WIPP Orientation Materials
Franklin College of Arts and Sciences
Faculty Orientation/ Writing Intensive Program

Designing a "writing intensive" course
does not mean assigning an overwhelming amount of writing
but providing students with a more intense engagement with the writing process
and the kinds of writing (and, hence, thinking) that a discipline requires.

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Franklin College  •  Writing Intensive Program  •  www.wip.uga.edu
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Making the Case for the Writing Intensive Program

Faculty Benefits: Enhanced Teaching

1. Ninety-nine percent of faculty surveyed in a 1993 study (In the Long Run 137) reported that they changed their teaching in some way as a result of participating in a similar program. The most important things they learned were not strategies in particular, but attitudes about how to approach student writing in ways so it is not such a chore. Faculty reported a renewed sense of commitment and enthusiasm. Additionally, teaching a writing-intensive course tends to make faculty more explicit about goals and criteria in syllabus, assignments, and other communication to students.

2. Specifically, attention to student writing shifts the focus away from "teaching" to "learning": writing is learning made visible (Caldwell, "Role of Faculty Development Programs"). Once faculty begin to think about students as learners, the road to good teaching is smoother. As a result, you will be rewarded with more engaged and satisfied students. Indeed, as many as 93% of students in writing-intensive courses have argued that the writing assignments stimulated their critical thinking, self-reflection, and learning.

3. Participation in the program provides opportunities for faculty to improve their own writing processes.

4. Participation in the program provides faculty with resources:
   - Trained writing support assistants to help you address writing in the disciplines.
   - A community of peers interested in writing, a forum for sharing the talent, perspectives, and expertise of instructors from all quarters of the campus.
   (WIP-L@listserv.uga.edu)
   - A web site: http://www.wip.uga.edu

Student Benefits: Enhanced, Engaged Learning

1. Writing promotes and deepens learning. The process of writing entails high-order thinking processes that are integral to learning, among them the metacognitive processes required by critical thinking and problem solving. As we know, one way to learn something is to teach it to someone else. Another way is to write about it.

2. Writing increases involvement in intellectual tasks and promotes "active learning." Interesting writing activities and assignments engage students actively and meaningfully in their courses, increasing a sense of commitment and participation. Furthermore, while engagement via writing is positively linked to satisfying learning experiences (R. J. Light, Harvard Assessment, 1992), social psychologists suggest that a positive relationship exists between the quality of involvement or engagement in an heuristic task such as writing or learning and the quality of one's ultimate performance on that task.

3. Writing is an essential part of much testing pedagogy designed to "measure" learning. Many disciplines evaluate student performance in terms of writing ability. An assumption that grounds the use of writing as a way of measuring learning in many academic contexts is this: "If you can't write it, you don't know it" (Arthur Adams, qtd. in St. Martin's Handbook, 3rd ed. 740). While there are other modes of learning, and while students admittedly learn differently, academic culture asks students to demonstrate learning in writing in their courses and at gateway points in their academic careers. More often than not, the students who can write effectively—that is, those who have adopted and practiced a process of
developing and presenting information in context—have an advantage. Writing-intensive courses give students more practice with the skills on which their performance in many academic situations will be assessed.

4. The process of writing uniquely develops thinking and writing. Unfortunately, an over-emphasis on writing as "correctness" and exclusively as a way to formally demonstrate learning has meant that attention to writing as a generative process of acquiring and developing learning has been neglected. Writing is a generative behavior. From email and lab notes to formal papers and essay exams, writing allows us not only to see what we think, but also to create and elaborate on our thought. Scholars and all kinds of professionals use the process of writing to develop their thinking and their writing: the sociologist uses field notes and the biologist a lab notebook, for instance. Learning theorists agree that "writing can be a powerful prod to the expansion, modification, and creation of mental structures" (Chet Meyers and Thomas Jones, "Promoting Active Learning" 24).

5. Students perceive that writing assignments featured by writing in the disciplines courses offer educational and career advantages. Such writing assignments introduce students to ways of researching, developing, and communicating knowledge that are specific to disciplines and professions. For example, students learn that what it means to think like a scientist is inseparable from what it means to write with credibility to a scientific audience. In writing-intensive courses, students learn the processes and forms of writing that are important in a discipline and which they will need in post-university careers.

6. Effective writing is vital not only in academic disciplines but also in the non-academic work place. Many students believe that they will not need to write after they turn in their last college paper. They are surprised to find that, according to one study, 98% of professionals surveyed in chemistry, psychology, engineering, and business report that writing is important to doing their jobs well" (St. Martin's Handbook, 3rd ed, 698).

7. Writing, receiving meaningful feedback, and revising, improves writing quality and fosters student confidence in the writing process. As writing-in-the-disciplines advocates have come to see, if students cannot think or write effectively, it may be because they have been given "too little opportunity to think or write at all." Writing-in-the-disciplines pedagogy affirms that writing is a learnable skill, or better yet, a set of learnable processes that do not depend upon magic, nor visits from the Muse. Giving students more opportunities to write, a more thoughtful engagement with the writing process, and more opportunities for guidance, feedback and revision markedly improves writing skills and makes improved writing quality more likely.
Understanding the Development of Student Writers

Every time a student sits down to write for us, he has to invent the university for the occasion—invent the university, that is, or a branch of it, like history or anthropology or economics or English. The student has to learn to speak our language, to speak as we do, to try on the peculiar ways of knowing, selecting, evaluating, reporting, concluding, and arguing that define the discourse of our community. [. . .] The student has to appropriate (or be appropriated by) a specialized discourse, and he has to do this as though he were easily and comfortably one with his audience, as though he were a member of the academy or an historian or an anthropologist or an economist; he has to invent the university by assembling and mimicking its language while finding some compromise between idiosyncrasy, a personal history, on the one hand, and the requirements of convention, the history of a discipline, on the other hand. Or he must dare to speak it or to carry off the bluff, since speaking and writing will most certainly be required long before the skill is “learned.” And this, understandably, causes problems.

—David Bartholomae, “Inventing the University” 589

Faculty across campus frequent lament: why can’t our students write? Although an understandable question, born out of frustration, it is—nevertheless—a question that reveals a fundamental misunderstanding about student writers. I will—and do—argue that our students do know how to write; however—and this is the point I want to stress—they most likely do not yet know “how to write” as a member of an academic community, a skill that requires multiple and new cognitive and practical demands. Specifically, I will argue that unsuccessful student writing is most likely a function of:

• an unsophisticated writing process, one that does not manage well the complexity of college-level writing tasks;

• an undeveloped cognitive awareness of the academic dialogue and writing’s role in it;

• a lack of understanding or struggle with the “content,” with which the writing deals;

• and, fundamentally, an unfamiliarity with the “ways of knowing” that are discipline-specific and that govern what constitutes “good writing” in any field.

In what follows, I will explain the rationale for these claims about student writing and the peculiarities of the development of student writing. But first, let’s review what students DO know how to write; Jasper Neel calls it “antiwriting,” and he provides this example:

X is one of the most important problems in today’s modern society. There are three main reasons why X should be stopped. This essay will explain those reasons.
First, a lot of people X because it is the popular thing to do. They do not realize how harmful it can be in their later lives. All young people should realize that the best thing to do is have fun later when it will last. Doing the popular thing now because it is fun is a big mistake, because this sort of fun doesn’t last.
Second, a lot of people don’t realize that taking the easy way now is a bad idea. The way to have a bright future that will last is to work hard now and wait until later to X. For example, Horatio Alger did not X a lot when he was young. Instead, he worked hard for a bright future, and he ended up with a wonderful family, a good job, a lot of money, and a beautiful home.
Third, the Bible says that young people should not X. The Bible has been around a lot longer than those who X. If young people will be patient like Job was and if they work hard like he did, they will end up with children and all the good things life has to offer.

In conclusion, I feel that people should not X. We should elect leaders and hire teachers who do not X. Because X is popular, and the easy way, and against the Bible, you can see X should be stopped. (84)
Unsophisticated Writing Processes—Revision Strategies of Student Writers

Nancy Sommers argues in "Revision Strategies of Student Writers and Experienced Adult Writers" that inexperienced writers have an underdeveloped notion of the processes of revising prose, as you will see. Indeed, she writes, "Most of the students I studied did not use the terms revision or rewriting. In fact, they did not seem comfortable using the word revision and explained that revision was not a word they used, but the word their teachers used. Instead, most of the students had developed various functional terms to describe the type of changes they made. The following are samples of these definitions" (excerpted from the article):

Scratch Out and Do Over Again: "I say scratch out and do over, and that means what it says. Scratching out and cutting out. I read what I have written and I cross out a word and put another word in; a more decent word or a better word. Then if there is somewhere to use a sentence that I have crossed out, I will put it there."

Reviewing: "Reviewing means just using better words and eliminating words that are not needed. I go over and change words around."

Reviewing: "I just review every word and make sure that everything is worded right. I see if I am rambling; I see if I can put a better word in or leave one out. Usually when I read what I have written, I say to myself, 'that word is so bland or so trite,' and then I go and get my thesaurus."

Redoing: "Redoing means cleaning up the paper and crossing out. It is looking at something and saying, no that has to go, or no, that is not right."

Marking Out: "I don't use that word rewriting because I only write one draft and the changes that I make are made on top of the draft. The changes that I make are usually just marking out words and putting different ones in."

Slash and Throwing Out: "I throw things out and say they are not good. I like to write like Fitzgerald did by inspiration, and if I feel inspired then I don't need to slash and throw much out."

In comparison, the experienced writers she studied had more sophisticated notions of revision. Here is a sampling of their definitions (again, excerpted from her article):

Rewriting: "It is a matter of looking at the kernel of what I have written, the content, and then thinking about it, responding to it, making decisions, and actually restructuring it."

Rewriting: "Rewriting means on one level, finding the argument, and on another level, language changes to make the argument more effective."

Rewriting: "My first draft is usually very scattered. In rewriting, I find the line of argument. After the argument is resolved, I am much more interested in word choice and phrasing."

Rewriting: "My cardinal rule in revising is never to fall in love with what I have written in a first or second draft. An idea, sentence, or even a phrase that looks catchy, I don't trust. Part of this idea is to wait a while. I am much more in love with something after I have written it than I am a day or two later. It is much easier to change anything with time."

Rewriting: "It means taking apart what I have written and putting it back together again. I ask major theoretical questions of my ideas, respond to those questions, and think of proportion and structure, and try to find a controlling metaphor. I find out which ideas can be developed and which should be dropped. I am constantly chiseling and changing as I revise."
The results of Sommers' study demonstrated that:

Inexperienced Writers (a) had no concept of "revising" as "re-seeing"; (b) thought revision was an act of editing, specifically words; (c) had no concept of nor concern for an audience—for making meaning for a reader ("I thought it/l meant it/l wrote it.").

Experienced Writers (a) saw revision as the process of "re-seeing" the piece as a whole: its overarching argument and structure; (b) saw revision as the process “of more than communication,” as the process “discovering meaning”; (c) saw the process of revision as integrally related to their reader's expectations/needs.

The Writing Process:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1) Planning or Prewriting</th>
<th>2) Drafting</th>
<th>3) Revising</th>
<th>4) Editing/Proofing</th>
<th>5) Publishing</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The stage in which the student talks to peers and the TA about ideas; roughs out notes and brainstorms; creates an outline or a point list.</td>
<td>The stage in which the student attempts to realize plans, by drafting ideas into a paper.</td>
<td>The stage in which the student reviews the draft (perhaps with peer readers)—looking for &quot;big,&quot; global issues, asking questions such as: Do I have an argument? Do I have enough evidence? In later revisions, the student will focus on more local issues, such as clarity and style.</td>
<td>The stage in which the student will &quot;clean up&quot; the writing, looking for errors such as those with grammar and punctuation.</td>
<td>The stage in which students share a finished product: with the professor, the TA, with their peers, world.</td>
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An Undeveloped Cognitive Awareness of
The Writing Process & The Academic Dialogue

The following is from John Bean’s Engaging Ideas
(source cited below).

"As William Perry (1970) has shown in his influential study of students’ cognitive growth through college, most [students] . . . view education dualistically, imagining knowledge as the acquisition of correct information and right answers. They see themselves as empty buckets being filled with data by their professors. To dualists, the only academic use of writing is to demonstrate one’s knowledge of the correct facts—a concept of writing as information rather than as argument or analysis. Students in Perry’s middle stages of multiplicity are beginning to accept the notion of opposing views, but they see these simply as ‘opinions’; since ‘everyone has a right to his or her own opinion,’ they see little purpose in defending any particular view and thus are not compelled through the process of rigorous thinking that intellectually mature writing demands. It is not until they reach Perry’s highest stages of development that a real reasoned argument begins to emerge. What our beginning college writers do not understand, therefore, is the view of academic life implied by writing [in the disciplines], where writing means joining a conversation of persons who are, in important ways, fundamentally disagreeing" (Bean 18).

The Composing Process of the Inexperienced Writer
(a.k.a. the “think, then write” model [Elbow, qtd. in Bean 30]

1. Choose a topic.
2. Narrow it.
3. Write a thesis.
4. Make an outline.
5. Write a draft.
[6. Revise.]
7. Edit. (Bean 29-30)

The Composing Processes of Expert Academic Writers

1. Starting point: perception of a problem. Expert writers feel an uncertainty, doubt a theory, note of piece of unexplained data, puzzle over an observation, confront a view that seems mistaken, or otherwise articulate a question or problem.

2. Exploration. The expert writer gathers data through library or laboratory and field research and through probing of memory; explores ideas in a journal or research log, in the margins of texts, or on note cards or the backs of envelopes; analyzes, compares, puzzles, talks with others, writes to self, focuses intensely on problem. The expert writer often explores ideas by rapid drafting of potential pieces of the essay or by making notes, doodles, or tentative outlines.

3. Incubation. The writer takes time off from the problem, does other things, and lets ideas cook in the subconscious. These first three stages are all recursive—as writers alternate between exploration and incubation, their perception of the problem may change.

4. Writing the first draft. Expert writers try to get ideas down on paper in preliminary form. Some writers make an informal outline prior to writing; others discover direction as they write, often pursuing different branches of ideas without worrying about coherence. To avoid writer’s block, expert writers lower expectations. They do not try to make first drafts perfect as they go. [Literature Review]
5. Reformulation or revision. Having gone once through the territory, expert writers take another look at the problem and think it through again. Many writers report dismantling their first drafts and starting afresh, often discovering their true thesis at the conclusion of their first draft. At this point, writers often make new outlines; they begin considering audience; they clarify their rhetorical purpose; they try to make the essay work for readers. Several drafts are often necessary as writer-based prose is gradually converted to reader-based prose.

[Peer-review/feedback. Expert writers now share their work with their colleagues for feedback and suggestions for further revisions.]

6. Editing. At this point, craftsmanship takes over from initial creativity. Writers worry about unity, coherence, paragraphing, sentence structure. Finally, writers begin to polish by correcting spelling and punctuation. Often, the recursive nature of the process is again felt as a writer, working on sentence structure, discovers new meanings or new intentions that require the rethinking of minor or even major parts of the essay. (Bean 30-31)

[Peer-review. Expert writers now submit their work for publication and undergo the formal peer-review process, which typically involves further revisions. If and when successful, the work is published, and the academic dialogue continues.]

**An Unfamiliarity with the “Ways of Knowing”**
The Complexity of Literacy Tasks

According to Lee Ann Carroll, as a result of her longitudinal study of college writers, “[when professors assign 'writing,' and students are unsuccessful, professors may assume that students don't know 'how to write’” (Rehearsing New Roles 129). Carroll responds to this assumption by noting that faculty reports of “poor” or “fair” student writing skills obscures the reality that college students must developmentally mature as writers—not as necessarily “better” writers, but as writers who must write “differently,” as they are required from year to year, and from discipline to discipline, “to produce new, more complicated forms addressing challenging topics with greater depth, complexity, and rhetorical sophistication. What are often called 'writing assignments' in college are, in fact, complex 'literacy tasks' calling for high-level reading, research, and critical analysis” (xlv), which “require much more than the ability to construct correct sentences or compose neatly organized paragraphs with topic sentences” (3). It is simply a “fantasy,” Carroll argues, to presume that students should learn “how to write” by the time they graduate from high school or by the time they pass First-year Composition. Such a fantasy amounts to believing that “students should already know how to write for situations they have not yet encountered” (xvi).

Here are a number of Carroll’s substantiated claims:

- “Writing assignments in college generally call for high levels of critical literacy, typically requiring skills in researching, reading complex texts, understanding of key disciplinary concepts, and strategies for synthesizing, analyzing, and responding critically to new information, usually within a limited time frame” (9).

- “Faculty are likely to underestimate how much writing tasks differ from course to course, from discipline to discipline, and from professor to professor” (9).
• "Lessons learned in first-year writing courses do not directly transfer to students’ work in their major areas of study" (9).

• "Students who begin as fluent, effective writers generally continue to be successful, though their writing sometimes appears to be weaker when they encounter new and unfamiliar expectations" (9).

• "Students who demonstrate difficulty both in writing and learning content material, nonetheless, do come to better understand the genres and demands of their disciplines and show increasing (but not perfect) ability to write in these genres. Professors reading individual papers in upper-division courses are unlikely to observe this growth over time, and their comments reveal both their patient efforts to help students improve and their frustration that some of their junior and senior students ‘still can’t write’" (9).

• "Students’ literacy develops because students must take on new and difficult roles that challenge their abilities as writers. In fact, student writing may sometimes need to get ‘worse’ before it can get ‘better.’ Because many college writing tasks are essentially new to students, they will need repeated practice to become proficient" (9).

In short, "[t]o think developmentally means taking a broader view of student ‘writing.’" The "kind of critical literacy required in college needs to be more broadly defined to include the ability to understand and use different methods of inquiry, sources of information . . . , ways of working, . . . forms of technology, and genres or types of reading and writing" (129-30).

An Unfamiliarity with the "Ways of Knowing"
Writing (in the Disciplines) = Thinking (in the Disciplines)

The Writing Intensive Program presumes that writing is inseparable from what Judith Langer terms the "ways of knowing" of a particular discipline, and therefore, "[w]riting (and the thinking that accompanies it) [is] a primary and necessary vehicle for practicing the ways of organizing and presenting ideas that are most appropriate to a particular subject area" (71). Further (and Langer would concur), writing (and the thinking that accompanies it) is the process by which disciplinary knowledge is constituted, the process by which one "comes to know" knowledge, and the process by which that knowledge is vetted. In short, writing is the academic dialogue that we, as educators, aim to introduce to our students. Hence, to teach writing is to teach the "ways of knowing" unique to any discipline: the methodology of inquiry, the conventions of evidence, the mode of presentation. Such a pedagogical goal, then, assumes that the most effective way to improve student writing is to do so within the context of disciplinary demands under the tutelage of committed faculty across the campus, who are willing and able to "articulate" those conventions.

According to Judith Langer:

• "If teachers are to help students develop higher order reading, thinking, and writing skills, they must be able to articulate the ways of knowing that are central to particular domains" (70).

• "Unfortunately, the earlier studies of effective teachers of English, science, and history have shown that these higher level intellectual skills are not the focus of instruction. Instead, it is the content that drives curriculum and is reflected in the courses and examinations that students take" (71).

• "What does all this mean for college teachers? It suggests the need to look beyond generic terminology about thinking and reasoning in discipline-based writing, to move beyond general recipes for more
thoughtful work, toward finding more specific vocabulary to use in discussion with students about how to create a comparison of historical eras, or to prepare a feminist critique in literature, or to write a summary of the critical features of Mendel's experiments" (85).

Teaching Students to Understand Disciplinary Discourse

Judith Langer's study revealed that educators failed to articulate the "rules of argument and evidence" unique to their discipline (83). The remedy is to help students understand the conventions of disciplinary discourse. These are some strategies for doing so:

• Photocopy an exemplary essay published in your field and distribute it to the students, so that they can examine it with the following questions in mind: are there multiple authors or just one (what does this reveal about the value and status of "authorship" in your field)? Is the first person used? Is the passive voice common? How long are the sentences/paragraphs? What form of documentation is used? Discuss with the students what these conventions reveal about the "ways of knowing" in your field. Here are some other questions to consider:

1. What key concepts must the reader understand in order to make sense of this writing? What does the writer assume the reader already knows? In other words, what does the writer take for granted about his or her evidence?

2. What is considered acceptable evidence?
   • Who or what is presented as an authority? How are his or her credentials established by the writer?
   • What kinds of material constitute primary sources in this field? Secondary sources? How is each presented?
   • How are empirical data (what can be observed and measured) used? What kinds are used, and how are they obtained and presented?
   • How are statistics and other numerical information presented and used? How influential is this information? Is it presented in the text itself, or is it set off in graphs and charts?
   • How are interviews, ethnographies, field research, and other kinds of firsthand experience presented, used, and valued?
   • How is the argument presented in logical terms? Does it rely on a particular strategy or organization (analogy, cause and effect, narrative, definition, etc.)?

3. To whom is the writer writing? What do these readers want or need? What distinctive beliefs, prejudices, assumptions, and other attitudes do they hold? What is the relationship between the writer and the readers? What does the writer assume they will do with the information in writing?

4. To what extent is the writer's voice present? Are the writer's own opinions prominent? Are they considered valuable? Or does the writer seem to leave his or her own opinions unstated?

5. What specialized vocabulary are readers expected to know? What sorts of words are explicitly defined in the text?

6. More generally, what formats are commonly used for writing in your field (laboratory report, literature review, technical report, analytical essay, formal argument, etc.)? What is each format used for? How is each organized, and why? For example, literature reviews, which are common in many fields, may
establish the writer’s credentials as a person familiar with the field and, at the same time, provide a rationale for the discussion by pointing out gaps in the literature” (Bullock 10-12).

Teaching the Writing Process

1. Writing in the disciplines scholars redefine what it means to “teach” writing: it means teaching the main process(es) of writing in disciplinary contexts. This is good news. For many, writing is a mysterious, largely unteachable “event.”

2. The "writing process" may be mapped visually, as done so above.

3. These "phases" or steps (also seen as "processes" themselves) break writing tasks into manageable parts done over time. Loosely sequential (and "recursive"), they allow for guidance, feedback, incubation, learning, and revising.

4. Simply articulating the phases amounts to a revelation for many students: the phases provide "flexible direction" about where to go or what to do next. According to the Bedford Guide to Teaching Writing in the Disciplines and our own student surveys, "simply going through the process ... helps students become more effective writers" (5). To enrich the quality of the writing, enrich the quality of a student's writing process.

5. The "process" concept for writing is fairly new in the history of ideas, although every discipline has a kind of productive schema (the scientific method, for example). Writing, itself, however, has been over-identified with a magical moment (“the fantasy of instant text production” [Patricia Bizzell]). This view has kept the process and its principles hidden.

6. This is particularly true regarding "revising": As Nancy Sommers argues in "Revision Strategies of Student Writers and Experienced Adult Writers," inexperienced writers have an underdeveloped notion of the processes of revising prose: they understand it as a "rewording activity," which explains their (mis)reliance on the thesaurus (48). "What is revealed in the students' use of the thesaurus is a governing attitude toward their writing: that the meaning to be communicated is already there, already finished, already produced, ready to be communicated, and all that is necessary is a better word 'rightly worded'" (47). "Because students do not see revision as an activity in which they modify and develop perspectives and ideas, they feel that if they know what they want to say, then there is little reason for making revisions" (48). Experienced writers, in contrast, understand revision as more than simply a process of communicating ideas; they see revision as "part of the process of discovering meaning altogether" (51).

