

Having a Writing Conference with Yourself

Read your piece to yourself (aloud, if possible) at least once, but probably several times. The best writers spend much time reading over and thinking about what they've written. Make some decisions about what's written on that paper—both strengths and weaknesses. Make notes to yourself about what needs to be attended to:

Questions about Titles

1. Does my title fit what the piece is about?
2. Is my title a “grabber”? Would it make a reader want to read my piece?

Questions about Introductions

1. Does my lead funnel the reader right into my piece—into the main idea or thesis?
2. Is the main idea (or thesis) clear, and is it worth writing about?

Questions about Information in the Body Paragraphs

1. What is the strongest or most exciting part of the piece? How can I build on it?
2. Have I shown (not told) by using concrete examples and sensory details?
3. What is each paragraph and the whole piece really about? Are there parts that are about something else? Can I cut them?
4. Is there any part that will confuse a reader? How will I clarify it-- give more Information? clean up sentence structure (syntax)? use exact and vivid vocabulary words?
5. Have I cited references and used quotations if needed?
6. Is my information correct and focused?

Questions about Style and Diction

1. Have I cluttered my piece with unnecessary adjectives and adverbs?
2. Have I unnecessarily said something more than once?
3. Have I unnecessarily overused any words? Have I overused “dead words”?
4. Are my verbs strong and active?
5. Are any sentences too long and tangled? Too short and choppy?
6. Have I paragraphed so that ideas hang together (topic sentence and supporting details) and so that readers' eyes get some breaks?
7. Is my information in order? (chronological, importance, etc.)
8. Does the voice (1st, 2nd, or 3rd person) stay consistent?
9. Does the verb tense (present, past, future) stay the same?
10. Have I used parallel structure with ideas, series of words, comparisons, etc.?

Questions about Conclusions

1. How do I want my reader to feel at the end of the piece? Does this conclusion do it?
2. What do I want my reader to know at the end of the piece? Does this conclusion do it?
3. Does my conclusion just drop off or fade out?
4. Does my conclusion add new or contradictory information at the last minute, thus unsettling my reader?
5. Is my last statement or word a clincher?

Questions about Conventions and Intangibles

1. Have I left glaring errors in spelling, punctuation, capitalization, etc.?
2. Is the piece presented appealingly and appropriately?
3. How does this piece express me?

It's a good idea to ask parents and peers to use this guide to edit your work for you as well.

This sheet is mainly for prose, but some of it can guide you through editing poetry. A good poem, according to Emily Dickinson, will “...make you feel as though the top of your head has been taken off...” Well, that's one way to judge a poem. You will receive poetry editing guides each year in HarrellLand.