Making and Using a Checklist

One of the most important things for you to keep in mind when it comes to using a checklist is that it's an opportunity for you to look honestly at what your students have learned, not what you have taught—which might be two different things. Anyone who thought they taught an elaboration strategy in writing only to find the skill absent from everyone's work the day after the lesson knows the truth of that. The key to being responsive is to be realistic and comfortable with what your students know. Some students will be way behind what they're *supposed to* know, and others will be way beyond what the curricular tools suggest you teach them next.

We're going to guide you step-by-step through the process of using a checklist to study what your students know and then plan for your responsive instruction.

Step 1:

Determine what you'd like your students to know by the end of your next unit.

You might base this information on:

- what the majority of your students already know and what the "next steps" could be

- the Common Core State Standards and your district's or school's expectations for your students

- bigger goals for your class such as collaborating or using self-talk for problem solving

- other guiding questions from the table on page 112.

Tip: Make a copy of your checklist *now* to use at the end of your unit to assess your students' learning.

K— Independent Writing Projects

	Many words	stretching	speech bubbles	small action	detailed pics	multiple pages	one idea					
Anna												
Arjun												
Benji												
Ernie												
Grace												
Harry												
Jack												
Jaxson												
Jordan												
Kevin												
Lettie												
Lexie												
Malini												
Max												
Micah												
Mila												
Mira												
Phillippe												
Princess												
Ray												
Sidney												

Step 2:

Look closely at student work and fill in your checklist.

This student work could include work samples, interviews, observations, or any other means of gathering data. If you're not sure about a student's performance on a given item, seek more information.

Tip: By using a plus-or-minus system, a minus can easily turn into plus as you begin to teach the unit or if you've incorrectly assessed a student (it happens!).

K– Independent Writing Projects

	Many words	stretching	speech bubbles	small action	detailed pics	multiple pages	one idea					
Anna	+	+	−	+	−	+	+					
Arjun	−	−	−	−	+	+	+					
Benji	+	+	−	−	−	+	+					
Ernie	+	+	−	−	+	−	+					
Grace	+	+	+	+	+	+	+					
Harry	+	+	−	−	+	+	+					
Jack	−	−	−	−	+	+	+					
Jaxson	+	+	−	−	+	+	+					
Jordan	+	+	−	−	−	+	+					
Kevin	+	+	−	+	+	+	−					
Lettie	+	−	−	−	+	+	+					
Lexie	+	+	−	−	−	+	+					
Malini	+	+	+	+	+	−	+					
Max	+	−	−	−	−	+	+					
Micah	−	−	−	−	+	+	+					
Mila	+	+	−	+	+	+	+					
Mira	+	+	−	−	+	+	+					
Phillippe	+	+	−	−	+	+	+					
Princess	+	+	−	−	−	+	+					
Ray	+	+	−	+	+	+	−					
Sidney	+	+	−	−	+	+	+					

Step 3:

Highlight what students need to work on and look for patterns.

Take out your highlighters and channel your love for color coding and get to work! Start by highlighting what students need to work on and start to notice patterns.

Tip: You'll get a different picture of your class if you highlight by goal rather than by student.

K– Independent Writing Projects

	Many words	stretching	speech bubbles	small action	detailed pics	multiple pages	one idea					
Anna	+	+	−	+	−	+	+					
Arjun	−	−	−	−	+	+	+					
Benji	+	+	−	−	−	+	+					
Ernie	+	+	−	−	+	−	+					
Grace	+	+	+	+	+	+	+					
Harry	+	+	−	−	+	+	+					
Jack	−	−	−	−	+	+	+					
Jaxson	+	+	−	−	+	+	+					
Jordan	+	+	−	−	−	+	+					
Kevin	+	+	−	+	+	+	−					
Lettie	+	−	−	−	+	+	+					
Lexie	+	+	−	−	−	+	+					
Malini	+	+	+	+	+	−	+					
Max	+	−	−	−	−	+	+					
Micah	−	−	−	−	+	+	+					
Mila	+	+	−	+	+	+	+					
Mira	+	+	−	−	+	+	+					
Phillippe	+	+	−	−	+	+	+					
Princess	+	+	−	−	−	+	+					
Ray	+	+	−	+	+	+	−					
Sidney	+	+	−	−	+	+	+					

