Atwell, N. In The Middle: New Understandings About Writing, Reading, and Learning (2nd Ed.), Boynton/Cook Publishers: Portsmouth, NH, 1998.

Having a Writing Conference with Yourself

One morning in writing workshop I watched Jake. He wrote furiously for a half hour, put down his pen, picked up his draft, jumped up from his desk, and asked Brendan to respond to his writing in a peer conference. When I watched more closely, I observed the same sequence of events with other students. I was worried.

Writers were bypassing their most important readers: themselves. They weren't internalizing standards for effective writing, because they depended on other people to identify and solve the problems in their writing. And they weren't discovering the integral role of reading in writing.

Experienced writers spend at least as much time reading and rereading their texts as they do writing them. We cast an eye back over the writing to tinker, make adjustments, build patterns, extend arguments, find the holes in arguments, fix redundancies, clear up confusions, resolve contradictions, become more interesting, add specifics, untangle sentences, play with punctuation, pick up momentum, get distance, try to act as an objective "other," see if the writing hangs together and makes sense, grasp hold again of the big picture, and attempt to get back on the track where we want our writing to ride.

I wrote "Having a Writing Conference with Yourself" as a guide for my students, with their input. We based it on the questions I ask them in conferences and they ask each other; I also included questions I address when I read drafts of my own prose. The focus is on making decisions—about purpose, meaning, information, leads, conclusions, titles, language and stylistic considerations—and on acting deliberately, to write literature.

Each student receives a copy of the questions and attaches it inside his or her daily writing folder. In a series of minilessons I talk about the questions in three chunks: purpose and information; leads, conclusions, and titles; and style. At the end of each minilesson I ask students to highlight the questions they know represent problems in their writing—the questions they need to pay particular attention to as they read their writing to themselves. Handing kids the list and suggesting they ask every question every time they write would overwhelm them, and it would defeat the purpose. I want discriminating writers whose active readings of their own writing become a foundation for decisions they make in their drafts and in the nature of help they ask of others in conferences.

HAVING A WRITING CONFERENCE WITH YOURSELF

Read your writing to yourself, as you write and after you've written. The best writers spend a lot of time reading over and thinking about what they've written so far and considering where they might go next. They also let their writing "cool down": they come back to a text after a hiatus, read it with fresh eyes, and consider it from the perspective of a new day.

Your job, as a responder to your own writing, is to make decisions about what's on the paper: the weaknesses—parts that need more work or could be cut—and the strengths—parts that work so well you want to build on them.

A writer's basic questions are always, "What is it I'm trying to say here? *Why* am I writing this?" The particular questions below may help you find and shape your purposes as a writer.

QUESTIONS ABOUT PURPOSE

- Does the writing answer the question, "So what?"
- Do I have a big idea? Do I have enough specifics to support this theme, argument, or purpose?
- Is the writing honest?
- Will it make a reader think and feel?
- Do I know what I'm talking about?
- Will readers relate to the writing so strongly that I hold their attention the whole time?

QUESTIONS ABOUT INFORMATION

Is my information sufficient? Is it accurate?

- Have I told enough? Have I explained each part well enough that a reader will know what I mean, every step of the way?
- What's the strongest, most satisfying part, and how can I build on it?
- Have I described thoughts and feelings at the points where readers will wonder what I am, or what my main character is, thinking and feeling?
- Have I embedded the context: told where, when, how, what, and with whom?
- Have I described the scene with enough detail that a reader can see it happening—can envision people in action?
- Did people talk? Have I directly quoted the words they said? Does it sound the way these people would speak to each other? Can a reader hear what they're like?
- Have I created questions in a reader's mind about where the writing will lead?
- Have I included specifics that reveal my character, myself, my subject, or my argument?

- Is the pace too fast to hold someone's interest or convince a reader? Do I need to slow down and expand on any part?
- Is the writing plausible, or *believable*? Are the reasons for actions and reactions clear and compelling?
- Is the writing *true* in terms of history, science, mathematics, geography, contemporary social issues, etc.? Have I done the research that gives credence to what I'm saying?
- Is my information in the best order?

Do I have too much information?

