

The Structure of Effective Mini-Lessons

Reading and Writing

Effective mini-lessons tend to follow a similar structure. While the *content* of the mini-lesson changes from day to day, the *structure* of mini-lessons often remains constant. Once teachers have internalized the structure of mini-lessons, they will decide that a particular mini-lesson requires a different structure, and tailor the design of that day's mini-lesson to match the purpose and content.

CONNECTION

Mini-lessons will begin with a connection. Put the lesson into the context of student's ongoing work and how it will fit into their lives as readers and writers. Next, explicitly name what will be taught. This is the teaching point. Possibilities include:

- Connecting the lesson with yesterday's lesson
- Connecting the lesson with an ongoing unit of study
- Connecting the lesson with the work of students
- Connecting the lesson with an experience outside of school

TEACHING

Next, teach students a new tool or concept that they will use often as they read and write. This is presented verbally and through modeling/demonstrating. Telling is not enough. Teach in ways that move students along a gradient of difficulty as readers and writers.

ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT

After the demonstration, provide an opportunity for guided practice. Students learn more from what they do than from the words out of someone else's mouth. Some ways to provide opportunities for active engagement include:

- Students acting like researchers as they watch the modeling/demonstration
- Students explaining to a partner what was done
- Students practicing the strategy on a familiar text or written piece (this would require having books or pieces of writing available)

LINK

To bring closure to the mini-lesson, restate the teaching point and link it to what the class has learned on previous days. Encourage the students to add today's teaching point to their repertoire of strategies they have on board as readers and writers and apply the strategy during student work time when appropriate.