



Mechanically Inclined: Building Grammar, Usage, and Style into Writer's Workshop

By Jeff Anderson



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Some teachers love grammar and some hate it, but nearly all struggle to find ways of making the mechanics of English meaningful to kids. As a middle school teacher, Jeff Anderson also discovered that his students were not grasping the basics, and that it was preventing them from reaching their potential as writers. Jeff readily admits, “I am not a grammarian, nor am I punctilious about anything, so he began researching and testing the ideas of scores of grammar experts in his classroom, gradually finding successful ways of integrating grammar instruction into writer's workshop.

Mechanically Inclined is the culmination of years of experimentation that merges the best of writer's workshop elements with relevant theory about how and why skills should be taught. It connects theory about using grammar in context with practical instructional strategies, explains why kids often don't understand or apply grammar and mechanics correctly, focuses on attending to the “high payoff, or most common errors in student writing, and shows how to carefully construct a workshop environment that can best support grammar and mechanics concepts. Jeff emphasizes four key elements in his teaching:

- short daily instruction in grammar and mechanics within writer's workshop;
- using high-quality mentor texts to teach grammar and mechanics in context;
- visual scaffolds, including wall charts, and visual cues that can be pasted into writer's notebooks;
- regular, short routines, like “express-lane edits, that help students spot and correct errors automatically.

Comprising an overview of the research-based context for grammar instruction, a series of over thirty detailed lessons, and an appendix of helpful forms and instructional tools, *Mechanically Inclined* is a boon to teachers regardless of their level of grammar-phobia. It shifts the negative, rule-plagued emphasis of much grammar instruction into one which celebrates the power and beauty these tools have in shaping all forms of writing.



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