- What parts aren't needed—don't add to my point, theme, character, or plot? Can I delete them?
- What is this piece of writing really about? Are there parts that are about something else? Can I cut them?
- Which is the one best example or illustration?
- Are there redundancies? Can I figure out the best way to say it *once*?
- Have I contradicted myself anywhere?
- Are there any places where the pace bogs down? Can I delete and compress information and speed things up?
- Is there too much conversation? Too many details? Too much description? Have I explained something too thoroughly?
- Is this a "bed-to-bed" memoir that describes every single event of one day? Can I focus on the important part of the experience and delete the rest?
- Have I cut to the chase?

QUESTIONS ABOUT LEADS

- Does the lead engage readers and bring them right into the theme, purpose, tone, action, or the mind of the main character?
- Does the lead give direction to the rest of the writing?
- Does the lead set the tone or create the first impression I want for my readers?
- Where does the piece really begin? Can I cut the first paragraph? The first two? The first page?

QUESTIONS ABOUT CONCLUSIONS

- How do I want my reader to feel and think at the end? Will this conclusion do it?
- Does my conclusion drop off and leave my reader wondering or confused?
- Does my conclusion feel tacked on?
- Does my conclusion go on and on?

- Does my conclusion give readers a sense of closure but also invite them to want to read this writing again?

QUESTIONS ABOUT TITLES

- Does the title fit the big idea of what the writing is about?
- Is the title a "grabber?" Would it make a reader want to read my writing? (Or is it merely a description of the topic?)
- Does the title give a hint or taste of the topic?
- Is the title memorable?

QUESTIONS ABOUT STYLE

- Is the imagery concrete? Can a reader see, hear, feel, smell, taste this?
- Is my choice of words simple, clear, and direct?
- Have I cluttered my writing with unnecessary adjectives and adverbs?
- Have I used strong, precise verbs?
- Have I used any of Macrorie's Bad Words (*really, very, so, all*)?
- Have I used any word(s) too often, especially in contiguous sentences?
- Are my sentences clear, direct, and to the point?
- Are my sentences active: *I did this*, not *It was done*?
- Are any sentences too long and tangled? Too brief and choppy?
- Have I used punctuation (: ; — . . .) that will give voice and meaning to my writing?
- Have I paragraphed often enough to give a reader's eyes some breaks?
- Have I broken the flow of my piece by paragraphing too often?
- Have I grouped together ideas related to each other?
- Is my information in order? Is this a logical sequence? Have I provided transitions for the reader from one idea to the next?
- Is there a voice, an actor?
- Does the voice stay the same—first-person participant (I did it) or third-person observer (he or she did it)?
- Does the verb tense stay the same—present (it's happening now or in general) or past (it happened before)?
- Does the writing sound like literature—does it flow—when I read it aloud to myself?

Conferences About Conventions

Charles Cooper wrote, "It's easier to persist with commas if you know you're engaged in some fundamentally important human activity that has very great consequences for your full development as a human being" (1984). It's my favorite quote about editorial issues, funny and true.

When students believe that what they have to say is important, both within their lives and beyond them, they care about how their words go down on the page. From our conversations in conferences and mini-lessons, my kids understand how conventionality contributes to a reader's appreciation of text. I think teachers do students a disservice if we represent reader response as an either/or proposition—that it's either "creativity" or correctness that makes a piece of writing good. Readers respond to both. If we teach simplistic formulas for good writing, we leave our students open to a reader's disdain or, worse, indifference. Other than a teacher, who is paid to do it, who would read an illegible or unpunctuated text? And what reader would read, very far anyway, a conventionally perfect text that says nothing? When teachers emphasize either creative writing or basic skills, we bypass a writer's sophisticated reasons for composing texts and a reader's equally sophisticated expectations of texts. Our job is to help students understand that content, craft, and conventions all matter. It's their job to make good decisions about what's appropriate, effective, and correct.

I ask my students to write as correctly as they can right from the start: to use what they know whenever they draft. An unfortunate legacy of the early days of writing workshop is the notion of "sloppy copies," a method that encouraged kids to ignore conventions when drafting and concentrate on content. Having edited—or tried to—enough sloppy copies for one lifetime, and having corrected the same errors time and again, I have learned to put conventions in perspective: it is reasonable and realistic for student writers to attend as they compose, to develop the habits of real writers. Adults do not go back when we've finished drafting and put in the periods; adults do use what we know of conventions to give our drafts voice and meaning. For example; marks like the colon, dash, double dash, and semicolon comprise a significant part of my drafting repertoire.

