Flip your writing workshop

A **Blended Learning** Approach

DANA JOHANSEN AND SONJA CHERRY-PAUL

HEINEMANN
Portsmouth, NH

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INTRODUCTION

Flipped learning helps students work at their own pace, set their own learning goals, and work with you to assess progress and set goals for the future. Flipped learning helps ensure that students can access instruction when they need it in order to continue moving forward.

—Dana and Sonja

Each year we set up our classrooms and prepare to teach writing. It's a time brimming with hope and promise. Polished floors sparkle. Desks are grouped in clusters, tables positioned for optimal student collaboration. The meeting area is surrounded by picture books to be used as mentor texts. We plan our first series of minilessons, the writing rituals and routines we'll introduce. We stock our shelves with markers and chart paper, envisioning the anchor charts we'll create with our students and where they'll hang.

We close our eyes and see a writing workshop buzzing with the sound of pencils flying across notebook pages, fingers tapping on keyboards, and students conferring with us or their writing partners. We imagine minilessons, small-group work, and assessments working together to meet the needs of all learners. No one is clamoring for help. No one is staring blankly at his or her notebook. No one is saying, "I'm finished. Now what?" Everyone is working diligently and quietly, accomplishing all we've imagined. . . .

Wait! What? This may be how classrooms are portrayed in books and videos and at professional development conferences, but they look very different in real life!

Our workshops are not picture-perfect. Creating an environment in which every student's needs are met and each learner is moving forward is a daily challenge. More often than not, a few students sit and stare; they haven't generated any ideas for their writing and are still at square one. When we take a closer look at the students who *are* working diligently, we notice some of them need to rethink ideas that are not rich enough to sustain their writing throughout the unit. Others need to rein in ideas that are too broad. And two or three are several steps ahead of their classmates (and sometimes us!); they've mastered the skills we're teaching and are ready to move on to something more challenging. There are also students we know are struggling, but we're not sure what's causing the trouble or how to help. Each learner has different writing goals and is moving at her or his own pace. Our writing workshops feel more chaotic than calm.

But we love the ebb and flow. Even though we wish we could do some days over, we know learning does not happen in lockstep, with everyone working at the same pace. Teaching is a daily orchestration directed at meeting the needs of all our students. We continue to ask, "How can I create an organized, structured, rigorous, and highly managed setting in which all learners can work at their own pace and learn the skills they need to move forward?" Each day we set goals for ourselves and with our students, and we work hard to achieve them. Given the wide variety of learners' needs, as well as the time constraints we face, it can be challenging to see progress. We turned to flipped learning to address some of the challenges in our writing workshops and are delighted with the results.

Technology as a Teaching Tool

No two teachers are the same in their approach and feeling toward technology. We each equip our wheelhouse with hardware and software with which we feel

confident and comfortable. Following are brief synopses of our journeys as digital learners and teachers and how this led to creating flipped lessons in our writing workshops.

Dana

Writing workshop fills my classroom with energy, creativity, and passion. Technology is a relatively new aspect, one that provides greater organization and opportunities for collaboration and assessment. I love technology, and I like thinking about ways to incorporate it into my curriculum. Learning to use new forms of technology is a rewarding challenge! If I'm having trouble with a particular platform, I ask a colleague for help, check out tutorials online, or fiddle until I figure it out. I also enjoy the added challenge of learning new ways to use technology in the classroom. It breathes new life into the room and the curriculum because it forces me to rethink my teaching.

My experience with technology goes back twenty years, to high school. I didn't have an email account, and very few people had cell phones ("for emergencies only"). My teachers didn't use technology in the classroom, other than occasionally wheeling in a TV/VCR combo on a stand. No one documented her life on a blog, an Instagram account, or a Facebook page. Computers were used for word processing and printing final drafts.

Jump ahead to 2004, my first year of teaching fourth grade. It was also my first time attending the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project's summer conference, in Chappaqua, New York. I excitedly incorporated the workshop approach into my classroom. I had an email account (though my students did not) and a cell phone (but rarely used it). Technology in my classroom consisted of five turquoise Apple desktop computers on a long table, which students used for word processing and publishing their final drafts. I would announce that it was time to switch to make sure students took turns typing their final pieces. Neatly printed copies hung proudly on our writing workshop bulletin board, and students assembled photocopied, plastic-bound anthologies of their stories.