How you can teach the writing process in your WIP courses:

• Show students the writing process graphically. Tell them about its advantages.

• Break writing assignment into parts. Assign "invention" activities and provide strategies (and the time) for revision.

• Explain/intervene in the process when you can. See student work in progress, whether in preliminary-outline or draft form, as assignment parameters permit.
• Teach writing process management: lead students to the best places to put their efforts.

• Remember that "simply going through the process" (instead of turning in a first draft as a submission one) teaches students to manage complex cognitive tasks and makes them more effective writers and thinkers. The process model makes writing teachable.

Designing Writing Intensive Assignments

Composition scholar Peter Elbow distinguishes between "low-stakes" and "high-stakes" writing assignments. Both are useful for students, and each has its educative aim. "Low-stakes" assignments are, as the term implies, opportunities for students to try out ideas/concepts in writing without regard for being evaluated on the work. In this way, "low-stakes" assignments aim to use writing to foster learning rather than to demonstrate learning, the latter being the aim of "high-stakes" assignments, such as research papers or term papers.

Whatever kind(s) of assignments you use in your courses, be sure to make the assignment relevant to the course goals and aims, integrating it as seamlessly as possible with the course. (Students complain bitterly on our student evaluations if they feel as though the writing was just "added on" or appeared to be "busy work." ) Additionally, be sure to give an assignment in writing, so that students have something to refer to and to clarify their task and purpose.

According to John Bean, author of Engaging Ideas, "although some teachers give their writing assignments orally or place general explanations in their course syllabi, putting assignments on separate handouts has several advantages: (1) it meets the needs of sensing or concrete learners . . . , who comprise . . . perhaps 60 percent of our entering students and who seem paralyzed by vague assignments that do not specify what the teacher wants; (2) it gives all students something to refer to late at night when their class notes no longer seem so clear; (3) if your institution has a writing center, it helps writing consultants understand what the professor is looking for prior to a tutoring session; and (4) most importantly, it helps the professor identify potential problems with the assignment and thus clarify its purpose and focus. Explanations of assignments for formal essays—as worded for students—should usually include the following elements:

Task. Explain what the student is supposed to write about. The instructor often presents the task as a problem or a question for the student to address, a thesis to support, or a rhetorical mode or form to follow. [Be sure to unpack terms such as “analyze” or “review.” Even “compare and contrast” may need explanation. Also, be sure to address the objectives of the assignment in relation to course goals.]

Role and audience. Generally, ask students to write from a position of power to audiences who know less about the topic than the writer or whose views on the topic differ from the writer’s (for example, “Address your paper to students who missed last week’s classes,” or, “In your argument on old-growth forests, address your essay to the group that opposes your position—either the logging industry or Earth First,” or, “Address your essay to peer-scholars in this discipline who are interested in your proposed question and will look forward to reading your finding and analysis”). Asking students to address the teacher, who typically knows more about the topic than the student, places the writer in an unnatural rhetorical position.
Format. Specify expected length, manuscript form, and similar details. Sometimes an assignment also specifies a certain organizational pattern.

Expectations about the process to be followed. Specify a time schedule for completion of first drafts, peer review workshops, revisions, and so forth. If you do not see the work in its various stages, ask students to save all doodles, notes, outlines, and drafts and to submit these along with the final essay. (This requirement encourages students to follow the recommended process and effectively discourages plagiarism.)

Criteria for evaluation. Explain how the final product will be graded. Will you grade essays holistically with a single letter grade? If so, what are the criteria for an A? Or will you grade analytically by weighing different features separately? If so, how much weight will be given to ideas? To organization and development? To sentence style and readability? To mechanics, appearance, and manuscript form?" (83-84).

Attending to the Wording of Assignments

When you compose your assignments, attend to the wording: be sure that your students know what it means to "analyze" or "interpret," and be mindful of the cognitive complexity of the task. Here are some words one might use to require tasks based on Bloom's developmental model:

Knowledge
Count, define, describe, draw, identify, label, list, match, name, outline, point, quote, read, recall, recite, recognize, record, repeat, reproduce, select, state

Comprehension
Associate, compute, convert, defend, discuss, distinguish, estimate, explain, extend, extrapolate, generalize, give examples, infer, paraphrase, rewrite, summarize

Application
Apply, calculate, change, classify, complete, compute, demonstrate, discover, examine, graph, interpolate, interpret, manipulate, modify, operate, prepare, produce, show, solve, translate, use

Analysis
Analyze, arrange, breakdown, combine, design, detect, develop, diagram, differentiate, discriminate, illustrate, infer, outline, point out, relate, select, separate, subdivide, utilize

Synthesis
Combine, compile, compose, create, derive, design, devise, explain, generate, integrate, modify, plan, prescribe, propose, rearrange, reconstruct, relate, reorganize, revise, rewrite, summarize, transform, specify

Evaluation
Appraise, assess, compare, conclude, contrast, criticize, critique, determine, grade, interpret, judge, justify, measure, rank, rate, support, and test


**Designing “Low-stakes” Writing Assignments** (that use writing to engage, explore, discover, learn, reflect)

Because universities present formal knowledge as a product for students to learn, students do not often see that “knowledge” results from a process, or that professionals use preliminary and often informal strategies to explore, elaborate, and test that knowledge in writing before it is communicated to larger audiences. Unless faculty make special efforts, students are unlikely to see that scholars and all kinds of professionals use writing as a way to develop their writing and their thinking. Writing-to-learn activities have this goal at heart.

In fact, “the phrase ‘Writing to Learn’ has replaced ‘Writing Across the Curriculum’ in interpretations of writing in the disciplines “because it suggests the powerful role language plays in the production, as well as the presentation of knowledge”: “Writing to Learn” is less about *formal* uses of writing to display memory and test mastery than it is about *informal* writing, about language that is forming meaning; about writing that is done regularly in and out of class to help students acquire personal ownership of ideas conveyed in lectures and textbooks” (Paul Connolly, “Writing and the Ecology of Learning” 2-3).

Examples: Logs, field notes, brief responses to issues written in class or as responses to readings, “microthemes,” email or web postings, sets of questions, problem-solving plans, work at earlier stages of writing process.

Cues like these may help you to develop an informal writing-to-discover or to-respond activity to use in your course:

- **Writing-to-learn activity/name:**

- **Purpose/goal/benefits to students:**

- **Best way to respond to the activity, it at all:**

- **How might you involve a WIP teaching assistant:**

- **How many activities such as this one would be feasible during a semester:**

  (Source: Parker Middleton)

**Possible “Low-stakes” Assignments**

Considering the kinds of writing most appropriate to your course and discipline—from position papers to lab reports to email responses, be inventive in designing opportunities for your students to write. You’ll help them to participate more fully and meaningfully in your course. You’ll help them contextualize,
activate, and apply what they are learning. You'll help them build and practice the processes that stand to improve writing quality as your discipline defines it. Some ideas for teaching with writing appear below. All invite adaptation—even in large classes—and few of them need to be responded to with written commentary, much less "graded" in a traditional way:

- Ask students to respond in a half page to "the most important idea" from a class session (Meyers and Jones 24).

- Assign an insight log in which students track memorable, problematic, or thematic statements from course readings.

- Ask students to choose two ideas from a day's lecture and to explain how they relate to each other in less than one page. This activity can be especially useful in developing invention/problem-solving skills if you specify that the ideas that students link must be incongruous in some way.

- Near the end of a class meeting, ask students to recap the day's discussion in four or five points or to propose a topic for a future meeting and to write an four-point agenda for it.

- To teach the critical thinking processes that writing in your course requires, ask students to a) define the main direction term relevant to doing a particular written assignment (analyze, define, compare and contrast, synthesize), b) to note what simple organizing plan it suggests, and/or c) to list the main components of a particular assignment (lab report, critical analysis, reaction paper, case study, etc.).

- Give students a set of questions or problems from which to choose, and, rather than asking them to detail an answer to a particular item, ask them to write a brief strategy for going about responding to it.

- Ask students to write a list of questions on a topic by brainstorming in writing.

- After you have explained the writing process and the staging of assignments, ask students to write the steps they envision taking in order to do a task on your syllabus. They might also file a writing plan or timeline for completing course projects in stages.

- Ask students to respond informally to open-ended questions. In such activities, they cannot fail if they participate, nor be penalized for making errors or getting "the wrong answer," since the goal is to speculate in writing.

- Give students opportunities to do pro and con reasoning in writing: give them an issue from a discussion or a point of theory, and ask for a list of advantages and disadvantages, strengths and limitations, or reasons for or against.

- Ask students to write a brief practice exam and to state its goals.

- When using multiple-choice or short-answer test formats, ask students to explain briefly in writing why they chose a particular answer. This requirement can re-focus their exam preparation and eliminate guessing strategies, since it asks students to articulate reasons for their choices. Asking for a brief (1-2 sentence) rationale in writing may be feasible for entire exams or a few
questions only. As Meyers and Jones report in their arguments for teaching with writing, a chemistry professor requires students to explain why a choice is right in order to get credit for their correct answer ("Promoting Active Learning" 24).

- Management consultant Tom Peters, whose ideas apply to educational leadership as well as to leadership of Fortune 500 companies, suggests that unless a new concept or strategy is applied in context soon after it is introduced, the chances of the learner ever applying it diminish considerably. To teach with writing, remember that brief writing activities in class or outside it, as well as more formal writing assignments, give students chances to immediately apply and practice new concepts without waiting for the exam, or until they have to write a paper, or still worse for their learning, until they graduate and need to apply their knowledge on the job.

(Source: Parker Middleton)

Designing “High-stakes” Writing Assignments

A design criterion of WIP courses, staged assignments make students engage in the writing process. Both staging (breaking into manageable parts over time) and sequencing (breaking into parts that build on one another) writing assignments help students to use a process approach to their work. Though "writing to learn" is part of the process of communicating learning, "writing to present learning" has been more common in the academy. What is uncommon about the writing-intensive approach is that it involves staging these more formal writing assignments to engage and to guide the writing process, as well as using writing-to-discover activities to enhance it. Staged assignments with opportunities for guidance, feedback, and revision teach the process involved in developing as well as presenting knowledge. This process philosophy that unites writing-intensive programs holds that "Both scientific papers and papers in the humanities can be taught through assignments that allow students to compose one stage at a time and eventually combine the stages into a full scale report or paper" (Chronicle of Higher Education 6.16.93).

Examples: A report that is divided into, taught, and written by sections; a paper in which students first submit a working thesis or hypothesis, then a planning outline, then a first draft, then a revision; "double submission" whereby students revise a lab report or paper after getting feedback (only the revision is graded).

Whether writing to learn activities or more formal papers, "writing assignments are no more valuable than any other form of teaching unless they allow the students to explore, think, take risks, and learn through the process" (Marcia Birken, "Using Writing to Assist Learning in College Mathematics Classes" 34). The prompts below may help you to stage a writing assignment you have used, or to create a staged writing assignment with opportunities for guidance, feedback, and revision.

- Assignment/Name:

- Goals/benefits to students:

- What parts might you break the assignment into:

- What do students need to know before doing the assignment:
• What models or preparatory work would be useful in the preliminary stages of the assignment:

• What opportunities/limitations will there be for feedback and revision: (time, number)

• How might you involve a WIP teaching assistant:

• Will conferences be required:

• Will points be given for work in progress, for example for drafts:

• How many staged assignments are feasible in the course:

Since "staging" breaks larger assignments into more, smaller tasks scheduled over time and allowing for incubation, feedback, and revision, as few as two (2) staged assignments in a semester will offer writing-intensive benefits to students and still be manageable.

(Source: Parker Middleton)

Responding to Student Writing

"We [should] comment on student writing because we believe that it is necessary for us to offer assistance to student writers when they are in the process of composing a text, rather than after the text has been completed. Comments create the motive for doing something different in the next draft; thoughtful comments create the motive for revising. Without comments from their teachers or from their peers, student writers will revise in a consistently narrow and predictable ways. Without comments from readers, students assume that their writing has communicated their meaning and perceive no need for revising the substance of their text" (Sommers 108).

Composition theorist Nancy Sommers’ landmark study, which analyzed the written commentary and marginalia of teacher responses to student writing, published as “Responding to Student Writing,” established the following:

• Most comments to student work are “hostile” and “mean-spirited” (108).

• “[T]eachers’ comments can take students’ attention away from their own purposes in writing a particular text and focus that attention on the teachers’ purpose in commenting” (108). “In the beginning of the process there was the writer, her words, and her desire to communicate her ideas. But after the comments of the teacher are imposed on the first or second draft, the student’s attention dramatically shifts from ‘This is what I want to say,’ to ‘This is what you the teacher are asking me to do’” (109).

“This appropriation of the text by the teacher happens particularly when teachers identify errors in usage, diction, and style in a first draft and ask students to correct these errors when they revise; such comments give the student an impression of the importance of these errors that is all out of proportion to how they should view these errors at this point in the process. The comments create the concern that these ‘accidents of discourse’ need to be attended to before the meaning of the text is attended to” (109).
• Students are given "contradictory messages" (109). “[T]hey are commanded to edit a sentence to avoid an error or to condense a sentence to achieve greater brevity of style, and then told in the margins that the particular paragraph needs to be more specific or to be developed more” (109).

• "[C]omments are worded in such a way that it is difficult for students to know what is the most important problem in the text and what problems are of lesser importance. **No scale of concerns is offered to a student**, with the result that a comment about spelling or a comment about an awkward sentence is given weight equal to a comment about organization or logic” (110).

• “**Most teachers' comments are not text-specific and could be interchanged, rubber-stamped, from text to text**” (111). “There seems to be among teachers an accepted, albeit unwritten canon for commenting on student texts. This uniform code of commands, requests, and pleadings demonstrates that the teacher holds a license for vagueness while the student is commanded to be specific” (112). "In effect, the teacher is saying to the student, 'Somewhere in this paper is imprecise language or lack of awareness of an audience and you must find it'" (112). "[T]o tell students that they have done something wrong is not to tell them what to do about it. In order to offer a useful revision **strategy** to a student, the teacher must anchor that strategy in the **specifics of the student's text**” (112).

“Written comments need to be viewed not as an end in themselves—a way for teachers to satisfy themselves that they have done their jobs [or to justify the grade given]—but rather as a means for helping students to become more effective writers” (115).

**WIP Principles for Responding**

Composition theorist Richard Straub sums up the basic WIP principles for responding to student work:

> The rule of thumb: **if you are going to make a comment, make it well.** Rather than spray the paper with various notes and abbreviations, take your time, select what areas of writing are most important for this student, at this time, and write out more fully each of the comments you do make. Try to cast your comments in ways that will engage and inform students, in terms that will connect your comments to the larger conversation of the class. Try to give them the kind of comments they will be interested in reading and working with. Response to a large extent is nothing more—and nothing less—than interpersonal communication, a matter of talking respectfully with someone else. (*The Practice of Response* 274)

These are the foundational principles: do not overmark papers; indicate for the student a sense of a hierarchical importance of your comments; provide strategies for revision or for composing future writing projects. Remember that you are not an editor but a reader. Hence your responses should address issues in terms of readability (including sentence-level errors or usage problems).

1) The response should be appropriate to the kind of writing assignment (low stakes? high stakes?) and to the stage the writing is in (ideally, you should see the project in its various stages):

In planning/drafting stages or in low stakes writing: focus your response only on global issues such as (a) the student's rhetorical purpose and the text's idea/argument/thesis/focus (is there a focus? is the argument logically sound? is the content accurate?); (b) the organizational strategy (are the subpoints...
arranged logically and effectively and/or appropriately?); (c) the text’s development (does it have sufficient evidence to demonstrate its point(s)?).

In revision stages: focus on issues such as introductory/concluding strategies, (b) general paragraph development (coherence, completeness, and unity), and then (c) sentence-level clarity and grace.

In editing stages: focus on issues such as (a) grammatical concerns, (b) spelling, (c) typos.

2) Do not overmark student papers—no matter what stage/kind of assignment; keep comments to 3-5 per page. Research demonstrates that traditional "correcting," "grading," or "marking" of student papers does not help students become better writers. Why?
According to composition scholar Maxine Hairston,

- Numerous corrections combined with long marginal and end comments produce cognitive overload . . . Often the student does not understand the teacher’s terminology [or handwriting] or cannot recognize the errors identified.

- When the teacher marks every mistake in a paper—and often, to the student's confusion, teachers cannot agree on what constitute mistakes—he or she presents the students with so many remedial tasks that many students give up because there seems to be no possibility of success . . . Good coaches and counselors set limited objectives for their clients.

- Many students will react to a mass of negative criticism by refusing to read it.

- Most students do not know how to use their teacher’s comments to improve their writing [students do not have a sense of "revising prose"].

- Students may resist reading comments because they get mixed signals from them. Teachers often give contradictory advice in their marginal comments (for example, a teacher may suggest to a student that she eliminate a paragraph but at the same time point out needed corrections in the paragraph).

- Teachers who mark every error give their students two very negative messages: first, that they really do not care what students say; they care only that they say it correctly; and second, that they consider teaching writing a great burden and thankless task ("On Not Being a Composition Slave" 120-21).

3) The response should indicate for the student a sense of the hierarchical importance of your comments. As you read, try to focus on about three issues you intend to comment on. Even if the paper is a miserable failure in every respect, find the three, major issues that the student should focus on when she begins revising.

4) Remind yourself that "because students must think their own thoughts, invent, discover, write, and revise, they must themselves develop some kind of authority;" thus, you must "be willing to share some of the authority that comes inevitably with the instructor’s role" (White 129). This amounts to resisting the urge to frame your responses in terms of what a student should do or should have done. Avoid being directive; avoid taking responsibility for the text (White 130-131). The response should be educative, coaching the student into revising and improving. As such, the response should provide a strategy, too. It is helpful to frame the response in terms of "goals."
5) Sharing authority means demystifying what characterizes effective writing: provide explanations of what grades/scores mean. Provide examples of successful writing.

6) Remind yourself to respond positively; focus on what the student has done well. "The art of the teacher—at its best—is the reinforcement of good things" (Diederich, "Praise" 58). Accordingly, "Noticing and praising whatever a student does well improves writing more than any kind or amount of correction of what he does badly" (Diederich, Measuring Growth in English 20). Donald Daiker writes: "My own method is to allow myself nothing but positive comments during an initial reading of a student paper; I lift my pen to write words of praise only. Another practice is to ask, just before moving to another essay, 'Have I told Melissa two or three things about her paper that I like?'" ("Learning to Praise"157). What will your strategy of positive response be?

Establishing Grading Criteria

As stressed above, to help students perform better at writing tasks, it is important to communicate the criteria for grading and the expectations of the assignment. Grading rubrics are the result of this articulation; they help the students and they help you, as you evaluate student work (and they help you save time!). There are two basic kinds of rubrics—each with their benefits: holistic and analytic rubrics. Holistic rubrics, as the term implies, assigns a grade based on an assessment of the piece as a whole. Analytic rubrics, on the other hand, assign point values to various factors or parts, resulting in an end grade that is calculated from the various points earned. Barbara E. Walvoord and Virginia Johnson Anderson, authors of Effective Grading, provide this strategy for constructing a rubric (specifically an analytic model). They write:

"If possible, work from examples of past student performances, grading check-lists, descriptions of criteria, comments on assignments or tests—anything that has helped you in the past to articulate criteria for students' performances.

1. Choose a test or assignment that tests what you want to evaluate. Make clear your objectives for the assignment.

2. Identify the criteria or "traits" that will count in the evaluation. These are nouns or noun phrases, such as "thesis," "eye contact with client," "use of color," or "control of variables."

3. For each trait construct a two- to five-point scale. These are descriptive statements. For example, "A '5' thesis is limited enough to treat within the scope of the essay and is clear to the reader; it enters the dialogue of the discipline as reflected in the student's sources, and it does so at a level that shows synthesis and original thought; it neither exactly repeats any of the student's sources nor states the obvious."

4. Try out the scale with a sample of student work or review with colleagues and revise" (69).

On the next page is an example of a portion of such a rubric for an assignment that asks students to design and conduct an original scientific experiment and write a report using scientific format. [This is a synopsis of the assignment; the teacher provided a detailed assignment sheet for the students, prepared much as Bean suggested, above. This example comes from Effective Grading.]
Trait: Methods and Materials Section

Level 5  Contains appropriate, quantifiable, concisely organized information that allows the experiment to be replicated. All information in the report can be related back to this section. Identifies sources of data. Sequences information appropriately. No wordiness.

Level 4  As above, but contains unnecessary information or wordiness.

Level 3  Experiment could be replicated from the information given. All information in the report can be related back to this section. However, fails to identify some data sources or has problematic sequencing.

Level 2  Marginally replicable. Parts of basic design must be inferred. Procedures not quantitatively described. Some information in Results or Conclusions sections cannot be anticipated by reading this section.

Level 1  Describes experiment so poorly it cannot be replicated.

On the next page is an example of a holistic rubric, which is used in the First-year Composition classes at UGA.
Competent/Credible/Complete
If you meet these first three standards, you are writing competently and you will earn a grade of "C." (70-79)

1. Unity
   - Contains a center of gravity, a unifying and controlling purpose, a thesis or claim, which is maintained throughout the paper.
   - Organizes writing around a thesis or according to the organizational requirements of the particular assignment (e.g., summary, narrative, argument, analysis, description, etc.)

2. Evidence/Development
   - Develops appropriate, logical, and relevant supporting detail and/or evidence.
   - Includes more specific, concrete evidence (or details) than opinion or abstract, general commentary.

3. Presentation and Design
   - Follows SMH guidelines for standard English grammar, punctuation, usage, and documentation.
   - Meets your teacher's (or the MLA's) and the First-year Composition program's requirements for length and/or format.

Skillful/Persuasive
If you meet all of the competency standards above and, in addition, achieve coherence and exhibit audience awareness, you are writing skillfully and you will earn a grade of "B." (80-89)

4. Coherence
   - Uses words and sentences, rhythm and phrasing, variations and transitions, concreteness and specificity to reveal and emphasize the relationship between evidence and thesis.
   - Explains how, why, or in what way evidence/detail supports point/claim/thesis/topic/ideas.
   - Incorporates evidence from outside sources smoothly, appropriately, and responsibly.

5. Audience Awareness
   - Demonstrates a sense that the writer knows what s/he's doing and is addressing real people.
   - Reflects a respect for values that influence ethos (e.g., common ground, trustworthiness, careful research).

Distinctive
If you meet all of the competency standards, achieve coherence and exhibit audience awareness, and, in addition, demonstrate a mastery of one or more features of superior writing, you are writing distinctively and you will earn a grade of "A." (90-100)

6. Distinction
   - Your writing stands out because of one or more of the following characteristics: complexity, originality, seamless coherence, extraordinary control, sophistication in thought, recognizable voice, compelling purpose, imagination, insight, thoroughness, and/or depth.

Essay Grade _______ +/- Points for special assignment requirements _______ =

Ineffective
If your paper does not meet competency standards, either because you have minor problems in all three competence areas (1-3 above) or major problems in one or two competence areas, you will earn a grade of "D" (60-69) or "F" (<60), and you should schedule a conference with your teacher.
Conferencing with Students: Why? How?