This doesn't mean that I don't edit and proofread myself at the end. When I'm as satisfied as I'm going to be with a text, I focus finally and formally on the issues that need my attention at this juncture, before a reader lays eyes on the product: spelling, sentence structure, punctuation, paragraph breaks and length, redundancies, verbs and tense, unnecessary modifiers, line and stanza breaks, active constructions, use/overuse of contractions, pronoun case, pronoun referents, commas to set off dependent clauses, correct placement of apostrophes on singular and plural possessives, and on and on. I ask my students to do the same: to become conscious of the conventions each of them needs to focus on and to at-

tend to the errors and awkwardness that will distract their readers and interfere with meaning.

Students edit in a pen or pencil different in color from the text, to show what they know and can find on their own, before they submit writing to me for final copyediting. Because I want editing to be conscious and deliberate, I ask each writer to list the conventions he or she will focus on. Figure 7-1 shows an editing checksheet: a cover sheet that each writer completes before self-editing, then attaches to the edited copy before submitting it to me.

Laurel's individual proofreading list, which is attached inside her daily writing folder, is the source of the conventions she listed on her editing checksheet. Each time I copyedit a piece of student writing, I select between one and three conventions that the writer doesn't understand yet, and I note them in the last column of the editing checksheet. The next day, when I return the writing to the writer so he or she may make a final copy, I confer about these conventions; then the student adds them to his or her individual proofreading list. Figure 7-2 shows a seventh grader's proofreading list by the end of seventh grade. These are the conventions I taught Mike—one, two, or three at a time—in our editing conferences from September through June.

I teach no more than two conventions in a conference because I've learned that this is the most my students can digest. If there are ten kinds of errors in a piece of writing and I teach about all of them at once, chances are slim that the writer will understand or remember any of them. But when I teach about a couple of errors, marks, or rules at a time, a student builds understandings, and there's a pretty good chance that the new conventions will be retained and applied in future pieces of writing.

My copyediting is *editing* in the strict sense of the word: I mark up the text. In a third color of ink I correct or indicate every error I can identify. Figure 7-3 shows an example of an edited text. Here I'm giving Catharine what she asked me for—my expertise about conventions—so she may ready the writing for her readers' eyes and expectations. Because I'm marking up a paper the writer has already marked, there aren't any of the heartaches that students once associated with a teacher's red pen. As copy editor, I'm one of the last stops on a writer's way to an audience he or she cares about and wants to affect. My kids are counting on me—just as I'm counting on my copy editor at Heinemann to save me from embarrassment and make sure my ideas have the best possible presentation.

In the past I kept records of the conventions I taught each writer: after

FIGURE 7-1 Sample Editing Checksheet

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Center for Teaching and Learning

