

Gathering Notebook Entries

The writer's notebook is at the core of any writer's workshop in the upper grades. We use writer's notebooks because it emulates the way many professional writers gather, store and nurture ideas for their published text. In writing workshop, notebooks are used as a tool to store ideas. Notebooks are "living" in that they can constantly be written in and referred back to as writers develop a piece or think about something new to write. They are an integral component of writing instruction in the upper primary and middle grades. Teachers should keep in mind that a writer's notebook is a container for the writer's thinking. Ralph Fletcher helps us understand what a writer's notebook is in the following quote. "What is a writer's notebook, anyway? Let's start by talking about what it's *not*. A writer's notebook is not a diary: 'Today it is raining. We have a substitute teacher named Miss Pampanella. She seems very nice. We are going to have gym right before lunch.' It's not a reading journal in which your teacher tells you to summarize the main idea of a book, or write a letter to a character. A writer's notebook is different from any journal you've ever kept before.....*A writer's notebook gives you a place to live like a writer, not just in school during writing time, but wherever you are, at any time of day.*"

In the video below author Mary Amato demonstrates how she uses her writer's notebook. This video could be shown to your class to help them understand how writers use notebooks to store their thinking.

Keeping a Writer's Notebook Video
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DcPcHYjTG9k>

Try It:

If you don't already have a writer's notebook of your own, you should start one now, and practice using it as you continue to read about the Writerly Life unit. Get a composition notebook and decorate it. Then choose a strategy from the

Indiana Partnership for Young Writers: Writerly Life (04: Notebooks)

possibilities for notebook entries handout below and make an entry into your notebook.



Unit of Study: Writerly Life Day/Date: Early in the study

Focus: (What one thing will you teach and why?):

Writers collect ideas for their writing projects on the pages inside their notebooks.

Connection (What will you say to the students about why you are teaching this?):

Yesterday we got notebooks and made them special to us by decorating the covers to fit our personalities. Today we are going to learn more about what writers put inside their notebooks.

Give Info: (How will you teach this? What exactly do you want to say?)

We can learn a lot about writing from our favorite authors, so let's look at what one author says about his notebook. (Show Mary Amato video.)

When I showed you my notebook yesterday, we noticed that some of the entries were long and some were short. Let's look at a few of these more closely. (Show excerpts on overhead/document camera that include several types of notebook strategies.) These are all ideas that I put in my notebook knowing that I could think and write more about each one. I've already turned many of these into stories and poems and essays and articles, and some I am not finished with yet. I know I can always come back to these when I need something to write about.

Active Involvement: (How will students "try-it" before they go off to work independently?)

Let's look at a list of strategies we can use to make notebook entries. Some of these strategies I showed you in my notebook today. Some we haven't seen yet. As you look at this list of strategies, I want you to pick one that you can do in your notebook during writing time today. When you decide, hold your idea silently to yourself. (Pause. Select 2-3 students to share what strategy they will use.)

Link: (What is the relationship between what you taught and what you expect them to do during workshop time?) Those are great notebook entries. I know the rest of you have great ideas too. Go back to your seat and put your ideas into your notebook, just like Mary Amato and I did.

MWTP: (Optional) When you have finished the first entry, you can try something else on our list of strategies. Today and every day, you can look at this list when you aren't sure what to put in your notebook.

Share: (How will students share the work they did w/ each other to further develop TP?)

Invite a student to share one idea he/she put in her notebook.

