



# Center for Writing-based Learning

## Responding to Student Writing

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# Writing as a Mode of Learning

- Writing is a mode of learning; *writing is thinking*
  - “We write to . . . objectify our perceptions of reality”—to discover, to shape meaning, to *know*. (Fulwiler and Young)
- Research on “writing to learn”
  - ✓ Note-taking more effective than reading or listening alone!
  - ✓ Writing increases content-area time-on-task
  - ✓ Synthesis: content-area knowledge & process of expression
- “Deliberate semantics” and revision
  - ✓ The systematic structuring of conceptual relationships
  - ✓ Goal-oriented “retrospective restructuring”—resolving disjunctions among content-area concepts and between concepts and manner of expression

# Designing Effective Response

- Relationship to the aims of the course
  - ✓ What do I want students to know?
  - ✓ What do I want students to be able to do?
- Relationship to the aims of the assignment
  - ✓ What part/s of those larger aims does this assignment pursue?
  - ✓ What must *these* comments accomplish?
- Relationship to function/purpose of student's text
  - ✓ Writing to learn
  - ✓ Writing to advance learning / evaluative progress

# Priorities / Efficiency / “Triage”

- How much time do I have to spend?
- Higher Order Concerns (HOCs)
  - ✓ Responsiveness to assignment/content-area knowledge
  - ✓ Genre, “audience,” *approximation of appropriate discourse conventions*
  - ✓ Organization/arrangement: “thesis,” introduction/conclusion, coherence (connections—sentence to sentence, paragraph to paragraph)
  - ✓ Critical thinking (analysis, synthesis, reasoned argument)
  - ✓ Development: specific detail, examples, definition, comparison/contrast, cause & effect, analogy
  - ✓ Grammar/syntax that obscures reasonable interpretation (“unpleasant ambiguity”)
- Lower Order Concerns (LOCs)
  - ✓ Grammar/syntax problems that do not obscure meaning

# The Mechanics of Response

- When

- ✓ “In process”: revision; strategic intervention—key to writing as a mode of learning
- ✓ Comments on “finished writing” are not internalized

- How

- ✓ With concision and reasonable limitations
- ✓ Flexibly

# The Mechanics of Response

- Where

- ✓ Margin comments

- allow for immediacy and specificity

- replicate reader's experience

- ✓ End comments

- offer encouragement

- act as stimulus for next step, whatever that is

- provide a global view—connections to course aims

- put margin comments in perspective (HOCs/LOCs)

# The Mechanics of Response

## Four Categories of Response

### Facilitative

Heuristic  
questions

Prasie

Development

Responsibility  
for learning

### Directive

“Telling”

Content-area  
knowledge

When

suggestion will  
not work (ESL)

### Corrective

Rule-based  
conventions

Editing

### Evaluative

Justification of  
the grade

Competency  
assessment

Predictive  
judgments

# Evaluation Rubrics

Rubrics—especially when developed concurrently with assignments—can be effective tools for responding to student writing.

Rubrics can serve as a

- Filter for assessing/interpreting student writing
- Check to assure that one's assignment aims are clarified
- Aid to efficiency (really!)

# Model for Addressing Grammar and Syntax

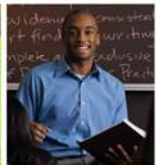
Marking with a comment key can reduce time responding to grammar and syntax.

## Model Key:

- [Items in brackets]: What is within the brackets is presented as a sentence, but some significant grammatical problem is present. *Reread what you have written, and see if you can correct the problem by editing the sentence.*
- Underlined phrases or sections: While not necessarily grammatically incorrect, these constructions are “wordy,” garbled, or otherwise confusing. Often, what is underlined seems to me something other than what you actually mean. *How would you revise these sentences for clarity?*
- Circled items: Circled words or punctuation represent a localized error. If a word is circled, you might have a missing or unnecessary apostrophe, or the word might be misspelled. A circled comma might mean that it is unnecessary. A circled instance of punctuation within a bracketed construction usually means that circled item is “the problem” in the sentence.



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