EDITING CHECKSHEET

TO BE PAPER CLIPPED TO THE TOP OF YOUR WRITING SUBMITTED FOR TEACHER EDITING

NAME Laurel

TITLE OF PIECE Follow Your Heart

DATE OF PIECE 1/2

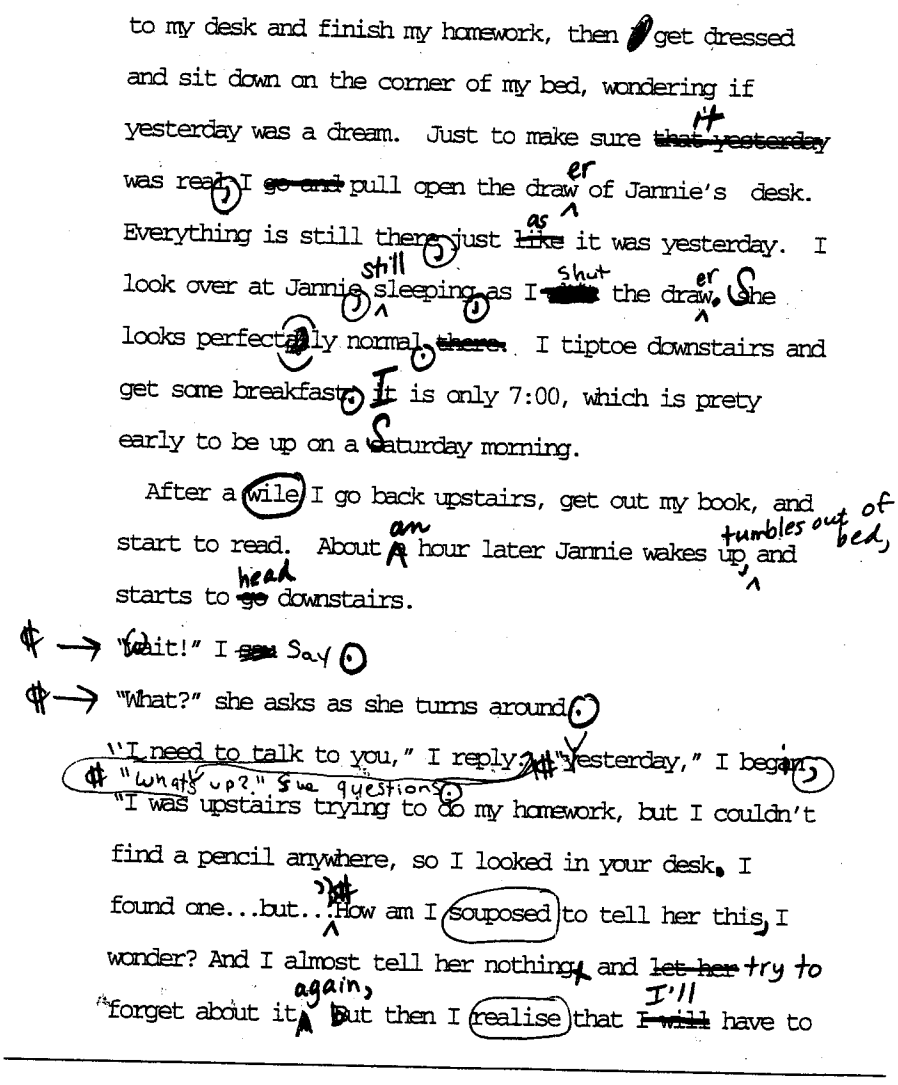
CONVENTIONS	EDITED (√)	PEER EDITED (if you'd like) by Martha	TEACHER'S COMMENTS
Capitalize the first, last, and important words in title	√	√	• When the words of a song or poem won't fit on a line, go down to the next line and indent the leftovers.
Circle every word you're not absolutely sure of.	√	√	
use ⌣ to join compound words	√	√	• Keep a consistent voice: I or he/she or (as here) you.
use an apostrophe to show possession.	√	√	

FIGURE 7-2 A Student's Individual Proofreading List

Mike's **'s Proofreading List**

1. Circle every word you're not sure of and look it up.
2. Capitalize first, last, and important words in a title.
3. In a poem, let the line breaks and stanza breaks do the work of punctuation wherever possible.
4. Put a comma between a weak ~~interjection~~ exclamation or interjection and the rest of the sentence.
5. Must have punctuation between a quote and its explanatory phrase: , or ? or !
6. No abbreviations in the heading of a letter. A colon after the greeting of a business letter.
7. Never start a sentence with a numeral: Ten percent of kids, not 10% of kids.
8. Write out numbers of fewer than three words as words: ten, thirty-four, 306.
9. A list takes commas to separate the items: small, stylish, gray bird.
10. When a one-syl. word ends with a vowel-cons, double the consonant before adding a suffix: stop + stopped.
11. Use a dash to show an abrupt change or interruption.
12. Watch pronoun case on compound subjects: Alex and I or Alex and me. Test for which one.
13. Keep verb tense consistent: past or present.
14. Watch for comma splices. Put ; or and or start a new sentence.

FIGURE 7-3 Example of a Student Text After Self- and Teacher-Editing


to my desk and finish my homework, then get dressed
and sit down on the corner of my bed, wondering if
yesterday was a dream. Just to make sure ~~that yesterday~~ it
was real. I ~~go and~~ pull open the draw of Jannie's desk.
Everything is still there just ~~like~~ as it was yesterday. I
look over at Jannie sleeping as I ~~[redacted]~~ shut the draw. She
looks perfectly normal ~~there~~. I tiptoe downstairs and
get some breakfast. It is only 7:00, which is prety
early to be up on a Saturday morning.

