Teaching Conventions in Context: Using Model Sentences

The following instructional practices for teaching written conventions in context use model sentences to help students learn how authors use conventions to clarify and convey meaning in their writing.

Notice

- Display the sentence with the targeted grammatical point.

- Ask: What do you notice?

- Ask (repeatedly, as needed): What else?

- Nudge students in the right direction to focus on the targeted grammatical point. For example:
  - What works in the text?
  - Where is good writing?
  - What is the effect?
  - What does the punctuation do?
  - What changes if we remove the punctuation? What if we use something else?

Imitate

- Look closely at the model sentence. Deconstruct the sentence, identifying its prominent features, including the targeted grammatical point. Provide a sentence pattern or frame as a visual scaffold (especially for struggling writers and English language learners).

- Model your own imitation (use the targeted grammatical point in your own sentence) and connect back to the prominent features.

- Show students how to insert their ideas and experiences and still imitate the grammatical point in their own sentences.

Share

- Share the imitation sentences sparked by the model.

- Listen, clap, and praise, but most of all, be sincere—create a positive environment that lets students know you value what they have to say.

Collect

- Have students look at the texts they have already read and see how other authors use the targeted conventions (grammatical points).

- Have students write appropriate sentences they find.

- After sentences are collected, share a few and celebrate the most powerful ones that exemplify the targeted grammatical points.

- Display sentences on the wall as models.

Write/Revise

- Imitate a powerful model sentence that uses the targeted grammatical point in a longer composition.

- Try a freewrite that uses the targeted grammatical point.

- Revise a sentence you have already written by adding the targeted grammatical point.

- Use the targeted grammatical point when responding to or summarizing readings.

Break Apart/Combine

- Together with students, demonstrate how to break apart the ideas in a model sentence into several simple sentences. Read and reread the sentence, noting the conventions the author uses.

- Provide students with opportunities to combine a set of simple sentences into one sentence that includes the targeted grammatical point. Have students compare their attempts with those of the authors and/or the combined sentences of their peers.

REFERENCE: Adapted from Anderson, 2007.