

Five Steps to Building a Strong Writing Classroom Community

Creating a classroom community of mutual respect and support that fosters learning and growth is every teacher's goal. When working toward building a strong writing classroom community, there are some specific steps to consider.

WRITE. This may seem obvious, but students have to write. They need frequent, varied opportunities to write, and they should have choice in what they write. Not every piece of writing needs to be polished. Brainstorming, planning, and freewriting count as writing, too.

SHARE. Students should always have the opportunity to share during a writing session. Maybe they'll share their plan for writing at the beginning of a session. At the end of a session, they may share a favorite paragraph, stanza, or sentence with a partner or with the entire class.

CRITIQUE. Receiving feedback on our work is crucial, and helps us make it better. Teacher feedback and conferences are valuable, and so is peer feedback. You'll need to provide explicit instruction and modeling for your students about how to give and receive feedback. The next page is a resource you may use. Others are included in my book, *Goal Setting in the Writing Classroom*.

REVISE. Revision is an integral part of the writing process. Students should revise, implementing feedback they've received. Also, just by letting their work sit for a bit and returning to it with fresh eyes, they will inevitably discover ways to strengthen their writing.

CELEBRATE. It's important to celebrate when a piece of writing is finished or progress has been made. Send a note home to a student's parents/caregivers for a job well done; have a whole class sharing; or create a publication highlighting your students' writing. You may even choose to do something fun as a class that may or may not relate to writing. Ask your students for their ideas about how to celebrate.

Each of these steps will help you build a strong classroom community of students who are creative, critical thinkers, willing to share – and, ultimately, confident and competent writers.

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How to Give and Receive Peer Feedback

When giving peer feedback:

- Listen to your partner.
- Ask, "What would you like feedback on today?"
- Give your partner specific feedback.
- Encourage and celebrate your partner's work.

When receiving peer feedback:

- Come ready to share.
- After sharing, say, "I'm ready for your feedback on [name something specific]."
- Listen to the feedback.
- If you don't understand part of the feedback, say, "Can you explain what you mean by [name point of confusion]?"
- Say, "Thank you for your feedback. I am going to try [name a suggestion your partner has given]."

Support Material
from Appendix E of
Goal Setting in the
Writing Classroom