Today, technology has changed everything about the daily routines in my middle school writing workshop. I use my cell phone to update the classroom blog, send tweets to authors, and take notes during writing conferences. Most of my students have personal email accounts and bring their cell phones to school each day. They use technology for communication, entertainment, and content creation.

Google Drive, WordPress, and Zaption allow them to exercise authentic writing practices, collaborate, and reach real audiences.

In connection with this new technology, I search for ways to maximize the workshop experience, differentiate my instruction, and create an environment in which students can find the information they need on their own.

Sonja

Traditionalist. Technophobe. Luddite. When you hear these terms, do you slide down in your chair, hoping to remain inconspicuous? Or perhaps you pull out your smartphone to show you're with it, you know what's happening (good move!). Or maybe you're a proud, card-carrying old fogy. I've enacted each of these scenarios.

When I was in elementary school, the closest I came to having a digital experience was using a calculator. In middle school, I took my Walkman everywhere and enjoyed playing with the Atari console I shared with my brother. In high school, the excitement continued as I learned to program a VCR. When I went to college, there were no personal computers. I wrote every paper by hand and then typed them on my electric typewriter. Now, as I type this on my laptop two decades later in a home practically run by computers, I am awed by the extraordinary changes technology has brought to every aspect of my life.

In terms of technological savvy and use, I'd say I'm halfway between a traditionalist and an enthusiast—an "appreciatist"! There's no way I would have survived my daughter's first year away at college without FaceTime, but the fast pace and constant updates of technology can be intimidating. Enhancements happen in the blink of an eye, rendering the knowledge I've gained obsolete. I feel I'm always on the starting line of a new race. However, there's no denying the power of technology, particularly in the classroom.

Specifically, technology fuels my writing workshop lessons, and the impact on my students' academic experience is indelible. Seven years ago, I was one of a handful of pioneers in my school district who switched from the chalkboard to the Smart Board. Back then, my students needed to go to a shared computer lab to use a computer; they used one only to publish their writing. Now, all my students use Chromebooks at every stage of the writing process. My school's technology facilitator has become an invaluable resource. Several times a week I pick his brain

for solutions to challenges I've encountered or for creative, tech-rich tips I can pass along to my students.

Writing workshop is where magic happens. Precious ideas full of promise are shared, nurtured, and celebrated. The energy and excitement are palpable. To develop their ideas, my students use Chromebooks, Google Docs, Photo Story 3 for Windows, and Movie Maker, among many other applications. I also flip my writing workshop lessons, making it possible for my students to have dynamic interactions with content, peers, and me. The efficiency with which I'm able to teach and my students are able to learn are compelling reasons to embrace flipped learning.

Definition of Flipped Learning

Flipped learning and *flipped classroom* (the terms are used synonymously) are current buzzwords in education. Entering either term in any search engine calls up articles, blogs, and Twitter postings by people sharing their successes using this pedagogical approach or asking questions about what it entails. Teachers regularly ask, "Isn't it what the kids are doing for homework?" When we first starting using flipped learning (the term we prefer because it emphasizes learning and not a physical space), we asked the same questions, so let's begin by clarifying what it is and how we define it.

Flipped learning is a pedagogical approach—a teaching method. It's a blended-learning approach to instruction. Catlin R. Tucker, author of *Blended Learning in Grades 4–12* (2012), defines blended learning as a hybrid style in which educators "combine traditional face-to-face instruction with an online component" (11). This approach promotes student-centered learning and engagement. Like every other teaching method, we use it when we believe it will help foster student learning in rich and meaningful ways. It may play a central or more minor role in the classroom.

