there, something to teach tomorrow when you scratch beneath the surface? Most importantly, does the content offered align with the goals your students have for themselves, and the goals you have for them?

To save time, it helps to know where to look. Many educators use sites like Pinterest to find communities of like-minded teachers that post lesson ideas, charts, and strategies. Others cultivate a Twitter community to follow respected colleagues, ask questions, and engage in chats to help expand their repertoire of teaching moves and ideas. Cast a wide net. Explore broadly. Find your community and tap into the digital resources the Internet offers.

Everybody needs a helping hand from time to time. Learning communities, whether they are online, published, or in person, are essential for our professional growth as educators. And it is also true that we shouldn't always need to look outside for the answers. Over time, if our only answer to the question "What can I teach my kids about XYZ?" is "Ask someone who knows more," our teaching self-esteem will suffer. Although asking for help is a good thing, knowing how to find the answers to our questions is often incredibly rewarding. This self-reliance, the ability to write our own lessons and create our own curriculum, is powerful. It allows us to respond to the kids in front of us, for our class to feel seen, and for students to continue to see us as an invaluable resource in the room.

What follows is a handful of concrete steps to use as a way to create reading and writing strategies from scratch and to pave your own way.

Do It Yourself: Mining Your Own Work for Strategies

Independence is powerful. For centuries, countries have fought for it, teenagers have rebelled for it, and hearts have yearned for it. This entire book is built on the hope that students will feel and employ greater independence throughout their academic lives.

And just as we all value independence for our students, we value it in our own lives as well. In our years co-writing curriculum with the Reading and Writing Project and working with teachers and students, we've been trained to generate our own strategies, to answer the question "How do I teach my kids to . . .?" ourselves. These self-made strategies come from an authentic source—our own reading and writing.

How to Write Strategies

Finding a strategy to teach students to read and write more powerfully is a little like learning how to get your first child to sleep through the night. You need the advice of experts, for sure, be it your mother, a book written by a respected PhD, or the guys down the street with five kids. You need the wisdom of those who have gone before you, and then you just need to figure out what weird thing works for you and your family. The same is true when we are trying to find the right strategies for our readers and writers. Outside sources are invaluable, as is diving in and doing the work ourselves. To write strategies, we have been

taught to lean on what we do when we actually read and write. Here is one way to create a strategy:

First, think about WHAT you want to teach. Many times, the **WHAT** is the skill you want to teach. The **WHAT** is the thing you want your students to be able to do at the end of your teaching. Perhaps you want your readers to predict or summarize or interpret a symbol in a text. Or maybe you want your writers to generate some writing-about-reading entries in their notebooks, create more consistent paragraphs, or elaborate on evidence they have researched. The first step is figuring out what exactly you want to teach the students. It might sound like this:

> **THE WHAT** = Writers create paragraphs as they write stories.

Figuring out what you want to teach tends to come swiftly and easily. You probably already have strengths in seeing a particular thing kids need. Perhaps seeing grammatical needs comes easy to you, or structural needs like topic sentences. Or maybe paragraphing pops out at you first. Celebrate this strength of seeing! But be conscious of staying too close inside the parameters of what you see naturally. That is, you'll want to make sure to try to see a lot of different kinds of **WHAT**s, or needs, that students have. If you are easily able to see convention issues, try looking for craft needs, and the like. By seeing a wide range of skills to teach, you'll up your chances to meet the needs of more students.

The chart on the next page shows some other examples of WHATs that can help keep your horizons broad when creating strategies.

Next, think about HOW students will accomplish that skill. This HOW is the strategy or the *way* students will perform the skill. For instance, *how* exactly does one interpret a symbol in a text? Or, what is the best *way* to write a thesis statement when writing an essay? Many times, this HOW is in a series of actionable steps, as Jennifer Serravallo describes in *The Reading Strategies Book* (Serravallo 2015). One of our favorite ways to think about this is to break down the HOW into a series of three steps. This way, the strategy is procedural in nature—the student can follow the steps with or without you being there to guide them. It might sound like this:

> **THE WHAT + THE HOW** = Writers create paragraphs as they write stories by creating a new paragraph each time a character speaks.
>
> 1. First, find a place in the writing where more than one character is speaking.
> 2. Next, read the section aloud, making a mark every time you hear a new voice speaking.
> 3. Then, rewrite the section, creating a new paragraph for each mark.