After a wile I go back upstairs, get out my book, and
start to read. About an hour later Jannie wakes up and tumbles out of bed,
starts to ~~go~~ head downstairs.

"Wait!" I ~~[redacted]~~ say

"What?" she asks as she turns around.

"I need to talk to you," I reply. "Yesterday," I began.
"I was upstairs trying to do my homework, but I couldn't
find a pencil anywhere, so I looked in your desk. I
found one...but..." How am I souposed to tell her this, I
wonder? And I almost tell her nothing, and ~~let her~~ try to
forget about it again. But then I realise that ~~I will~~ I'll have to

I edited and noted on the editing checksheet the lessons I would teach in a conference the next day, I also listed the conventions in my editing journals, which were three-ring binders with several pages for each student. After a couple of years, the duplication of effort wore me out. Since students record on their individual proofreading lists the conventions teach them, the proofreading lists can serve as a record for both of us. Students use their proofreading lists when they self-edit by copying down the relevant con-

ventions onto an editing checksheet. At the end of each trimester they photocopy their proofreading lists, for us to use in evaluation. When I report to parents that I teach skills in the context of pieces of writing, I show them what this means. The proofreading lists demonstrate exactly what their children are learning about conventions over the weeks and months of a writing workshop.

The editorial issues I address in conferences run the gamut, from syntax to usage to spelling, punctuation, capitalization, word choice, format, and style. There isn't one set of conventions, no skills scope and sequence. There are individual writers with varying degrees of understanding. By teaching in context and one to one, I can go right to the heart of what an individual writer needs to know. It is surprisingly easy to make such judgments. As a reader I have expectations, and the ways a writer eases my way, or disconcerts me, jump off the page when I edit. Below I've listed conventions of texts that I've taught my students in conferences about editorial issues.

CONVENTIONS TAUGHT IN EDITING CONFERENCES
(TAKEN FROM STUDENTS' INDIVIDUAL PROOFREADING LISTS)

- Edit in a pen or pencil that's a different color from my piece, so I can show Ms. A. and myself what I found.
- Write on one side of the paper only, so I can cut and tape and use arrows to go onto the back of the page.
- Skip lines or type double-spaced, so I have room to revise and polish.
- Keep two left-hand margins on my prose pieces, one for regular lines and one for indents.
- Draft in paragraphs.
- Use the symbol ¶ to indicate where I think I need new paragraphs.
- Watch for paragraphs that are too long. Give readers more breaks and breathing space.
- Watch for too-short, choppy paragraphs: combine these.
- Use short (1–2 sentence) paragraphs to punch a point, idea, or turn of events.
- Circle every word I'm not absolutely sure of, then go back and look up its spelling.
- Write numbers of fewer than three words as words: e.g., one, twenty-six, 160.

- Never start a sentence with a numeral: *Ten percent of kids*, not *10 percent of kids*.
- Don't abbreviate in prose, except for the permissable words we listed in our handbooks.
- All right = two words. A lot = two words.
- Put capital letters at the beginnings of sentences.
- Capitalize *Mom* and *Dad* when they're names, but not when they're labels (*I asked Mom for a ride*, vs. *I asked my mom for a ride*).
- Capitalize names of countries and monuments.
- Put capital letters on the first, last, and important words in a title.
- Use *an* (not *a*) before nouns, adjectives, and adverbs that begin with vowels.
- Use brackets when I need parentheses within parentheses: ([ ]).
- Avoid parentheses in narratives.
- When I have to split words between lines, split them between syllables. See a dictionary to find out where a word splits.
- Never split a one-syllable word.
- Keep the voice of my narratives consistent: either *he/she* or *I*.
- Keep my pronouns clear so readers can tell who *he*, *she*, *we*, or *they* refers to.
- Keep my verb tense consistent: either *past* (it happened before) or *present* (it's happening now, or in general).
- Use ____ and *I* as a sentence subject (not ____ and *me*).
- Read my pieces softly to myself and put periods where I hear my voice drop and stop.
- Proofread softly to myself out loud and listen for missing words and missing sounds at the ends of words.
- Watch for comma splices, because a comma isn't strong enough to hold two sentences together. Use a period or semicolon, or insert *and* after the comma.
- Use a semicolon between two sentences where I want to show a relationship.
- Use apostrophe *s* to show something belongs to someone.
- Use an apostrophe to show a letter is missing: *let's*; *that's*; *don't*.
- Use ellipses to indicate a long, dramatic pause; an ellipsis is just three dots.
- To achieve a dash on the computer, hit *hyphen + option + shift*.
- Use a colon to show a list is coming.
- Use a colon to show an explanation is coming.

