

THE EXPEDITIONARY LEARNING WRITERS' WORKSHOP

Expeditionary Learning believes that the writers' workshop is an excellent tool to explicitly teach writing process and traits, to give students opportunities to practice and share their writing, and to scaffold for expedition products. Writers' workshops that center on expedition content invite students to think deeply about the compelling topic and to learn to represent that thinking in a particular genre or format. In addition, learning expeditions build background knowledge that supply students with ideas, perspectives, and tensions to write about. Writing products created for authentic audiences provide students with purpose and enhance motivation; the writing product itself can be scaffolded through successive writers' workshops that build the necessary skills. It is far easier to develop ideas, to work on the craft of writing, and to offer feedback when we have something to say, a common format in which to say it, and an audience in mind to say it to. Thus, writing in the context of an expedition helps students to learn expedition content, to develop deeper understanding of the compelling topic, and to learn and improve the craft of writing.

The writers' workshop model proposed by Expeditionary Learning differs in one significant way from the view of writers' workshops as described by Lucy Caulkins, Nancy Atwell, Donald Graves, and others. These authors believe that student choice, in both topic and format, is essential. EL believes expeditions harness the power of the writers' workshop precisely by specifying the choice of content and format while leaving the creative articulation of ideas wide open. When students write about expedition content using a particular format, the teacher is able to devise helpful and focused mini-lessons, to model the writing process by working through the same assignment, and to find exemplary models for generating criteria. The shared background knowledge developed during an in-depth investigation, as well as instruction in a particular format, enable students to provide substantive peer critique based on criteria and rubrics. Therefore, writing about expedition content in a specified format for an authentic purpose and audience facilitates the teaching and learning of writing.

Through the EL Writers' Workshop, students are better able to critique their own and others' writing. They develop a common language to talk about the craft of writing, they experience powerful teacher modeling of thinking like a writer, and they learn protocols for critique and revision that lead to more effective writing. At the same time, students sharpen their critical thinking skills and their ability to appreciate different perspectives. The EL Writers' Workshop promotes students' understanding of expedition content and strengthens their command of written language so that students write to learn as they learn to write.

The components of the writers' workshop are as follows:

1. A focused **mini-lesson** that explicitly teaches a particular skill (e.g., how to revise for better word choice). In creating a mini-lesson, the teacher is explicit about what part of *the writing process* is being focused on (e.g., pre-writing, drafting, or revision), which *trait* or *component* is being targeted (e.g., developing ideas, organization, etc.), and which *type of writing*, format, or text structure forms the context for exploration of the trait or component (e.g., developing ideas for a persuasive piece such as an editorial). By being explicit and focused, we make sure we know what we are teaching and why we are teaching it.
2. Time for students to **practice** and **apply** what has just been taught in the mini-lesson.
3. Protocols for students to **critique** and **respond**
4. Opportunities to **revise** and **share** their writing.
5. Time to **debrief** and create **anchor charts** that describe the students' shared understanding of traits, process, and craft.