

from Chaos to Confetti:
5 ELA Routines
That Make *all* the Difference

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& Perfection Learning



5 ROUTINES:

BELL RINGERS:

The
instantaneous engagement
routine

STATIONS STRATEGY:

The
strategically unexpected
“whack-a-mole”
routine

LAST WORD:

The
no hiding
routine

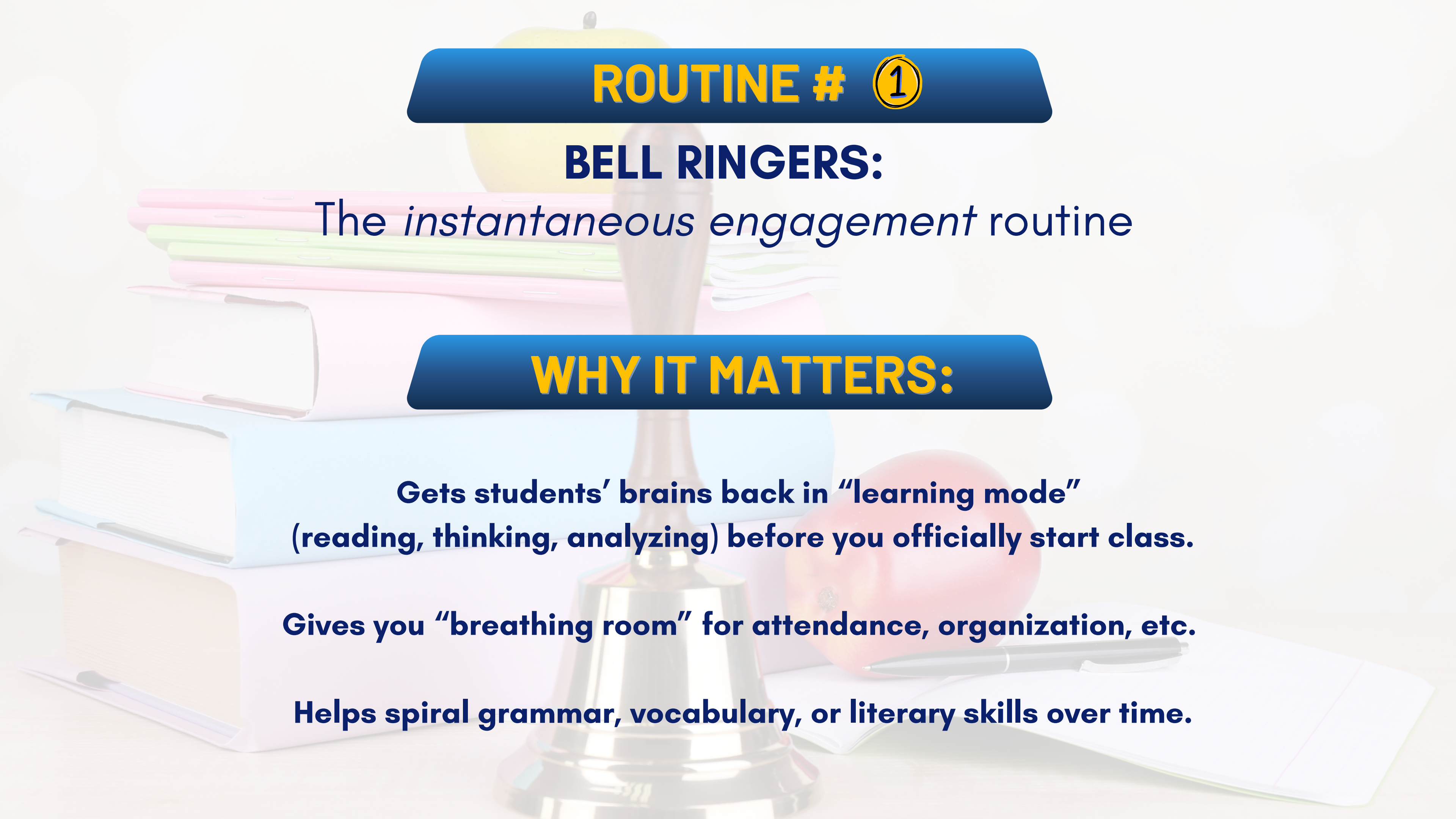
DISCUSSION TASK CARDS:

The
plug-n-play, ready-made
routine

FREE-WRITING:

The
no-prep, no grading
writing stamina
routine





ROUTINE # ①

BELL RINGERS:

The instantaneous engagement routine

WHY IT MATTERS:

**Gets students' brains back in "learning mode"
(reading, thinking, analyzing) before you officially start class.**

Gives you "breathing room" for attendance, organization, etc.