- Experiment with — and : to give my writing voice and power.
- On a list, put commas between items and use the serial or Harvard comma before the final *and*.
- Separate mild interjections from the rest of the sentence with a comma: *Wow, that's cool. Hi, how are you?*
- Separate vocatives from the rest of the sentence with a comma: *I told you, Mom, I'm coming. Ethan, wait for me.*
- Use a comma between two independent clauses joined by *and, or, but, nor, so,* or *because*.
- You're = you are. Your = belongs to you.
- It's = it is. Its = belongs to an it.
- There = a place or a sentence starter; their = belongs to them; they're = they are.
- Then = time; than = comparison.
- In a rhymed poem, the rhyming words go at the ends of lines.
- In a rhymed poem, keep one left-hand margin and no indents, except for run-overs that won't fit on the line where I want them: indent these.
- Use line breaks and white space to help punctuate a poem.
- Punctuate a song or poem as prose: no extra commas/comma at the end of each line.
- Use a deliberate, consistent format in an open-form poem, e.g., capitals and punctuation or no capitals and punctuation.
- Delete excess words in open-form poems: cut to the bone, until I can't cut another word.
- Put a comma after the closing of a letter: *Sincerely,*
- If the closing of a letter is more than one word, capitalize the first word only: *Your friend,*
- Don't indent the greeting of a letter.
- On every letter I write, use the same heading:
  my street address
  my town, state, and zip
  today's date
- On a business letter, include an inside address: the recipient's name, title, and address.
- Don't use abbreviations in the heading or inside address of a letter.
- On a business letter, put a colon after the greeting and print my name under my signature.
- Put quotation marks around the words people say out loud.

- When the *he said* or explanatory phrase comes after the quote, separate it with a comma, exclamation point, or question mark, never a period.
- When the explanatory phrase comes before the quote, it's followed by a comma.
- Unless the explanatory phrase begins the sentence, it's lower case: *"Okay," he said.*
- A quote and its explanatory phrase usually belong in the same paragraph.
- Start a new paragraph every time the speaker changes when writing dialogue.
- Use single quotes when quoting inside a quote.
- When proofreading, listen for too many *ands*.
- Proofread for the bad words: *really, very, so, a lot, just, sort of, kind of, little, big, all.*
- Avoid exclamation points except in dialogue. Let my choice of verbs and my sentence structure convey the excitement.
- People *lie down*; people *lay* things *down*.
- Check if I have the correct preposition (*in, for, from, about, of, to,* etc.) for the idiom I'm using.
- Avoid *you* unless I mean *you*.
- Watch for overuse of forms of *to be* (*were, was, is,* etc.) and strive for active verbs.
- Make sure my sentences have actors: *I did it* vs. *This was done by me.*
- Use a thesaurus to help find strong verbs.
- Avoid overuse of the thesaurus: keep my voice in the writing.
- Listen for redundancy: when I use a word more than once in close proximity.

Since I began teaching about conventions in the context of pieces of kids' writing, not only are students more correct and versatile, but I've become more knowledgeable about how conventions work. Because kids need rules and marks explained in terms of function, I have to understand how they work. So rather than parrot *Warriner's* rules about punctuation, I show my students why the different marks were invented—most often to cue readers about what to expect or what to do with their voices—and how different marks achieve their effects. Instead of reciting *Warriner's* seven models of paragraph formation—models seldom found in the real world of published prose—I explain how paragraphs were developed to give readers

breaks. I show how the paragraph symbol was inserted in early illuminated texts, before indentation became a convention, to make breaks for readers and signal new themes or information, and I ask writers of unparagraphed drafts to decide where to break their prose so it's easier for a reader to take it in. The conference transcripts below illustrate ways of approaching basic conventions—end-stop punctuation, legibility, and paragraphing of dialogue in narratives—from the perspective of function.

MS. A.: Sandi, there was one big problem I noticed last night when I edited this memoir; it had to do with periods and other end-stops. Can you tell me what a period does?