"A great deal can be accomplished in fifteen- or twenty-minute conferences if the instructor... talks as little as possible, and never picks up a pen except to write down what the student has said. Students come to conferences hoping for answers, but they get the most out of conferences if they are the ones who devise those answers."

--Rebecca Howard and Sandra Jamieson, *The Bedford Guide*

Why Conference with Students?

1. *The teacher can reinforce and aid in students' writing processes.* TA can help student with invention during drafting stages, organization during drafting stages, etc. That is, TA can focus his/her comments on the relevant stage of the process as well as help the student retain the appropriate focus. Additionally, the TA can help the student think about his/her writing process by posing questions such as: “how long [do you] spend brainstorming, how long [do you] spend drafting a paper, and what forms [do your] revision and proofreading take. We want to try to show them, of course, the direct correlation between their work habits and their attitudes. In most case, students who are discouraged are not spending enough time or they are badly misusing the time they spend writing” (Julian 78). "A conference after a paper has been graded is an autopsy; it dwells on past failures, not future possibilities, and it provides advice to be used in some nebulous ‘next time’" (Carnicelli 103). Remember our responding principles—these would be the same during conferences: remember what stage the text is in, and respond accordingly.

2. *Individualized instruction in writing is more effective than group instruction* (Carnicelli 106).

3. *The teacher can make a more effective response to the paper in an oral conference than in written comments* (Carnicelli 106). "A teacher reading a paper at home is deprived of two invaluable resources: the student's information and the student's opinions. A conference teacher can use these resources to respond more accurately to the paper. Students come to conference with an enormous amount of information about their papers. They know, more or less, what they were trying to accomplish in the paper. They know the problems they encountered in writing it. They know what they meant in specific words and sentences. They know other ideas and facts about the subject that they couldn't manage to fit it. All of this information can be immensely useful to the teacher in diagnosing the paper and in suggesting new possibilities or entirely new topics. The student's opinions of the paper are equally valuable in shaping the teacher's response to it. The student provides another mind, another perspective on the paper. The very process of discussing the paper with the student can help the teacher understand it better. If the discussion turns up significant disagreements, so much the better. A good argument from the student can help the teacher clarify or modify an inadequate response (Carnicelli 107).

4. *The student can learn more from an oral response than from written comments* (Carnicelli 107). (Remember our discussion of how students typically find written comments confusing, contradictory, and/or how students typically ignore written comments.) Of course, oral responses are also potentially
confusing and/or contradictory: but the two-way street allows for clarification/amplification. However, this is not to say that written comments aren't also an effective part of conferencing: more on this below.

5. "Conferences can promote self-learning" (Carnicelli 109). (See Hilgers et al., "The Case for Prompted Self-Assessment.") "When the teacher's response is given first, whether orally or in writing, the student is put in a reactive position. Even though the student may ask questions and raise objections, the teacher's response usually determines the focus of the conference. This is a useful type of conference, and it may be the most effective in many teaching situations; yet it does not fully exploit the greatest single advantage of the conference method. Conferences are an ideal way to promote self-sufficiency and self-learning in students. To encourage their students to make fully independent judgments, some teachers prefer not to give any response to the paper until after the student has responded first. They try to make the student's response, not their own, the focus of the conference" (Carnicelli 109; emphasis added).

6. "The conference method is the most efficient use of the teacher's time" (Carnicelli 110).

How to Conference with Students?

1. "The teacher should read the paper carefully" (Carnicelli 111), preferably before the conference.

2. "The teacher should offer encouragement" (Carnicelli 113). Remember the daiquiri principle of responding with praise, teaching from the student's strengths rather than her weaknesses. Build student confidence; lessen writing anxiety.

3. "The teacher should ask the right questions" (Carnicelli 114). The Bedford argues that the teacher should "ask the student to describe its main assertion(s), the reasons he or she believes (or doubts) them, and the problems the student encountered in drafting. This frees the student from the written text, prompting him or her to think about the development of ideas rather than about the words already committed to the page" (35) (although in latter stages, of course, you would want the student to focus on the "words committed to the page"--and different, more appropriate questions would be posed.). Such open-ended questions ensure that the student will be the one speaking and that the student be actively engaged in assessing and evaluating his/her own writing. Murray and Carnicelli use questions such as these:
   • What's your purpose in this paper? (Carnicelli calls this "the single, most productive question" he's found [115]).
   • What parts of the paper do you like the most? Why?
   • What parts of the paper did you have trouble with?
   • What do you think of your paper? (helps with evaluation--perhaps more useful in latter part of the semester)
See also "Prompted Self-Assessment" (15) for additional question options.

4. "The teacher should [help the student come up with] specific suggestions for revising the paper" (116). Yet, remember another one of our responding principles: avoid being directive. Guide the student in formulating a set of goals for paper revisions. The Bedford notes: "The instructor can also suggest options: "What would happen if . . . ." And he or she should warn of pitfalls: "I'm concerned that if you say . . . ." (35). "No conference should end . . . . with simple platitudes about spending more time and
proofreading better, though we usually do want to make these points. What we want to do in conferences is get students excited about some piece of writing they are working on" (Julian 78).

5. "A teacher must listen to the student" (Camicelli 117). The Bedford suggests: "the instructor should listen and then repeat or synthesize what the student has said: "It sounds to me as if you're saying that . . . ." (35). "Again, the most successful meetings are usually those in which the student does much more talking than the instructor, whose best role is to help the student articulate goals and explore options" (Bedford 35).

6. "A teacher should avoid writing on the student's paper" (Bedford 35). "[T]he pencil, once in hand, takes on a life of its own. The instructor becomes carried away with the heady success of solving problems in the paper. But in the bargain, the student loses ownership of his or her writing and does not learn about the writing process. Watching the instructor revise does not teach students how to make their own revisions. The instructor should pick up the pencil only to act as scribe, writing down what the students says. By taking notes and giving these to the student at the conclusion of the session the instructor saves the student time and helps him or her remember the insights achieved. The instructor might begin a conference by asking the student about his or her plans for the paper or his or her concerns. The conference proceeds with the instructor eliciting from the student the various options that might be pursued and concludes with the two of them weighing the pros and cons of these options" (36). The "take away" agenda. The "postwrite" assessment.

(Source: Michelle Ballif)

Conferencing Scenarios Identify the problem roots and solutions in these familiar scenarios.

Scenario 1: Though students know your office hours, they don’t come.

Scenario 2: A student comes to your office, hands you a draft, and asks you to tell him or her "what you think"/whether it’s "good" or not. The student may ask what grade the work would get at that point.

Scenario 3: A student comes to your office reluctantly, telling you that he or she is not interested in writing the way that the class requires—and resents the extra step of the conference.

Scenario 4: A student comes to your office without a draft or what you asked him or her to bring. The student may tell you that he or she is stuck.

Scenario 5: You’ve seen a number of students. When a particularly challenging student comes by, you just don’t know what to say to start the conversation. You end up focusing on sentence errors.

Scenario 6: You’ve looked over a draft in an early stage conference, and there’s so much that needs attention. And—with the student sitting there—you don’t know where to start.

Scenario 7: The student nods in agreement while you’re meeting, but when he or she leaves, you’re not sure the student knows what to do or what to focus on next.

(Source: Parker Middleton)
Using Peer Feedback

"Peer response to writing not only produces improved revisions . . . but also produces improved first drafts, for students tend to work harder on writing that they know their classmates will read and analyze."

—Bedford Guide to Teaching Writing in the Disciplines 184

Peer response multiplies opportunities for responding to student work; it gives writers real audiences; it allows readers to participate in the decision-making that is part of the writing process; it leads students to work by analogy from one paper and task to others; and it trains students in the problem-solving skills that communicators need. There is something instructive about seeing how others are working to solve the same problems that you are. For effective peer feedback in writing-intensive courses:

1. Teach students how to do it. (See #4 & #6.) Tell them what the goals are, what to look for, and how to respond fruitfully. Peer response can reinforce your own responding strategies.

2. Model peer response to the class as a whole; model it in the individual feedback you give students.

3. Use it more than once. One authority suggests a minimum of three times.

4. Teach the premises and benefits of peer feedback. Research suggests that students could spot as least 50% of sentence errors if given another pass through a paper. Given some training time, they can also identify argument patterns, areas of promise, and gaps in the work of others. The peer response process makes students better readers of their own work. It also, most importantly, mirrors the process of the academic dialogue.

5. Make peer response into what Peter Elbow calls a "believing game." Some students think peer response is a subjective free-for-all, a holiday for slackers, or more likely, an exercise in expected negative critique. Unless trained otherwise, they're probably going to respond to each other's work in the unproductive ways that their own writing has been responded to. Some may be reluctant to trust the feedback of their peers—unless you teach them what to look for and how to assess it. Build students' confidence to respond generatively to each other's papers (recall Donald Daiker's arguments for "praise"), and you'll increase their ability to see their own revising options.

6. Focus peer feedback on select issues appropriate to the process stage and type of assignment:
   • Limit text tasks for each session.
   • Give concrete focus points, for example, rather than asking students to respond generally.

7. Related to above, design a feedback cue sheet to focus students' attention and to localize the response vocabulary for your course. (You can use peer response in all parts of the writing process. Just fit it to the stage and the assignment type.)

8. Require written feedback from student readers. You'll push their articulation skills, and lead them to frame problems in the written forms that make solving problems easier. Also, students tend to make more thoughtful, responsible suggestions when they have to write them to someone else. (Students may write a two-question note to their readers who can respond in turn in writing.)
9. Consider peer feedback options. Use the best types for the course size and assignments: individual, small group, workshop, in-class, take-home, email. Make peer response participation part of an assignments complete score.

10. Be inventive about incorporating peer response. Some writing-intensive courses ask students to review whole folders of student papers; others ask them to respond to two or three other students' work via take-home drafts, and points are awarded for the quality of the peer response. You may want to adapt a "writing group" approach, asking students to form small teams that help each other through the stages of an assignment. (Source: Parker Middleton)

Peer Feedback Prototypes

1. Peer feedback—planning:
   • Ask students to propose their topics, asking them to tell a reader, for example
     --what the paper will focus on and what sources will be used
     --what questions or concerns they have at this point
   • Ask readers to respond, vetting the proposal in terms of the topic and source criteria you provide and suggesting angles, approaches, and ways to enrich interest/evidence base.
   • Ask students to provide peer response to planning outline, testing preliminary order and weighting of points.

2. Peer feedback—sources:
   • Ask students to bring working bibliographies and to assess each other's sources in terms of criteria you list for print and web sources.

3. Peer feedback—first draft/claim-thesis:
   • Ask peer teams to respond to working thesis or main point only in terms of thesis criteria you provide.
   • Ask peer teams to list terms that need defining and to propose an order of points/expectations for paper's proceeding based on reader's needs and working claim.

4. Peer feedback—topic sentences/points order/format/evidence:
   • Ask peer teams to underline all substantive evidence for claims, noting where evidence is lacking.
   • Ask peer teams to abstract claim and topic sentences from the draft; this provides an outline for writers.
   • Ask peer teams to write subheads for peers' papers.

5. Peer feedback—special paragraphs or sections:
   • Give students criteria for introductions, thesis paragraphs, methods and materials sections, conclusions, etc. Ask peer teams to respond to manageable chunks.

6. Peer feedback—sentence issues:
   • Ask students to look at readability and style issues (wordiness, active/passive voice, how quotes are introduced, how information is documented, etc.).

7. Peer feedback—proofing session:
   • Ask peer teams to help ready a late stage draft for submission.

8. Peer feedback—at any point:
   • Ask students to read 3-5 other student efforts and to tell writers one thing they learned by reading and one thing that would make the work better fit reader interest, the goals of the assignment.
   • Ask students to write a note to their writing group that states one or two dilemmas they're facing; writing groups write back with solutions, next steps. (Source: Parker Middleton)
Writing Intensive Program Course Guidelines

Course Guidelines: Successful WIP courses specifically

- Feature interesting and innovative writing assignments and activities, teach students how to do them competently, and make the rationale for writing tasks and their specific benefits clear to students.

These assignments take different forms: from brief, ungraded responses to research projects designed to be completed in sections. Successful WIP courses design writing tasks that engage students in thinking beyond the expected types of exam or term-paper writing, and they provide instruction along the way. They also explain the goals and benefits of writing tasks that students are asked to do.

- Relate writing assignments clearly to course-learning goals.

Writing activities and assignments should be a discernibly relevant part of the course, integral to course learning and the ways of thinking and writing the discipline values.

- Teach the communication values of a discipline, for example, its rules of argument, evidence, and format (the kinds of writing and ways of thinking that are important in a field).

Successful WIP courses recognize two main things: 1) the most effective learning of communication skills occurs in the context of particular disciplines; and 2) the ways of developing and presenting knowledge in a field are marked by specific and inseparable writing values, which deserve attention throughout a student’s academic career. WIP courses help students to understand how a discipline’s “ways of knowing” are integrally related to its ways of writing. To teach disciplinary writing, then, is to help students to “think” like a sociologist, biologist, or musicologist.

- Teach the kinds of writing tasks students will do in their academic work and beyond—in graduate education and professional life.

Students perceive instruction in the kinds of writing tasks that graduate study and professional work require as an advantage of WIP courses.

- Teach the writing process by breaking assignments into parts and steps and help students understand the value of revision.

Rather than requiring an intensive—and exhaustive—amount of writing, writing-intensive courses give students a more intense engagement with the process of writing. WIP courses stage and sequence assignments, and teach students to break writing tasks into parts, allowing time for reflection, discussion, and learning.

- Get involved with student writing: offer opportunities for guidance, feedback, and revising.

The Writing Intensive Program recognizes that teaching writing in the disciplines means involving faculty in students’ writing processes as guides and coaches rather than only as graders. Students perceive thoughtful, added contact with others about their writing and opportunities to revise as an advantage of writing-intensive courses. Two things that students like most about their WIP courses: 1) the chance to get feedback, to revise drafts, and to improve their grades; and 2) the opportunity to receive multiple feedback perspectives from teaching assistants and other students.
• Make use of WIP teaching assistants and make their roles and resources clear to students.

Along with other instructional resources, WIP teaching assistants help faculty provide more interaction with students about writing. Successful WIP courses make use of the WIP assistant's training, outline her responsibilities, and explain how students can benefit from working with the WIP TA (see the section "Working with WIP TAs," below).

Course Guidelines: Assignments
In addition to the guidelines offered above, here are some additional guidelines that will help WIP faculty and teaching assistants design successful writing assignments.

• The key questions to ask from the start: What are my learning goals in this course? How can I use writing assignments to achieve them? What are the kinds and forms of writing that are essential in my discipline?

• Recognize the different purposes of different kinds of writing tasks—writing to learn and writing to present learning tasks, or in the words of composition scholar Peter Elbow, the difference between “low stakes” and “high stakes” writing. The simple distinction asks instructors to think about “how much a piece of writing matters or counts” in a particular situation and how it contributes to the learning process. Low stakes writing assignments aim “to get students to think, learn, and understand more of the course material” without penalizing them for making errors that would count in high stakes writing situations. Often informal, low stakes assignments are described and judged differently from high stakes writing, which is the end result of the writing process. High stakes writing, which presents learning more formally, is evaluated more formally.

Students benefit from both low stakes and high stakes writing assignments. Writing process pedagogy says that students' high stakes writing will improve 1) if we assign low stakes writing and allow it to be revised before demanding high stakes writing, and 2) if we are involved in the process of helping students produce high stakes writing. Effective WIP assignments provide opportunities for writing to discover, capture, record, or respond informally and opportunities to elaborate, revise, and refine work into a more formal product.

• If the writing assignment is a high stakes one, stage the assignment, building in several opportunities for helpful feedback, conferencing, and revision.

For example, require that the student first submit planning materials—such as a working thesis, a tentative outline of major points, or an annotated bibliography; later, require the student to submit a rough draft to which you and the WIP TA will respond with useful strategies for revision—global, at first; a second—and even third—draft will allow you to respond to more local concerns, such as grammar, punctuation, and usage issues, before the student hands in the final product.

• Teach discipline-specific models, formats, conventions. Along with teaching the writing process, teaching students to write means teaching the writing conventions of a discipline: how to think, how to argue, how to write as scientists, sociologists, or music historians. Judith A. Langer's "Speaking of Knowing" emphasizes that "writing (and the thinking that accompanies it) then becomes a primary and a necessary vehicle for practicing the ways of organizing and presenting ideas that are most appropriate to a particular subject area." (71). This requires faculty to state explicitly the often tacitly held "rules of argument and evidence that represent the ways of thinking unique to each discipline" (83).
• Avoid the tendency to attempt too much. Two sequenced writing assignments with guidance and feedback in planning, drafting, and revising, for example, give students greater learning benefits than turning in a 20-page paper at the end of a course. Teaching with writing requires working smarter, not necessary harder.

**Course Guidelines: Syllabi**

As the case in any course that asks students to write, strong syllabi are especially important in writing-intensive courses because they model effective writing, establish the purpose and role of writing in the course, and give vital information about it. Furthermore, in a WIP course, syllabi teach the writing process by charting writing assignments, their stages, and due dates. Moreover, syllabi, both paper-based and online versions, are perhaps the course document that students are most likely to keep up with and to review most often. This makes the syllabus an important teaching tool—for students as well as for faculty.

Previous WIP faculty have reported that writing-enriched classes lead them to articulate more clearly their goals for a course and to state objectives and criteria for grading more explicitly in their syllabi and materials.

Some features of effective syllabi for Writing Intensive Program courses are listed below.

• Make writing in the disciplines philosophy, as well as the role and benefits of writing in the course, clear. WIP syllabi should integrate writing assignments fully into course learning. In some situations, this may entail more selling than in others: students in lecture-based courses may not expect to have to write and may be resistant because, as they put it, "It isn't an English class." This resistance may be met by emphasizing the benefits of writing to learn the course content, as well as by emphasizing writing as a critical competency in an information culture. It can also be countered with truly innovative writing assignments that students see as clearly relevant to their university and post-university careers and that boost their performance in the course.

• Introduce and articulate the role of your WIP TA.

• Stage assignments, breaking them into manageable parts with opportunities for guidance, feedback, and revision. A course calendar or process timeline can be useful.

• Sequence assignments so that students can build on and elaborate early learning.

• Consider logistics of prompt feedback, conferences, and revision.

• Offer clear guidelines and criteria by which work will be generated and evaluated. Along with articulating the features of effective writing in a course and specifying the most important writing conventions, course materials should let students know what part disciplinary styles and formats such as MLA, APA, or CBE will play, as well as the role that editing errors involving grammar, punctuation, and spelling will play in finished work.

(Source: Parker Middleton and Michelle Ballif)
Working with WIP TAs
Talking Points for WIP Faculty and WIP Teaching Assistants

Prior to the beginning of the semester, the participating faculty member and his/her assigned WIP teaching assistant should address the following in order to be clear on the logistics of the course, the roles and responsibilities of both the faculty member and the WIP TA, and, most especially, to guarantee that the WIP TA will be utilized as the WIP principles and best practices prescribe. Please remember that the TA is not a "grader" but a "writing coach." Hence, the TA should not be used to grade quizzes or such, but rather s/he should be conferencing with students and responding to their written work.

_______ How will the Writing Intensive Program and the Writing Intensive Program TA be introduced to the class? Will there be a statement on the syllabus that explains the program and explains the role and responsibility of the WIP teaching assistant? What will these statements be? Make sure students know the TA's purpose and role, and how they are to work with the TA—for example, whether meeting with the TA is required to get back drafts or papers. The WIP strongly encourages the faculty to allow the TA to introduce himself/herself to encourage students to see the TA in an position of authority.

_______ What kind(s) of writing will be assigned? Low-stakes (informal, writing-to-learn activities, such as journal entries) or high-stakes (formal essays, term papers, etc.)? Who will compose each actual assignment (the document that specifies the writing task, purpose, requirements, and evaluative criteria)? Will the specifics of each assignment be included in the syllabus, or will the assignment document be a separate handout? Will the faculty or the TA compose the assignment?

_______ How will the logistics of the course guarantee that the WIP TA is actively involved in the writing processes of the students and is not being used just as a grader? The WIP prescribes two, key course components: mandatory conferences and opportunities for revision. How will the syllabus provide for at least one required (individual or group) student-TA conference? How will the syllabus (and the writing assignments) provide opportunities for revision? Will the TA have class time to discuss writing assignments or effective writing, in general?

_______ Related to above, if the faculty member will be assigning high-stakes writing assignments, how will the assignment be staged, so that the TA can intervene several times in the students' writing processes? How will the logistics of such be managed on the syllabus (e.g., establishing due dates for drafts)? How will low-stakes writing assignments be configured to allow TA-student interaction?

_______ How will the written assignments be evaluated? The Writing Intensive Program urges faculty to provide for students clear guidelines for effective writing and grading standards in your course. Criteria may be spelled out in a rubric that can be adapted for reviewing drafts and grading final products. Who will create these rubrics—the faculty member or the teaching assistant?

_______ Who will be responsible for an assignment's final grade? Or will both the faculty and the TA weigh in on the grade? However this is decided, make sure the students understand, and make sure that the TA has some authority. A brief, norming session may be helpful between the faculty member and the TA to help ensure that rubrics are used effectively and uniformly (in short: to make sure that a paper that the faculty member considers to be an "A" paper is the same as what the TA considers to be an "A" paper).

_______ Talk about the time and logistics involved in getting work back to students promptly, as well as how feedback strategies will be communicated to students.
Talk about how grade disputes and disgruntled students will be handled.

Talk about how to best communicate with each other (e.g., e-mail, during office hours). Establish whether the TA is expected to attend the class every class period (the WIP strongly encourages that the TA attend the class, so that s/he can have an active presence in the class—and so that s/he can be aware of all that is going on in a class). Discuss any other expectations that you have for the course and each other. The WIP strongly encourages regular discussions between the faculty member and the TA to ensure that expectations are understood.

(Source: Parker Middleton and Michelle Ballif)

Works Cited


Franklin College • Writing Intensive Program • www.wip.uga.edu

Michelle Ballif, Director, mballif@uga.edu
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**Focus of study**
- Humanities: No one right answer
- Social Sciences: Generally, no one right answer (except e.g., to questions of historical fact or human physiology), but some answers, models, and interpretations are better than others, e.g., if they have better explanatory, predictive, or practical value
- Sciences: One right answer, current (tentative) models bring us closer to that answer

**Typical kinds of writing**
- Humanities: Analytical essays about texts, writers, and ideas
- Social Sciences: Analytical essays on events, phenomena, social behaviour, people, practices, etc.
- Sciences: Experimental research papers

**Typical structural features of the writing; typical documentation**
- Humanities: Introductions and conclusions are expected by otherwise structure is highly flexible
- Social Sciences: Depend on the nature of the paper: more like a scientific research paper, more highly prescribed the structure
- Sciences: Structure is highly prescribed (introduction, literature review, sample, method, findings, discussion, etc.)