SOME EXAMPLES OF WHATS, OR SKILLS IN READING	SOME EXAMPLES OF WHATS, OR SKILLS IN WRITING
☼ Predict ☼ Summarize ☼ Determine Importance ☼ Visualize ☼ Infer ☼ Interpret ☼ Synthesize ☼ Analyze ☼ Critique	**Writing Process** ☼ Generate or collect entries (brainstorming). ☼ Rehearse or make a plan for a piece of writing. ☼ Write a rough draft. ☼ Revise a piece of writing. ☼ Edit a piece of writing. **Qualities of Strong Writing Structure** ☼ Make an outline for an essay or a story mountain for a narrative. ☼ Create paragraphs. ☼ Construct clear topic sentences. **Elaboration** ☼ Say more about a piece of evidence, an idea, a concept, a topic. ☼ Write descriptively. ☼ Use a balance of dialogue, actions, and inner thinking. **Conventions and Grammar** ☼ Use commas in a series. ☼ Create complex sentences. ☼ Maintain subject/verb agreement.

Other times, the **HOW** is just a quick way for students to figure out how to perform the desired skill. It might just sound like this:

> Writers create paragraphs as they write stories by creating a new paragraph when there is a change in setting—the subway arrives, the sun sets, a week goes by.

Now, here is the bonus part. We have been at this place before, where it seems so simple and we launch into strategy writing. Sometimes, like in the example above, we are very familiar with the strategy, and with a bit of thinking we can name exactly **HOW** kids can practice a skill. But other times, after we have named the **WHAT**, we are less clear. "Okay," we think, "the what and the how. I know the what: I want my kids to find and interpret symbols when they read. Okay . . . now the how . . . the how . . . umm…."

How do we figure out the **HOW** if we don't know it automatically? How do we figure out the strategy, the way, for kids to perform a skill? Here's the way that we learned to find the **HOW**.

Let's focus on a new example. The **WHAT** in this instance is the skill of interpreting a symbol in literature.

1. **Try to perform the skill yourself, as an adult, for a few minutes.** In this example, read a text or a part of the text and consider the symbols you see, thinking about their meaning. Give yourself five to ten minutes to try to perform the skill. Try it a few times or in a few places of a text.

   > *Example of performing the skill:* "I read a text and think, 'Huh, it seems like the fox is a symbol for anger and upset. Whenever he shows up in the book, it is always dark and stormy and the color red shows up over and over.'"

2. **Step back. Study what you did. Name how you did what you did.** Try to name exactly what you did as a reader or writer. Don't be afraid to be wordy at first! Try saying it a few different ways.

   > *Example of studying what you did:* "Well," I think. "I noticed that the fox was a symbol. I noticed that the fox popped up whenever there was trouble in the text. I also studied the images around the fox—the colors, the setting—to make me think what he might stand for."

   > *Example of naming how you did what you did:* "So, generally speaking, readers can interpret a symbol in a text by . . . looking for an image or color that shows up over and over again. Then they ask themselves what the image or color might represent."

3. **Phrase the strategy in kid-friendly language. Be clear. Be explicit.** Make sure kids can understand each word and phrase. Remember, the goal is for them to do this work independently! Reach for kid-friendly language that describes exactly what you did.

   > *Example of phrasing the strategy in kid-friendly language:* "So to my class I could say that readers interpret symbols by finding repeating images or colors and asking themselves, 'What might these symbols really stand for? Could red really mean anger? Could the flying bird really stand for freedom?"'

This do-it-yourself process uncovers how one actually performs a reading or writing skill and helps name the strategy in a way that is teachable to others. It helps you figure out a **HOW** on your own. Plus, it is rooted in real writing and reading work so the **HOW**s you discover will feel authentic to you. Now, some strategies will be better than others, but doing the work yourself uncovers many possible strategies to try and use on your teaching tools and with your students.

Finally, think about WHY when putting the finishing touch on the strategy. Why is this strategy important? What is the purpose? Why might we, as readers or writers, want to do this work? We want to tether our skills and strategies to a strong sense of purpose. This helps students (and ourselves) buy into the work, know when to do the work, and see the bigger meaning of the work. The **WHY** is often verbal—a line or two of purpose spoken as the tool is unveiled. The **WHY** might sound something like this:

> **THE WHAT + THE HOW + THE WHY** = Writers create paragraphs in stories by making a new paragraph when there is a change in setting—the subway arrives, the sun sets, a week goes by. Paragraphs help readers get a visual heads up about changes or shifts coming in the text, and they help them be ready to experience something new.

This process unlocks a floodgate of strategies. You can do this on your own or working with the company of colleagues. You can also do this work with kids, helping them to name the strategies they know and use.