For more on observing students read:

- *The Art of Classroom Inquiry: A Handbook for Teacher–Researchers* by Ruth Shagoury Hubbard and Brenda Miller Power (2003)
- *Reflecting Children's Lives: A Handbook for Planning Your Child-Centered Curriculum* by Deb Curtis and Margie Carter (2011)

Step 4:

Choose the big goals you'll be working on with the whole class during the unit.

What are four big goals that most of your students need? These goals will be the driving focus of your unit.

Now's the time to take out your curriculum tools and see what you can use for resources. You might take your math unit and flip through the lessons and decide which to skip and which to teach. If your students need it, go back to an earlier unit or even another grade level and use the lessons or ideas that best fit their needs.

Take out four blank pieces of paper and write one goal at the top of each piece of paper. Then, come up with four or five focus lessons for each goal. These focus lessons will become your whole-class lessons.

Tip: Design the anchor chart that will complement your goals and reflect the language you'll use with students right on these planning pages and *voilà*! that's ready to go now, too. For more on anchor charts see *Smarter Charts, K–2: Optimizing an Instructional Staple to Create Independent Readers and Writers* (2012) and *Smarter Charts for Math, Science, and Social Studies: Making Learning Visible in the Content Areas* (2014) by our very own Kristi Mraz and her coauthor Marjorie Martinelli.

Independent Writing Projects

GOAL: Build Stamina / Add More

1. Launch: What books do we want to add to the world?
2. Add more to your pictures & words.
3. Add more by using speech bubbles.
4. Add more by using small actions.

CHART:
Writers Add More!
Before → After
Pictures →
Words →
Speech →
Sm. act. →

* use student work as mentors each day— photocopy before & after.

* shares / mid workshops can highlight editing tools / problem solving strategies.

Step 5:

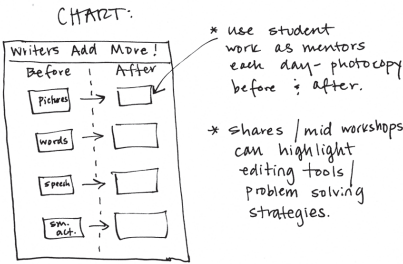**Plan for small groups and individual conferences.**

Chances are some students will need to work on *all* of the objectives you've included on your checklist and others won't need to work on any of them. The checklist can be your starting point for small groups and one-on-one conferences.

Tip: Transfer the next steps from your checklist right onto your small-group planning templates and conferring notes. You can find samples of all of these templates in the appendixes.

K – Independent Writing Projects

GOAL: BUILDING Stamina / ADDING more	Many words	stretching	Speech bubbles	small action	detailed pics	multiple pages	one idea
Anna	+	+	–	+	–	+	+
Arjun	–	–	–	–	+	+	+
Benji	+	+	–	–	–	+	+
Ernie	+	+	–	–	+	–	+
Grace	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Harry	+	+	–	–	+	+	+
Jack	–	–	–	–	+	+	+
Jaxson	+	+	–	–	+	+	+
Jordan	+	+	–	–	–	+	+
Kevin	+	+	–	+	+	+	–
Lettie	+	–	–	–	+	+	+
Lexie	+	+	–	–	–	+	+
Malini	+	+	+	+	+	–	+
Max	+	–	–	–	–	+	+
Micah	–	–	–	–	+	+	+
Mila	+	+	–	+	+	+	+
Mira	+	+	–	–	+	+	+
Phillippe	+	+	–	–	+	+	+
Princess	+	+	–	–	–	+	+
Ray	+	+	–	+	+	+	–
Sidney	+	+	–	–	+	+	+

↑ small groups ↑