designed to engage students in thinking, writing, reading, discussing, noticing, questioning, and discovering during editing instruction. We teach editing rather than merely practice it.

Our editing instruction starts with students observing how powerful texts work. They ask themselves, “What are the writers doing?”, “What can we learn from their effectiveness – and, more often than not, their correctness?” This way of editing is inquiry based, open-ended, and bound by meaning:

- What do you notice?
- What else?
- What would change if we removed this or that?
- Which do you prefer? Why?

The idea is to begin with the end in mind (Covey 2004). Knowing what successful writing looks like (Spandel 2004) helps students produce more effectively.

According to Jeff Anderson, we “...invite students to notice, to read like writers, to come into the world of editing – a friendly place rather than a punishing place, a creational facility rather than a correctional one. When we develop a place where concepts can be developed and patterns can be learned, kids feel safe, take risks, and feel welcome in every stage of the writing process”.



# Explaining the Invitations

*Adapted from Everyday Editing (Chapter 3), by Jeff Anderson*

## **INVITATION TO NOTICE**

Ask kids, “What do you notice?” and “What else?” again and again, listening to their responses, going where they go, making sure to hit on the craft and at least one key point about the patterns in the sentence. You do not have to cover it all. The *invitation to notice* is an activity in differentiation in which kids notice what they notice (with slight nudges from the teacher from time to time).

### **PROBING BEYOND “WHAT DO YOU NOTICE?”**

- **CRAFT:**
  - ❖ What’s working with the text?
  - ❖ What’s effective?
  - ❖ Where’s the good writing? The craft? The effect?
  - ❖ What else?
  
- **PUNCTUATION:**
  - ❖ What’s the punctuation doing?
  - ❖ What effect does the punctuation have on my reading aloud?
  - ❖ What changes if we remove it? Use something else?
  - ❖ What’s the writer accomplishing with his or her choices?
  - ❖ What else?



## **INVITATION TO IMITATE**

To imitate, students look closely at the model, and they in turn clarify their understanding and revise and expand their thinking about the patterns or concepts – editing and craft – as they play with applying what they noticed to their to their own ideas. Imitation lets students try on authors’ styles and see how they fit within their own developing style.

When students are invited to imitate sentences of effective writers, they learn a lot. The time spent noticing what is strong about the model sentence pays off when kids imitate the punctuation and the writer’s craft contained in the sentence.

### **INVITING STUDENTS TO IMITATE**

- Deconstruct the sentence for its prominent features.
- Show an imitation of your own or a student’s and connect back to the prominent features.
- Show students how to insert their ideas and experiences and still imitate the structure or pattern.

## **INVITATION TO REVISE**

This invitation has elements of the other two previous invitations. In the invitations to revise students to play around and try the concept they are learning. This can be done with a small piece of text (one sentence) or a larger piece of text (paragraph). This invitation works well when students combine and uncombined sentences. In fact, sentence combining is one of the key recommendations *Writing Next* (Graham and Perin 2007).

### **WAYS TO INVITE KIDS TO REVISE**

- Imitate a powerful model.
- Try a freewrite.
- Revise a freewrite, adding in the new pattern.
- Respond to or summarize reading.
- Have students uncombine sentences from literature to make as many sentences as possible.
- Have students combine sentences from literature using a subordinating conjunction or any of the following words: after, although, as, when, while, until, because, before, if, since (Jeff Anderson refers to these words as AAWWUBBIS words).



## **INVITATION TO EDIT**

Students need to develop a keen eye to find mistakes – in their writing and on tests. Standardized tests usually require students to find one error in a sentence. What’s not right? What doesn’t work? They don’t usually have to identify parts of speech or name grammatical structures. They need to see and hear what is working and not working in writing. In order to give students needed practice and still stay true to writer’s craft, we start with a great mentor sentence. We talk about what is good with the sentence. Then we cover it up and reveal another version of it with one thing changed. Mostly changes with grammar and mechanics. Students then look at the sentence to find the one error, analyzing why it is an error. Again we show them the correct version of the sentence so that students imprint correctness on their brain. Then we cover it up again and reveal another version of it with one other change. This process is repeated about 4 times, each time students are looking for the one error that is in the sentence. Why is this a better process than the practice associated with Daily Oral Language where we ask students to identify several errors in one sentence? Consider this quote from *The View from Saturday*:

*How can you know what’s missing if you’ve if you’ve never met it? You must know of something’s existence before you can notice its absence.*

- E.L. Konigsburg, *The View from Saturday*

After seeing the correct sentence, students identify what has changed as each sentence is uncovered separately. The students stay open to changes from sentence to sentence so the activity continues to be generative.

### **UNCOVERING HOW WRITERS COMMUNICATE WITH READERS**

#### **How’d They Do It?**

*When the web is finished, the spider waits for insects to fly into its web.*

- Seymour Simon, *Spiders*

- When the web is finished, the spider waits for insects to fly into it’s web.
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## ***INVITATION TO WRITE***

This invitation is an assessment piece. It is designed to be used as a formative assessment. Based on the responses of students to the invitation, teachers can determine whether or not this lesson needs further instruction.

