



[https://tinyurl.com/
ENGAGEmicroconferences](https://tinyurl.com/ENGAGEmicroconferences)

BEYOND THE RED PEN:
EMPOWERING STUDENTS THROUGH

MICRO- CONFERENCES

*Katie Steinhauser
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**TO RECEIVE CREDIT FOR THIS SESSION,
MAKE SURE YOU COMPLETE THE
SURVEY AT THE END**

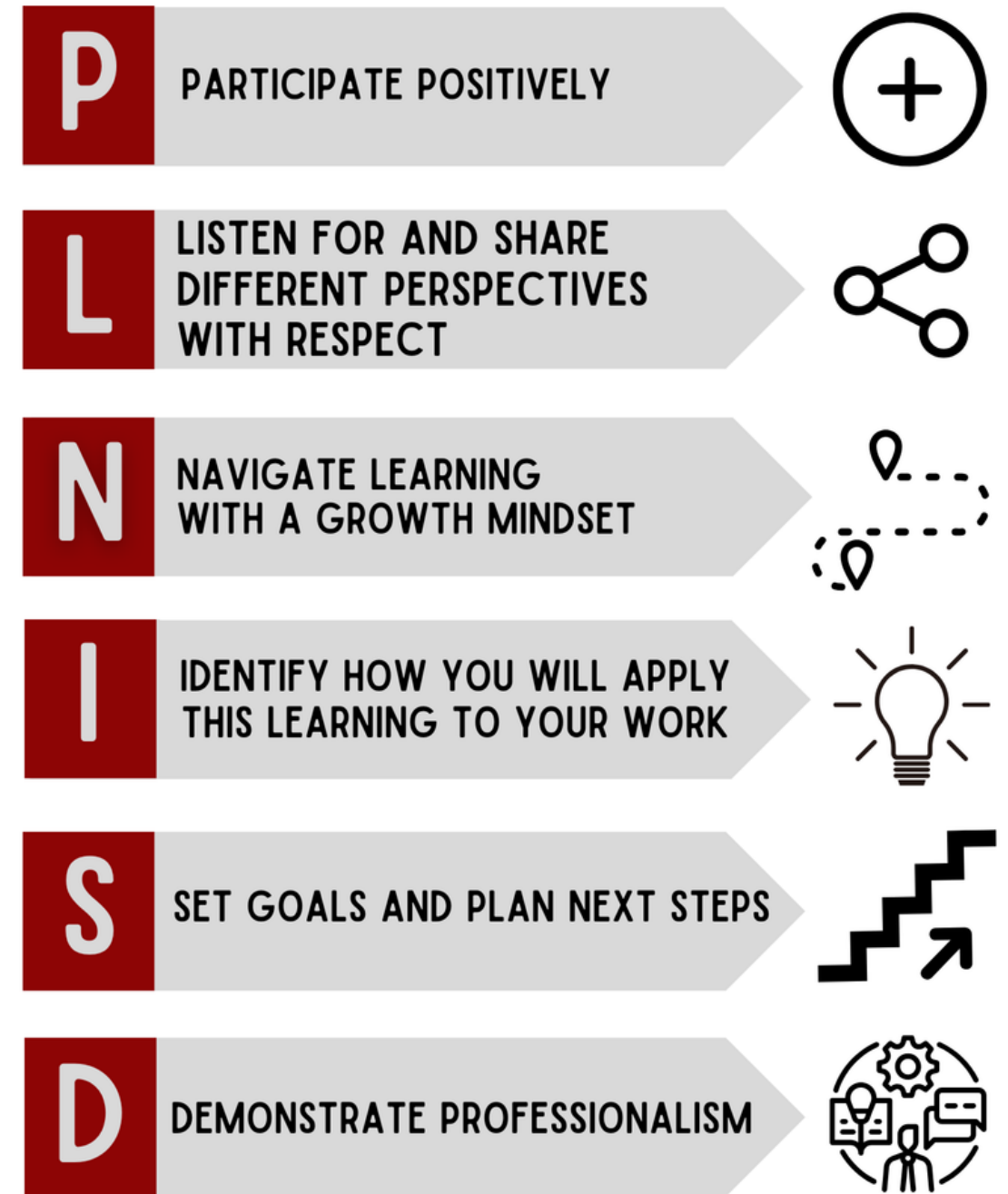


NISD PROFESSIONAL LEARNING EXPECTATIONS

Some of my own personal housekeeping things before we get started:

