

# Study Guide

## No More “How Long Does It Have to Be?”

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Fostering  
Independent  
Writers  
in Grades 3-8

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teachers provided by Stenhouse Publishers



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## Summary

In this anticipated follow-up to *No More "I'm Done!"* (2010), grades 3–8 teachers will find the inspiration and tools to shift from a teacher-directed writing program to a student-propelled workshop model.

Drawing on a wealth of Writer's Workshop experience in upper elementary and middle school classrooms, Jennifer Jacobson provides strategies to help engage and support writers as they discover their voices and take charge of their learning.

Jacobson shares tips on how to establish the spaces, routines, and tone to run a highly productive writing time:

- building classroom spaces conducive to practicing thoughtful, engaging writing
- rolling out a streamlined sequence of varied writing activities
- leading creative explorations of mentor texts
- integrating the riches of minilessons, conferring, sharing, and publishing
- building a workshop curriculum that aligns with your goals and rubrics

As she clarifies misconceptions about writing and workshops, she serves up an immensely readable blend of activities, anecdotes, and advice that will energize and inspire your students.

The following are suggestions to help groups of educators read, discuss, and extend the ideas from *No More "How Long Does It Have to Be?"* into their classrooms. These ideas will come to life as teachers are given opportunities to put them into practice with students. With that in mind, we have developed discussion questions, pulled provocative quotes, and provided professional development ideas from each chapter that will enable participants to reflect on the text.

The format of the guide is set up for a study group. It could be used for a study group or individually as a reflective structure for those reading the book alone. The suggestions offered in the guide are designed to foster collaboration, spark new thinking, and support the transfer of new ideas into the classroom.

## Introduction

### Discussion/Sharing

- What comes to mind when you think of your students and Writer's Workshop? Student attitudes? Successes? Challenges?
- What roles do student voice and choice play in Writer's Workshop in your classroom?
- What are your guiding beliefs in Writer's Workshop?

### Reading Excerpt

- Read the section, *New Game Plan* (pages 2–4).
- Jennifer explains that Writer's Workshop fosters goal-setting writers. Respond to her list of benefits of Writer's Workshop on page 3.

### Quotes Worth Discussing

*"My time in the classroom and my years of writing children's literature, have taught me that the process of learning to write most closely resembles the process of learning to play a sport. It requires practice, guidance, and immediate feedback."* –page 2

*"Writers begin every task with an internal series of questions, such as, Who is my audience? What do I want to accomplish? How can I best approach this subject? Can I bring freshness to my approach? How will I prewrite?"* –page 2

*"We get used to taking control of every minute of every school day (and every behavior our students demonstrate) that it seems impossible that letting go of some of this control could actually bring about better results."* –page 4

## Putting Ideas into Practice

- What is one idea you will continue to think about after today and might integrate into your Writer's Workshop?
- Think about your beliefs about Writer's Workshop. Start to jot down your thinking.

## Chapter 1

### Planning for Independence

#### Discussion/Sharing

- What are your thoughts about meeting places within your classroom?
- What does a typical Writer's Workshop in your classroom look and sound like?
- How do you use technology to support Writer's Workshop?

#### Reading Excerpt

- Read the section, *Schedule* (pages 11–13).
- What do you notice? What do you wonder?
- How does your Writer's Workshop schedule compare to what Jennifer recommends?

#### Quotes Worth Discussing

*“Upper elementary and middle school classrooms are seldom designed with movement, choice, collaboration, and independence in mind.”* –page 5

*“Think of your classroom as studio space an environment that supports the experimentation and utilization of many tools, models, and ideas.”* –page 5

*“Many teachers circulate around the room while the students write. I don't recommend it. Writing requires concentrated thinking.”* –page 7

## Toolbox

- Think of your classroom. What tweaks might you make to promote choice, collaboration, and independence?

## Putting Ideas into Practice

- What is one idea that you will think about after today and might try out in your classroom?
- Take a few moments to reflect and jot down your thinking around Writer's Workshop.