SANDI: It comes at the end of a complete sentence.

A: How can you tell if something is a complete sentence?

S: If you have a complete subject and a complete predicate.

A: Right. So . . . what does that mean?

S: (long pause) I'm not sure. It's a rule we learned in sixth grade.

A: Well, let's take a look at "Body in Gull Lake" and see if you can learn a convention you can apply. Punctuation shows people how to read a piece of writing—what to do with their voices. A period usually shows a reader where to drop and stop her voice. Do me a favor. Read this paragraph softly aloud and listen: Where does your voice drop and stop?

(Sandi reads.)

A: Can you hear the periods?

S: Yeah. I see what you mean.

A: Without periods what you have is a problem known as *run-on sentences*. Your reader's voice runs on and on. Periods are probably the single most important punctuation mark, because they signal the stops. Would you add this convention to your proofreading list, that from now on you'll proofread softly to yourself and make sure you've put periods where your voice drops and stops?

S: Sure.

MS. A.: I had major difficulty editing this for you, Brian. Your handwriting had me stumped. It took me about three times as long to edit as the other drafts I read last night because I couldn't make out the words.

BRIAN: Everybody else can read my writing.

A: So I'm the first reader who's ever complained?

B: Yeah.

A: Besides starting a new set of quotation marks, do you know how writers usually show readers that one person has stopped talking and another has started?

T: Uh-uh.

A: Writers start new paragraphs whenever the speaker changes. That way readers have an easier time following the conversation. It's a way of signaling readers that one person has stopped talking and now another's about to start. You go down to the next line and indent each time there's a change.

T: And you leave all this space blank?

A: Right.

T: Doesn't that waste a lot of paper?

A: Well, I don't think it's a waste if it helps a reader. What book are you reading these days?

T: *Where the Red Fern Grows*.

A: May I see it? . . . Look, Rawls does here what I was talking about. See? The boy and his grandfather are talking, and as they converse back and forth each gets his own paragraph.

T: I never noticed that before.

A: It's probably one of those conventions that you never took particular notice of. It's always been there, helping you follow the story. So, could you add "new paragraphs when the speaker changes" as a convention on your proofreading list?

T: Okay.

For most teachers—and certainly it was true for me—conferences with individuals about works-in-progress are such a radical departure from what we used to do as English teachers that it takes a long time to get a sense of how they work, for us and for our kids. I know this time is worthwhile. Writing conferences work; they work for a lifetime of teaching; and their quality and effectiveness only improve with experience. Conferences don't require fancy equipment or expensive consumables. They demand teachers who care about kids and good writing, who make it our business to write and to read about writing. They call for teachers who know something worth saying after we sit down next to our kids and ask, "How can I help you?"

A: Well, let me tell you exactly what happened when I read this. The letters are so small I had to squint to see them. The *m*s and *n*s are written exactly alike, so I couldn't tell which is which. The letters with closed circles, like *o*, *a*, *d*, and *b*, weren't closed, so I couldn't figure out which letter you meant a lot of the time. All in all, I almost missed a great story because your cursive got in my way. Do you have any idea what you could do about this, so other readers won't be turned off and pass by what you have to say?

B: I could write neater.

A: Um-hmm.

B: Take my time.

A: You could. Can I suggest another alternative?

B: What?

A: Well, rather than retooling your cursive, which would take a tremendous amount of practice and steal time from your *writing* writing, why don't you print? How's your printing?

B: I think it's pretty good. But we're not supposed to print in school.

A: That's not a rule in my class. Let's face it. After all the time you spent on cursive in third and fourth grades, by the time you get to high school and college your teachers won't care whether you print or use cursive, just as long as they can read what you've written. The only thing you need cursive for is your signature. Would you be willing to print and see how it goes?

B: I guess so.

A: How are you going to add that to your proofreading list?

B: I'll say something like, "Print so other people can read what I've written."

A: Sounds good.

MS. A.: I noticed you did an effective job here of using quotation marks around the words people said aloud. Every time someone speaks, you've indicated it's a direct quote by putting marks where they begin and marks where they stop.

TIMMY: I finally got the hang of that.

A: Let me show you something else about writing dialogue. In this part, who's talking here, in this sentence?

T: Um . . . I am.

A: And who's talking here, in the next sentence?

T: David.