- Take breaks whenever you need to
- Take notes however you'd like (on computer, phone, paper)
- Ask questions at any point during the presentation

Northwest ISD
Professional Learning Expectations
A Culture of Learning



SURPRISE! LET'S GRADE SOME PAPERS!

- You have 4 minutes
- Read the student paragraph and give feedback as you normally would:
 - Mark **anything and everything** you'd normally comment on
 - Write in the margins, underline, or add notes as if this were your own student



LET'S TRY THAT AGAIN...

- Now you have 2 minutes
- Look at the same student paragraph—but this time:
 - Only give feedback on how the student **uses and embeds evidence**
 - Is the quote too long for the sentence?
 - Is it integrated smoothly into their own words?
 - Are quotations cited using MLA format?
 - Is there an attempt to incorporate analysis/commentary into the sentence?



INTRODUCTION

- My name is Katie Steinhauser
- I teach English II Honors and Reading I, II, III at Steele ECHS
- B.A. in English Literature and M.A. in English Writing & Rhetoric from Texas Woman's University
- Going into my 5th year of teaching

What I've learned: **teaching writing** is one of the most challenging things we do as English teachers—and **grading student writing** is one of the most time-consuming parts of the job

THE PROBLEM

- Students need:
 - More scaffolded writing practice (especially before being expected to be successful on major writing summatives)
 - Consistent, personalized feedback on their writing
- Teachers need:
 - A hundred more hours in the day to give students feedback on their writing AND do every other part of their job (because our planning periods are never going to cut it when it comes to grading papers)

GRADING ACTIVITY DISCUSSION

- Which version of feedback took less time?
- Which one do you think would be clearer and more helpful to the student?
- If you had to choose, which one would likely lead to better student revisions?
- What might change in our writing instruction if we focused feedback like this more often?

THE POWER OF MICRO-CONFERENCES

- What you experienced in the grading activity:
 - Full feedback = time-consuming, overwhelming, and scattered
 - Focused feedback = faster, clearer, and more actionable
- This is the power of micro-conferences:
 - Instead of drowning in the full scope of a student's paper, you zoom in on one skill that actually moves their writing forward

*"By ignoring the urge to play an editor who marks everything, we **reclaim** our role as teachers."*

—Matthew Johnson from Flash Feedback

WHY MICRO-CONFERENCES MATTER

- **How can we give students better, quicker feedback without burning ourselves out?**
 - Assigning less writing practice is NOT a solution
 - Giving less feedback is NOT a solution
 - Replacing teacher feedback with that from students' peers or AI is NOT solution
 - Peer review, while helpful, often lacks depth or student buy-in
 - AI may help with grammar or structure (sometimes)—but it can't replace YOU!

