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Please enjoy this complimentary excerpt from *Writers Read Better: Nonfiction* by M. Colleen Cruz.

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# PART 2

## LESSONS FOR DRAFTING—AND UNDERSTANDING AUTHOR’S CRAFT

### What You Will Find in This Section

**Writing.** These lessons focus on drafting nonfiction pieces. Whether your students are writing pieces on topics of personal expertise, something that is more research-based, or something that is content specific, this stage will help them decide for themselves the best ways to present their information to their readers. During this phase in the writing process, they will discover their piece’s voice and tone. They should also be filled with enough energy and excitement for their writing to carry them through the revision process.

**Reading.** Meanwhile, in their nonfiction reading work, students will make connections between the choices they are making as writers and the choices professional authors make. This stage guides them to the realization that everything that shows up in an informational text was placed there by the author for a reason. The lessons in this section help students as they interact with a textbook, magazine article, online passage, or high-interest nonfiction trade book. No matter what the genre, there are people behind the texts. When students know this, they are more able to bring this same deliberateness to their own craft as writers.

### When to Use These Lessons

You can use these lessons whenever they meet the needs of your students. Here are some ways to do that:

- Use the writing lessons as a supplement to your current nonfiction writing workshop unit when you feel students could use additional support or options for drafting.
- Continue to use them as part of a stand-alone unit. If you teach each one, you will guide students through the complete drafting segment of an informational piece.
- Sprinkle the lessons throughout the year, whenever your students are drafting nonfiction writing pieces and need some part of the process reinforced.

- Use them outside of writing workshop and within other disciplines, such as science and social studies, when doing reports, presentations, and so forth.

The reading work has similar flexibility. You can use the lessons to

- Continue a current informational unit or supplement one that you already teach
- Help students who are struggling with reading in their content area subjects. If that is the case, you can dip into these lessons and, with a few adjustments, teach them as part of a lesson within a subject area
- Support small-group work and extend readers of various skill levels

## Preparing to Use the Lessons

There are a few things I recommend you do to prepare to teach the lessons in this chapter:

- **Offer students the choice of drafting on paper, with an app, or with another program.** When students move out of the generating and developing stage and into the drafting stage, it can help them both symbolically and practically to change materials or platforms. This step cues students that they are moving forward in the writing process. It also helps make revision easier later if students can physically or digitally cut and paste without losing original drafts. It does not matter whether the student is using paper with picture boxes, plain white loose-leaf paper, yellow drafting paper, Google Docs, Word Online, or Pages. What does matter is that students see that they are moving on in the writing process and that drafting requires a different set of muscles—a different set of tools—even though there is, of course, overlap.
- **Consider creating and using demonstration writing.** If you decide to demonstrate with your own writing in this phase of the writing process, it is wise to create a draft that you can use as a teaching tool throughout your teaching. Some teachers create one piece with anticipated teaching opportunities built in and use it again and again. Other teachers create more than one draft for different purposes. Whatever you decide to do, ultimately, the most powerful aspect for your students will be seeing your writing and the work you do on that writing so that they can hear your thought process and choices you (and they) can make as a writer.

- **Check on student progress.** You will want to keep an eye on reading volume and interest. This is the phase in the unit in which students can start to slow down after their initial excitement about a new genre or topic has lost a little of its shine. If you keep reading logs, now would be a good time for students to spend some time reflecting on how much they are reading and if certain topics, authors, or styles entice them to read more.
- **Freshen up the classroom library.** If you kept some texts out of rotation for the first part of the unit, now would be a good time to trade those books for books that have not been seen by your students in awhile.
- **Reenergize read-aloud work by bringing in a variety of texts that highlight writer's craft.** If you have a projection screen, choose a few digital multimodal texts: texts that include video, hypertext, infographics, and other features that access a variety of modalities. Look for ones that would make for good read-aloud texts and later lend themselves to lesson work. Also, consider selecting engaging trade books that highlight easily identifiable craft moves. A few are mentioned in the lessons in this part of the book, but you might want to gather a few of your own favorites as well. Finally, choose a short video or two that is informational and mirrors some of the craft moves.

As you move into these lessons, I hope that the ideas here will help you breathe new life into your students' drafts and their early stages of revision, as well as give you some new ideas (or remind you of old favorites) when it comes to considering author's craft as a reader.

# Writing

## DRAFTING WHAT YOU'RE MOST READY TO WRITE

### PURPOSE

Students learn to draft “out of order” when that makes sense for the development of their piece.

### LESSON INTENDED FOR

- Personal expertise books
- Content-specific books or reports
- Oral reports
- Students at a wide range of levels

### MATERIALS NEEDED

- One of the class mentor texts (for this lesson, I use *Robots* by Melissa Stewart)
- Your demonstration draft, as described in the lesson (craft it in front of the students or prepare it ahead of time)
- Students’ plans or tables of contents

### Lesson steps

1. Explain to students that writers do not have to draft in order, from first chapter to last.
2. Discuss how structures, such as tables of contents and article outlines, allow writers to draft in any order they choose.
3. Demonstrate how beginning with the chapter that they feel the most expert on can help ensure that the first chapter they draft is strong.
4. Encourage students to then use that first chapter as an example to lean on as they draft subsequent chapters.