Helps spiral grammar, vocabulary, or literary skills over time.

EXAMPLES:

Quote	Post one sentence (or short paragraph) from today's reading or a mentor text. "What's the tone? What word shifts the mood?"
Grammar Mentor Sentence	A sentence with an interesting or best-practice example of any grammatical concept you wish to reinforce (commas, parts of speech, sentence variety, etc.)
Vocabulary in context	Show a sentence with an unfamiliar word, or a familiar word used in a unique way. Students infer meaning and use context as evidence.
Annotation	Show 1–2 lines from a text. Students annotate for figurative language, word choice, etc.

STRATEGY # 1

Bell-Ringer Quotes

 ***Bud, Not Buddy*** (Christopher Paul Curtis)

Quote:

"Rules and things number 3: If you got to tell a lie, make sure it's simple and easy to remember."

Bell-Ringer Tasks:

- **Grammar:** Identify the prepositional phrase in the sentence. Rewrite the sentence using a different prepositional phrase.
- **Style/Imitation:** Write your own "Rule and Thing" in the same sentence structure as Bud's (ex: "*Rules and things number 4: If you borrow a pencil, always give it back with the eraser chewed up.*").
- **Inference:** What does this "rule" reveal about Bud's worldview or the kind of situations he expects to be in?



ROUTINE # ②

STATION STRATEGY:

The strategically unexpected “whack-a-mole” routine

WHY IT MATTERS:

Allows you to pull small groups or conference while students are engaged elsewhere.

Ensures behavior & academic expectations remain solid.

Creates built-in scaffolding, differentiation, and student accountability.

ROUTINE # 2

STATION STRATEGY:

The strategically unexpected “whack-a-mole” routine

Station A


Station A


Station C


Station B


Station B


Station D


Station C


ROUTINE # ②

STATION or SMALL GROUP TIME

What happens if students finish early?

What happens if students need more time?

What is the expected noise / volume level?

What do they do if they have a question and can't move forward w/o your input?

Are students allowed to get up during station / group time?

Where does their work go? Is this for a grade?

What is the expectation or routine for cleaning up?

ROUTINE # 3

DISCUSSION TASK CARDS:
The plug-n-play, ready-made routine

WHY THEY MATTER:

Ensures structure + academic, genre-specific talk (so “turn-n-talk” doesn’t devolve into surface chatter)

Gives you an exit ticket, conversation control, and sometimes assessment data all in one

Can be reused all year long — you just swap the focus (genres, sentence starters, etc.)

Students learn how to agree, disagree, add to another student’s point,
or challenge—appropriately and respectfully.

The background of the slide is a soft-focus photograph of several students sitting at a table, reading books. The lighting is warm and natural, creating a calm and studious atmosphere. The students are seen from the chest up, with their hands resting on the pages of their books. One student in the foreground is wearing a yellow sweater, while another to the right is wearing a light blue button-down shirt. The books are open, and the students appear to be engaged in their reading.

OPTIONS for USE:

DISCUSSION TASK CARDS:

The plug-n-play, ready-made routine

Gallery Walk: Place cards around room, students rotate and respond (with evidence) at each card.

Small Groups: Each group draws or is assigned a card stack during literature circles / during reading.

Bell Ringer in pairs: Students each get a card, discuss, and then each writes an official response.

Self-differentiation: See which task cards students *think* are the easiest / hardest / etc.

READY-MADE LOGISTICS:

DISCUSSION TASK CARDS:

The plug-n-play, ready-made routine

Keep a stable “deck” of cards that cover your go-to skills (organized by genre) so you never have to reinvent the wheel

**Let students help prep:
cut, sort, bag,
then label and organize**

Practice what it looks like and sounds like “to discuss” using the task cards.

ROUTINE # 4

FREE-WRITING:

The no-prep, no grading *writing stamina* routine

WHY IT WORKS:

It builds writing stamina without demanding full essays every time.

It encourages students to think on their feet.