Flipped learning has sparked conversations about the role of the teacher, the role of the student, and how students learn content (specifically, *where* and *how* direct instruction is delivered—in the classroom, at home, or both). Teachers who use flipped learning believe in the effectiveness of direct, or explicit, instruction and its benefits in the classroom. Rosenshine (1987) defines explicit instruction as a "systematic method of teaching with emphasis on proceeding in small steps, checking for student understanding, and achieving active and successful participation by all students" (34). Elements of this teaching method include presentation, guided practice, assessment and feedback, and independent practice (Archer and Hughes 2011). We believe explicit, direct instruction is an effective teaching method to use in writing workshop. Is it the only teaching method we use? No. It is one effective method for teaching, in addition to others. See Figure Intro.1 for more information about what flipped learning is and is not.

Flipped learning is . . .	Flipped learning is not . . .
› blended learning	› online tutoring
› student-centered	› one size fits all
› individualized	› only for homework
› engaging	› a lecture
› created by the teacher	› a replacement for the teacher
› interactive	› passive
› efficient	› every day, all day
› assessed	› accessible only from home
› setting and meeting goals	
› concise and to the point	
› strategies and models	
› tailored to specific instances when students need extra support or a challenge	

Flipped learning is a relatively new term and its definition is amorphous; educators, researchers, and administrators use it to label many different forms of learning, which has contributed to the tensions surrounding its use in the classroom. Troy Cockrum, author of *Flipping Your English Class to Reach All Learners* (2014), defines flipping a classroom as "using technology to deliver asynchronous direct instruction with the intention of freeing up class time for student-centered learning" (9). He notes that because there are so many interpretations of the term, the model looks different in every classroom. Bergmann and Sams, authors of *Flip Your Classroom: Reach Every Student in Every Class Every Day* (2012) and prominent advocates in the flipped classroom movement, agree; they encourage teachers to customize this teaching approach to suit the needs of their students. They note that "one unifying characteristic of all flipped classrooms is the desire to redirect the attention in the classroom away from the teacher and onto the learners and the learning" (96). In short, the goal of flipped learning is to create more time for active learning in the classroom by relocating direct instruction to other times in the day, such as after school. As a result of the scrutiny given the term's nebulous meaning, the Flipped Learning Network released a definition of flipped learning on March 12, 2014:

> Flipped learning is a pedagogical approach in which direct instruction moves from the group learning space to the individual learning space, and the resulting group space is transformed into a dynamic, interactive

learning environment where the educator guides students as they apply concepts and engage creatively in the subject matter. (http://flippedlearning.org/domain/46)

We've aligned our approach to flipped learning during writing workshop with this definition because it emphasizes shifting whole-class direct instruction to individual instruction.

Research on Flipped Learning

Despite the increased research related to online and podcast learning, there are very few studies examining flipped learning in high school, middle school, and elementary school classrooms. However, flipped learning is used in many college courses (Arnaud 2013), and research on its use in that context has identified the following benefits:

» differentiation
» engagement
» independence
» efficiency

Bergmann and Sams (2012), high school chemistry teachers in Woodland Park, Colorado, found that flipping their teaching transformed their classrooms. They saw increased differentiation and engagement because their students could work at their own pace, review material on their own, and advance their understanding of the content. Bergmann, Overmyer, and Wilie (2011) also noted a rise in student engagement. Students' motivation increased as a result of learning actively during class time and having more opportunities to interact with peers and teachers. Their students enjoyed flipped learning far more than a traditional lecture. Overall, flipped learning classrooms have the advantages of online learning (students can review concepts and select the content they need to learn) as well as the advantages of a workshop (students have a classroom space in which to ask questions of their peers and their teacher, seeking clarity and feedback).

Research also points to increased efficiency. Teachers gain back time to initiate active learning, provide feedback, and ask questions. In a study by Leicht et al. (2012) that tracked flipped learning in an engineering class, students reported that having time to work independently and being able to use technology were more effective than a traditional lecture; they felt more confident in their understanding. Leicht et al. and Talley and Scherer (2013) found increased student achievement in classrooms using flipped learning. Talley and Scherer noted that flipped learning, with its flexibility and opportunities for active learning, increased their students' understanding of the material.

All teachers are researchers. We make observations, collect data, alter our approach, and assess the results. We encourage you to try flipped learning and

evaluate the results. We believe you too will find increased student differentiation, engagement, independence, and efficiency.