TODAY'S AGENDA

What are micro-conferences? *Definition and procedures*

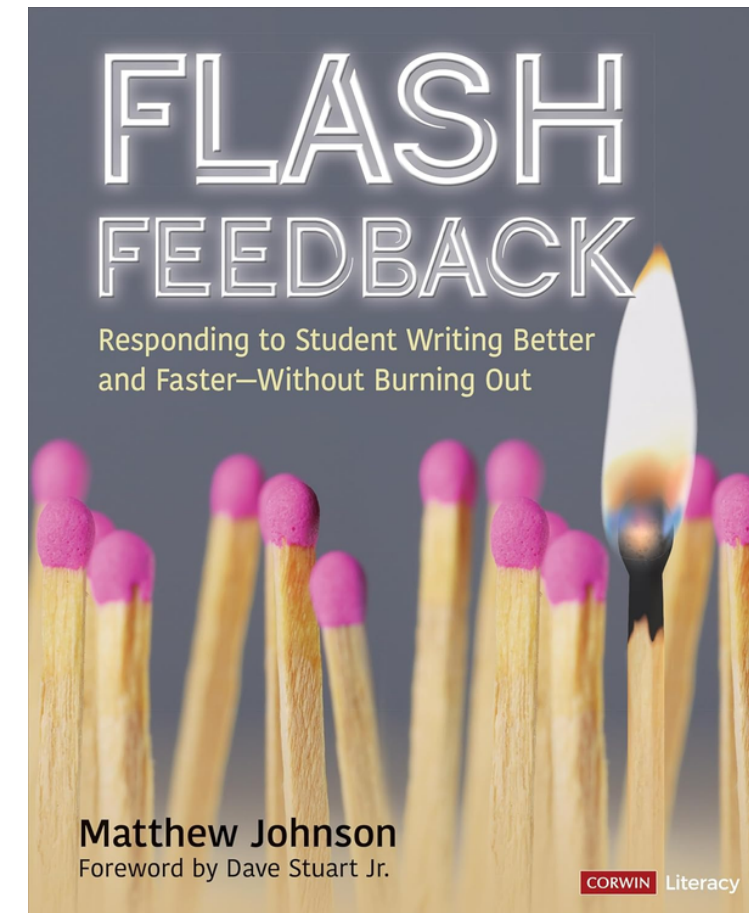
Real-classroom examples *How I use them in English II Honors*

Planning time *Draft your own micro-conference activity + tracking system*

Resources and Q&A *Access to templates, checklists, and sample prompts*

WHAT ARE MICRO-CONFERENCES?

- Adapted from Matthew Johnson's *Flash Feedback*
 - Short, laser-focused writing conferences—**1-2 minutes**—on one or two target skills (e.g., clarity of thesis, embedding evidence, identifying theme)
 - Occurs during drafting or revision time



*Stick around for the
free giveaway!*

BASIC COMPONENTS OF MICRO-CONFERENCES PT. 1

1. Teacher identifies **one or two target skills** for the students and provides a **lesson** and **mentor text** to demonstrate what she is looking for
2. Students complete a brief assignment wherein they **practice the target skill(s)** and **self-assess** their own understanding/performance
3. Once a student finishes the assignment, they signal for the teacher to come over, which begins the conference
 - a. If the teacher isn't available to conference right away, the student can (1) self-edit, (2) peer review, or (3) continue working on any other given task (i.e., independent reading)

BASIC COMPONENTS OF MICRO-CONFERENCES PT. 2

1. Each micro-conference begins with the student showing the teacher their completed assignment and/or asking for clarification/help on the assignment if they're stuck
2. The teacher gives her thoughts on the student's work and the conversation continues as needed
 - a. Offer praise for what the student has done well and advice for what the student can do to improve moving forward
 - b. Address any student misunderstandings on the assignment
 - i. The goal is to keep the longest conferences to **1-2 minutes**

BASIC COMPONENTS OF MICRO-CONFERENCES PT. 3

1. If the conference needs more than a few minutes, the teacher can give the student an additional tangible task for the moment and ask to stop by in a few minutes once everyone else has had a micro-conference (or determine a time outside of class to discuss it further)
 - a. Ensure that every student gets a chance to talk to the teacher!

*"[W]e need to treat each piece of feedback as what it really is: a moment of **connection** with the students that continues a process that began the first time a student touched a pen to paper."*