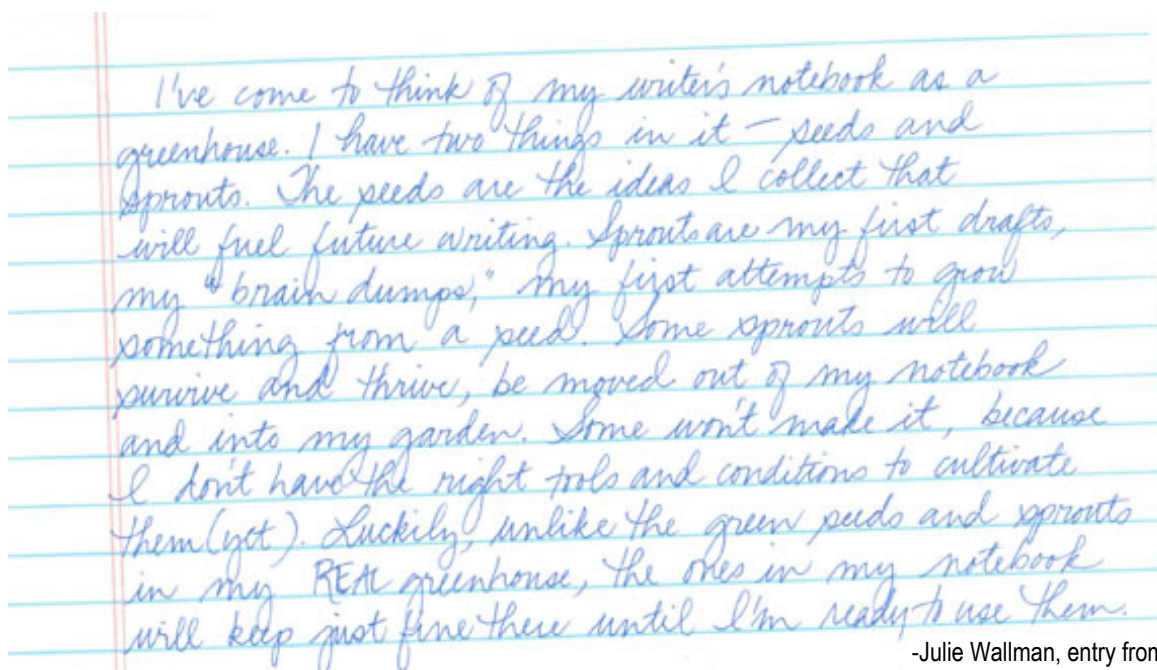
Introduction to Writing Notebooks

A writer's notebook is like that ditch—an empty space you dig in your busy life, a space that will fill up with all sorts of fascinating little creatures... You'll be amazed by what you catch there...

What is a writer's notebook anyway? Let's start by talking about what it is not. A writer's notebook is not a diary: "Today it is raining. We have a substitute teacher named Miss Pamapnella. She seems very nice. We are going to have gym right before lunch." It's not a reading journal in which your teacher tells you to summarize the main idea of a book, or write a letter to a character. A writer's notebook is different from any journal you've ever kept before...

A writer's notebook gives you a place to live like a writer, not just in school during writing time, but wherever you are, at any time of day.

- Ralph Fletcher, *A Writer's Notebook: Unlocking the Writer Within You*



I've come to think of my writer's notebook as a greenhouse. I have two things in it—seeds and sprouts. The seeds are the ideas I collect that will fuel future writing. Sprouts are my first drafts, my "brain dumps," my first attempts to grow something from a seed. Some sprouts will survive and thrive, be moved out of my notebook and into my garden. Some won't make it, because I don't have the right tools and conditions to cultivate them (yet). Luckily, unlike the green seeds and sprouts in my REAL greenhouse, the ones in my notebook will keep just fine there until I'm ready to use them.

-Julie Wallman, entry from her writer's notebook

Collecting Seeds

A seed is any small snippet or memento that inspires you, something you think you can write a lot about when you have more time. Seeds are quick snapshots of things you want to remember (or *can't* forget, no matter how hard you try).

Cultivating Sprouts (aka Nurturing a Seed Idea)

Sprouts are typically longer entries, more detailed. Sprouts are "thinking on paper," perhaps more deliberate and intense thinking about an earlier seed entry.

There's a fine line between seeds and sprouts, ideas and beginnings, and most professional writers would group them all together as "notebook entries."

What to put in your writer's notebook: Strategies for Collecting and Cultivating Ideas