The Flipped Writing Workshop

Writing workshop is a natural venue in which to increase differentiation, engagement, and efficiency and promote choice and independent learning. Flipped learning dovetails with the structures already in place, which include the minilesson, small-group work, and one-on-one learning.

Drawing on the work of Lucy Calkins (1994), Nancie Atwell (1987), Fountas and Pinnell (2001), and Donald Graves (2003), we have designed our workshops in ways that prioritize active student learning and, most important, time in which to write. Fountas and Pinnell write, "The purpose of the writing workshop is to give students opportunities to write within the school day and to provide appropriate, intensive, targeted instruction to the whole group, small groups, and individuals" (50). We wanted to devote more time to student writing and individual instruction. Using flipped learning in writing workshop helped us achieve these goals.

Before we began flipping our lessons, a typical writing workshop included a minilesson, time for students to write and/or meet one-on-one with us, and last, a time to share and set goals about what they would like to work on in the future. Using flipped learning in place of some minilessons freed up time for more student writing and conferring. Lucy Calkins (1994) first envisioned the writing workshop minilesson as a brief time (five to ten minutes) in which teachers "offer something to the group that is meant to inspire and instruct" (189). Since we believe strongly in the value of minilessons in writing workshop, the idea of flipping them was initially terrifying. What would happen if we encouraged our students to learn some minilessons on their own? Would these flipped lessons be just as effective? Would students' learning suffer? How would these changes affect our writing workshop? What we found astonished us (and we think it will astonish you too). When we flipped some of our lessons, we covered more content. We had more time for individualized instruction and conferences. Our students set goals about what they needed to learn, sought out the information on their own, and had more time for writing. We rejoiced at the changes we were seeing: our students were taking more ownership of their learning and making choices about what they needed to learn.

What does flipped learning in a writing workshop look like? Imagine being able to teach a new minilesson and review three previous ones in one workshop session. All—yes, all—your students are able to set goals, have their needs addressed, and write. Additionally, you're able to confer with several students and quickly assess their progress. Here are two examples:

> You're teaching a narrative writing unit in third grade and you notice that
> your students have different skills they need to work on. Several need to

learn how to create paragraphs, several others are exploring strategies for elaboration, and two are ready for the challenge of writing a flashback. You send these students to their computers or tablets to find the lessons they need while you confer with others.

Or perhaps you're teaching a fifth-grade essay unit. Some of your students are ready to move on to writing counterclaims in their arguments. Some need to review how to write a thesis statement. Two need help using transitional phrases to distinguish their arguments from their counterclaims. You direct your students to flipped lessons on their tablets or computers that address their needs. Your students become more independent in their learning, and you are free to meet with more of them individually.

A writing workshop, in all its wonderfully chaotic glory, functions more smoothly and efficiently with flipped learning. We invite you to embrace flipped learning as a liberating teaching approach in elementary and middle school writing workshops that lets students work productively, at their own pace, with you there to model and guide. These lessons can then be accessed whenever students need them, including at home, which is incredibly helpful for parents who wonder, "What is my child learning? What is he being asked to do?"

Overview of This Book

Chapter 1 offers guidelines for determining which writing lessons to flip and why. We present a framework, based on five essential questions, that crystallizes the process. We discuss technology platforms, options, and resources. We also include processes for creating flipped lessons and how these lessons can be incorporated into your writing workshop. Finally, we include assessment practices to guide your evaluation of flipped learning and your students' learning.

Chapter 2 discusses the challenge of helping students generate ideas to write about. We demonstrate how flipping lessons helps students access the instruction they need when they need it.

Drafting is the focus of **Chapter 3**. We often race around the classroom during this step, trying to address many and varied needs. Flipped lessons are a way to clone ourselves, to help each student reach his or her goals.

Chapter 4 explores the challenges of getting students to perceive revision as a pivotal step in the writing process. Revising can seem daunting. Flipped lessons encourage students to practice and apply strategies that help them see their writing in a different light and make key changes that improve it.

Chapter 5 explores flipped lessons as a way to provide explicit instruction students need to strengthen the mechanics of their writing.

Chapter 6 focuses on publishing and celebrating students' writing. There are a variety of options for making students' work public and sharing it with others. Flipped lessons help students navigate these choices and make important decisions.