Guided Practice: Crafting a Reading Strategy

Okay, first let's pick a **WHAT**. Let's imagine we want to get better at *inferring about characters*. And now we have to figure out the **HOW**, the strategies, or ways, to teach kids to do that big skill. **First, we need to practice that skill ourselves.** Right now, read the beginning of *Wonder* by R. J. Palacio. As you read, jot down initial ideas you have about this character:

> I know I'm not an ordinary ten-year-old kid. I mean, sure, I do ordinary things. I eat ice cream. I ride my bike. I play ball. I have an Xbox. Stuff like that makes me ordinary. I guess. And I feel ordinary. Inside. But I know ordinary kids don't make other ordinary kids run away screaming in playgrounds. I know ordinary kids don't get stared at wherever they go.
>
> If I found a magic lamp and I could have one wish, I would wish that I had a normal face that no one ever noticed at all. I would wish that I could walk down the street without people seeing me and then doing that look-away thing. Here's what I think: the only reason I'm not ordinary is that no one else sees me that way.
>
> But I'm kind of used to how I look by now. I know how to pretend I don't see the faces people make. We've all gotten pretty good at that sort of thing: me, Mom, and Dad, Via. Actually, I take that back: Via's not so good at it. She can get really annoyed when people do something rude. . . .

> . . . Via doesn't see me as ordinary. She says she does, but if I were ordinary, she wouldn't feel like she needs to protect me as much. And Mom and Dad don't see me as ordinary, either. They see me as extraordinary. I think the only person in the world who realizes how ordinary I am is me.
>
> My name is August, by the way. I don't describe what I look like. Whatever you're thinking, it's probably worse.

What did you notice about August? What is he like? How would you describe him? What initial theories do you have about him?

Here's a quick example of what our notes looked like at this point:

> August seems like an ordinary kid. But it also seems like he knows he doesn't seem ordinary to other people. August seems like the kind of kid who is an outsider.

Now, second of all, step back. Study what you did. Name how you did what you did. We'll start off and study what we did. We tried to make inferences about the character in our notes above. So how did we do that? How did we arrive at that thinking?

Our notes:

> We noticed what the character liked and did for fun. But we also noticed how others reacted to the character. That's how we got to those thoughts about him seeming like an ordinary kid in some ways, but being an outsider in other ways.

Of course, your observations and theories will be different from ours, so you'll likely have arrived at them in different ways. Consider this: How did you arrive at your thinking in the previous step?

Okay, **lastly, try to phrase the strategy in kid-friendly language. Be clear. Be explicit.** We managed to uncover two strategies. Our notes:

Evaluating the Importance of the Skill

While you are practicing the skill, try naming why this work is important. Not only will this help you figure out the WHY to your strategy, it is also a good litmus test. If you can't name why this is important, it may not be the best skill to focus on!

Readers infer about a character by studying what he or she likes or does. These likes and dislikes, actions and activities reveal that character's personality and traits.

Readers also infer about a character by studying how other characters react to him or her. These reactions reveal how the character deals with other people's reactions. This shows a big part of who they are as a person.

You may find that your notes lead you to a completely different strategy, and that's great! Readers and writers need a range of strategies to choose from.

Put it all together (**WHAT + HOW + WHY**) and **BOOM**! You've developed your own teaching strategy, ready for sharing with students. Here's how we turned our thinking into a strategy:

> Readers make an inference about a character by studying what he or she likes or does. These likes and dislikes, actions and activities reveal the character's personality and traits. This is important because small things such as likes or actions often reveal big truths about people.

Once we have named our strategy, we can boil it down even further, getting it ready for, say, a repertoire chart or demonstration notebook. It can help to clarify what we are saying by breaking things down to a list or steps, like this:

> Readers make inferences about characters by . . .
>
> 1. Studying their likes and dislikes
> 2. Studying their actions and activities
> 3. Asking, "What does this reveal about their personality?"

Fine-tuning Your Strategies

In our years doing this work, we have stumbled across some obstacles along the way. Here are a few problems to be on the lookout for, and some ways to solve them when they arise:

- *First, be on the lookout for strategies that are too wordy.* This happens easily as we search for the exact words to name all that we are doing as a reader or writer. Too many words pose problems for the kids—they'll lose stamina as they read, the strategy won't fit on the teaching tool, they'll be less likely to remember it. If you find the strategy too wordy, try thinking of a catchphrase. It works in advertising. We are much more likely to remember Nike's slogan, "Just Do It"