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# Part 1

## Minilessons and Building Stamina

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## Chapter 2

### Routines to Support Independent Writers

#### Discussion/Sharing

- What are your beliefs about Writer’s Workshop? How are they similar and/or different to Jennifer’s on page 22?
- How do you use mentor texts within Writer’s Workshop? How do you choose them?
- What are your thoughts on assigning prompts?

#### Reading Excerpt

- Read the section, *Explorations* (pages 31–34).
- What do you notice? What do you wonder?

#### Toolbox

- Bring a pile of picture books (potential mentor texts) to the group. Identify techniques that the books’ authors have used.

#### Quotes Worth Discussing

*“I suspect it is the fear of chaos that keeps most teachers from attempting Writer’s Workshop—a general mistrust of their students’ ability to employ agency and stay on task.”* –page 23

*“Running around trying to find mentor texts that someone else recommended is often a waste of time. Instead, begin building a collection of picture books, short stories, articles, editorials, and reviews that you love.”* –page 26

*“Prompts in and of themselves have no instructional value. Assigning them is not only unwarranted in a successful writing class, their overuse actually hinders growth for the following reasons.” –page 37*

### **Putting Ideas into Practice**

- What is one idea about routines that support independent writers that you will think about after today and might try out in your classroom?
- Take a few moments to reflect and write down your thinking around Writer’s Workshop.

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## Part 2

### Conferring and Author's Chair

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## Chapter 3

### Routines to Support Independent Writers

#### Discussion/Sharing

- What do writing conferences look like and sound like in your classroom?
- Do you embrace peer conferences as part of Writer's Workshop?
- What do you see as the benefits and challenges of author's chair?

#### Reading Excerpt

- Read pages 60–63, *Author's Chair*.
- What do you notice? What do you wonder?
- How is this description of author's chair similar to what you implement in your classroom?

#### Quotes Worth Discussing

*"Effective writing coaches have the listening skills of a psychotherapist, the analytical skills of a venture capitalist, the fine touch of a brain surgeon, the communication skills of a journalist, and the motivational skills of a marketer."* –page 49

*"Focusing on what is working not only builds the writer's drive but also helps the writer repeat successes."* –page 55

*"Instead, peer conferences are a time for students to act as effective audience members— to respond to the work in ways that will lead to revision."* –page 59

### Putting Ideas into Practice

- What is one idea about conferring and author's chair that you will think about after today and might try out in your classroom?
- Take a few moments to reflect and write down your thinking about Writer's Workshop.

## Chapter 4

### Launching a Narrative Unit

#### Discussion/Sharing

- What are your thoughts on teaching narrative writing to students?
- How do you approach teaching narrative writing?
- How do you typically launch a narrative unit?

#### Reading Excerpt

- Read the first section of the chapter, *Launching a Narrative Unit* on pages 65–67.
- Reflect on this section. How do Jennifer’s beliefs about narrative writing compare to yours?

#### Toolbox

- Jennifer writes, “Remember, Desire+ Fear = Tension, and tension is always a good thing.” Try the lesson on creating conflict outlined on page 72.
  - You will need the two skateboarding narratives found in the book’s appendix. Compare and contrast the success of the two narratives. Which one better holds a reader’s attention? Which has a more satisfying ending?

#### Quotes Worth Discussing

*“Trust is an essential component of working well with and growing from other writers.”*

–page 65

*“Note that too often we describe personal narratives as essays about your experiences, but this is misleading and often leads to meandering lists that have little regard for the interest of readers.” –page 65*

*“A story without tension is a very boring story indeed.” –page 66*

### **Putting Ideas into Practice**

- What is one idea about narrative writing that you will continue to think about after today and might try out in your classroom?
- Take a few moments to reflect and write down your thinking on narrative writing.



## Chapter 5

### Launching an Informative Unit

#### Discussion/Sharing

- What are your thoughts on teaching informative writing to students?
- How do you approach teaching informative writing?
- How do you typically launch an informative unit?

