*An introduction to Praise-Question-Polish*

Mark frowned as he read over his personal narrative about a trip to a corn maze. He thought about all the steps he had accomplished. He had started out by making a list of events. Then he added details to those events. Next, he started a rough draft. After a few sentences, though, he wanted to know if he had an interesting beginning.

“Want to read the beginning of my story?” Mark asked Joey.

“Sure,” Joey said. He took Mark’s story and read:

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| **Lost in the Corn Maze**  A trip to a regular corn maze turned a little scary last year. I started out by going in with the rest of my family. It was a neat place, with tall rows of corn all around us. I thought, “How can a corn maze be fun?” but once I was inside, I couldn’t see anything.  We twisted and turned, trying to decide how to get out. But then my little sister said she had to go to the bathroom. My mom said that she would take her back to the barn, and she’d go back out the way we came. That left my brother and me in the maze. At first it was fun and we goofed around, running back and forth through the rows of corn. But then we noticed that we hadn’t met anyone for awhile. It was getting darker, and the field was awfully quiet. I heard some crickets chirping in the distance. |

When Joey was done reading, Mark said, “So? What do you think?”

Joey shrugged. “It’s good.”

Mark looked at him. “Really? Why do you think so?”

Joey shrugged again. “I just do. It’s good.”

What did Mark want to know about his piece of writing?

How do you think he felt about Joey’s answer?

Writers like to hear specific comments about their writing. We want to know what sounds good, which details stand out, and where we can improve. In our class, we will use a method called Praise-Question-Polish to give feedback to our fellow writers.

Here is an example of some Praise and Polish for Mark’s writing. Can you think of a question for Mark’s piece? Something that you are still wondering?

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| **Praise (give a specific example of something that the writer does well)** | **Question (ask about what you still want to know)** | **Polish (suggest an area that could be improved)** |
| *I like the way you included your thoughts about the corn maze* |  | *I think that the first sentence still needs work. Perhaps you could describe the corn maze in greater detail.* |

Mark decided to ask someone else about his piece. Luckily, Tania knew all about Praise-Question-Polish. “I really like the details that you included about the corn maze,” she told him. “But I wonder what you mean when you say that once you were inside, you couldn’t see anything.”

“Oh!” said Mark. “I meant that I couldn’t see anything except the corn.”

“That sounds better,” Tania said. “Maybe you could describe what that looked like—really put us there.”

Mark thanked Tania and went back to his desk. What do you think he did when he sat down?

1. Stared out the window and chewed on his pencil
2. Looked for misspelled words in his piece of writing
3. Added more details to the beginning of his piece, as Tania had suggested

That’s right—writers like feedback, and then they act on the feedback. Once someone gives you specific questions or suggestions, it’s important to do what you need to do to make the piece of writing better.

Now, do some thinking of your own. How will Praise-Question-Polish help you to improve your writing?

(Emily Kissner 2008)