- Record snippets of conversations you overhear between strangers.
- Gather family photographs and photographs of places important to you.
- Save take-out menus, napkins with logos, matchbooks from restaurants, hotels, etc.
- Make very close observations of everyday things.
- Gather family recipes (and list the occasions and other foods you eat/ate with them)
- Write down quotations that intrigue you from music, movies, books, etc.
- Look through a telephone book and mix and match first and last names to create potential character names. List them in your notebook.
- Gather paint swatches with names you like and/or colors that remind you of something specific you've seen. Tape them in your notebook.
- Jot down the rules and procedures of a game you played when you were a kid.
- Gather old letters, postcards, birthday cards, Christmas cards...ones actually sent to you or ones belonging to strangers that you scavenge at antique stores and flea markets.
- Make timelines (real or fictional).
- Record plot ideas inspired by news stories.
- Sketch people, places, things.
- Write down family stories (yours or anyone else's) that you never want to forget.
- Describe anything you wish you had taken a photograph of but didn't/couldn't.
- List interesting facts or statistics that you stumble upon (or know by heart).
- List potential titles, even (especially) if you have no idea what story goes with them.
- Jot down notes about a dream that scared or puzzled you.
- Gather maps (published) or draw your own.
- Go someplace that your character would go and behave like him/her. What would he notice? How would she react? What would he/she order off the menu?
- Do a "fast write," dumping all of your thoughts, reflections, reactions to your seed idea in your notebook as an egg timer ticks away.
- Go on an observation walk or sit quietly someplace. Write what you hear, see, smell, taste and feel. Write whatever happens.
- People watch. Draw conclusions about someone based on what they do, say, wear, carry with them, etc. Imagine the smallest details of their lives.
- Eavesdrop. What is each person thinking that he/she is not saying to the other?
- Make a big list of things you remember or things you don't remember. Things you're good at. Things you're not good at. Things you know. Things you don't know.
- Interview someone who plays a key role in your story or a relevant expert.
- Do "character research" like an actor would...learn a skill that your character already knows, shadow someone with same career as your character.
- Think like a detective as you live your everyday life. What happened just before you entered? Who was there before you?

Sources: Calkins, L. (1994). *The Art of Teaching Writing*. Heinemann; Fletcher, R. (1996) *A Writer's Notebook*. HarperTrophy; Grant, S. (2007) *Notebook Know-How*. Indiana Partnership for Young Writers Summer Institute; Ray & Laminack (2001) *The Writing Workshop*. NCTE

"Everybody walks past a thousand story ideas every day. The good writers are the ones who see five or six of them. Most people don't see any." – Orson Scott Card

Possible Writer's Notebook/Sketch Journal entries might include:

- things you notice that pique your curiosity
- close observations: sights, sounds, textures, moods
- snippets of interesting dialogue you overhear
- questions
- lists of things to think about later
- quotes
- generating writing from photographs
- memories
- plot ideas (from news, life, etc.)
- character ideas from interesting people
- setting ideas
- research data (observations, explorations)
- reflections on and off things you see, hear, think about
- word play: play with words you like
- family stories you know
- top ten lists (people, place names, music, etc.)
- conversations you've had
- ideas you care about
- passions (things that make you angry, puzzled, joyful, etc.)
- things kids say
- anything unusual that "disrupts the commonplace"

Never consider your notebook/sketch journal a finished project, but rather a place to collect your thoughts over a range of endless possibilities. Give yourself the freedom and flexibility to take risks and try things out.

And yet —these are places of record, and you will be turning them in to me. Don't use your sketch journal as a diary of your daily life, or confide anything you wouldn't feel comfortable sharing with me.

Last note: PERFECTION IS THE ENEMY. Be sloppy. Be creative. Spelling and handwriting don't matter in the slightest. Only you need to know what anything means. And don't forget to put your name on it somewhere.

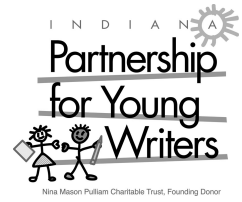
Possibilities for Notebook Entries

Memories
Family stories
Special Occasion
Observations
Conversations
Research
Opinions
Real word/current events
Photographs
Hopes
Newspaper clippings
Writing off book
Reflections

Noticings
Wonderings
Meaning of events
Snippets of language
Images
Lists
Experiments with words
Dreams
Plans
Poetry
Letters/pictures meaningful to you
Split page (things I know/reflection)



Qualities to work towards in your Writer's Notebooks/Sketch Journals



Volume	Writing in a sustained rhythm over a period of time (i.e: “at least four entries per week”)
Variety	Writing many kinds of entries about many different topics Trying a variety of types of writing, as well as graphical/visual entries Capturing different tones and moods (serious, playful, observant, happy, thoughtful, etc.) Playing around with genre Discovering a couple of topics that matter to you enough to explore them repeatedly (“life topics”)
Thoughtfulness	A reader should hear your voice when reading your notebook Entries should reflect what is important to you in some way Entries should not feel like you rushed through them just “to get it done” Allow yourself to think your way through ideas (explore, discover, wonder) Occasionally reread your notebook and add to or question previous ideas and entries