### What I Say to Students

I want to let you in on a little writing secret: writers do not always draft their pieces in the order they will show up in the book. Let me show you an example.

*[Hold up a copy of one of the class mentor texts.]*

**Melissa Stewart** did not likely draft the first chapter of this book first. And this author is not alone. Since most information writers have a structure or table of contents that they are working from, they can be very free to write in whatever order they want. It’s sort of like how when you have a list for the grocery store. You don’t have to buy everything in order. You can go in order of what’s in the aisles because the list will make sure you get everything you need.

So you might be wondering, “Hey—if I don’t have to draft my first chapter or section first, how do I decide what to draft first?”

Well, of course, there are no rules, but one way that many writers find helpful is to start with the chapter on a subtopic they find easiest to write about. In

my case, since I'm writing about rats, the thing I find most fascinating about them and know the most about is their bodies. I am absolutely fascinated by their bodies! Just thinking about all that information I am getting very inspired. Let me demonstrate this approach for you.

[Hold up a marker or other tool to show you are about to write.]

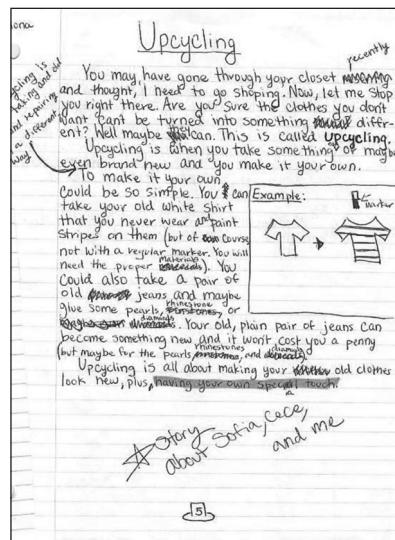
Let's see. I think I'll start by writing a little description about their bodies.

Rat bodies are incredible. Since rats are mammals, they are covered in fur. It comes in different colors, depending on the type of rat: black, brown, blonde, gray, and white are common.

Hmm . . . as I was writing, I found myself starting with their fur. That was sort of surprising. But I like it. And I have so much more to say. I'll get back to this in a little bit.

What was great about this approach is that I found it super easy, and now I'm all revved up to do even more writing. But maybe even more importantly, when I'm done with drafting this chapter—and I'll be done quickly—I will have a great chapter that I can model my other chapters off of.

When you write today, I know many of you are still finishing up structuring your pieces. But a lot of you are ready to start drafting. If you are, one way you might get yourself going really quickly is by looking over your plans and deciding to start drafting today with the chapter you feel most ready to write, even if that won't necessarily be the first one in your book.



Fiona starts drafting with a chapter she feels ready to write.

# Reading

## SPOTTING WHAT'S MOST IMPORTANT TO AN AUTHOR

### PURPOSE

Students learn to spot the sections in a book where an author might be showing off a bit, which gives them access to a window into what that author values most.

### LESSON INTENDED FOR

- Reading high-interest nonfiction
- Trade books
- Articles
- Digital texts
- Students at a wide range of levels

### MATERIALS NEEDED

- Your demonstration reading text (for this lesson, I use *Robots* by Melissa Stewart)
- Students' independent reading texts

### Lesson steps

1. Remind students of their enthusiasm during writing and how the authors they read experience similar excitement.
2. Highlight a place in a class text where the writer makes some craft-rich moves, such as using powerful verbs and alliteration.
3. Discuss how these craft moves give readers a clue that the writer is particularly enthusiastic about this part of the topic.
4. Ask students to try to find a clue like this in a text they have already read independently. If you are in a school where students have access to digital devices, they could try this work on a digital text. However, depending how much instruction you've done in digital reading, you might want to vet the text and make sure it is either a very familiar text or a very simple one. The most important thing is that the text is accessible and also has a clear spot the students will be able to identify.
5. Remind them that this is another thing they can be on the lookout for as readers.

### What I Say to Students

Earlier today we were working on our drafts, and I felt the electricity crackling in the air because so many of you chose to not only write about topics that interest you but also write today about the subtopic or chapter that interests you most.

Well, guess what, readers? Writers all have favorite parts of their manuscript, especially sentences or sections that crackle with energy. Those are great places for readers to pause and ponder. Those are often spots that are drenched in importance for the author, and therefore, they can be places of

importance to us. We can often spot them because the author unloads some writing fireworks on us. When we see them, we want to take note.

Let me show you what I mean in *Robots* (Melissa Stewart, National Geographic Children's Books © 2014), the demonstration book we looked at during the writing part of this lesson. Here's a passage I want to read aloud.

*[Project a page from the book and it read aloud.]*

Animals are really good at moving around on this planet. They hop across rocky cliffs. They slither and scuttle over sand. They fly and swim and tunnel underground. Many motions that animals use can also be used by robots.

Did you guys see all the fancy writing? As a writer, I was a little jealous. As a reader, I was sitting up and taking notes: now this is a place that Melissa Stewart really wants us to realize is important.

Please pull out an article from your folder, and practice looking for the spots where the author's enthusiasm shows through.

*[Give the students a few minutes for this task and then bring them back together.]*

As readers, you always want to keep in mind that authors help light the way to the things they value most by showing off a bit.



Trying to determine where the writer might be showing off.