It gives you “meat” to work with when you teach grammar or writing concepts later.

ROUTINE # 4

FREE-WRITING:

The no-prep, no grading *writing stamina* routine

WHAT TO USE:

Literature / reading-based (open-ended questions or prompts)

Quotes from literature, life, music, verses, etc. that students respond to

Images that could have multiple interpretations (paintings, memes, photos)

ROUTINE # 4

FREE-WRITING:

The no-prep, no grading *writing stamina* routine

LOGISTICS - HOW IT WORKS:

Use a timer (start with 3 minutes—gradually work up to 10 over time).

Give students two choices every time.

Students write (NOT TYPE!) in notebooks or journals.

Re-use the free-writes when you teach grammar mini-lessons → Instead of teaching a grammar concept and following up with a worksheet, teach the grammar concept and have students choose one of their “old” free-writes to practice + apply the concept.

STUDENT INSTRUCTIONS

HOW WE FREE-WRITE

- 1) If it's a QUOTE, start by copying it.
If it's an IMAGE, start by listing and describing exactly what you see. If it's a topic, start by explaining it.
- 2) Then begin writing about *what you think* about it. No, really. If you like it or not, it's ok to say so. Just explain *why*.

Psst.
Stop gripping your pen or pencil so hard.
Seriously.
Relax while you write.

STUDENT INSTRUCTIONS

3) Are you getting stuck? Start with these ideas:

- * What does the quote or image remind you of?
- * If it's a topic, then what do you think about it as compared to what others think about it?
- * How would you change the image, the quote, or the topic to make it better, or funnier, or more realistic?
- * How could you use your imagination to expand the idea? What would make the quote, image, or topic more interesting?
- * What else would you like to know about it?
- * Does it remind you of anything? Like a movie, book, or a game or something?

4) Stuck again? Ok. Look at the last word you wrote. Start copying that word over and over and over again until a new thought enters your mind that you can write about.

ROUTINE # 5

LAST WORD:
The no hiding move

WHY IT MATTERS:

It forces every student to speak one last time in class for the day (no hiding).

The constraint (one sentence: claim + evidence) keeps it focused and rigorous.

It clarifies class thinking — you see where everyone's mind is at, and you can resolve misconceptions or elevate interpretations.

HOW IT WORKS:

LAST WORD: *The no hiding move*

At the end of class discussion or reading, pose an open-ended question (e.g. "What is the most important conflict right now in the text?").

Students think for 30-60 seconds, then share (orally or via sticky note) their "Last Word":
1 sentence = claim + evidence.

-OR-

Have students complete this in small groups rather than whole-class sharing (such a time-saver if you have only a couple minutes and want everyone to participate)

Use the "last words" as a launching point for tomorrow (you might say, "Some of your Last Words today gives me ideas for tomorrow's reading").

ROUTINE # 5

LAST WORD:
The no hiding move

TIPS & TWEAKS:

If students tend to 'copy' each other, then have them write their Last Words first
Collect a few (if written) to quickly scan how many are hitting claim + evidence properly.

Occasionally invert:
“Tell me what you changed in your last word after hearing someone else.”
This forces listening and revision.

I want to leave you with this...

**Your classroom doesn't need more bells and whistles,
and you don't need more to plan.**

**Really, your classroom just needs a few tried and true routines that run
themselves with no extra prep.**

**When students know exactly what to do at the start, in the middle, and at the
end of class, you're free to focus on the teaching.**

A yellow circle with a black outline and a thick black brushstroke border. Inside the circle is a large, bold, blue number 1.

Bell Ringer Routine

A pink circle with a black outline and a thick black brushstroke border. Inside the circle is a large, bold, black number 2.

Stations Routine

A purple circle with a black outline and a thick black brushstroke border. Inside the circle is a large, bold, black number 3.

Discussion Task Cards

A green circle with a black outline and a thick black brushstroke border. Inside the circle is a large, bold, white number 4.

Free-Writing

An orange circle with a black outline and a thick black brushstroke border. Inside the circle is a large, bold, black number 5.

The Last Word

Which One Will You Use First?

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That Make *all* the Difference

1

Bell Ringer Routine

2

Stations Routine

3

Discussion Task Cards

4

Free-Writing

5

The Last Word

Which One Would You Like to Talk Through A Bit More?

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The Last Word

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