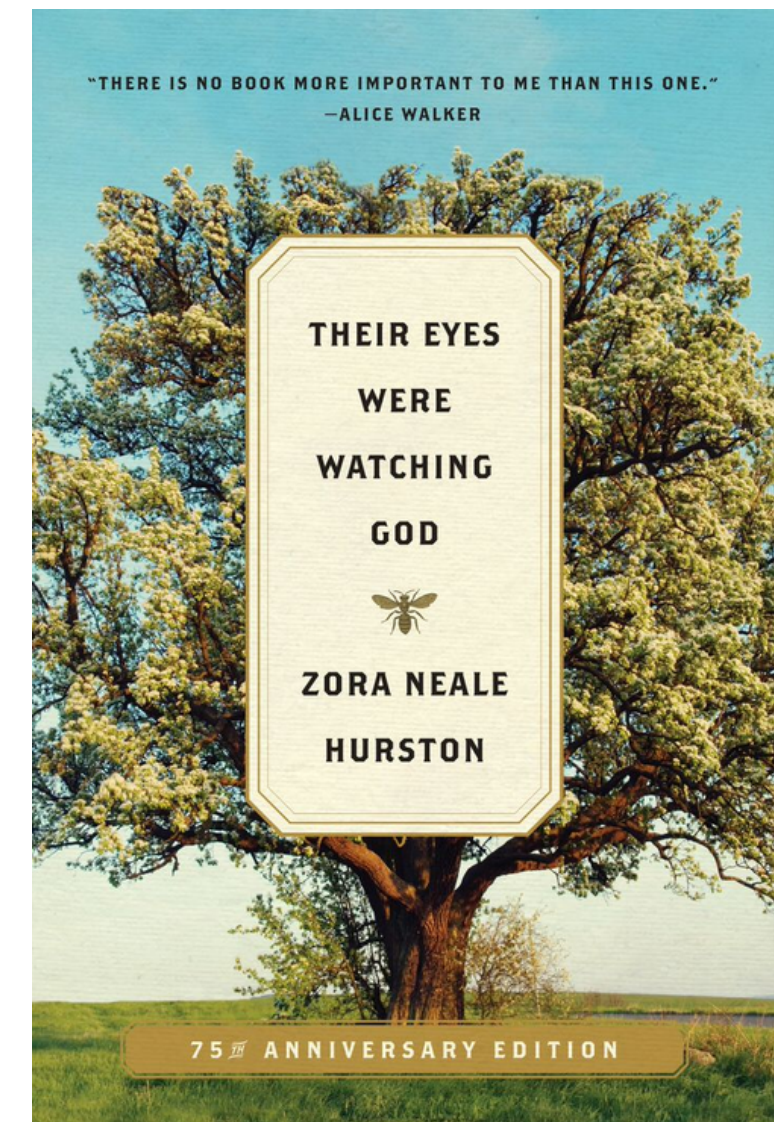
—Matthew Johnson from Flash Feedback

QUESTIONS SO FAR?



MY CLASSROOM'S MICRO-CONFERENCES

- **Target skill:** embedding text evidence + making inferences about characterization
- **Text:** *Their Eyes Were Watching God* by Zora Neale Hurston
- **Mentor text:** analytical body paragraph student exemplar from previous year



MY CLASSROOM'S MICRO-CONFERENCES

- **Student task:** How is Janie characterized in Chapter 1 of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*? Write your topic sentence first. Then, write two text evidence sentences that could serve as your evidence in a full ABP.
- **Student self-assessment questions:**
 - How many quoted words do you include in each sentence?
 - On a scale of 1–10, how well do you think you sandwiched the text evidence between your own words? Are both sentences grammatically correct? What could you do to get a 10?

MY CLASSROOM'S MICRO-CONFERENCES

- **Questions I'd ask during the conference:**
 - Can I take a look at what you've written so far?
 - Where'd you self-evaluate on that scale of 1-10? Why'd you give yourself that score? How can I help get you to a 10?
 - How did you choose your evidence? *(If the quote seems ineffective for the prompt...to guide them toward better TE)*
 - What was challenging about embedding this quote? *(If the student is a gifted writer and has done the task well without much teacher help...to ensure the student can explain the writing process)*

MY CLASSROOM'S MICRO-CONFERENCES

- **Feedback I'd give during the conference:**
 - This a great quote to show Janie's character because...
 - This quote may not be the best choice because...
 - I appreciate that you only chose the 7-8 key words of the quote because...
 - To help with making this embedding a little smoother, remember you can use a bracket/ellipses here... *(if the student is ready for this added challenge)*
 - Instead of lumping the evidence at the end of the sentence, try sandwiching it with your own words... *(if the student is ready for this added challenge)*

MY CLASSROOM'S MICRO-CONFERENCES

- I don't grade any part of micro-conferences
 - Instead, I have students complete the task and self-assessment in their journals, which I grade holistically at the end of each unit for the completion of all of that unit's required journal entries
 - Students focus more on grades than feedback
 - Students seem to act like the learning is done once a final grade is given, so any additional feedback is often overlooked or completely ignored

FAQ: WHAT ABOUT...?