**Typical focus, tone, evidence, and use of sources**
- Humanities: Strong, argumentative thesis (risk taking is common), supported especially by material quoted from primary sources
- Social Sciences: Depend on the nature of the paper: more like a scientific research paper, more tentatively the tone, the larger the focus on primary research and evidence and the smaller the focus on secondary sources (e.g., brief references within a lit. review)
- Sciences: Focus on conclusions from actual research reported in the paper

*Source: University of Calgary, Effective Writing Programme, 1998*
Rapid Exchange Between Soil Carbon and Atmospheric Carbon Dioxide Driven by Temperature Change

Susan E. Trumbore, Oliver A. Chadwick, Ronald Amundson

Comparison of 14C (carbon-14) in archived (pre-1963) and contemporary soils taken along an elevation gradient in the Sierra Nevada, California, demonstrates rapid (7 to 65 years) turnover for 50 to 90 percent of carbon in the upper 20 centimeters of soil (A horizon soil carbon). Carbon turnover times increased with elevation (decreasing temperature) along the Sierra transect. This trend was consistent with results from other locations, which indicates that temperature is a dominant control of soil carbon dynamics. When extrapolated to large regions, the observed relation between carbon turnover and temperature suggests that soils should act as significant sources or sinks of atmospheric carbon dioxide in response to global temperature changes.

Two critical questions regarding the role of soils in the global carbon cycle are (i) what is the fraction of carbon that soils release carbon from increased decomposition rates in a warmer world and (ii) what is the potential for transient release or sequestration of carbon in soils as a result of interannual climate variability? Soil organic matter (SOM) contains roughly two-thirds of the 15 to 20 cm layer of soils organic carbon and two to three times as much carbon as atmospheric CO2 (1). According to estimates based on ecosystem modeling, changes in soil carbon after disturbances, and carbon isotope, at least half of the organic matter in the 0- to 20-cm layer of soils is in fast-turning carbon pools with turnover times of decades or less (2). Prediction of the short-term effects of climate change on soil carbon storage requires quantification of soil carbon turnover rates and how they vary with factors such as temperature, precipitation, and soil properties.

To determine the influence of temperature on storage and turnover of soil carbon, we sampled C and 14C from a series of soils along an elevation transect of the western slope of the Sierra Nevada range, California, that were previously sampled in the period from 1958 through 1963 (3). All the soils have similar parent material, age, relief, and aspect, but they differ in climate and vegetation. The 14C in atmospheric CO2 was measured by the electron capture method in 1964, using 14C tracer gas (1). The 14C in soils removed from the past 30 years provides a means of determining the site-specific and turnover time of fast-turning soil carbon pools (5, 7, 10, 11). Mean annual temperature decreases with increasing elevation along the Sierra transect according to the atmospheric lapse rate. Precipitation averages between 90 and 120 cm year-1, except at the lowest elevation site (12). Vegetation changes from oak woodland or savanna in the Sierra foothills to mixed conifer forest at higher elevations (13). Soils vary from Alfisols to Inceptisols with increasing elevation and are developed on unglaciated granodiorite. Vegetation and soil carbon are assumed to have achieved steady state with average Holocene climate conditions and roughly equivalent soil residence times with respect to weathering and erosion (14).

We separated bulk (<2 mm) SOM into three fractions (17): low-density organic matter (<2.0 g cm^-3); the portion of density (2.0-3.0 g cm^-3) organic matter that is hydrolyzable in acids and bases; and the nonhydrolyzable dense residue. Low-density organic matter consists of relatively undeveloped vascular plant material mixed with charcoal, making up 50 to 90% of the total carbon in the soil horizons, with the proportion increasing with elevation (Table 1). The greatest abundance of mineral-associated (>2.0 g cm^-3) organic matter (40 to 50% of total A horizon carbon) was in soils with >10% clay (11). Nonhydrolyzable components made up less than 15% of the total soil carbon at all sites.

We report 14C data (Table 1) as A.C. (18). Negative A.C. values (less than -50 per mil) indicate that on average, the carbon has resided in the soil long enough to reflect radioactive decay of cosmogenic 14C. Positive A.C. values indicate significant amounts of bomb 14C. SOM fractions with the fastest turnover times have the least negative A.C. values and show large increases in A.C. (>100 per mil) over the past 30 years. Refractory organic matter fractions have more negative A.C. values.

Table 1. Carbon inventory and A.C. values in fractionated SOM for Sierra transect soil A horizons. Soil inventory data are from 1992 collected profiles and represent weighted averages of up to three depth intervals. LF is low-density (<2.0 g cm^-3) organic matter; Hyd. and Res. are the hydrolyzable (in acids and bases) and nonhydrolyzable portions of organic matter, respectively (>2.0 g cm^-3). The amount of carbon in the LF, Hyd., and Res. fractions is expressed as a percent of the total A horizon carbon. The A.C. values are given for archived (AR) and 1992 soils. The Fallbrook archived soil was sampled in 1962; others were sampled from 1958 through 1959. The Musick2 soil profile was collected approximately 120 km north of the Sierra Nevada Forest in 1959 and 1990. Although not strictly on the same transect, it provides a test of the robustness of measuring soil carbon dynamics with A.C. within a set of comparable forest communities. The procedures for Musick2 soil differed from those here slightly. Locations of sites (latitude, longitude): Fallbrook, 36°43'N, 119°17'W; Musick, 37°11'N, 119°16'W; Shaver, 37°2'N, 119°11'W; Corbett, 37°5'N, 119°11'W; and Chiquito, 37°18'N, 119°15'W.

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The Governance Self-Assessment Checklist
An Instrument for Assessing Board Effectiveness

Mel Gill, Robert J. Flynn, Elke Reissing

This article describes the development and validation of the Governance Self-Assessment Checklist (GSAC). The GSAC was designed to assist boards of directors of nonprofit and public sector organizations to identify strengths and weaknesses in the governance of their organizations, educate board members about the essentials of good governance, and improve their governance practices. The instrument comprises 144 items organized into twelve subscales. The results of the study indicated that the subscales have excellent internal consistency reliability, exhibit good criterion-related validity, and are able to discriminate between stronger and weaker aspects of board functioning. The relative strengths and weaknesses in board effectiveness were identified, and the implications of the findings for the assessment of board effectiveness and field applications of the GSAC were discussed.

PUBLIC TRUST in boards of directors depends on transparent govern-ance structures and processes and clear accountability to stakeholders. The assessment of board performance is essential for demonstrating accountability and generating public trust. The establishment of causal links between effective boards and strong

Note: This research was made possible through a grant from Human Resources Development Canada administered through the Institute on Governance, Ottawa. We appreciate the support of these organizations and their commitment to improving nonprofit governance. We also acknowledge the contributions of the board members, staff, and external observers of the participating organizations. Finally, we thank the anonymous peer reviewers for their useful comments and suggestions. Correspondence related to this article may be addressed to Mel Gill, Synergy Associates, 57 Westpark Drive, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada K1B 3G4 (mel.gill@synergyassociates.ca).
The establishment of causal links between effective boards and strong organizational performance... is fraught with difficulties.

organizational performance, however, is fraught with difficulties, not the least of which is the valid measurement of effective board and organizational performance. Proxy, rather than direct, measures of board and organizational effectiveness have typically been used in research studies. Board and organizational reputation, agency capacity to raise funds, and the absence of repeated financial deficits are examples of such proxy measures.

Herman and Renz (1997, 1998, 2002) discussed the difficulties in measuring organizational effectiveness and linking it to board performance. Bradshaw, Murray, and Wolpin (1992a) identified three types of objective measures of organizational effectiveness: input effectiveness (success in obtaining essential resources), throughput effectiveness (efficiency in use of resources, or cost of production) and output or outcome effectiveness (success in product or goal attainment). Cutt and Murray (2000), in a comprehensive treatment of the complexities of nonprofit effectiveness evaluation, identified “two basic kinds of evaluation standards: absolute standards and relative standards” (p. 33). Absolute standards are sufficiently concrete to allow assessment of how well an organization has achieved specified goals. Relative standards (benchmarks) allow comparison of an organization’s achievements to results achieved by other organizations in a similar field or to its own past performance. Such evaluations are often expensive and beyond the capacity of current information systems.

Notwithstanding the complexities of rigorous organizational effectiveness evaluation, a small but growing body of research has identified governance best practices and examined the relationship of the latter with effective organizational performance. This article describes the development and validation of the Governance Self-Assessment Checklist (GSAC), an instrument designed to assist boards in assessing their own performance. It presents findings on the ability of the GSAC to predict organizational effectiveness, based on data from 281 board members and 31 executive directors from 32 nonprofit organizations and 27 independent observers.

Literature Review

We reviewed the literature on board performance and organizational effectiveness as well as other board assessment instruments to determine the need for a new instrument and inform the development of the GSAC.

Assessing Board Performance and Organizational Effectiveness

Bradshaw, Murray, and Wolpin (1992a), in a survey of CEOs from some four hundred Canadian nonprofit organizations, used two measures of board performance (respondent satisfaction with overall board performance and a weighted index of ratings on performance
Ethos, Witness, and Holocaust “Testimony”: The Rhetoric of Fragments

Michael Bernard-Donals

We have come to believe that eyewitness testimonies of the Shoah are exceptionally strong instruments through which we can confront students with both the horrors of the event itself and the potential power of language. Reading the language of those who survived gives us insight into both the profound difficulty of writing and the strong demand to obey the imperative to do so. In part, this is because the ethos of these speakers goes without saying: the language of the testimony and the events that lie behind it are so unimpeachable, and so horrifying, as to render the character of those who survived the crucible eminently sound. But what happens when, for one reason or another, the ethos of the witness is called into question? This became the case when Daniel Ganzfried, a reporter for a Swiss weekly magazine, found that Binjamin Wilkomirski—the author of the memoir Fragments: Memoirs of a Wartime Childhood—may not be who he says he is, and that he may never have been at Auschwitz, as the memoirist claims he was, “except as a tourist.”

Ethos, as a means of securing assent, has traditionally been understood as deriving from the text itself and, to some degree, from external factors such as the speaker’s history or character. Whether ethos is established primarily through the persuasive act or through the audience’s prior knowledge of the speaker’s virtue has been open to speculation from the beginning of the rhetorical tradition. And yet both the intrinsic and extrinsic traditions—what James Bammlin has called the “rhetorical” and the “philosophical” views of ethos—are troubled when confronted with the question of whether the Wilkomirski “memoir” has any worth as a testimony of atrocity. When judged in terms of extrinsic criteria (the philosophical view), the worth of a discourse—regardless of its ability to produce knowledge or to accurately record an event—can always be called into question if we can impeach the character or the veracity of the speaker. In the case of the witness named Binjamin Wilkomirski, it
discourse (to get it right), but also to adhere to the good, and lead an audience toward the good as he or she does so. The classical rhetorical texts (Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*, Cicero’s *De Oratore*, Quintilian’s *Institutes*) all tend to understand the good as more or less contextually situated, and they all suggest that the integrity of the speech and the integrity of the speaker are intimately related (see Johnson). What this means for someone such as Aristotle is that in the best of circumstances, the speaker hews to the truth of the matter and, in so doing, is more likely to be seen by an audience as someone of good character. Quintilian’s “good man speaking well” is essentially a responsible speaker who is knowledgeable not just about the subject but also about virtue, both in him or herself and in the audience; the best testimony is logically coherent and adheres to the principles of goodness.

The difficulty here, of course, is that principles of virtue are themselves defined by convention; in Aristotle’s view, virtue is “a state of character concerned with choice, lying in a mean, i.e., the mean relative to us, this being determined by a rational principle and by that principle by which the man of practical wisdom would determine it.” (Nichomachean Ethics 1107a). By Cicero’s time, the speaker’s virtue is tied almost entirely to the felicity and truth of the discourse itself, “by means of particular types of thought and diction” (*De Oratore* II, xlii, 184). The extent to which the integrity of the discourse could be guaranteed—its ability to make clear the nature of the subject of discourse, and to assure an audience of its “rightness”—is the extent to which the speaker acquired credibility and assent. The speaker is considered virtuous if he or she can lead the audience to mutually acceptable conclusions or actions—that is, actions based in common knowledge or opinion.

But what happens when we learn that a discourse or a testimony whose integrity we had taken for granted and whose author we had no need to question turns out to be a lie? More specifically, what happens when the standing of the author seems to throw into question the validity of the knowledge that the discourse has produced? This is what happened in the Wilkomirski case. In Zurich in early 1994, a literary agent received a copy of the manuscript that would eventually be published as *Fragments: Memories of a War-time Childhood*. It is a memoir, written in the voice of a child, of the author’s experiences during the war. Separated from his parents at the age of three, he found himself interned, first in Majdanek and then in another unnamed camp, before he was brought to live in an orphanage in Kranow after the war and, finally, to Switzerland. It is a harrowing account of bewilderment and confusion, murder and
In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the rise of sports reflected issues of class, race, and gender. Sporting associations soon defined class status. Different sports became associated with certain ethnic groups. Participation in sports indicated Americanization. For women, participation in sports declared a certain level of independence and acceptable sports varied according to class. Overall, participation in sports, especially nonviolent ones, showed a level class above laborers and new immigrants. Sports also provided people of lower class backgrounds with an opportunity for achieving a higher class. In total, sports mirrored one's class, race, and gender.

The type of sport that an individual participated in reflected the class of that individual. Primarily occupation and income determined social class; they also determined sporting activities. The three basic classes were the small upper-class elite, the moderate-sized middle-class craftsmen, and the large lower-class laborers. The elite class, composed of mostly whites, had the money and leisure time to actively pursue sports. They enjoyed expensive, exclusive sports like horse-racing and yachting. Sports helped distance them from lower classes. Also, sports provided opportunities to prove manliness, something evidently on the decline of the effeminate rich. In addition to the expensive, time-consuming nature of sports, sports clubs enhanced the distinction between upper-class elite and middle and lower classes. Although these clubs often promoted less elite sports, membership was limited to the social elite of a city. Often middle-class individuals would gain a higher social class by gaining membership to such a club.
race, and gender determined the sporting activities in which an individual participated. Distinctions of class operated within the limitations of race; social class and racial limitations added to the restraints of gender. That is, upper-class white males enjoyed the most variety while lower-class females enjoyed the least.

This is in some respects a better draft. However, you left out some of the better points you mentioned in your first draft. Keep working hard on the revisions, but make sure the next is stronger than the first.
Low-stakes Writing
&
Appropriate Response Practices
writing. Will you teach students in groups and/or in individual conferences? Will you respond to students' writing? Evaluate students' writing?

2. Ask your professor what resources would help you teach writing in your discipline. Can he or she recommend a particular style or documenta-
tion guide or provide some good models of student writing in your dis-
cipline? Ask your professor how he or she teaches writing in your discipline.

Why (and How) We Teach Writing

"Writing is thinking on paper."
—William Zinsser, On Writing Well

In this chapter you will learn

- how the Writing-Across-the-Curriculum movement developed.
- how Writing-to-Learn assignments help students understand and remember material.
- how Writing in the Disciplines improves students' comprehension and fosters understanding of discipline-specific writing genres and conventions.
- how to use the writing process to teach writing.

"Yes," you may be thinking, "I see that this book will help me to teach and evaluate writing as a TA. But why does writing matter in a subject such as chemistry, political science, or physics anyway? After all, doesn't writing belong in an English course? And how does a non-English teacher teach writing?" An explanation of the theory underlying Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) and the writing process will help you understand why writing is essential in subject-area courses and how you can teach writing.

Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC)

Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) refers to the writing students do in all their classes. The WAC movement recognizes that students cannot learn all they need to know about writing in one or two semesters of required composition classes. As with all skills, writing ability improves with practice. Students need to practice writing throughout their university careers in order to improve as writers. Besides, writing in disciplinary classes has a number of benefits for both professors and students. At a meeting recently I asked faculty from all disciplines why they wanted to include writing assignments in their courses. They immediately responded with comments such as the following:

- "When I read what my students have written, I can see what they have really learned."
Part I: What You Teach When You Teach Writing

45 "I just came from working in industry as an accountant. All I did was write reports. I need to teach my students to write so they will be prepared for the work they will do."

These comments reflect the two main reasons for including Writing Across the Curriculum: Writing to Learn and Writing in the Disciplines.

WRITING TO LEARN

Perhaps the most important reason to include writing in the subject-based classroom is that writing actually helps students learn and remember material. For example, how well do you remember dates or formulas you learned for an objective test you took three years ago? In contrast, how well do you remember the information you researched for a paper you wrote three years ago? Most people remember the content of their own writing much better than the facts they studied to pass an exam.

In her landmark 1977 study, "Writing as a Mode of Learning," composition expert Janet Emig compared learning theory research with writing practices and found that writing facilitates effective learning because it uses many senses (sight, touch, hearing), is both analytic and creative, provides a product that is available for both immediate and long-term feedback, uses syntax and paragraphing that force synthesis and analysis, and requires an active engagement with the material.1 Toby Fulwiler, another composition scholar, provides an even simpler summary of why writing enhances learning: It is physical, visible, and personal.2

This learning enhancement is certainly accomplished through major, formal writing assignments such as research papers, but much good can also be derived from informal and even extremely brief writings. The writing may take place during class or outside of class as a homework assignment. Any brief writing assignment will center students' attention on the subject at hand. Having students write even for one minute—summarizing the content of the day's lecture or composing a question about the material—serves the purpose of physically, visibly, and personally enhancing students' learning. Writing assignments are most likely to increase learning when they have been designed with that purpose in mind.

Teaching Tip: In-Class Writing-to-Learn Activities

Writing-to-Learn assignments might take only a few minutes out of a class period. Asking students to write brief responses to simple prompts can provide information about student learning, encourage student participation, and help students to synthesize course information. Below are some ideas for short writing prompts.

At the beginning of class, students might write for a few minutes on one of the following prompts. Have students share their responses with the class to start the day's discussion.

- What questions do you have about last night's reading?
- What's the relationship between yesterday's topic and today's?
- What were the most important points in last night's reading?
- During the middle of the class, students might take a few minutes to respond to one of the following prompts. Ask a couple of students to share their responses to check understanding and refocus the class on the course material.
  - Summarize the concept we've been discussing in class today.
  - What questions do you still have about this material?
  - At the end of class, ask students to write on one of the following questions. Have them pass in their responses as they leave the classroom. As a TA you can scan through the responses and let your professor know whatever problems the students are having with comprehension. Then your professor can adapt the next lesson to meet the particular needs of the students.
    - What's the most significant thing you've learned in class today?
    - What aspect of this concept confuses you?
    - Explain what we learned today in your own words.

Writing-to-Learn assignments can also be specifically tailored to a particular course. For example, the following list features Writing-to-Learn assignments used by faculty members in a number of disciplines at Brigham Young University.1

- Audiology and Speech Language Pathology. For each game or art project studied, students write down one therapy idea and describe how they would use it with current clients.
- Geology. For a ten-minute in-class essay, students are given some statements for and against population control. They write about this question: "Do present-day environmental concerns justify government-sponsored measures to halt population growth?" After writing, students exchange essays and write a brief response to their classmates' essays. Then they exchange essays again and write another response, so every student receives two responses.
- History. For homework, students write a one-paragraph-length question to be turned in at the beginning of each class period. Questions make up 20 percent of the course grade and will be evaluated according to quality of thought and appropriateness for stimulating class discussion.

1 Thanks to Lee Robinson, Jeff Keith, Jenny Pulsipher, Brian Harker, and Suzanne Hendrix.
Music. After listening to Beethoven's Appassionata Sonata, Movement I, students write for five minutes on this prompt: "Pretend you are Antonio Salieri. How would you react to this piece? Why?"

Statistics. Students write, in their own words, a one- to two-sentence explanation of the central limit theorem.

Journals or learning logs—in which students write an entry every class period or every week—can be used as ongoing Writing-to-Learn assignments. The prompt can remain constant (a summary for every reading assignment) or variable (a different question provided for students to respond to each class period). In either case, writing in a journal regularly will assure students not only complete class assignments, but also think about them. They will come to class more prepared to listen to the lecture and contribute to discussion. However, it is very important that students see the journal assignments as clearly reinforcing what they are learning in class and not just as busy work. Students' writings should be read, responded to, and evaluated in some way. Example 2.1 is a reading journal assignment, and Example 2.2 is the journal assignment's corresponding template for students' written responses.

A Writing-to-Learn assignment could also be a short, relatively easy-to-grade essay, or micro-theme, that would require students' thoughtful analysis and synthesis of the material. See Example 2.3 for a particularly creative micro-theme assignment from an introductory chemistry class.

Example 2.1. Reading Journal Assignment

| Purpose | The reading journal should do two things. First, it will encourage you to stay on top of the reading assignments. Second, by thinking and writing about the reading material, you should have a much better grasp of the ideas, concepts, and principles of management in dietetics than you otherwise would. |
| Audience | You are really writing to and for yourself, but I will look at your entries, and your question section might be written to me or to yourself. Occasionally you will share and compare entries with your classmates. |
| Format | A template is provided for you in the syllabus and you can download the template from the Web. Diagrams may be neatly done by hand, but please type other parts of your entry. Examples of diagrams are shown below. |

Example 2.2. Reading Journal Response Template

| Name: |  |
| Date: |  |
| Section: |  |

Summary, outline, or diagram of key concepts:

Use this area to:

- Summarize—use prose to condense the reading into short but salient points.
- Outline key points using standard outline format.

So…

Think about the reading assignment and in this space answer questions like:

(continued)
Example 2.27 (continued)

- Diagram the important points using a fish diagram, cluster, map, or organization chart.
- How does this relate to previous reading or class discussion?
- Have I observed these principles in action (or being violated)?
- Why is this information important to know? Or make other associations or observations related to the reading.

I'm not sure about:

List concepts that are not clear to you, connections you aren't sure of, or other questions raised by the reading.

---

Writing assignment

One the surface of the mirror, you and your friends all share similar stories. Since you are the most scientifically inclined of the group, you are assigned to write a short report, based on sound fundamental molecular reasoning, explaining what happened to you all. Your report to the group should include a discussion of the forces that kept you all together and then reunited you. You should also explain why you each found yourselves alone for a period of time and how you ended up together again on the surface of the mirror. A couple of good paragraphs should suffice.

Focusing questions

You will need to formulate these as part of the prewriting analysis. Be sure to point out the inner-relationship between the physical states of matter and intermolecular forces, giving special attention to hydrogen bonding.

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Designing Writing-to-Learn Assignments

Whether you use in-class writings, a daily journal, or micro-themes, Writing-to-Learn assignments are good ways to involve students in their own learning and for you and your professor to quickly gauge how well the students understand the material. The following are some guidelines to consider as you and your professor design your own Writing-to-Learn assignments.

- Integrate the writing into the course work. Use the students' writing in class so that it carries importance. Have the students discuss the writing in small groups or use the writing as test preparation. Read aloud some of the writing to the class, or have the students use this informal writing to prepare for a formal writing assignment. Read through the students' responses to get an idea of their understanding of the material, so your professor can adjust the lectures accordingly. Be sure that the students understand how writing fits into the rest of the course work. You and your professor should know what you hope to accomplish through the writing assignment. Share these goals with the students.

- Decide on clear guidelines for each assignment. You need a clear writing prompt to guide the students' writing. Let the students know how long they should take (one minute? five? twenty?). Tell them whether or not you will be checking for surface, mechanical errors. Let the students know the form of the writing (a question? journal entry? poem? and the
You Teach When You Teach Writing

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WRITING IN THE DISCIPLINES (LEARNING TO WRITE)

Including writing as an instructional aid will certainly improve students' comprehension of the material, but another important reason to include writing in subject-based classes is that writing is vital to students' professional achievement. Students should learn to write in the classes that prepare them for their future careers. Ask professionals in your field, and you will usually explain that writing is an important part of what they do every day. A research chemist must write an accurate report of her findings. A business executive must write a clear explanation of his marketing plan. An engineer must write a persuasive proposal to receive funding for her project. A doctor must write detailed notes on his cases for insurance purposes. Your future job may involve research, production, or management, but in nearly every situation you must be able to communicate—in writing—what you are doing.

