

Writing Instruction Considerations: Questions Guide

This guide accompanies the blog post [Writing Instruction Considerations](#) by Carl Anderson and Matt Glover.

Does the instructional approach take a parallel approach to composition and conventions?

Questions to ask of an instructional approach:

- Does the approach encourage children in all grades to start writing from the very beginning of the school year? Or does it hold kids back from writing until they achieve some level of “readiness”?
- Across the school year, do students receive instruction on how to apply writing conventions to their writing?

Does the instructional approach have students writing for long periods of time?

Questions to ask of an instructional approach:

- How much time does it suggest devoting to writing instruction each day?
- How is this time used? Do students write for most of the time, or is the time filled with a series of activities instead?
- How much time is devoted to writing in a typical week? What percentage of this time is actually devoted to students writing?
- Is whole group instruction focused on a single teaching point in a limited amount of time, thus allowing student the maximum amount of time to write?

Does the instructional approach include instruction on how to write better?

Questions to ask of an instructional approach:

- Does the approach include lessons that will help students learn to craft the writing they do better—e.g. lessons on how to organize writing, how to write with specific detail, how to get voice in writing?
- Does the approach include “process” lessons that teach strategies for navigating stages of the writing process, such as how to make a plan for a piece of writing, and how to edit a draft?

Does the instructional approach provide for differentiation of instruction?

Questions to ask of an instructional approach:

- Does the approach prioritize 1:1 writing conferences?
- Does the approach value small-group work with students in addition to 1:1 conferences, especially in large classes when it will be difficult to confer with all students as frequently as we would like?

Does the instructional approach support teachers and students in studying a stack of published mentor texts to provide children with a vision for what they're writing?

Questions to ask of an instructional approach:

- Does the approach recognize the importance of students learning from mentor texts?
- Do suggested lessons have teachers show and discuss mentor texts?
- Does the approach suggest or provide grade-appropriate mentor texts, or give teachers guidance on where to find them?

Does the instructional approach support teachers in teaching rather than (or in addition to) reminding, telling, correcting, hinting, or commenting?

Questions to ask of an instructional approach:

- During whole group instruction, does the approach support teachers teaching with published texts, teacher-written "process texts," and student writing to show students what writers do?
- During individual conferences, does the approach support teachers in deciding whether to teach/demonstrate/model using a published piece of writing, a teacher-written process text, a student sample, or having student in the class show what they did as a writer?
- Over the course of the school year, is there a balance of lessons that focus on craft, process, and conventions?

Does the instructional approach prioritize student engagement through student choice of topic?

Questions to ask of an instructional approach:

- Do students usually get to choose their own writing topics?

- Does the approach support students by teaching strategies for generating meaningful topics?
- If the approach is integrating writing with a content area, and students are writing to a topic related to that content, do they first write to a topic of choice before writing to an assigned topic?
- If students have to write to a topic/prompt on a high stakes test, does the approach teach students how to write to a prompt *after* first teaching them to write well?

Does the instructional approach prioritize student engagement through students sometimes having choice of genre? In the units that are genre studies, which genres are being studied?

Questions to ask of an instructional approach:

- In some units of study, can students choose their own genres? Does the approach include studies that focus on aspects of authors' craft or process which allows students to choose personally meaningful genres?
- When students study genres, are those genres highly engaging? For example, we know that some narrative genres, such as short realistic fiction and fantasy, are highly engaging for students, yet some instructional approaches prioritize frequent studies of personal narrative at the expense of more engaging narrative genres.

As part of the instructional approach, do children usually write in authentic genres that can be found in the world?

Questions to ask of an instructional approach:

- Does the instructional approach ask students to write in real-world genres?
- Or does it have students only write in genres that exist only in schools, such as isolated paragraphs, five paragraph essays, or reports?

Does the instructional approach provide support for teachers to make responsive decisions regarding the sequence and modifications of whole group lessons to meet the needs of children in the class?

Questions to ask of an instructional approach:

- Does the instructional approach support teachers in making modifications to suggested units so that they better fit student needs?
- Does the approach give teachers guidance on how to modify any suggested units of study based on ongoing assessment of students?

If the instructional approach utilizes AI, does it enhance teaching, not supplant it?

Questions to ask of an instructional approach:

- Will the AI component be used as a feedback tool for students when they are unable to have access to their teacher (i.e. when the teacher is conferring with other students in the class)?
- Is there an understanding that typical feedback AI components give *tells* students what they could do with their writing (“You should make your ending more interesting.”), but doesn’t *teach them* how to do it?
- Does the approach support teachers in producing their *own* process/demonstration text, instead of having AI do it for them? Writing their own texts allows teachers to understand what students are experiencing as they write, and also allows teachers to analyze their own process so they can generate process related teaching points.