

ACADEMIC CONFERENCE STEMS

Conferences are a powerful instructional tool, providing teachers with more time for assessment and differentiation, the opportunity to deepen relationships with students, and an insight into their own work from the perspective of the student. In addition to receiving immediate feedback, students benefit by having guided practice for metacognition and reflection. Conferences also allow students to share their thoughts and feelings about their work and their learning.

Purpose	Language	Notes
Letting the student set the agenda	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are we talking about a piece of your work, one of the objectives, or content-related questions? • What can you tell me about ... • What questions do you have about ... 	<i>At times you may need to focus the conference on a specific piece of work, objective, or content—that is okay!</i>
Focusing on the work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tell me about ... • Show me where this meets the objective/competency/indicator. • Where do you see opportunities for improvement? • What is particularly strong/effective? • What do you see when you look at this? 	<i>Conferences focus on student work because their work is the only way students can demonstrate mastery.</i>
Providing opportunity for student reflection and metacognition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do you feel about this work? Why? • Can you tell me about your process? • Tell me more about how you ... • What do you know now that you didn't know when you started? • What can you do now that you couldn't do when you started? • What was challenging about this? How did you overcome that challenge? • How will you use this new knowledge/skill in the future? • What strategies did you use to solve that problem? 	<i>Reflection is connecting the past to the present and future. (I used to think ... but now ... and so.) Metacognition is thinking about thinking. Both skills are vital to empowering students to have ownership over their learning.</i>
Giving feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When I look at this, I see ... (w) • I'd like to see more of ... (c) • I understand ... when I see ... (w) • I don't understand why ... (c) • I like how you ... because ... (w) • Can you explain why ... (c) • What helped me understand was ... (w) • I'd like to learn more about ... (c) • You did ... really well because ... (w) 	<i>Give students a mixture of warm (w) and cool (c) feedback. Too much warm feedback can make a student feel uncertain about next steps, and too much cool feedback can lead to frustration and feeling overwhelmed.</i>

Identifying next steps	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What are your next steps?• What extra help will you get?• What support do you need from me?• If you had this to do over again, what would you do differently?• When you revise, think about ...• Now that you know ... can you ...• Now that you can ... how will you use that?• What can you do to meet the objective?• What might happen if you ...• What else might you do to ...	<p><i>Initially, students are likely to need the most support in this phase of the conference. However, simply telling students what to do next reduces buy in.</i></p>
Ensuring understanding	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Tell me more about ...• Can you tell me/show me how you will ...• Give me an example of ...• How else might you say ...• What do you mean by ...• What will it look like when ...	<p>Make certain the student understands what they need in order to carry out their next steps.</p>
Making commitments	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Are we agreed that before the next time we meet, I will ... and you will ...• When can you have this done?• How much time do you think this will take?• What is your plan for ...• Can you have this done by ...	<p>Ending on “You know what to do, right?” leaves the situation open-ended and is unlikely to result in action by the student.</p>
Refocusing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• I would love to hear more about that. Can you see me during lunch/office hours/advisory or after school so we can talk more? (Write the student a pass or sticky note or have them record the appointment in their planner.)	<p>Conferences are for discussing academics. It is appropriate to set boundaries when students raise issues that don't merit immediate attention.</p>