Often entirely different kinds of writing, or genres, are required in one discipline than in another, and each genre requires adherence to specific conventions for presentation and documentation. For example, pp. 18–19 feature the introductions from articles in a chemistry journal and in an English composition journal. The differences in the two pieces of writing are immediately evident. The chemistry article uses figures and headings to present and organize material visually, while the English article does not. The English article starts with an almost anecdotal introduction, while the chemistry article moves directly into its main focus. The English article is more personal, leisurely, and literary in tone, while the chemistry article is concise, direct, and objective. Students need to learn these kinds of discipline-specific conventions, and they can best learn them from a practicing professional in the field, such as you.

In addition, each discipline requires different formats for different types of writing: a certain structure for a case study, another structure for a book review, and so on. (See Table 2.1.) These various requirements can be complete mysteries for novices such as your students.

The subject-area classroom is the best place for students to learn to write in these various professional genres because:

- The professor and you, as experienced subject-area writers, can mentor and guide the student novices to an understanding of appropriate writing conventions.
- Students read subject-specific writings that serve as professional models for their own writing.
- Students can practice discipline-appropriate types of writing.
- As students come to understand the theoretical underpinnings of their discipline, they will understand better how to communicate in that discipline.

The Writing Process

Because writing is important in courses across the curriculum and in the disciplines, both to enhance learning and to teach discipline-specific style and con-
Excited-State Proton Transfer: From Constrained Systems to "Super" Photoscis to Superfast Proton Transfer

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ABSTRACT

We have used novel methods to investigate excited-state proton transfer in a wide variety of organic molecules. These methods include monitoring the time evolution of proton transfer using techniques such as infrared absorption, resonance Raman spectroscopy, and transient absorption spectroscopy. In all cases, we have observed superfast proton transfer rates, which are several orders of magnitude faster than those observed in ordinary organic molecules.

General Principles

Simple thermodynamics for the ground and excited states of any proton-containing molecule (AH) and its conjugate base predict that the excited state (AH*) is a stronger acid than the ground state if the absorption or emission spectrum of the conjugate acid is characterized by a bathochromic shift relative to that of the conjugate base (nH > nA, see Figure 1). This thermodynamic cycle is described by the Förster equation:  

\[ k_{	ext{p}} = 
\]

![FIGURE 1: Proton transfer and decay processes in photoscis.](image)

Since \( k_{	ext{p}} = \frac{1}{\lambda} \), the \( k_{	ext{p}} \) obtained from the Förster equation, determined by the acidoic strength of the conjugate acid, is an important parameter in understanding the relative stability of excited states.

Molecules that undergo significant protonation upon deprotonation, e.g., pyridinium ions, show that the protonation process is much faster than the formation of the conjugate acid.

In contrast, to form a conjugate acid, a hydrogen atom must be removed from a carbon or nitrogen atom. This process is much slower than the formation of the conjugate acid, and as a result, the acidoic strength of the conjugate acid is less than that of the ground state.

Clearing the Air: WAC Myths and Realities

Between the two of us, we have accumulated more than forty years of experience in writing across the curriculum. As pioneers in the field, we know the WAC territory because we have explored and helped to map its inch by inch, planting flags on behalf of students and their need both to write and to learn to write. We know the field. So when we heard a featured speaker at a recent WPA conference define WAC in a way that neither of us recognized—refusing false dichotomies and serious misunderstandings—we decided it was time to expose the myths surrounding WAC, to clear the air, to set the record straight.

Comparing notes after the talk, we concluded that what bothered us most was the fact that an informed and respected colleague clearly had in his head an inaccurate map of terrain that both of us knew so well. He referred to formalist concerns with “grammar across the curriculum” and to irreconcilable dichotomies between writing in the disciplines (WID) and writing across the curriculum (WAC). Our simultaneous and shared discomfort at this conference presentation illustrated for us the need to re-constructivist WAC and to reposition WAC theory. Our goal is a more enlightened discussion of what WAC is, what it does, and what it can become.

Susan McLeod is Professor of English and Chair of the English Department at Washington State University, where she also directs writing-across-the-curriculum faculty seminars and teaches graduate and undergraduate courses. A long-time member of the Board of Directors of the National Network of Writing Across the Curriculum, she has consulted and led faculty seminars at colleges and universities across the country. She has published articles and books on WAC and writing program administration, her current project is a co-edited collection tentatively titled WAC for the New Millennium (forthcoming from NCTE). Elaine P. Melman is Provost (Chief Operating Office) and Professor of English at Arizona State University West. In the early 1970s, she initiated and directed the Beaver College writing-across-the-curriculum program, one of the first WAC programs in the nation. She was a founding Executive Board member of the National Council of Writing Program Administrators (WPA). She has co-authored three books and has directed NEH-sponsored national institutes to improve the teaching of writing. Her current project is a spiral-bound freshwater composition handbook, co-authored with Janice Ferris (forthcoming from McGraw Hill in 2001).
TABLE 2.1.
Specialized Kinds of Writing Common to a Few Disciplines

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>History</th>
<th>Physics</th>
<th>Sociology</th>
<th>Music</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Book review</td>
<td>Lab notebook</td>
<td>Observation</td>
<td>Reaction paper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research paper</td>
<td>Grant proposal</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>Concert review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narrative</td>
<td>Research article</td>
<td>Case study</td>
<td>Music analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prospectus</td>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>Experimental report</td>
<td>Program notes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Inventions, you may be thinking, “How do I go about teaching writing?” This is obviously a complex question. A good starting place is realizing that writing is a process. Many studies have shown that both professional and student writers follow the same kind of general process to produce written documents. Hardly anything that is written well was written in one draft. If you think back on how you write when you want to write well, you will probably recognize that you follow a process something like the following.

- **Prewriting.** First you think about the subject and contemplate the assignment’s purpose, audience, context, scope, style, and format. You mull over ideas for potential topics as you walk, wait at stop lights, shower, or doodle in your notebook. You think about a basic structure for the piece. All of this happens over time, either consciously or subconsciously, either in your head or in writing. Depending on the assignment, you may do research, either in the library or the lab. This is a time when you look for issues, problems, or uncertainties that you think would be interesting to explore (or easy to write about).

- **Drafting.** When you feel ready (or when the deadline starts to loom) you start writing your ideas in sentences and paragraphs. As you work on the draft you will come to understand your subject more clearly, and your focus and structure may shift in subtle or even grand ways. You will begin to formalize your central purpose and structure, formulating a controlling thesis statement. As you try to express your ideas logically and compellingly, you may see that you need more data and will have to return to your research. As you follow a certain line of reasoning, you may discover that it doesn’t really work and that you need to find another plan of development. Drafting is the messiest part of the process and perhaps the hardest work of all.

- **Revising.** After you have a pretty good draft, you start to revise. Usually you are so close to the work by this point that it is hard for you to look at it realistically. You may enlist some outside eyes—a friend, a roommate, family member, classmate, writing tutor, TA, or professor—to read over the paper and tell you what is confusing and what needs more evidence. With this feedback, you may make major changes to your draft, changing focus, structure, order, and paragraphs to make your meaning clearer. You may even rewrite the paper.

- **Editing.** Once the draft says pretty much what you want it to, and says it clearly, you probably go through it again to make sure that everything is correct. You may run your computer’s spell checker and grammar checker. You may read the paper aloud, looking for errors that the computer tools missed. You may smooth out awkward phrasing and make sure that the punctuation is correct. You may fiddle with the format, putting in headings and page numbers.

- **Publishing.** Publishing means “making public.” As a student, you probably publish most of your work by submitting it to be evaluated by the professor or TA. However, you may also sometimes have the satisfaction of submitting your work to be published to a wider audience, perhaps at a symposium, conference, or even a professional journal. In those cases, you may go over your writing again with a “fine-toothed comb” just to make sure you’ve caught all your errors and that everything you’ve written makes sense.

Prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing. These steps comprise what is called the writing process. Of course, the five steps are not really separate, for the writing process is recursive in nature. (See Figure 2.1; notice how each step encompasses elements of other steps, from prewriting through publishing.) You might return to prewriting-type work in the midst of drafting or even do some editing. Of course, revision is going on all the time, at every step. You do not “finish” one step before you move to the next, and sometimes you “finish” the project only when a deadline forces completion upon you. You can help your students to become better writers by teaching them the steps of the writing process and the strategies for working at each step.

Conclusion

Students need to recognize that writing is a part of thinking, learning, and the work they do beyond their undergraduate careers. You can help students use the writing process to think through their ideas as they write, to formulate the problems they respond to, and to examine their reasoning and support. One of the leading WAC pioneers, Barbara Walvoord, explains that we “help students
improve writing as they learn and in order to learn their sociology, biology, business, law, or engineering. Writing is not a separate task in a subject-based classroom. It is a part of the learning that must be done.

Chapter Checklist

- Research shows that writing assignments and writing instruction belong in subject-based classes, or across the curriculum.
- Short in-class or out-of-class writing assignments enhance learning because writing requires personal involvement and synthesis.
- Students in all disciplines need to learn the types of writing specific to their field and the writing conventions that are expected of them as professionals.
- Teaching students how to use the writing process in a subject-area class will help them to write better, learn the subject matter more thoroughly, and prepare them to write professionally.

Applications to Your Own Situation

1. Write about a Writing-to-Learn assignment (such as keeping a journal or doing in-class writing) you have completed for a class. How did the assignment help you learn? If you did not find it useful, consider ways to revise the assignment to improve its effectiveness.

2. Following the guidelines in this chapter, think of a brief Writing-to-Learn assignment that would be appropriate for the class you are TAing. Write an explanation of what you hope the assignment will teach students. Refer to the examples on pp. 11-12.

3. Find some good examples of writing in your discipline. Determine the genre of each example. Is it a proposal, a report, a research article, or something else? List some conventions of good writing that are distinctive to your discipline, referring to the models you’ve gathered. You could turn this into a Writing-to-Learn assignment by having your students complete this analysis themselves.

4. Ask a professional in your field about the role of writing in his or her daily work. Share with your students what you learned about "real world" writing in your field.

5. Write a paragraph describing the process you follow when you write a major paper. Identify the strategies you use while prewriting, drafting, revising, and editing.

Working with Your Professor

1. Discuss with your professor ways to use writing to enhance learning. Together, think of brief Writing-to-Learn assignments that you could in-

2. Look together at the major writing assignments for the class. How do the assignments prepare students to write in your particular discipline? Are there ways to improve the students’ preparation for writing in this discipline?

3. Look over your syllabus. Are there any intermediate, sequenced assignments that encourage the students to start the writing process early? (For example, assignments that require students to submit the topic for their paper, then a preliminary bibliography, then a draft for peer review.) Discuss including sequenced assignments, if there are none already scheduled, to discourage students from procrastinating. Such assignments also provide you with an opportunity to comment on the students’ writing at multiple points in their writing processes.
This essay argues that we will have an easier and more productive
time with student writing if we make a distinction between high stakes
and low stakes assignments and also between high stakes and low
stakes ways of responding to student writing.

High Stakes and Low Stakes in
Assigning and Responding to Writing

Peter Elbow

As I try to understand my own experience of writing and the experience of my
students and as I try to plan my teaching, nothing has been more useful to me
than the simple and crude distinction between high and low stakes writing—
the question of how much a piece of writing matters or counts.

Assigning Writing

The goal of low stakes assignments is not so much to produce excellent pieces
of writing as to get students to think, learn, and understand more of the course
material. Low stakes writing is often informal and tends to be graded informally. In a sense, we get to throw away the low stakes writing itself but keep
the neural changes it produced in students' heads. High stakes assignments
also produce learning, but they are more loaded because we judge the writing
carefully for soundness of content and clarity of presentation.

It's obvious why we need high stakes assignments in our courses. We
can't give trustworthy final grades that reflect whether students actually
understand what we want them to understand unless we get them to articulate
in writing what they have learned. If students take only short-answer tests
or machine-graded exams, they will often appear to have learned what we are
teaching when in fact they have not.

Am I saying that if students can't explain something in writing, they don't
know it? Not quite. That is, I acknowledge that some students can understand
something well and yet be hindered from explaining it in writing because
of their fear of writing or lack of skill. In fact, it sometimes happens that
we understand something well that we can't even explain in speech—much
less in writing. Nonverbal knowing is most obvious in realms like music, art, and dance (mathematics?), but it can occur in any realm. That is, we can know something at a felt, nonverbal level before we find words for what we know.

But even though students can sometimes know things they can’t explain in writing, I still argue for high stakes writing. I think good college grades should reflect more than nonverbal and nonwritten understanding. They should also reflect the ability to convey that understanding in writing. (Conceivably we should relax this demand in music, art, and dance classes.) I hasten to add that my tough position rests on two gentler premises. We should honor nonverbal knowing, inviting students to use low stakes writing to huddle and fish for words for what they sense and intuit but cannot yet clearly say. And if we assign lots of low stakes writing, students are much less likely to be held back by fear or inability to put what they know on paper when they come to high stakes writing.

Students may complain, “But how can you grade on the basis of writing when this isn’t a writing course?” We mustn’t forget here a basic pedagogical principle: we are not obliged to teach everything we require. We don’t teach typing, yet we often require it. Must we stop requiring skilled reading unless we explicitly teach it? Besides, if we require students to explain their learning on paper, we will be doing a big favor to our campus writing program and writing teachers. Writing courses only work well if students need writing to prosper in their other courses. (For more about assigning high stakes writing, see, in particular, Chapters Five and Six.)

Importance of Low Stakes Assignments

Writing feels like an inherently high stakes activity—especially because most people learn and use writing primarily in school, where it is virtually always evaluated, usually with a grade. Writing tends to be used for more serious occasions than speaking. (“Are you prepared to put that in writing?”) Speech feels more like a low stakes activity because we learn it in the home and on the playground and use it casually everywhere. We don’t usually think of our speech as being graded.

But speech can be used in formal and evaluative settings—as when we are interviewed for a job or give a talk. In fact, if we pause and reflect for a moment, we will realize that our speech is almost always evaluated, even if not formally graded. How we talk and what we say are probably the main basis on which people we meet look down on us or are impressed with us.

And writing can be used informally, even casually, and in a nonevaluate setting. In truth, if we are looking for the best possible low stakes arena for language—for using language to learn, explore, take risks, or commune with ourselves and not have our language be evaluated—writing is much better than speaking. Writing permits us to keep our words private or to revise them before showing them to anyone else. Speech is riskier because it is almost always heard by someone in its first bloom; it can never be taken back.

In this volume, Toby Fulwiler, Art Young, and M. Elizabeth Sargent in particular (Chapters Two, Three, and Four, respectively) describe low stakes writing assignments: frequent, informal assignments that make students spend time regularly reflecting in written language on what they are learning from discussions, readings, lectures, and their own thinking. These informal pieces of writing are sometimes done in class and sometimes for homework. These pieces are low stakes because individually they don’t have much effect on the final grade. Teachers tend to distinguish these assignments by calling them not essays but quickwrites, letters, freewrites, thinkpieces, or thinklogs. (When we require students to turn in a draft of a high stakes essay a week or more before the final version is due, the draft tends to function as a low stakes piece.)

Stephen Fishman and Anne Herrington (Chapters Five and Six) describe a mixture of high and low stakes writing assignments.

Because it is so ingrained to treat writing as a high stakes activity, especially in schools and colleges, I want to summarize here some of the special benefits of low stakes writing.

- Low stakes writing helps students involve themselves more in the ideas or subject matter of a course. It helps them find their own language for the issues of the course; they stumble into their own analogies and metaphors for academic concepts. Theorists are fond of saying that learning a discipline means using its discourse, but learning a discipline also means learning how to use that discourse. That is, students don’t know a field until they can write and talk about what is in the textbook and the lectures in their own lingo, in their informal home or personal language—language that, as Vygotsky famously observed, is saturated with sense or experience.

- When students do high stakes writing they often struggle in nonproductive ways and produce terrible and tangled prose. When they do low stakes writing, their prose is usually livelier, clearer, and more natural—often much more interesting—in spite of any carelessness and mistakes. They don’t tie their syntax in so many knots or defensively restrict themselves to simple “Dick and Jane” sentences, because they aren’t worrying so much about the grade or whether they are writing exactly what the teacher was looking for. I’ve almost never seen a piece of low stakes writing I couldn’t easily understand. But I’ve seen lots of high stakes writing that students worked very hard on that was impenetrable.

- Low stakes writing improves the quality of students’ high stakes writing. By assigning frequent low stakes pieces, we ensure that students have already done lots of writing before we have to grade a high stakes piece—so that they are already warmed up and more fluent. Their high stakes pieces are much more likely to have a clear, alive voice. And it’s no small help to their high stakes writing that we have seen a number of their low stakes pieces. For then, when they turn in a high stakes essay that is awkwardly tangled or even impenetrable, we don’t have to panic or despair; we can just say, “Come on. You can say all this in the clear, lively voice I’ve already seen you using.”

- Low stakes writing gives us a better view of how students are understanding the course material and reacting to our teaching. We see a better
sense of how their minds work. We can see better the interactions between their thinking about course material and their thinking about other realms of their life, between their thinking and their feeling. We get better glimpses of them as people.

- Probably the main practical benefit of frequent low stakes assignments is to force students to keep up with the assigned reading every week. When students put off the reading till an exam or major paper is due, they learn much less from discussions and lectures. And when only the teacher and a few diligent students have done the reading, the whole course tends to lose steam.

Responding to Writing

When we assign writing, we can trust that we are helping students learn more and probably even write better. But when we respond or comment, we can't be so confident. The news from researchers is not encouraging. They have discovered how often teacher's comments are not clear, how often comments are misunderstood by students even when they are clear, and how often comments cannot be trusted (for example, the teacher writes, "You should omit this section." or, "You need a comma here," or, "This hypothesis has been discredited," when in fact many or even most authorities would disagree). Researchers have trouble finding good evidence that our comments on student writing actually help students learn more or write better. (Elizabeth Hodges is one of these researchers, and in Chapter Seven, she gives us interesting and practical glimpses into the essential sequence of events: the teacher's reactions to a student paper, that teacher's actual comment on the paper, and the students' reading and understanding of that comment.)

These sobering results are not really so surprising or not surprising if we stop and reflect on the conditions in which we write our comments and the conditions in which students read them. After all, we write comments in great quantity—working slowly down through thick stacks of papers on our desk. It is often late at night and we are usually in a hurry. And truth be told, we are often writing in a discouraged or downright grumpy mood. Writing comments on papers and exams is a major portion of the "academic writing" of most academics, yet it's not the writing we really care about. It seldom has much effect on our careers, and we seldom do any revising of it. No wonder it is seldom our best writing. And let's face it: it's not feasible to write our comments really slowly and to revise them carefully. We are surely going to continue to write comments fast, late at night, and not always in the best mood. Still, we can learn to do it better—thus the efforts in this book.

Even when we write clear, accurate, valid, and helpful comments, our students often read them through a distorting lens of resistance or discouragement—or downright denial. (Don't we sometimes read responses to our own articles by professional reviewers through similar lenses?) When students read what we write, they are usually reacting at the same time to all the past teacher comments they have received. The most obvious example of

this is that students tend to take almost anything we write as criticism—even if we are just asking them a question or making an observation, or even making a low-key statement of mild praise. ("I'm curious how you managed to be so dispassionate on such a controversial issue," or, "I was interested that you were able to quote from a book that I didn't assign." "Uh oh, I'll never do those things again.") And when we include a grade with our comment, we increase the likelihood of a distorted reading—sometimes no reading at all.

What discouraging news. But I think we need to hear it. It helps us ask some very practical questions as we respond to student writing: Am I wasting my time with this comment? What are the chances that it will be understood as I intend it? That it will help? Perhaps we could adopt the principle of our better-paid professional: "At least do no harm." When we assign writing, at least we do no harm.

Continuum Between High and Low Stakes Responding

In the face of this bleak situation, I call again on the distinction between high and low stakes. But here I am emphasizing a continuum with many intermediate points. Just as important, it is also a continuum from the least responding to the most responding.

Zero response (lowest stakes). When I am clear and honest with students about the fact that I need to require more writing from them than I can comment on, I help them fairly quickly get over any feelings of deprivation or resentment. Most students come to appreciate the chance to write with the knowledge that they will be heard but will not have to deal with my response. In fact, many teachers require some low stakes writing that they don't even read. Students can appreciate and benefit from the freedom of this private writing. (See Sargent and Elbow, Chapters Four and Eleven, respectively, on ways to deal with private writing.)

Minimal, nonverbal, noncritical response. We can note effective or strong or correct passages by simply putting a straight line underneath particular words or phrases or alongside longer sections. (Teachers often use check marks in the margin for this purpose, but I find straight lines are more specific markers.) I can respond in this way virtually as quickly as I can read. Almost every student needs some encouragement, and some students on some occasions need lots. Even in very poor pieces of writing, certain parts are always better than others; students benefit from having them pointed out. To find strong points, even in weak writing, is a skill that will help us improve student learning and writing.

Supportive response—no criticism. There are usually things that students do well that are hard to point to with simple straight lines (for example, "You chose a good approach to your topic," or, "You write with a clear and lively voice.") Whether we call it praise or positive reinforcement, the fact remains that this kind of response does the most good with the least effort. That is, we are most likely to cause learning and least likely to do harm if the message of
our response is, in effect, “Please do more of this thing you are already doing here.” We are least likely to cause learning and most likely to do harm if we give the message that is all too often implied in critical feedback: “Start doing something you’ve never done before.”

Descriptive or observational response. An example of this response: “You begin with an anecdote from your own experience; then show us how it throws light on your academic topic. Then you make your case—which really rests on a process of definition—showing what fits and what is excluded.” One of the hardest things for student writers is simply to see their own text, to understand the logical and rhetorical strategies they have used. Neutral and noncritical observations can be very effective because students don’t need to resist them.

Minimal, nonverbal critical response. Just as quickly as we can read and put in straight lines, we can also put wavy or wiggly lines underneath words or alongside passages that are unclear or problematic or wrong. It’s remarkable what a strong sense of our readerly presence and response we can give to students when we note five or six phrases or passages per page with straight and wiggly lines: they get a felt sense of what is working and not working for us.

Critical response, diagnosis, advice (highest stakes). This is our meat and potatoes—what we tend to assume is our main job. Obviously, we often need to give critical response to help with learning and to explain the basis of poor grades. But my premise here is that the higher we go on the continuum, the more we need to ask the crucial pragmatic questions: Is this comment worth it? How much response do I need? How much criticism will be useful? What is the likelihood of my effort doing good or harm? I don’t mean to suggest that we can just mechanically match low stakes responses with low stakes assignments and high with high. Obviously, we will often mix levels of response—in particular, mixing praise and criticism. Even the highest stakes assignment merits some praise.