- What do you do with students who already excel at a given skill and get bored during workshop time?
- What about students who need more support than a quick micro-conference allows?
- What if I don't have time to meet with everyone in a single class period?
- What do I have students do when they're done with the writing task *and* their micro-conference?
 - Self-editing checklists, peer review, apply the skill to a new excerpt, mentor text reflections, independent reading, etc.

QUESTIONS SO FAR?



HOW I TRACK CONFERENCES

- I have two methods for tracking writing conferences: quick notes on paper and final notes on spreadsheet
 - When I'm moving from desk to desk, I want a quick, easy way for me to take notes on each micro-conference
 - Eventually, I make time to transfer those notes into a spreadsheet
 - This is the easiest and most organized way for me to track student writing progress over time

"...the glowing wall of the computer screen [feels] more formal and intimidating, where a regular old notebook tends to blend in...and be forgotten by the student."

*—Matthew Johnson
from Flash Feedback*

HOW I TRACK CONFERENCES

- Last year, I just used blank printer paper to jot down quick notes including the student's name, their self-assessment score, their mastery level (masters, meets, approaches, does not meet), and any additional comments
- This year, I want to be more prepared during micro-conferences using [this printed template](#)
 - You could just keep track of these paper notes in a binder instead of transferring them onto a spreadsheet

HOW I TRACK CONFERENCES

- I prefer to keep track of all conferences on [one spreadsheet](#)
 - Easily editable (especially helpful when students are added/removed from your class throughout the year)
 - Color-codable for tracking mastery levels or absences
 - Color-coding the spreadsheet helps me easily identify
 - Any given student's writing progress
 - An entire class period's mastery of a given skill
- I also add the students' grades on formative and summative writing assignments, so I have even more data to track their progress

QUESTIONS SO FAR?



WHY MICRO-CONFERENCES WORK

- Timely, focused, actionable feedback
- Helps you track student progress overtime
- Builds student ownership of revisions
- Reduces the pile-on effect of marking full drafts later
- Builds relationships and trust—students feel seen and heard
- Puts a face to the writer

*“Each student brings a **unique** understanding of writing informed by all the writing and writing instruction that came before. Conferences allow us a clear picture of how students view and know writing. And remember, we strive to **teach the writer, not the writing.**”*

—Matthew Johnson from Flash Feedback

TEACHER'S WORKSHOP

- What are 2-3 skills your students struggle with that could be targeted with micro-conferences throughout the school year?
- When in your instructional cycle could you fit in micro-conferences?
- How would you track your micro-conferences? Would you want your students to track them, too? How so?
- What barriers might you face in implementing micro-conferences in your classroom, and how can you address them?

TEACHER'S WORKSHOP: OPEN FLOOR

- What skill did you choose to target in your micro-conference? Why?
- What does your tracking system look like? How will it help you manage conferences?
- Where in your unit or class routine do you plan to fit them in?
- What challenges do you anticipate—and how might you handle them?
- What strategies have you used to implement writing conferences successfully? What did that look like in your classroom?

RESOURCES

- [Micro-Conference Planning Checklist](#)
- [Micro-Conferences Notes Google Doc Template](#)
- [Micro-Conferences Tracker Google Sheet Template](#)
- [Flash Feedback: More Meaningful Feedback in Less Time](#)
[Episode of The Cult of Pedagogy Podcast](#)

THANK YOU!

Email me at katelynn.steinhauser@nisdtx.org
with any additional questions or comments!
Have a great 2025–26 school year!



WANT ATTENDANCE CREDIT?

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