



VOICE

IDEAS

DESIGN

LANGUAGE

PRESENTATION

Nasdijj, a Navajo writer, says, “Still, I know nothing about the technical stuff, like where to put a comma... What I know about writing has to do with where to put your heart.” Nasdijj is right: it *is* important to know where to put your heart. But in the end, the comma needs to be put in the right place, because placing it there ensures that the reader will receive the heart of your words.

If you lay out a time-line for a single piece of writing, you’ll notice that the writer leaves the work just as the reader picks it up. The quality of presentation stands at the crossroads between writer and reader. Where earlier the writer’s attention has been on meaning and how best to convey it, now the writer wishes to clear the way for the writing to be read. The quality of presentation includes all those things that invite readers to pick up a text and enable them to read it with ease.

Presentation is akin to “curb appeal” in real estate. The house with curb appeal attracts more potential buyers eager to take a look. During the publishing process, a writer decides how she will present her writing to the reading public. Writing that has been published with care invites readers to pick it up. The quality of presentation includes all those things that make writing “reader friendly”: the surface features of print (punctuation, spelling) and the syntactical features of language (subject-verb agreement). When the rules of grammar and mechanics are in place, there’s a transparency to the words and sentences that allow the other qualities to shine through.

For a list of Presentation lessons, see page 101.

The Presentation lessons fall into four sub-qualities:

● **CONVENTIONS** In too many classrooms the teaching of mechanics and conventions has been isolated from real writing. When this happens, students get the mistaken idea that “creative writing” and “skills” don’t mix. We believe that writing instruction must include the teaching of conventions (fragments, run-ons, paragraphing, etc.) and that these skills become most sensible when taught in the context of each student’s writing. For students who are making the transition to English from their native language, there will be a wider range of grammar-related issues to address. While we do not lay out a course of study for these students, we hope you will borrow from the ideas of how to work with students on sentence-level editing and use them to meet the specific needs of your students.

● **COOL TOOLS** There is a new interest in teaching grammar and mechanics not as the “grammar police” but as tools that give writers increased range and flexibility (for example see *Image Grammar*, by Harry Noden, Heinemann, 1999.). TQW’s “Cool Tools” section has been written in this spirit, not as “memorize this rule for the dash” but rather as “look what amazing things you can do with the dash.”

● **EDITING** The typical classroom energy dynamic is often “high teacher, low student.” One way to change that is to expect students to be their own first editors. While we won’t give students total responsibility for checking correctness in writing (we still act as “editor-in-chief”), we know students learn as they cast an editor’s eye on their own work. TQW lessons help students get to know their own bad tendencies and become more skilled at proofreading their work.

● **FINAL FORM** These lessons deal with publishing: how to choose what to publish and exactly how to make the writing look the way you want it to. They also ask the student to think expansively: What is my purpose in this writing? Who do I want to read this? What look do I want this to have? Form follows function, and if your students write for a variety of purposes (and we hope they do!), the writing will take many different forms: books, booklets, brochures, letters, bulletin boards, newspapers, photo albums, and science fairs. The TQW lessons help students bring more attention to publishing their work so they can take pride in delivering it to readers.