Nevertheless, it pays to notice the natural links between levels of assignment and response. That is, the lowest stakes response (zero response) goes most naturally with low stakes assignments: when the writing doesn’t much matter to the final grade, we can afford to withhold our response or criticism. Similarly the highest stakes response (critical response) goes most naturally with high stakes assignments: if our judgment of a student essay will have any significant impact on the final grade, we are obliged to explain any criticism we have. This critical response carries the highest stakes for many reasons: with critical response, we have to worry more about whether we are wrong or unsound; critical response is more likely to misfire or do harm because of how it is received—even if it is sound; and critical response is likely to cost us more work and more uncertainty. In contrast, low stakes minimal responding requires the least time and effort from us, requires the least expertise from us, takes the least time away from our teaching of the subject matter, and is least likely to turn teachers and students into adversaries.

I am not trying to stamp out critical response; I’m just arguing that we should use less of it—and use more minimal and low stakes response instead. Note, for example (and this is another case of mixing), that we can use plenty of low stakes praise without giving up criticism—without pretending that a piece of writing is better than it is. For example, we can write something like this: “Your paper doesn’t work very well and the worst problem is confusing sentences. I often couldn’t understand you. Nevertheless you do have plenty of clear sentences and I’ve marked particularly strong ones with a straight line. To work on your serious problem, try to figure out what you were doing when you wrote those strong sentences—and do more of that.” It might seem hard to find examples of good organization in a disorganized paper, but not if we set our mind to it. For example, we can write: “I got lost a lot as I read your paper. It has big problems with organization. But I’ve put straight lines along several paragraphs that hang together just fine, and also lines between several paragraphs where they follow well and your transition works fine. Give us more of that! You’ve shown you can do it.”

It is important for us to realize that we don’t need to feel guilty if we use lots of low stakes and minimal response—especially if we are not teaching a writing course. Assigning more writing, using less response, and using more praise doesn’t mean leaving out all criticism or lowering standards. Students need the experience of writing a great deal and getting minimal and low stakes response because they tend to associate writing with criticism and high stakes. If we are not so much teaching writing as using writing to teach something else, it makes particularly good sense to use lots of minimal and low stakes response. When we assign a piece of writing and don’t comment on it, we are not not-teaching we are actively setting up powerful conditions for learning by getting students to do something they wouldn’t do without the force of our teaching.

Conclusion: Concrete Suggestions

- For high stakes assignments, it can be very helpful to require a draft a week or more before the final version. Teachers handle drafts in a wide variety of ways depending on their circumstances and styles. At the very least, we can just collect drafts and not comment—simply checking that they are done—thus forcing students to carry their thinking through two steps. Of course, if our circumstances make it feasible, it is good to give comments on a draft. When we comment on a draft, our response becomes almost automatically low stakes, even if critical: we can write suggestions for revising rather than just an autopsy. (Notice in Chapter Six how Herrington describes the production of an essay that has very high stakes but one that students work up to along a path of lower stakes drafts and comments on those drafts.) It is probably worth cutting back on the amount of responding on some assignments for the sake of giving students at least one experience of feedback on a draft aimed at a revision. If we can only do this once, it’s better to do it in the first half of
the semester—with the goal that students can internalize some of our responses when they work on later high stakes assignments. But commenting on drafts may be more feasible than some teachers think: if we give good responses on a draft, we can make do with just a quick verdict on the revision (perhaps using the kind of grid that I suggest in Chapter Eleven).

- Even when we are commenting on a final version, we can frame our comments in a forward-looking way: instead of saying, "Here's what didn't work," we can say, "Here's what to work on in future papers.”

- I find it easier to comment on important assignments if I get students to turn in a short reflective cover letter or piece of process writing with the assignment itself. I invite something informal, even handwritten. I ask them to tell me what they see as their main points, how they went about writing and what happened, which parts they are most and least satisfied with, and what questions they have for me as a reader. Reading the cover letter usually helps me decide what to say in my comment. Often I can agree with much of what the student has said, and sometimes I can be more positive about the essay than the student was. Students may have difficulty at first with this self-reflective writing, but it promotes a skill worth working on. It gives them practice in trying to see their own thinking more clearly. (Herrington gives good examples in Chapter Six of cover letters for a mid-process draft and a final draft.)

- I find commenting much easier if I read the whole piece before making any comments except for straight and wiggly lines. I save lots of time by reminding myself that students can seldom benefit from criticism of more than two or three problems. Therefore, the most crucial decision in commenting is which problems to focus on, and I can make that decision till I read the whole paper through. Most of my bad commenting comes from jumping in with marginal comments as I am reading. I am more likely to waste my time on something that turns out to be a minor issue, or make some passing remark that the student misunderstands, or say something that's actually wrong ("You obviously don't understand x", when later on it's clear that she does understand x), or get caught up in a little spasm of unhelpful irritation. If I settle for just making straight and wiggly lines, these serve me as a map when I glance back over the paper after I have read the whole thing and I am trying to decide what are the few main things I need to say. (In Chapter Nine, Chris Anson points out an exception: when we put our comments on a tape cassette, we may want to tell the story of our reactions as we are actually in the process of reading. Yet Anson also points out that even for this kind of responding he sometimes does better by waiting until he has read the whole piece.)

- As Hodges points out in Chapter Seven, when we return papers to students with our comments attached, it's a great help sometimes to ask students to take five minutes right then and write us a short note telling what they heard us saying and how they are reacting to it. This helps us learn when we are unclear or when students misinterpret our words or react in ways we don't expect.

- If we are writing comments where the stakes aren't too high, we can save time by waiting till we have two pieces in hand, read them together, and write only one comment on both. The comparison is often pedagogically useful. ("Notice how much clearer your point was on this paper compared to that one [or how much more carefully you argued]. What helped you?")

- Though it sometimes costs me a few more words, I try to avoid an impersonal "God/truth voice" in my comments. Almost anything that we might say in response to a piece of writing is going to be affected by our own point of view. Even the main ideas in our discipline are arguable. If we are willing to say, "Unconvincing for me," instead of "Unconvincing," students are more likely to pause, listen, and think—in as much as just resisting, or else unthinkingly giving in to authority. Besides, magisterial shorthand words like "Awk" are often extremely unclear. I have been trying to learn to write more accurate translations like, "I stumbled here," or, "I'm lost," or, "Writing feels unprofessional," or, "Too slangy for my ear," or, "Can you be less roundabout?"

I sum up this chapter with that useful dictum "At least do no harm." Think how much good we do in assigning lots of writing, especially lots of low stakes writing. But this approach is only feasible when we realize that we can get by with far less response and criticism than we usually assume.

Note

1. It interests me as a writing teacher to note that though our commenting on student papers is undeniably "academic" and indeed "professional" writing, it is often very casual: we often write in incomplete sentences and use lots of "I" and "you." I'm not saying that these features make our writing bad or unprofessional or unacademic. I'm just pointing out that many academics unthinkingly assume that casual informal writing is not academic and should not be used by students.
Time-saving Tips
The Franklin College Writing Intensive Program
Responding to Student Writing: Time-saving Tips

Put your comments (and the time spent making your comments) in perspective by reminding yourself:

“No professor is capable of making comments so profoundly wonderful that a student will become a perfect writer on the basis of remarks on a single paper”
(Doug Hesse, “13 Ways of Looking at Responding to Student Writing”)

1. Save Time by Doing All You Can to Guarantee (More) Successful Writing from Your Students:

• Attend to the actual assignment: be sure to be as clear as possible about what the assignment is asking the student to compose (review Bean's suggestions about creating assignments). "Start with carefully designed assignments and give the students enough time to complete the assignment successfully. The clearer the assignment, the fewer variables left for you to cope with; the more adequate the time, the fewer hasty or careless errors you (should) have to contend with" (Josephine Tarvers, Teaching Writing).

• Use rubrics that clearly communicate criteria on which the assignment will be evaluated. Use rubrics as "check sheets," so you can have the rubrics do a good deal of the explanatory work for you.

• “Make good student papers available to illustrate features of strong work" (Hesse). “Use scoring guides and class discussion of sample papers to develop student-assessment and reduce the need for extensive comments on individual papers’ (Ed White, Assigning, Responding, Evaluating).

2. Save Time by Communicating to Students How You Will be Responding (i.e. according to the WIP Principles):

• “Set ground rules for yourself, and clearly convey to students what they can and cannot expect in terms of your response. For example, tell them (or include a response sheet that tells them) that your written comments will address only one main strength and one main area for improvement, if that’s what you choose to do. Cover other aspects of the paper with a response or grading rubric. 1. ‘The most effective aspect of this paper is ___________ (or, ‘The best section of this paper is on page ______); 2. The one thing that would most improve this paper or ones like it in the future is _______” (Hesse).

• “Be realistic when telling students when they’ll get papers back. (Plan on 10-20 minutes per paper; as always plan a 20% cushion.) A week is realistic” (Tarvers). “Set a schedule for your grading and keep it” (Tarvers). “Set reasonable time limits. Buy a timer and be ruthless about paying attention to it. Read the paper through once in its entirety before you mark anything, even minor, mechanical errors. This allows you to assess the biggest strengths and weaknesses, to target your attention. Reread the paper, making your minimal marks and marginal comments. Then skim it one more time and compose your endnote.” Restrain yourself w/ the endnote: A quick 3-part formula: strengths, a few weaknesses, goals/strategies (Tarvers).

3. Save Time by Intervening Early in the Process:

• “Devote a class hour to generating ideas” (John Bean, Engaging Ideas).

• “Have students submit something to you early in the writing process” (Bean).

• “Make one-on-one conferences efficient” (Bean; review Hendengren).
4. Save Time by Not Editing Student Work:

- "Teachers have a finite amount of time to spend responding to writing. There is evidence that time spent meticulously annotating every aspect of a student’s paper does little good. This is especially true if the comments are rubber stamp ones: 'awkward,' 'be specific,' and so on" (Hesse).

- "Students learn to write by writing, and while judicious advice is helpful, there is a gap between knowledge and performance. A steady diet of being closely edited doesn’t mean that a student will necessarily internalize what he or she needs to do in future tasks" (Hesse).

- "Edit’ only a fraction of a paper: a selected paragraph . . . Make clear up front that you do not aspire to be exhaustive’" (Hesse).

- As ever, look for patterns of error; try to diagnose the cause of the errors (some misunderstanding) and address that.

5. Save Time by Making a Limited Number of (Helpful) Comments:

- "Use brief marginal comments to call attention to ‘higher order’ aspects in the paper, usually content or development. . . . Use squiggly lines (or what you will) to call attention to sentence errors or hugely rough spots (but remember that your goal should be to teach). Don’t feel compelled to mark everything, and certainly don’t edit everything.

- Consider typing your comments on a word processor, so that you can “cut and paste” comments about problems that multiple students are making. Also, if you find all students are struggling with

- “Put minimal comments on finished products that will not be revised” (Bean).

6. Save Time by Requiring Students to Do Some of the Evaluation, themselves:

- Use Peer-review.

- “Have students write a cover memo in which they describe their strategies in writing the paper and what they perceive its strengths and problem areas to be” (Hesse).

- “Require students to tell you the specific aspect of the paper on which they’d most like to get feedback from you, then reserve most of your comments for that aspect. You might want to give them a menu of features to select from or, at least, explain to them why very general requests won’t yield them much help (e.g., ‘Does it flow?’)” (Hesse).

7. Save Time by Not Responding to All Written Work:

- Use low-stakes writing that requires little, if any, commentary.

- “In courses with multiple assignments, give students ‘vouchers’ good for one detailed commentary per term. They should reserve that for the time they want you to read a paper as you would a manuscript submitted to a journal” (Hesse).

8. Save Time by Making Optimum Use of Your Own Working Patterns (Hendengren):

- “Some teachers like to grade a few papers a day; others like to grade a whole class set in one sitting. Some like to grade early in the day; others prefer to do it late at night. Find out what works best for you.
(Note: Even if you think you 'work well under pressure,' don't procrastinate grading until two hours before you must return the papers.)" (Hendengren).

- "Get started on the papers as soon as possible. Sometimes the hardest part of reading papers is starting the task. Try to grade at least one or two on the day the papers come in, to get over the inertia. Always return the papers within a week, unless they are very long. If you wait too long to return papers, the students will not be as likely to learn from your comments. It's better to make fewer comments and return the papers soon, than to cover the pages with comments and return them late" (Hendengren).

- "Sit in a comfortable location. Work wherever you feel comfortable—at your desk, at a library table, on the couch, or on a lawn chair in the sun. Change locations sometimes to give yourself a break. Moving from the desk to a comfortable chair sometimes can give you the energy to go on for another hour or two" (Hendengren).

- "Reward yourself. After so many papers, go for a walk, eat a cookie, or talk to a friend. One of my colleagues hides M&Ms in his stack of papers so that every so often he comes across one and can eat it." (Hendengren).

9. Save Time by Making Use of UGA's Writing Center

10. Others?
Maintaining Professionalism
Chapter Checklist (continued)

☐ When you suspect plagiarism, tell your professor and work with him or her to handle the situation appropriately. If the plagiarism seems to come from a lack of understanding, teach the student the necessary skills and perhaps allow a second chance. If the student has plagiarized intentionally, your professor—or the school—will need to take punitive actions.

☐ Have a plan in place for dealing with students who challenge their grades.

☐ Don't change a grade for pity's sake. Instead, offer to help the student improve his or her writing skills so that he or she will earn a better grade next time.

☐ Have a firm late-paper policy in place. Make exceptions only for true emergencies.

Applications to Your Own Situation

1. Familiarize yourself with your school's honor code or statement on academic honesty or plagiarism. Be sure you understand the school's definitions of plagiarism and the prescribed methods for dealing with it.

2. Review the class syllabus to see if intermediate assignments could be added as a means of deterring plagiarism.

3. Find ways to teach the documentation conventions of your discipline so that students will not unintentionally plagiarize. (See the Technology Tactics box on p. 129.)

4. Brainstorm a list of grading-related problems not discussed in this chapter that might come up. Think of possible ways to deal with the problems.

Working with Your Professor

1. Discuss a scenario in which you suspect a student has committed plagiarism. Determine what type of evidence your professor would want as proof and how he or she would determine whether the plagiarism was inadvertent or intentional.

2. Discuss specific grading-related concerns that your professor has dealt with in the past. What advice can he or she give you about these types of situations? If necessary, use Application 4 as a basis for your discussion.

3. Work with your professor to draft policy statements on plagiarism, grade disputes, and late papers and publish them in the class syllabus, assignment sheets, or in a stand-alone handout.

Maintaining Professionalism

"The secret of education is respecting the pupil."
—Ralph Waldo Emerson

In this chapter you will learn

- how to help students who lack basic writing skills.
- about learning disabilities and how to advise students who may have them.
- ways to help international students with writing.
- how to respond if students share emotional problems with you.
- tips for avoiding bias.
- how to avoid situations that could be construed as sexual harassment.

In the course you are TAing, you are likely to address a variety of problems that do not directly relate to grading. Some students come to your class with individual concerns that will inhibit their ability to write well or learn. Some students will have other concerns requiring assistance. Some situations are just inherently problematic. The ideas contained in this chapter should not be considered as prescriptions or formulas for responding to such situations. Instead, these discussions might alert you to the kinds of problems you may face and give you a few suggestions for dealing with such concerns. Always discuss problems with your professor as they arise. Together you can determine good ways of responding to them.

Students Lacking Basic Writing Skills

You may find that some students in your class simply lack good writing skills. Because you are a TA for a subject-specific course, you probably do not have the time to teach these students basic usage. However, there are some simple ways to support the students in improving their skills.

- Show the students how to use a writing handbook, and encourage them to invest in one and study it. (See the Bibliography for a list of good handbooks.)
Part II: Ways to Teach Writing

- If your school has a writing center, refer students there for extra help. Because writing-center tutors are trained to teach skills, not “fix” papers, they will not proofread and edit a draft. However, if students ask for help learning a certain skill (for example, how to avoid fragments), the tutors will teach the skill in the context of the students’ own writing.
- Suggest that students find a qualified English tutor to work with them individually on achieving college-level writing skills.

Technology Tactics

The following online resources provided by Bedford/St. Martin’s feature free interactive grammar exercises. These sites allow students to practice grammar and usage skills in a noncompetitive, self-paced environment. The exercises give instant feedback and instruction to help students reinforce their understanding of writing-related concepts. Such exercises are no substitute for applying concepts in the context of students’ papers, but these exercises can help students to clarify certain usage conventions.

- **Exercise Central.** At bedfordstmartins.com/exercisecentral, students will find the largest collection of editing exercises—with automatic feedback—available online that provide practice for mastering the skills of editing grammar, style, punctuation, and mechanics.

- **The Bedford Handbook Online.** At dianaacker.com/bedhandbook, students will find electronic exercises for grammar, research, and writing that allow them to practice essential skills in an interactive environment. More than 1,000 items with feedback after each item reinforce key grammatical and writing-related concepts.

Students with Learning Disabilities

Learning disabilities are difficult to define, and even more difficult to diagnose. However, as a TA, you need to realize that students may have some “central nervous system dysfunction” that interferes with their ability to read or write. Students may know this already and be working with your school’s accessibility services (or equivalent) to accommodate their differences. With the authorization of accessibility services, these students may ask that legitimate accommodations be made. For example, they may need longer time for an in-class essay, or they may need to listen to texts on tape rather than read them. With your professor’s approval, give these students the accommodations they need. However, hold them to as high a standard as the rest of the class for their finished work.

If a student seems to be achieving at a lower level on tests and papers than you would expect from his or her performance orally and when there seems to be no evident condition that would cause that underachievement, you might suspect the presence of some kind of learning disability. Discuss with the professor the possibility that the student be tested by accessibility services to determine if a learning disability does exist. Diagnosis and learning accommodation strategies could help a student with a learning disability succeed academically.

International Students (Nonnative Speakers of English)

International students have a particularly tough time with writing assignments. In addition to the obvious difficulties of not being completely fluent in English, international students often have differing cultural and social expectations and may miss the network of family and friends that they may have relied on at home. The school system in their home country may be very different, and simply not understanding the American academic system can be a deterrent to learning.4

Obviously, these students have varying degrees of facility with the English language. Because they may not fully understand verbal instructions, it is especially important to provide written assignment descriptions when international students are in your class. Encourage your professor to create very clear, written assignment explanations so that students not fluent in English can study the requirements on their own with the help of a dictionary. If the professor does not create such a document, perhaps you could do so with his or her permission. To accompany the written explanation, provide model papers that demonstrate clearly the expectations for the assignment. These resources will help all your students, but they are especially useful to international students for whom the expectations of American academic writing may be new.4

Of all the students in your class, international students will probably be most likely to ask for your help with surface-level writing concerns. Remember, though, that you are a teacher, not an editor. Encourage your international students to study a handbook or find a tutor. You may also want to refer students to the online grammar resources described in the Technology Tactics box on p. 134. As with all your students, determine the most relevant skill a particular student needs to know in a particular paper, and then teach it.

Perhaps one of the most important things to teach international students is that basic assumptions about writing vary from culture to culture. Robert B. Kaplan, a pioneering researcher into cultural differences regarding writing, explains that there are markedly different assumptions about “Who writes what to whom, how, when, where, and to what end.”5 Some cultures do not assume that students have the right to express original ideas. Different cultures have different ideas about the most effective ways to organize an argument or what constitutes good evidence. Good writing in some cultures may zigzag from one idea to another or follow a much more circular structure, with the thesis appearing near the end of the paper. Kaplan’s cultural thought pattern “doodles,” shown in Figure 14.1, demonstrate the differing writing structures found in various cultures.6

Because of these differences, international students often need instruction in the linear method of organization expected in American academic writing. Show them how we expect a thesis statement in the introduction and how everything in the paper follows directly from that thesis. Explain how topic sentences...
control the content of each paragraph. You might use highlighters to show how each part of the thesis is developed in consecutive sections of the paper. Be careful not to imply that the American way of writing is the only "right" way, but simply explain that this is the way Americans write.

You can address international students' writing concerns in one-on-one conferences. (See Chapter 8.) Because of differing cultural expectations, however, international students may not understand how to interact in such a setting. In many cultures students would never think to disagree with their teachers. If you say, "I think you should do this," or "This is what you are trying to say," international students may be even more likely than other students to simply agree with you. Take the time to explicitly discuss the expectations for student contribution in a conference situation. Let the students know you expect them to speak freely about their ideas and that you want to know what they are thinking. Use open-ended questions to encourage students to contribute.

**Teaching Tip: Open-Ended Questions**

When conferencing with ESL students, it is especially important to phrase your questions so that there is no expectation of a single correct answer. As discussed in Chapter 8, use open-ended questions that allow students to think creatively about how to express their own ideas. Sometimes it is hard to compose truly open-ended questions that do not lead students to a particular answer you know you want. One key is to keep the attitude of respect for the student. Don't assume that you automatically know what is best for him or her. Expect the student to surprise you with better ideas than you would have thought of. Following are a few suggestions for open-ended questions you could use in conferences with ESL students.

- "Tell me about what you are trying to accomplish with this paper."
- "Explain to me your reasons for believing X."
- "Show me your organizational plan in outline form."
- "Tell me through the connections between the various sections in your paper. Describe to me how parts A, B, and C support your thesis and connect to each other."
- "Every paragraph should have a topic sentence stating the main purpose of that paragraph. Use this highlighter to mark the topic sentence for this paragraph. Explain how all the information in the paragraph ties together."
- "Is this sentence in your paper in active or passive voice? Which do you think would work best in this case?" (See p. 39 for more on active and passive voice.)

Most important, treat international students naturally. Rik Andes, an English as a Second Language (ESL) instructor, says, "Have fun with ESL students. Learning a foreign language is hard enough—treat the situation carefully and help them discover the correct patterns in an enjoyable way."

Remember to respect these students. It takes great courage and ability to study in a foreign country in an unfamiliar language. These brave and bright students deserve the extra guidance you can provide, but remember to hold international students to the same high standards you expect from your other students.

**Students with Emotional Problems**

Sometimes students will share personal concerns in a writing assignment or a writing conference. These students trust you, and you should respond with a concern worthy of that trust. However, you are not in a position to offer professional counseling to those in need of it. These situations require great sensitivity as well as professionalism.

Composition professor Marilyn J. Valentino suggests the following guidelines for dealing with students who have emotional problems.

- Learn about your legal responsibilities and the support available at your school and in your community.
- Keep the contact information for support services handy so that you can refer students in need there.
- Ask questions to be sure you understand what the student is discussing. Don't jump to conclusions.
- Don't keep the concern to yourself. As a TA, be sure to tell the professor of all such problems. With his or her cooperation, you may both want to talk the problem over with a professional.
- Remember that you are a teacher, not a counselor or even a buddy. Remain a professional. Don't think you can "rescue" anyone. Valentino suggests using questions such as "Is there someone you trust whom you can talk to about this?" "Are you talking to anyone else about the problem you are having?" or "How would you want to solve this?"
- You can also say, "I don't have the authority [experience, background] to help you, but I can give you the number of the campus counselor so that you can make an appointment to talk with someone. Or would you like me to call the counseling center or walk over with you now?"
Avoiding Bias

Be careful not to let gender-based stereotypes influence your dealings with students. For example, don’t assume that a woman is likely to have trouble with computational skills or that a man is likely to misunderstand the emotional import of a novel. Elizabeth Birmingham studied male and female graders, comparing how they responded to male and female students’ papers. She found that when responding to male students, male TAs were 25 percent more likely to offer praise than criticism. In contrast, female students received twice as much criticism as praise from male TAs. The male TAs were more likely to ask female students questions that challenged their mental abilities, such as “So, what’s your point?”; “I don’t get it”; and “In other words, I’m confused.” In contrast, the male TAs asked male students questions that focused more on lack of effort than lack of ability, such as “You’re a good writer. I expected more of you.” Be sure that in your teaching and your grading, you treat both male and female students with equal respect.

