

Target Grade Levels: All

Key Concepts: Writing process, narrative writing, MY Tutor feedback, Revision

One of the most common concerns I hear from teachers who use MY Access!® is that MY Tutor feedback is too general to be helpful for students. MY Tutor was never designed to replace teaching of writing skills, but it does support and reinforce effective writing instruction. By modeling with whole-class guided instruction, teachers can enable their students to use MY Tutor independently. Below, you will find a model lesson that demonstrates how to use MY Tutor feedback to teach students a specific skill: writing a detailed setting in a narrative piece.

Step 1: Preparation

Before this lesson each student needs to have submitted at least one draft of a narrative piece. You will also need a sample essay to use throughout this lesson. Ideally it will be keyed into MY Access!® so you can project it and use it to model how to make revisions. Ask a student who has received a 3 or low 4 to volunteer his or her essay. You can also find student-written model essays for all IntelliMetric™ prompts in the Resource and Training Center under “MY Access!® Writer’s Model Catalog.” For the purposes of this lesson, an elementary-level student sample will be provided.

Step 2: Getting Started

Have students log on to MY Access!® and resume or start a new revision of their narrative piece. Once there, have them click on “MY Tutor” and select “Development” from the drop-down menu. Ask them to suggest what they think the “Content and Development” of an essay is. List ideas on the board and then project the narrative rubric and read the description under Content and Development.

Return to the MY Tutor feedback. Many of them-but not all-will see “Revision Goal 1: Create a detailed setting.” Students who have written stories that score 5-6 will see a revision goal related to character, so ask them to follow along with what you’re projecting.

Step 3: Defining Setting

In order to apply the MY Tutor feedback, students need to understand what setting is. Ask students to try to define it for you and to explain why it is important to a story. Have a volunteer read suggestions 1 and 2 under Revision Goal 1. Tell them that they will be using the MY Tutor feedback to improve the setting of their story.

Distribute the [“What is Setting?”](#) handout. Read the description of setting and the sample from *Night of the New Magicians* by Mary Pope Osborne. Prior to reading the excerpt, ask students to notice the details Osborne uses to describe the setting, and to underline them as you read. After reading, allow students to share what they underlined. Point out that she uses rich, sensory details that allow the reader to hear, smell, see and feel where this story is taking place.

Note that this handout also has information about character for a later lesson.

Step 4: Modeling With a Student Sample

Next, have a volunteer read a student piece from your own class or the sample narrative response to the prompt "A Bus Trip to Anywhere." Ask the students if the writer does a good job of describing the setting. They should be able to recognize that she does not. Be sure to remind them that because this is an early draft, that is perfectly okay-they will help this writer revise her story.

If you are using the sample provided, ask students to underline the first sentence of the third paragraph: "*When everyone got on the big yellow bus, I started the engine.*" If you are using a piece from your class, choose one moment in the story where the writer can add more specific details about the setting. In both cases, use the projected essay to highlight the sentence in MY Access!® and change its color to green.

For the sample provided, ask volunteers to describe a bus-what do they imagine it looks like on the outside? Inside? What does it smell like, feel like? If students have trouble providing description, ask them specific questions-what are the seats like? The windows? The door? Then, working as a class, use these details to compose several sentences that describe the setting. At this point, it is important to show students how to revise in MY Access!-by deleting the original sentence and inserting the new sentences in its place.

I wrote the following sample with a fifth grade class, but your lesson should incorporate the ideas your students provide. I helped craft the sentence structure using the ideas from the list of bus descriptions we created earlier in this lesson. This is what we came up with:

*We stepped up the narrow and steep stairs of the long, yellow bus. **Once inside, a blast of hot air hit us so we felt like we were breathing fire.** The plastic on the seats was practically melting, but the windows were so old and rusty we couldn't get them **down no matter how hard we tried.** It smelled like somebody had left dirty shoes in there for a hundred years, **and I knew this would be one long ride.***

After revising this portion of the story, ask where else this writer can add more detailed setting.

Step 5: Revising in MY Access!®

At this point, I have often said to students, "Okay, now return to your essay and add setting details." But I noticed that many students still had difficulty thinking of ideas, and they ended up adding only a sentence or two to their story. If this is the case in your class, more guided instruction is required.

Begin by re-reading the MY Tutor feedback. Ask students to read their story and to find one moment where they can add setting or improve the setting they already included. Have them highlight this sentence in green as instructed by MY Tutor.

Next, give students 5-10 minutes to work with a partner using the "[Creating a Detailed Setting: Peer Response Activity](#)." The first person will read his or her highlighted sentence or describe

the setting of the moment that needs revision. Then, the partners will brainstorm a list of sensory details the writer can include to describe the setting—just like we did earlier as a class for “Bus Trip.” The writer should write down this list. Then, they will switch and do the same thing for the other person. You may want to spend a few minutes showing students how to use the Word Bank. Be sure to point out the [“Adventurous Adverbs and Awesome Adjectives”](#) category, which includes sensory detail words that they may want to add to their list.

Once students have their list of ideas they will add descriptive sentences about the setting in their story. After they’re finished, give them the rest of the period to continue their revisions. Ask them to find at least two additional moments in their story where they can add setting. At the end of the period, submit to see if their scores improve (they usually do). As improved score serves as visual proof that adding setting detail to a story is a powerful form of revision.

Step 6: Reinforcing the Skill

Now that students have learned what setting is, they should be able to apply it to the next narrative piece they write. If they don’t remember, MY Tutor will reinforce what they already learned so they can work independently.

Final Thoughts

If access to computers is an issue at your school, you can do much of this lesson offline. A paper copy of the [MY Tutor Feedback](#) can be distributed to students so they can do everything described above in the classroom with a hard copy of their story.

In workshops, I often tell teachers that MY Tutor is as helpful for them as it is for their students. How many times do we teach a skill that we think students have mastered, (let’s say writing a thesis statement), only to find ourselves writing “You need to write a thesis statement” on over half their papers? It’s not that students are lazy: they just haven’t mastered the skill in order to transfer it to their own writing. With MY Tutor, the feedback is already written down for us. Students simply need to be reminded to read it, remember what was taught (or look back at their notes), and revise their papers. Over time, as you teach skill lessons related to MY Tutor, students will learn to revise independently.

Contributor: *Stephanie Binckes is a former high school English and ELD teacher. As a fellow of the California Writing Project, she has worked as a writing coach and mentor throughout her state. She wrote this article to help teachers re-envision MY Access! as a powerful tool that can be used to support students throughout the composition process.*