

Ten Tips for Conferencing With Students

1. **Choose a Single Topic:** Zoom in on one strategy, such as making inferences, linking literary elements to themes, determining important details and ideas, or showing how text features connect to main ideas.
2. **Complete the “Before the Conference” Section:** The prompts in this section help you reflect on what you plan to discuss and think of more than one possible scaffold to try. Having multiple scaffolds helps because if one doesn’t work, you have another at your fingertips.
3. **Be Positive:** Start by pointing out what the student has done well. It could be something you recently observed or the effort the student puts into analyzing texts.
4. **Count to 100:** When you ask a question to start the conversation, count to 100 and give the student time to think. The tendency is for teachers to fill the silence with talk and solutions. This doesn’t support students. Though your wait time might feel like an eternity, resist the urge to talk.
5. **Listen Carefully:** Avoid interrupting a student. Listen carefully and jot down questions you have; ask these once the student has finished talking. Throughout the conference, use your knowledge of this student to make comments and ask questions that boost the student’s confidence and encourage him to talk.
6. **Pose Questions That Prompt the Student to Recall Prior Lessons:** Review a mini-lesson or a think-aloud that relates to the conference’s topic. When you point the student to a specific lesson, you shift the focus away from her own thinking, which sometimes frees her up to find the solution from the lesson.
7. **Model and Think Aloud:** Sometimes you’ll need to think aloud to show the student how you apply a strategy to reading in order to refresh his memory and build enough confidence so the student risks completing guided practice.
8. **Negotiate Goals:** Start by recapping the conference and then inviting the student to set a goal that she can achieve in 1–2 weeks. If the student struggles with this, suggest two goals and ask her to choose one.
9. **Have the Student Develop a Plan to Achieve Goal:** Having a goal is the first step, but reaching that goal requires a plan. Help the student figure out what he has to do to reach the goal, and write the plan on the conference form. Give a copy of the plan to the student to tape into his reader’s notebook.
10. **Close a Conference With Positive Comments:** Say something positive to the student at the end of the conference so she leaves feeling that she improved and deepened her understanding of the conference’s topic. Start with *I noticed . . .* or *I like the way. . .*