Similarly, be sure that you avoid bias toward or against anyone on the basis of race, religion, sexuality, national origin, political affiliation, or any other distinction. Evaluate papers objectively based on the predetermined criteria you and your professor have set up. In your comments, keep the focus on the craft of writing, the development of the ideas, the structure of the paper, and the clarity of sentences. Never write a comment on a paper that could be construed as a personal attack.

Avoiding Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment is a very real concern on today’s campuses. Professors and TAs need to be especially careful that their dealings with students remain unequivocally on a professional level. Be sure that you are aware of your school’s policies on this issue. The Chicago Handbook for Teachers offers the following good advice:

- Maintain a professional distance from your students.
- Never become romantically involved with one of your students. The line between friendly behavior and what might be considered impropriety or sexual harassment is a fine one, but you should never cross or even approach it.
- Avoid meeting students alone in your home or theirs.
- Avoid unusual physical contact.
- Make sure not to make comments or use language that might be interpreted as flirtatious or provocative.
- When having one-on-one conferences with a student, always keep your meeting space’s door open.

Conclusion

With the suggestions listed here, your professor’s help, and your own good sense, you will be able to find sensible ways to handle the difficult situations that may arise. If one overall principle could guide you through any problem, it probably would be “respect the student.” Always remember that the student is a person, just like you. Respect the student as a person and do what you can to help the student learn in your class.

Chapter Checklist

- Suggest that students with poor writing skills seek further individual help from the writing center or personal tutors. Suggest that students invest in a writing handbook.
- With your professor’s support, be willing to make appropriate accommodations for students with learning disabilities.
- Be understanding of the challenges facing nonnative speakers of English. Be sure that expectations for assignments are clear.
- If students share emotional concerns with you, be respectful and kind. Refer them to the school counseling center for professional help.
- Treat all students equally, regardless of gender, race, religion, sexuality, national origin, political affiliation, or any other distinction.
- Maintain a professional distance with all students. Stay well away from behavior that could be interpreted as sexual harassment.
- Remember that each student is an important individual who deserves to be treated fairly and with respect.

Applications to Your Own Situation

1. Be aware of campus resources that can assist you and your students with problems such as those discussed in this chapter. Find the addresses and numbers of the various support services on your campus—the writing center, the accessibility services center, the center for international students, and the counseling center—and keep a list of contact information for these services handy.
2. After grading a set of papers, divide the papers by gender and check to see if you responded to both men and women in the same ways. Also scan through your responses to check for other forms of bias. Be sure that your responses focus objectively on helping students improve their writing without casting aspersions on their beliefs.
3. Familiarize yourself with your school’s guidelines for avoiding sexual harassment. Be sure that you follow the guidelines carefully.
Sample ESOL Errors

1) Word order/syntax
   a. Still I do believe that only by the way of life people choose they should be judged. [unconventional syntax]
   b. We can’t base on people’s appearances our opinions. [unconventional syntax]

2) Verb form/tense
   a. This kind of reminds me of when Pearl Harbor got attack.
   b. As an Asian, I have experience racial profiling.

3) Plurals and uncountables
   a. She has a lot of intelligences and makes good grades.
   b. I want to share my thought and feeling.

4) Morphology
   a. I know everybody is scared, but that shouldn’t make us more ignorance.
   b. I guess after September 11, everybody is more paranoia to anyone who looks Middle Eastern or Arab.

5) Pronouns
   a. They want expensive toys to play with because their friends have it.
   b. The child might rebel because they will not have both parents to control them.

6) Prepositions
   a. As a result in the study, farmers began experimenting with different crops.
   b. We often discriminate of people.

7) Idiomatic Expressions
   a. My first semester of college was an eyes-opening experience.
   b. That test was pieces of cake.

8) Articles
   a. He has been arrested the few times.
   b. I was surprised when I came to United States. [missing article]
Writing Assistance at UGA

Where do I go?

We now offer day and evening tutoring services at three locations:

- Park Hall Writing Center (Park 66)
- Student Learning Center (SLC 341)
- South Campus Writing Center (Science Library 201)

To make an appointment, visit www.english.uga.edu/writingcenter and choose a day, time, and location that fits your schedule.

What can the tutors do for me?

Tutors will help students address writing issues they or their teachers identify, giving priority to broader substantive elements first in considering how effectively a piece of writing
  fulfills its purpose
  develops the ideas it presents
  organizes ideas for coherence and emphasis
  states ideas clearly
  observes the conventions of standard edited written English and the conventions of the discipline for which the writing is intended.

In addition, for ESOL students, we can identify problems which appear to be second-language issues: blatant errors in diction, and confusion in syntax, word forms, or idioms which would be unlikely to appear in the writing of native speakers. We can suggest more appropriate words for the diction, and we can clarify the use of verb tense, plurals, American English syntax, and other grammatical issues. Just as tutors respond to broader, substantive concerns first in considering the overall effectiveness of a piece of writing, they respond to second-language issues following a general set of priorities:

1) Word order/syntax
2) Verb tenses
3) Plurals and uncountables
4) Morphology
5) Pronouns
6) Prepositions
7) Idioms
8) Articles

Tutors generally look for a pattern of second-language problems in the student’s writing, explain how to revise/correct an identified problem, and then ask the student to look for and revise/correct other instances of the problem. Tutors also encourage students to learn to proofread their papers for the specific language problems previously identified in their own writing and suggest ways to proofread for specific problems. Please note that tutors do not revise, edit, or “correct” the writing of ESOL/multilingual students.
Teachers frequently find themselves confronted with student issues that go far beyond class assignments and difficult subject matter. As a result, many teachers often feel out of their depth when dealing with issues ranging from classroom disruptions (e.g., email abuse, sexual harassment, attendance), personal problems (e.g., eating disorders, sexual abuse, substance abuse), or academic issues (e.g., study skills, academic homework student appeals).

The following resources are an excellent place to start when you find yourself in unfamiliar territory when dealing with difficult students or sensitive issues that you may not feel qualified to address.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Resource</th>
<th>Contact Information</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic Honesty</td>
<td>Office of the Vice President for Instruction</td>
<td>Ph: 542-4138, email: <a href="mailto:dbor@uga.edu">dbor@uga.edu</a></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Academic Honesty Policy: A Culture of Honesty</td>
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<td>Academic Honesty Resources</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student Academic Appeals</td>
<td>Office of the Vice President for Instruction</td>
<td>Ph: 542-4138, email: <a href="mailto:dbor@uga.edu">dbor@uga.edu</a></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Always first check with your department for academic appeals information.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Student academic appeals</td>
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<tr>
<td>Attendance problems</td>
<td>Linda Edge, Office of Vice President for Student Affairs</td>
<td>Ph: 542-8230, <a href="mailto:edge@uga.edu">edge@uga.edu</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical and mental disabilities</td>
<td>Disability Services</td>
<td>Ph: 542-4138, (770) 542-8770 (direct line for hearing impaired), <a href="http://disability.uga.edu/">http://disability.uga.edu/</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diversity issues</td>
<td>Minority Services and Programs</td>
<td>Ph: 542-5773, <a href="http://www.uga.edu/msp/">http://www.uga.edu/msp/</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-mail harassment / abuse</td>
<td>Computer Security Incident Handling Team</td>
<td>email: <a href="mailto:abuse@uga.edu">abuse@uga.edu</a>, Computer Security and Ethics Guidelines: <a href="http://www.uga.edu/compeve/">http://www.uga.edu/compeve/</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>ESL students (English as a second language)</td>
<td>The Writing Center</td>
<td>Ph: 542-2119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Academic Center, Academic Assistance</td>
<td>Ph: 542-7773, <a href="http://www.uga.edu/academic/">www.uga.edu/academic/</a></td>
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| Sexual abuse | UGA Health Center | Sexual Violence and You: [link](http://www.ugaheroinfo.com/rape_and_you.html)  
Sexual Health Guide & UHC Treatment Options: [link](http://www.uhs.uga.edu/sexualhealthindex.html) |
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<td>Sexual Assault Center of Northeast Georgia Ph: 353-1912 <a href="http://www.asconega.org/">link</a></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mental Health Clinic Ph: 542-2273 <a href="http://www.uhs.uga.edu/CAPS/">link</a></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Athens-Clarke County Police On-Campus Ph: 9-811 <a href="http://www.accpd.org/">link</a></td>
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<td></td>
<td>University Police Ph: 542-2200 <a href="http://www.ps.uga.edu/">link</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Study skill</td>
<td>Academic Center, Academic Assistance Ph: 542-7575 <a href="http://www.uga.edu/adaa/">link</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>(time management, reading rate and comprehension, procrastination, motivation, test strategies, test anxiety, note-taking)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Substance abuse</td>
<td>Alcohol and Drug Counseling, University Health Services Ph: 542-8030</td>
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<tr>
<td>Suicide threats</td>
<td>University Police (will do a dialnet welfare check) Ph: 542-2200 <a href="http://www.ps.uga.edu/">link</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Threats against you or your students</td>
<td>Mental Health Clinic Ph: 542-2273 <a href="http://www.uhs.uga.edu/counselment.html">link</a></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Judicial Programs Ph: 542-1131 <a href="http://www.uga.edu/judicialprograms/">link</a></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>University Police (in case of immediate on-campus danger) Ph: 542-2200 <a href="http://www.ps.uga.edu/">link</a></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Athens-Clarke County Police (in case of immediate off-campus danger) On-Campus Ph: 9-911 <a href="http://www.accpd.org/">link</a></td>
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Grading Criteria and Rubrics
Developing and Applying Grading Criteria

Trying to decide the relative merits of a piece of writing can lead to a tangle of problems. Given a set of student essays, instructors frequently disagree, often vehemently, with one another's assessments. Because we teachers have little opportunity to discuss grading practices with colleagues, we often develop personal criteria that can seem eccentric to others. In fact, the first half-hour of a paper-grading workshop can be demoralizing even to the most dedicated proponents of writing across the curriculum. What do teachers actually want when they ask students to write?

Answering this question is not easy. Professional writing teachers grant that the assessment of writing, like the assessment of any art, involves subjective judgments. But the situation is not entirely relative either, for objective standards for good writing can be formulated, and readers with different tastes can be trained to assess writing samples with surprisingly high correlation. But the potential for wide disagreement about what constitutes good writing is a factor with which both students and teachers must contend.

The Problem of Criteria

The extent of this disagreement was illustrated by Paul Diederich (1974) in one of the most famous experiments in composition research. Diederich collected three hundred essays written by first-year students at three different universities and had them graded...
by fifty-three professional persons in six different occupational fields. He asked each reader to place the essays in nine different piles in order of “general merit” and to write a brief comment explaining what he or she liked and disliked about each essay. Diederich reported these results: “Out of the 300 essays graded, 101 received every grade from 1–9; 94 percent received either seven, eight, or nine different grades; and no essay received less than five different grades” (p. 6).

Diederich discovered, however, some order in this chaos. Through factor analysis, he identified five subgroups of readers who correlated highly with one another but not with readers in other subgroups. By analyzing the comments on the papers, Diederich concluded that each subgroup was consistently giving predominant weight to a single criterion of writing. Sixteen readers were putting main emphasis on quality of ideas; thirteen on sentence structure, usage, spelling, and punctuation; nine on organization and development; nine on creative wording or phrasing; and seven on liveliness or committed voice, a factor Diederich labeled “flavor and personality.” (Diederich counted one reader in two categories; hence these numbers add up to fifty-four rather than fifty-three; see his book, pp. 6–10, for details.)

Diederich’s research enabled him to develop procedures through which a diverse group of readers could be trained to increase the correlation of their grading. By setting descriptions for high, middle, and low achievement in each of his five criterion areas—ideas, organization, sentence structure, wording, and flavor—Diederich was able to train readers to balance their assessments over the five criteria. Since then, numerous researchers have refined or refocused Diederich’s criteria and have developed successful strategies for training readers as evaluators (see, particularly, Cooper and Odell, 1977, and White, 1992, 1994). Many of these strategies have classroom applications also, for training students as evaluators of writing greatly improves their ability to give high-quality advice in peer review workshops.

Providing Criteria for Students

Even though readers can be trained to apply uniform criteria to student essays, these criteria often vary from discipline to discipline (and from teacher to teacher), a phenomenon that often confuses students. Not only do styles vary widely across the disciplines, but there are also fundamental differences in the way arguments are structured and elaborated—a problem students feel acutely as they move through their general education courses.
To make matters more confusing for students, different teachers within the same discipline often value different kinds of writing. Some teachers, as we have seen in Chapter Three, want students to sound like professionals in the field. Others assign narratives, personal reflections, and other alternative assignments calling for voices other than the apprentice academic.

Because of such variety of expectations, instructors should describe their criteria for judging writing and, whenever possible, provide samples of successful student papers from previous classes.

Developing Criteria and Grading Scales

Criteria for writing are usually presented to students in one of two ways: analytically or holistically. The analytic method gives separate scores for each criterion—for example, ideas, ten points; organization, ten points; sentence structure, five points—whereas the holistic method gives one score that reflects the reader’s overall impression of the paper, considering all criteria at once. Many instructors prefer analytic scales because the breakdown of the grade into components, when combined with the instructor’s written comments, conveys detailed information about the teacher’s judgment of the essay. Some people object philosophically to analytic scoring, however, on the grounds that writing cannot be analyzed into component parts. Can ideas really be separated from organization or clarity of expression from clarity of thought? Such people prefer holistic evaluation, which does not suggest that writing is a mixture of separable elements. Also, holistic grading is faster and so is often preferable when one’s main concern is rapidity of assessment rather than precision of feedback.

Both analytic and holistic scoring methods can also be classified two ways: general description methods and primary trait methods. Proponents of general description argue that criteria for writing can be stated in a general or universal way (good organization, graceful sentence structure, and so forth). Proponents of the primary trait method, however, argue that criteria must be stated specifically in terms of the given writing task. For example, the criteria for a history paper detailing the origins of the electoral college would differ from those of a political science paper arguing that the electoral college should be abolished. A primary trait scale for the history paper might include criteria like these:

Does the writer make effective use of primary sources?
Does the essay explore the alternatives to the electoral college discussed at the constitutional convention?
In contrast, a primary trait scale for the political science paper might include these criteria:

Does the writer predict the consequences of abolishing the electoral college using acceptable empirical data?

Does the writer anticipate objections to these predictions and adequately respond to them?

Thus, a primary trait scale uses grading criteria keyed directly to the assignment. (Examples of different kinds of grading scales will appear later in this chapter.)

Developing Analytic Scales

Exhibit 15.1 illustrates a simple analytic scale using general description methods. Analytic scales normally list three or more criteria, almost always including quality of ideas, organization, and sentence structure. Many analytic scales are elaborate, with numerous additional categories and subcategories. Some analytic scales are dichotomous, meaning that the reader simply checks off "yes" or "no," depending on the presence or absence of certain features of the writing:

Is there a thesis statement? Yes ______ No ______

Other scales ask the reader to rate each feature of the writing along a number sequence:

Quality of thesis statement:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Low</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>Middle</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>High</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Many analytic scales weigh some criteria more heavily than others, depending on what the instructor wishes to emphasize. Thus, you might allot twenty-five points for ideas, fifteen points for organization, and ten points for sentence structure. But if you are particularly annoyed by careless spelling errors, you might give ten bonus points to papers with no misspelled words and deduct ten points for having more than, say, five misspelled words. Exhibits 15.2 and 15.3 illustrate analytic scales using primary trait criteria. Exhibit 15.2 is a scoring guide developed by an English professor for an assignment on Conrad's The Secret Sharer. The professor gives the scoring guide to students at the time she passes out the assignment. The scoring guide thus reinforces key features she expects in students' essays and serves as a checklist during peer review. Exhibit 15.3 is a scoring guide used by finance professor Dean Drenk to pro-
Exhibit 15.1. Simple Analytic Scale (General Description Method).

**Scoring Guide for Essays**

**Quality of Ideas (_____ points)**
Range and depth of argument; logic of argument; quality of research or original thought; appropriate sense of complexity of the topic; appropriate awareness of opposing views.

**Organization and Development (_____ points)**
Effective title; clarity of thesis statement; logical and clear arrangement of ideas; effective use of transitions; unity and coherence of paragraphs; good development of ideas through supporting details and evidence.

**Clarity and Style (_____ points)**
Ease of readability; appropriate voice, tone and style for assignment; clarity of sentence structure; gracefulness of sentence structure; appropriate variety and maturity of sentence structure.

**Sentence Structure and Mechanics (_____ points)**
Grammatically correct sentences; absence of comma splices, run-ons, fragments; absence of usage and grammatical errors; accurate spelling; careful proofreading; attractive and appropriate manuscript form.

Provide feedback on his thesis support microthemes in finance (see Chapter Five, pages 74–75). His scoring guide can be easily adapted to the needs of professors in other disciplines.

**Developing Holistic Scales**

Samples of holistic scales are shown in Exhibits 15.4 and 15.5. Exhibit 15.4 is a holistic scale for summary-writing assignments. Exhibit 15.5 is a holistic scale for grading physics microthemes. Holistic scoring depends on a reader's all-at-once assessment of a paper based on one attentive but quick reading. Research suggests that the correlation between readers actually increases if readers read quickly, trusting the reliability of their first impressions (White, 1994). Thus, holistic scales work best in conjunction with rapid grading and "models feedback" (see Chapter Thirteen, page 236; see also Rogers, 1995, for a discussion of holistic scoring in a chemistry course).

**Conducting a Departmental Norming Session**

A good way to improve one's grading practices is to join a conversation with colleagues about what constitutes excellent, good,
Exhibit 15.2. Analytic Scale (Primary Trait Method).

Scoring Guide for Assignment on *The Secret Sharer*

Your essay is supposed to provide a supported answer to the following question:

How has the experience with Leggatt changed the captain so that what he is at the end of the story is different from what he was at the beginning?

In order to do well on this paper, you need to do these things:

1. Have your own clear answer to this question.
2. Support your answer with strong arguments and textual details.
3. Make your essay clear enough for a reader to understand with one reading.

**Criterion 1.** Does your essay have a thesis statement at the end of the first paragraph that answers the question regarding changes in the captain?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>no thesis or unclear thesis</th>
<th>clear thesis</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Criterion 2.** Is your thesis supported with strong argumentation and use of significant details taken from the story?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>weak argument and/or lack of details as support</th>
<th>strong argument and good details as support</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Criterion 3.** Is your paper easy for a reader to follow?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paragraphing and transitions</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>10</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clear Sentences</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accurate mechanics: grammar, spelling, punctuation, neatness</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Dolores Johnson*

satisfactory, and poor papers. A surefire way to stimulate such conversation is to "staff-grade" with colleagues a set of essays written in response to an assignment within your discipline. One participant selects in advance four or five essays that seem to span the range of quality from excellent to poor, duplicates them for the department, and uses them to initiate discussion. In developing criteria, instructors are advised to use a number scale that does not translate directly into letter grades. A six-point scale ranging from 6 (best) to 1 (worst) is most common. Using a numerical scale tem-
Developing and Applying Grading Criteria


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grading Criteria</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Support of Theses</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Clarity of support:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Logic (relationship of support to thesis):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Sources of support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Quantity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Quality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total microtheme grade</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Specific Features of Your Microtheme</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grammatical errors are numerous enough to interfere with understanding your response.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The organization of your response is not clear.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The logic of your support is confusing or does not make sense.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your conclusions are not warranted by your support.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your support is too imprecise or too general.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Bean, Drenk, and Lee, 1982, p. 32.*

Temporarily suspends the additional problem of variable standards for letter grades. Thus, a “hard grader” and an “easy grader” might agree that a particular essay rates a 4 on a six-point scale but disagree on how to translate that 4 into a letter grade. The hard instructor might give it a C+ and the easy instructor a B. Since standards for letter grades are a different issue from standards for ranking several pieces of writing, problems of devising criteria for writing are simplified if we separate the two issues, at least initially.

After an initial norming session in which department members reach agreement on the sample papers and develop criteria for each gradation on their scoring scale, members break into pairs to staff-grade the set of essays. Each essay is read independently by two readers, who meet periodically to compare scores and discuss discrepant grades. On a six-point scale, instructors should aim to come within one point of each other’s scores. Differences of two or more points indicate a wide divergence of criteria. A departmental norming session every year or so can increase instructors’ communal
Exhibit 15.4. Holistic Scale for Grading Article Summaries.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>A 6 summary meets all the criteria. The writer understands the article thoroughly. The main points in the article appear in the summary with all main points proportionately developed (that is, the writer does not spend excessive time on one main point while neglecting other main points). The summary should be as comprehensive as possible and should read smoothly, with appropriate transitions between ideas. Sentences should be clear, without vagueness or ambiguity and without grammatical or mechanical errors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>A 5 summary should still be very good, but it can be weaker than a 6 summary in one area. It may have excellent accuracy and balance, but show occasional problems in sentence structure or correctness. Or it may be clearly written but be somewhat unbalanced or less comprehensive than a 6 summary or show a minor misunderstanding of the article.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>A score of 4 means &quot;good but not excellent.&quot; Typically, a 4 summary will reveal a generally accurate reading of the article, but it will be noticeably weaker in the quality of writing. Or it may be well written but cover only part of the essay.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>A 3 summary must have strength in at least one area of competence, and it should still be good enough to convince the grader that the writer has understood the article fairly well. However, a 3 summary typically is not written well enough to convey an understanding of the article to someone who has not already read it. Typically, the sentence structure of a 3 summary is not sophisticated enough to convey the sense of hierarchy and subordination found in the essay.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>A 2 summary is weak in all areas of competence, either because it is so poorly written that the reader cannot understand the content or because the content is inaccurate or seriously disorganized. However, a 2 essay convinces the grader that the writer has read the essay and is struggling to understand it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>A 1 summary fails to meet any of the areas of competence.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Confidence in their grading practices. For more detailed descriptions of this procedure, along with sample student essays and reader-developed scoring criteria, see White (1992). See also Bateman’s discussion of scoring a set of sociology essays dealing with ethnocentrism (1990, pp. 110–116).

Determining Grades

Assigning a letter grade to a piece of writing always poses a dilemma, and I can offer no easy advice. Teachers who use analytic scales often add up each student’s total score, rank the papers, and trans-
Exhibit 15.5. Holistic Scale for Grading Physics Microthemes.

6, 5 Microthemes in the category will show a confident understanding of the physics concepts and will explain those concepts clearly to the intended audience. A 6 theme will be clearly written throughout; will contain almost no errors in spelling, punctuation, or grammar; and will have enough development to provide a truly helpful explanation to learners. A 5 theme will still be successful in teaching the physics concepts to the intended audience but may have more errors or somewhat less development than a 6. The key to microthemes in the 6, 5 category is that they must show a correct understanding of the physics and explain the concept clearly to a new learner.