Chapters 2–6 include these recurring components:

» We unpack a specific step in the writing process and discuss some of the typical challenges our students face during it. We then demonstrate how flipped learning helps us anticipate challenges, address students' needs, and maximize instructional time in the writing workshop.

» We provide a snapshot of how and when we send our students off to work, including what led to the flipped lesson and what occurred after it (minilesson, small-group work, independent work, homework).

» We model a flipped lesson, including the technology used, a "top five" list of additional lessons we recommend flipping, tech tips for both novice and advanced users of technology, and brief suggestions for ways to assess students.

» We identify opportunities for reflection that help us assess our needs and help our students monitor their learning.

FIGURE 6.9 ▼
Student Flipped
Lesson Plan

Student Flipped Lesson Plan

Slide 1: Introduce the title of your lesson.

Lesson Title: _____

Slide 2: State the lesson objectives.

Lesson Objectives:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Slides 3–5: Teach. Draw or write what each slide below will look like.

3	4	5

Slide 6: Classmates try!

What will you ask your classmates to do?

_____

_____

_____

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Frequently Asked Questions

Is flipped learning just for middle school and high school students?

No. Flipped learning can be used with students of all ages. Also, flipped learning is often limited to math and science, but it can be used in all content areas.

Does flipped learning consist only of assigning videos for homework?

No! Flipped learning reduces whole-class instructional time and empowers students to learn at their own pace and at a time best for them. Most of our students access flipped lessons during writing workshop sessions—as small-group work, partner work, or independent work. Occasionally, we assign a flipped lesson as homework. We also encourage students to review lessons at their leisure. It is important for students to know they can access these lessons at home if they need them. (See Chapter 1 for more information on how you can use flipped learning to differentiate and create an individualized learning experience for your students.)

There are so many flipped lessons already available online. Do I really have to create my own?

Yes, there are many good flipped lessons online. However, students prefer learning from lessons that their own teacher has created. View some representative flipped lessons online, then make your own. Your students will respond to your voice, your laugh, and your familiar style of teaching. They want to feel you there with them. A plus is that you can customize your lessons with references to events occurring during the school year. For example, when teaching a lesson about description, you might say, "Remember when we were outside at recess and saw the eagle perched on a tree branch, and we all stopped and stared at him for a while? We couldn't tear ourselves away. We were taking in every little detail as if we were imprinting his image on our minds." These references engage your students and personalize the learning experience.

What do I do if my school has no or very little technology?

Never fear! Great flipped learning can be delivered via mobile devices and flash drives. Simply upload your lesson to a site such as TeacherTube, YouTube, or WatchKnowLearn, and your students can access it on their mobile devices. If your students don't have mobile devices (common in the elementary grades), encourage them to take turns using any available computers at your school

(perhaps one in your classroom and a few shared ones in the library). Flipped learning is very flexible. That's the beauty of it. You have many choices for how you can make it work for you.

I'm interested in flipped learning, but I'm technologically challenged and need the simplest way possible to create flipped lessons. Which is the easiest technology to use?

We wish there were an easy answer. Everyone has a different comfort zone with regard to technology, so the easiest way to flip for one teacher isn't always the easiest way for another. Overall, the easiest technology to use is probably your cell phone or tablet. You can film the lesson quickly with the mobile device and then upload the lesson to a server like YouTube or TeacherTube. These simple lessons are no-frills and are filmed in one take. If your school does not allow sites like YouTube, try uploading to Vimeo, TeacherTube, WatchKnowLearn, or Google Drive. (Chapter 3's model lesson was filmed with a mobile device.)

I feel comfortable using technology and want to make really fabulous flipped lessons. I'm ready to take risks. Which technology is for me?

If you want your flipped lessons to be jazzy and include lots of bells and whistles, Camtasia is for you. It's well worth the cost, with the capability for callouts, overlays, and animations (check out the model lesson in Chapter 5). If you have a tight budget, try searching for Camtasia alternatives in online search engines. There are many options.

My teaching goal this year is to collaborate more with my colleagues. Can flipped learning help me do this?