#### Reading Excerpt

- Read the first section of the chapter, *Launching an Informative Unit* on pages 81–85.
- Reflect on this section. How are Jennifer’s beliefs around informative writing similar and/or different to yours?

#### Toolbox

- Explore the articles referenced on page 90. These articles present the same topic but address different audiences and use different voices. Discuss concepts of audience and voice and how they intersect. See article links below:

<https://www.teenink.com/nonfiction/all/article/18346/Hypochondriac/>

[http://www.huffpost.com/entry/children-hypochondria\\_b\\_3137840](http://www.huffpost.com/entry/children-hypochondria_b_3137840)

#### Quotes Worth Discussing

*“As with all writing, the greater choice you feel you can offer, the more growth you’re likely to see.”* –page 81

*“With all your writing units, students should have the opportunity to write several pieces- perhaps one will be an informative article on Minecraft the next a skateboarding Two Truths and a Lie challenge, and then a blog post that includes statistics on bullying.”*

–page 84

*“It is important to demonstrate to students that our early decisions are fluid. They are a place to start but not rigid constructs. Topics should be modified and sometimes abandoned.”* –page 89

### **Putting Ideas into Practice**

- What is one idea about informative writing that you will continue to think about after today and might try out in your classroom?
- Take a few moments to reflect and write down your thinking on informative writing.

## Chapter 6

### Launching a Unit on Persuasive Writing or Argument

#### Discussion/Sharing

- What are your thoughts on teaching persuasive and/or argument writing to students?
- How do you approach teaching persuasive and/or argument writing?
- How do you typically launch a persuasive and/or argument unit?

#### Reading Excerpt

- Read the first section of the chapter, *Launching a Unit on Persuasive Writing or Argument* on pages 97–99.
- Reflect on this section. How do Jennifer’s beliefs around persuasive/argument writing compare to yours?

#### Toolbox

- The article referenced on page 99 contains persuasive and argument pieces. Share two essays and discuss which essay you find most effective and why. Create an anchor chart of effective craft moves.

#### Quotes Worth Discussing

*“Formulaic essays signal a lack of critical thinking on a part of the author and are interpreted as shallow. If you feel you must begin with a formula, do plan to move your students away from the scaffolding into more fluent decision making.”* –page 98

*“Many a teacher has taught students to write five-sentence paragraphs with one topic sentence, one concluding sentence, and three supporting sentences stuffed in the middle. This might be a handy way to show students how to write a response to a test question, but in the real world of writing, we don’t use hamburgers.” –page 98*

*“Good grammarians everywhere will tell you that sentence fragments are A-OK and incredibly effective, especially in persuasive writing when the author wants to make a point.” –page 98*

### **Putting Ideas into Practice**

- What is one idea about persuasive or argument writing that you will think about after today and might try out in your classroom?
- Take a few moments to reflect and write down your thinking on the different writing genres. How might you tweak your approach to them?

## Chapter 7

### These Are Not Endings

#### Discussion/Sharing

- How do you assess student writing?
- Are students involved in the assessment process?
- How do you celebrate student writing?

#### Reading Excerpt

- Read the section, *Summative Assessment* on pages 108–111.
- Reflect on this section. Focus on Carla as she gives the student an early grade. What do you notice? What do you wonder?

#### Quotes Worth Discussing

*“Assessment allows students to hone their understanding of craft, to aim for specific results, and to monitor their progress.”* –page 107

*“If you take the time to develop the rubric or checklist together, students will have more understanding of the traits and more commitment to meeting the goals.”* –page 108

*“As mentioned earlier in this book, students should write far more than you have the ability to assess.”* –page 112

#### Putting Ideas into Practice

- What is one assessment idea that you will think about after today and might try out in your classroom?

- Take a few moments to reflect and write down how your thinking has changed throughout the reading of this book. What changes do you want to implement in your Writer's Workshop?