

Writing Conferences – Responding to Writing

By Karen Keyworth

Director of Education, Islamic Schools League of America

There are many different ways to conduct writing response session, but all of them are similar in philosophy. The basic philosophy is to nurture the feeling of “ownership” in the writer while guiding the writer toward better writing. This is true for all writers at all ages and stages. Writers who lack confidence will need to be encouraged, but they will quickly develop their confidence.

To do this, you must truly trust that the writer will be able to discover the weaknesses in the writing, initially by your guidance and eventually by him/herself. This is true for adult writers as well as children. They all can do this. I have seen it happen!

Here are some guidelines for responding to writing during writing conferences:

1. Your hands need to be **empty**. Do not hold any writing utensils (pens, pencils, erasers, etc.) in your hand! If you must touch something, bring a cup of coffee with you to hold.
2. The **writer** takes notes, and *you do not write on the writer’s paper*. Feel free to remind the writer to “write that down.” The writer might get very caught up or excited about the discussion and forget to make critical notes. You may remind him/her.
3. Discuss content/ideas only. This is not the time to discuss proofreading problems such as grammar and mechanics. That will come during the proofreading step.
4. Always remember to begin with what you **LIKED** about the writing. Even if the writing is simply terrible, you can find something positive to say such as “This is such an interesting topic!”
5. The point of this discussion is to improve the writing, not hammer the writer. Remain focused on the writing at all times. **Instead** of saying, “You don’t demonstrate to the reader how this action occurred,” you can say, “I was confused about how this action occurred.” When the writer then explains, you can say, “Oh, now I see. Well, I think if you include that explanation in your writing, I will be able to understand it better.”

Can you add some more guidelines for responding to writing during conferences?