Yes. Flipped learning is a great way to collaborate, bond, and get to know your colleagues better. It happened with us. We love making flipped lessons side by side. We share teaching strategies, discuss what is going well, and ask each other questions when we get stuck. Many teachers share their flipped lessons. For example, a fourth-grade teacher and a fifth-grade teacher might collaborate on creating a collection of writing lessons and each use them. Research reveals that students respond best to lessons featuring teachers with whom they are familiar, so creating and sharing lessons with teachers of other grade levels or content areas in your school is appealing. With your colleagues, brainstorm a list of lessons you know students will use over and over again, in many content areas. Flipped lessons on essay structure, how to write a single paragraph, or when to use a semicolon, for example, can be used in any subject. Whether students need to write a paragraph in history, English, math, or science, they can access the flipped lesson.

Can students create flipped lessons that they share with the class?

Yes! It's exciting for students to create a collection of flipped lessons. The only potential difficulty is their access to screencasting software or apps that record.

If your students have tablets or smartphones, it will be easy for them to create lessons. If they use computers, it may be more of a challenge to acquire screencasting software, but it's definitely doable. Screencastify is a great screencasting Google app; if your students use Google Docs or Google Slides, this is a great option. Overall, cell phones may be the easiest way. (Chapter 6 includes suggestions for making student-created lessons.)

My teaching goal this year is to incorporate more small-group learning in my writing workshop. How can flipped learning help me meet this goal?

Flipped learning is an excellent way to create more opportunities for small-group learning. Before we began flipping lessons, pulling together writing lessons for small groups of learners was a struggle. We were constantly reteaching strategies or teaching the same advanced strategies, group after group after group. Flipped learning saved us. We created a few flipped lessons we knew small groups would need over and over again (each chapter in this book includes a top-five list). Having these go-to lessons always available made things much more manageable. After the whole-class minilesson, we would pull together a small group of learners and encourage them to access a flipped lesson (Chapter 4 includes an example of how this looks in the classroom).

How do you explain flipped learning to parents?

We've found most parents are very receptive to flipped learning, because it provides opportunities to individualize their children's learning experience. We say, "Each child is a unique writer and learner, and we want to support every child's learning style. Flipped learning allows your child to access lessons online that will support his or her learning in writing workshop—review concepts as many times as needed, move forward at her or his own pace, and try new strategies. Flipped learning is just another way for your son or daughter to access instruction whenever he or she needs it. If your child is absent, needs more time to grasp a concept, or is ready for a new challenge, flipped lessons can provide this extra support."

How do you explain flipped learning to administrators?

Administrators welcome flipped learning, because it's a way to maximize instructional time and break away from a lockstep teaching approach. We explain flipped learning to our administrators this way: "Flipped learning is a teaching method that can be used in school or at home. Through it, students access a variety of lessons in which they review concepts, work at their own pace, and move ahead. Flipped learning helps us address our students' needs by fostering differentiated instruction, increasing time for one-on-one teaching, and strengthening student engagement." Use your administrators' receptivity to your advantage by asking for their support in securing additional technology to make flipped learning even more accessible in your classroom.

Appendix

Organizer for Planning a Flipped Writing Workshop Lesson

Lesson Topic: _____

1. Set goals. (Why do I want to flip this lesson?)

-

-

-

-

2. Select tools. (How am I going to flip this lesson?)

[Refer to Figure 2.2: Selecting Tools Checklist for more ideas.]

____ PowerPoint   ____ Word

____ Google software   ____ Other: _____

____ Interactive whiteboard software

I will record my lesson using: _____

I will upload my lesson to: _____

3. Create the lesson outline. (How will I structure this lesson? Which teaching approach will I use?)

Lesson Title (Slide 1)	
Students Will Learn . . . (Slide 2)	
Teaching Points (Slides 3–5)	
Students Try!	
Reflection: How Did It Go? (Final Slide)	

4. Determine the method of delivery. (When and where will students use this flipped lesson?)

_____ Individual work   _____ Homework

_____ Partner work   _____ Other: _____

_____ Small-group work

5. Create a formative assessment. (How will I know what my students have learned?)

_____ Entrance ticket   _____ Writing notebook

_____ Graphic organizer   _____ Other: _____

_____ One-on-one conference