4, 3 Microthemes in this category will reveal to the instructor that the writer probably understands the physics concepts, but lack of clarity in the writing or lack of fully developed explanations means that the microtheme would not teach the concept to new learners. Microthemes in the 4, 3 category are usually "you know what I mean" essays; someone who already understands the concepts can tell that the writer probably does, too, but someone who does not already understand the concepts would not learn anything from the explanation. This category is also appropriate for clearly written essays that have minor misunderstandings of the physics concepts or for accurate essays full of sentence-level errors.

2, 1 These microthemes will be unsuccessful either because the writer fails to understand the physics concepts, because the number of errors is so high that the instructor cannot determine how much the writer understands, or because the explanations lack even minimum development. Give a score of 2 or 1 if the writer misunderstands the physics, even if the essay is otherwise well written. Also give a score of 2 or 1 to essays so poorly written that the reader can't understand them.

late scores into letter grades by establishing a curve or by setting point ranges for levels of grades. Other teachers, using a more holistic method, try to develop an interior sense of what an A, B, C, or D essay looks like. If possible, it is best to read through a set of papers quickly before marking them and assigning grades, trying to get a feel for the range of responses and sizing up what the best papers are like. In grading essay exams or short papers, many teachers develop schemes for not knowing who the authors are until the papers are graded. (One method is to have students use their social security numbers rather than names; another is to have students put their names on the back of the last page.) Not knowing who wrote which essay eliminates any halo effect that might bias the grade.

To avoid grading on the curve, some teachers like to establish criteria for grading that are as objective and as consistent as possible. Although this is no easy task, the following explanation, written by Cornell University English professor Harry Shaw (1984), shows how one professor makes his decision. It is as good a guide as any I know.
How I Assign Letter Grades

In grading "thesis papers" ... I ask myself the following set of questions:

1. Does the paper have a thesis?
2. Does the thesis address itself to an appropriate question or topic?
3. Is the paper free from long stretches of quotations and summaries that exist only for their own sakes and remain unanalyzed?
4. Can the writer produce complete sentences?
5. Is the paper free from basic grammatical errors?

If the answer to any of these questions is "no," I give the paper some kind of C. If the answer to most of the questions is "no," its grade will be even lower.

For papers which have emerged unscathed thus far, I add the following questions:

6. How thoughtful is the paper? Does it show real originality?
7. How adequate is the thesis? Does it respond to its question or topic in a full and interesting way? Does it have an appropriate degree of complexity?
8. How well organized is the paper? Does it stick to the point? Does every paragraph contain a clear topic sentence? If not, is another kind of organizing principle at work? Are the transitions well made? Does it have a real conclusion, not simply a stopping place?
9. Is the style efficient, not wordy or unclear?
10. Does the writing betray any special elegance?
11. Above all, can I hear a lively, intelligent, interesting human voice speaking to me (or to another audience, if that’s what the writer intends) as I read the paper?

Depending on my answers to such questions, I give the paper some kind of A or some kind of B [pp. 149–150].

Conclusion: Expecting Excellence

When students know an instructor’s criteria for assigning grades— and when they have the opportunity to help one another apply these criteria to works in progress—the quality of their final products will improve gratifyingly. It is satisfying indeed to see how well many undergraduates can write when they are engaged in their projects and follow the stages of the writing process through multiple drafts and peer reviews. By setting high standards, by encouraging multiple drafts, by refusing to be the first human being to read a student’s paper—in short, by expecting excellence— instructors can feel justified in applying rigorous criteria.
But it is important too that students never think of their writing as “finished.” In the best of all worlds, students would be allowed to rewrite a paper if they wished to improve it further. The presence of grades should never override the more important emphasis on revision and improvement.

The point, then, of assigning writing across the curriculum is to engage students in the process of inquiry and active learning. Although one of our goals is to improve students’ communication skills, writing is more than communication; it is a means of learning, thinking, discovering, and seeing. When teachers give students good problems to think about—and involve them actively in the process of solving these problems—they are deepening students’ engagement with the subject matter and promoting their intellectual growth. By adding well-designed writing assignments to a course, teachers give students continued practice in critical thinking. Teachers know when their approach is working: the performance of their students improves.
Peer Review
Reviewing/editing a manuscript for scientific publication

Calvin Chong

Horticultural Research Institute of Ontario, Department of Plant Agriculture, University of Guelph, Vineland Station, Ontario, Canada LOR 2E0. Received 30 September 1997, accepted 28 January 1998.

Chong, C. 1998. Reviewing/editing a manuscript for scientific publication. Can. J. Plant Sci. 78: 377–382. The peer review process is the basis of evaluation or “quality control” in modern science. Peer review ensures publication of valid scientific results that are appropriately presented and interpreted. As scientists, we benefit from and are expected to review the work of our colleagues. A request to review a manuscript recognizes the reviewer’s expertise as an authority or leader in a field of research. The capacity to conduct a good review enhances one’s reputation and career advancement, and is well worth the effort expended. Manuscripts submitted to the Agricultural Institute of Canada (AIC) scientific journals are logged and monitored through a centralized processing system. A primary goal of the journals is to review manuscripts within 90 d of submission. Good reviews provide a constructive and well-reasoned appraisal of a manuscript phrased in the spirit of professional courtesy and confidentiality. Both anonymity of the reviewer and confidentiality of manuscript contents must be maintained in the peer review process. Any question of conflict of interest or ethical standing of a reviewer or duplication of publication should be directed to the editor immediately. Editors, authors, and reviewers are important partners in the peer review process.

Keywords: Peer review, manuscript processing, scientific journals


Mots clés: Examen par les pairs, processus de publication du manuscrit, revue scientifique

Since the first scientific journals appeared in the 1660s, peer review has been the cornerstone of modern science (Bishop 1984). The traditional format of the scientific paper known by the acronym IMRAD (Introduction, Methods, Results, and Discussion) has remained virtually unchanged (Day 1988).

The primary goal of scientists is to communicate new and original research findings in peer-reviewed scientific publications. As scientists, we are expected to critically review the work of other scientists and to pass judgement on its acceptability for scientific publication.

From the viewpoint of the scientist as author, the peer review process can be daunting. The typical scientific paper represents thousands of dollars in costs and the culmination of hundreds of hours of meticulous planning, gathering of data, analysis and interpretation of the results, and manuscript preparation. A scientist’s reputation, self esteem, and ability to attract research support, especially in an era characterized by dwindling research resources, are dependent on his/her productivity, which is based largely upon the number and quality of peer reviewed papers. Yet, records of the AIC scientific journals indicate that one in every three or four submitted manuscripts is deemed unacceptable. Table 1 lists, in descending order of percent frequency of occurrence, the primary reasons for rejection of 186 manuscripts submitted for possible publication in the Canadian Journal of Plant Science during the 3-yr period, 1990–1992. Any one of these reasons was sufficient grounds for rejection although, in most cases, rejection was based on a combination of two or more (Chong 1994).

As authors, we are often “blinded” by familiarity with our work. We may unknowingly have overlooked other plausible interpretations of our results, or neglected (or were unable) to write with the high degree of precision and clarity required to document a complex experiment or complex results from multiple factor experiments. Alley (1987) indicates that most

Abbreviations: AIC, Agricultural Institute of Canada; CBE, Council of Biology Editors; CJAS, Canadian Journal of Animal Science; CJPS, Canadian Journal of Plant Science; CJSS, Canadian Journal of Soil Science; IMRAD, Introduction, Methods, Results, and Discussion

1Presented at the Second AIC Workshop on Scientific Writing and Presentation, Truro, Nova Scotia, 17 August 1997.
weak scientific writing is so, not because of the complexity of the task, but primarily because most scientists have never received formal training in scientific writing. The primary objective of scientific writing is to inform our readers. The key to good scientific writing is conciseness, clarity, and simplicity (Alley 1987; Day 1988; Anstey and Shady 1994).

Good peer reviews do make a difference in assisting the authors and the journals to publish valid scientific results that are appropriately presented. During my tenure as Associate Editor and, later, Editor of the Canadian Journal of Plant Science, I recall several poorly prepared manuscripts which required major revisions with re-revisions, or which were rejected initially and resubmitted later after extensive revision. After thorough, constructive, and repeated critical peer review, these submissions won awards as best papers in their disciplines.

This paper highlights points to consider when one is requested to review and edit a manuscript submitted for publication. The presentation is aimed primarily at senior graduate students, post-doctoral fellows, and scientists with limited publication experience. While the paper discusses practices and procedures used for the AIC journals, the basic principles also apply to other scientific journals. The Council of Biology Editors (1991) compilation of papers on peer review in biomedical publications provides other views and insights about the topic of peer reviewing.

THE AIC JOURNALS

The dissemination of scientific information has been a primary function of the AIC, which has been publishing scientific journals since 1921 (Anonymous 1995). Currently, there are three primary scientific research journals, each sponsored by one or more scientific societies: the Canadian Journal of Animal Science (CIAS) sponsored by the Canadian Society of Animal Science; the Canadian Journal of Plant Science (CIPS) sponsored by the Canadian Society of Agronomy, and the Canadian Society for Horticultural Science; and the Canadian Journal of Soil Science (CJSS) sponsored by the Canadian Society of Soil Science and the Canadian Society of Agrometeorology.

The AIC journals are ranked amongst the world's top agricultural science journals. The involvement of the societies and their representation on the journals’ editorial boards and management committees plays a crucial role in the success of the journals. Each year, approximately 70 members of the sponsoring scientific societies serve as Editors, Associate Editors, and Assistant Editors, and many more scientists serve as reviewers (Anonymous 1995).

The AIC also publishes the Canadian Journal of Agricultural Economics, books such as the Biology of Canadian Weeds, and other miscellaneous publications.

Manuscript Processing

Manuscripts submitted to CIAS, CIPS, and CJSS are handled through a centralized system. This system allows the editors (one for each journal) and the Journals Section to effectively track each manuscript throughout its entire process and compile year-end statistics on all manuscripts (Chong 1992, 1993).

A primary goal of the editors and the journals is to complete the review of manuscripts within 90 days from submission. As illustrated in Fig. 1, the major steps in the review of a typical paper are as follows:

1. The author submits his/her paper to the Journals Section at the AIC’s National Office in Ottawa, where its receipt is immediately acknowledged. It is logged and thereafter monitored.
2. The journal Editor, through communications with the National Office, assigns the manuscript usually to an appropriate Associate Editor. The journal Editor, however, may decide to handle a particular manuscript without sending it to an Associate Editor. In the case of CIAS, an Assistant Editor (i.e. Associate Editor in training) occasionally may be assigned a manuscript.
3. The Associate Editor seeks two or sometimes three reviews.

If the review is favourable

4a. The Associate Editor communicates directly with the submitting author concerning revisions.
5a. The author returns the revised manuscript to the Associate Editor who accepts it at that point, indicating so in writing to the author. Occasionally, the Associate Editor may request further revisions and/or re-review.
6a. The Associate Editor sends the accepted version to the Journals Section for copy editing.
7a. The Journals Section sends galleys to the author, along with other information such as date of publication, reprints, and page charges.
8a. The author reviews, approves, and returns the galleys to the Journals Section for publication.

If the review is unfavourable

4b. The Associate Editor re-routes the paper, the reviews, and his/her recommendation to the journal Editor.
5b. The journal Editor writes the author, indicating clearly the reasons for rejecting the paper, and may suggest remedial measures and/or invite a revised version. In the case of CIAS, Associate Editors may also reject papers.

RECEIVING A MANUSCRIPT FOR REVIEW

The swift review of a manuscript is important to the author. He/she has worked on this project for a number of years, prepared several drafts, and is anxious to have the work published. While 2 weeks to complete a review would be most desirable from the journals’ viewpoint, most Associate Editors usually request return of reviews within 3 or 4 weeks. Considering time in the mail, busy work schedules of reviewers, time for the editors to assess the reviews and write to the authors, and provided there are no undue delays, the 3- to 4-week time frame is usually sufficient for the journals to complete most reviews within 90 days.

When requested to review a manuscript, consider first whether or not you are an appropriate reviewer. Don’t be afraid to say “no” if you are not confident. A decline to review is better than a cursory or an inadequate review. Contact the Associate Editor by telephone, fax or e-mail and recommend
at least one alternate reviewer. To avoid delays in the mail, the Associate Editor may request that you re-route the manuscript directly to the alternate. Some professors may suggest a graduate student or post-doctoral fellow as a potential reviewer. This may be part of the training process for the junior colleague. In such cases, the Associate Editor should be confident of the technical knowledge of the reviewers.

If you decide to review the manuscript but find that the review will be delayed for any reason, let the Associate Editor know as soon as possible. If a review cannot be completed on time (90 days), the Associate Editor will normally communicate with the author indicating a reason for the delay and when the review likely will be completed. Authors appreciate being informed when reviews are late.

**GUIDELINES FOR JUDGING**

Most scientific journals, including those of the AIC, provide guidance for judging the suitability of a paper. The "Guidelines for Reviewers" or traditional blue comment form used by the AIC journals (including a new revised version used presently by CJAS) request that reviewers "provide a constructive, well-reasoned appraisal ... phrased in the spirit of professional courtesy." The reviewer is prompted to evaluate the manuscript according to a series of checklist questions, and to provide summary comments and recommendations. The checklist essentially embodies the five criteria that validate a scientific paper (Bishop 1984).

The paper must:
- provide new and original contributions to knowledge
- provide clear and reasonable interpretations of the data
- be logically consistent within itself and within the body of existing knowledge
- provide results that are testable and repeatable by other scientists
- provide due reference to prior work upon which the research depends.

In writing a research paper, or in peer reviewing it, the goal is similar — to communicate and authenticate new science — except that authors and reviewers approach the matter from different perspectives. As "gate keepers" of science, Bishop (1984) recommends that a scientist should review a manuscript with the same care, diligence and thoroughness as when he/she is writing a paper. However, the primary role of the reviewer is as an advisor to the editor. A good review will also be very helpful to the authors.

Most reviewers provide a short paragraph or two of general comments including a statement of the research problem, an indication as to what extent the objective(s) was accomplished, and changes required to improve or make the paper acceptable for publication. The general comments are usually accompanied by more specific comments listed by page and line number.

Two copies of the review are requested, one unsigned to be sent to the author, and the other signed by the reviewer to
be kept on file. Should you wish to provide additional comments to the Associate Editor, do so in a separate note or letter.

A typical complaint expressed by reviewers is that "the manuscript was not reviewed sufficiently in-house before submission ... and was verbose and unorganized." These papers can be quite frustrating and time-consuming to review. Some research organizations and scientific journals require thorough reviews by at least two knowledgeable colleagues before manuscript submission. Perhaps, this requirement by the AIC journals will reduce these deficiencies in submitted manuscripts. I recommend that the journals consider this as a new policy.

As a reviewer, be tactful and constructive in your criticisms. Always highlight and emphasize the positive aspects of the paper. For example, don't just say, "The paper is poor and lacks focus." State reasons for your opinions and suggest alternatives or possible solutions. Authors appreciate reviewers who make an effort to help improve their manuscript. "Acid" criticism serves no purpose; it irritates the author, is non-productive, and is non-professional. Associate Editors may remove or delete undesirable reviewer’s comments.

Try to word comments in a "caring and humble tone." Your suggestion or recommendation, although worthy of consideration, may not always be the best one, or may be controversial. There are times when reviewers will disagree, for instance, a recommendation to reject and one to accept. The Associate Editor may choose not to heed your advice, and may seek additional reviews. Poorly worded or harsh reviews that have insufficient rationale are frustrating to authors. A few authors have suggested that "bad" reviewers should be blacklisted from publishing papers (Sojka et al. 1992). Fortunately, this policy has not yet been adopted.

Rejecting a paper is a delicate task and the journal Editor does so only reluctantly after very careful and thorough consideration of the review documents. Reasons for rejection should be clearly indicated, along with what changes are required to make the work publishable, whether in regard to the present results or in the pursuit of additional or future studies.

In the first AIC Workshop on Scientific Writing and Presentation, Hall (1997) discussed the use of statistics in journal articles. Deficiency in statistical methods or interpretation is perceived to be a common, if not the major, reason for manuscript rejections. It is interesting, however, that "insufficient data" as a reason for rejection (Table 1) was listed most frequently (59% frequency of occurrence), outranking "inappropriate experimental design/statistics" (37%). This evidence may be a reflection of the increasing trend towards more short-term, applied research, and perhaps also increasing pressures to publish.

Table 1. Primary reasons for rejection of manuscripts submitted to Canadian Journal of Plant Science

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>% frequency of occurrence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Insufficient data</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inappropriate experimental design/statistics</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inappropriate procedure/methodology</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inadequate contribution to knowledge</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inadequate interpretation</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor organization and presentation (revise/renumb)</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inappropriate for CIPS</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited scope (revise to short communication)</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1) 86 rejected manuscripts during the 3-yr period, 1990-1992; Source: Chong (1994).

The blue comment form presently used by CIPS and CISS urges that "considerable time can be saved by entering (pencil) spelling corrections, grammatical suggestions, and word re-arrangements directly on the manuscript." Write legibly and be neat. It is annoying and a waste of time for editors and the author to have to decipher illegible comments. Refrain from changing the author’s literary style, and concentrate your efforts in the sections of the manuscript that are obviously verbose, or where the meaning is ambiguous or confused. The use of first and third-person pronouns and of the active voice are acceptable and sometimes preferred. As a general rule, use the passive voice in the Materials and Methods section and the active voice in the Results, Discussion, and Conclusion sections.

Published papers in the AIC journals are read widely by scientists of many disciplines. Manuscripts thus should be presented in language that is clearly understood by both specialists and non-specialists. Discourage the use of slang, jargon, and local vernacular, and request that unfamiliar technical terms be defined.

**GRAMMAR — A PERVERSIVE PROBLEM**

As a reviewer it is sometimes difficult to decide "how far to go" with grammar. Some manuscripts seem to require a total rewrite! In such instances, your judgement as a reviewer can be challenged. While reviewers are not required to make extensive revisions to the text, some Associate Editors and reviewers will make exceptions, particularly with overseas manuscripts in which English or French is obviously not the author’s first language. It is the author’s responsibility to check for common grammatical errors such as incomplete or run on sentences, and inappropriate uses of "that/which" or "effect/affect". Some institutions are now requiring manuscript review by an English editor prior to submission to the journal (Sojka et al. 1992).

The blue comment form presently used by CIPS and CISS urges that "considerable time can be saved by entering (pencil) spelling corrections, grammatical suggestions, and word re-arrangements directly on the manuscript." Write legibly and be neat. It is annoying and a waste of time for editors and the author to have to decipher illegible comments. Refrain from changing the author’s literary style, and concentrate your efforts in the sections of the manuscript that are obviously verbose, or where the meaning is ambiguous or confused. The use of first and third-person pronouns and of the active voice are acceptable and sometimes preferred. As a general rule, use the passive voice in the Materials and Methods section and the active voice in the Results, Discussion, and Conclusion sections.

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**CITATIONS AND PROOFREADING**

To be a more effective reviewer, learn the formatting and editorial style for abstracts, tables, figures, footnotes, and abbreviations commonly used in the journals. As indicated above, references are an essential part of a scientific paper. Short Communications should contain only a few (usually not more than nine) references. Full-length papers may contain as many as required. However, references should be highly pertinent and multiple citations (usually more than three or four) should be avoided.

While it is the responsibility of the author to check references with the original articles and to ensure citation accuracy, Harper (1992) has demonstrated that errors are frequently found in references. It is difficult, if not impossible, for a reviewer to detect "not obvious at first glance"
errors. Nevertheless, check them carefully. In the least, make sure that all of them are listed and formatted as required by the journal, and that appropriate or important historical ones are included. If you are unfamiliar with the editorial requirements of the journals, browse through a recent issue and also examine the “Notice to Authors” (usually located in the first issue of each year). If you are so inclined, learn and use the symbols that editors use for proof reading (Minister of Supply and Services Canada 1985; Anonymous 1988; CBE 1994). Your reviews will be more “professional looking.”

Note also that staff of the Journals’ Section also copy edits manuscripts for obvious errors such as in spelling, grammar, and journal style.

ALTERNATE PUBLICATIONS
While most manuscripts (ca. 70%) submitted to the scientific journals are full length papers, some are eventually published as Short Communications upon recommendation of a reviewer and/or Associate Editor, and by agreement with the author. It is a common misconception that a short communication is a down-graded paper. Rather, it is an alternate form of scientific publication. It is reviewed as thoroughly as a full length paper. Cultivar and germplasm descriptions published in the CJPS are also peer reviewed.

The occasional letter received by a journal is also peer reviewed and published in the Letters section of the journal. If a letter comments on the work of a previously published paper, the authors of the paper will be invited to submit and publish a rebuttal (also peer reviewed) along with the letter.

Increasingly, reviews of research in specific areas (usually by invitation) and papers presented at workshops and symposia are being published after appropriate peer review. Papers such as those dealing with forage and animal nutrition may, after appropriate review in one journal, be published in another with the approval and consent of the Associate Editors, Journal Editors and authors involved.

Since 1994, applied research papers have been peer-reviewed and published in a separate Application of Technology section of the CJAS. These papers, which transfer technology, do not have to be new or original contributions to science. Plans are underway to proceed similarly in the CJPS (this process is now underway).

ANONYMITY, CONFIDENTIALITY, AND ETHICS
Ethical issues or codes of conduct dealing with scientific publication are often controversial and not fully understood. Unlike laws, ethics may change with time, reflecting shifts in a society's attitude (Bishop 1984).

Like most scientific journals, the review system of the AIC journals is based on the ethical principles of anonymity and confidentiality. Bishop (1984) emphasizes that, for the system to be effective, reviewers must be "free from the possibilities of repercussion if they are expected to report with the candor and accuracy required for critical review."

A submitted paper is a confidential document and should always be treated as such. Avoid the urge to disclose the contents to others. If you need to discuss or seek guidance from another colleague concerning issues in a paper under review, you may do so if you ensure confidentiality such as not revealing the specifics or the author's name and institution. Consult the Associate Editor conducting the review prior to showing the manuscript to a colleague. Do not make photocopies of manuscripts prior to publication without permission of the Associate Editor.

Associate Editors routinely acknowledge receipt of reviews and express appreciation. To foster a good editor-reviewer relationship and make reviewers feel more a part of the review process, an Associate Editor may indicate to the reviewer to what extent the review agrees with that of a second reviewer. The Associate Editor may also send along a copy of the second reviewer's report, or even a copy of his/her decision letter to the author. This correspondence and any communication, including conversations between reviewer and editor concerning the paper under review, are also confidential. Do not transmit reviews or related information by fax or e-mail unless specifically requested to do so.

Bishop (1984) discussed ethics from the perspective of authors, editors, or reviewers. He maintains that many issues of ethics have arisen from factors such as the increasing pressure to "publish or perish," greater government involvement, and complexity of funding procedures. The following points are most relevant to the reviewer:

- The ultimate responsibility for ethical behaviour in scientific publication rests with the author. As a rule, it may be regarded as unethical for reviewers and editors to question the authenticity of experimental results. The practice of science is self-policing and the consequences can be severe for anyone who intentionally falsifies results.
- Reviewers should ensure that pertinent references are cited to prior work on which a paper depends.
- Simultaneous submission of the same scientific paper (in full or in part) to more than one journal is a deception. Such an infraction is often brought to an editor's attention by vigilant reviewers.
- Reviewers should make every effort to review a manuscript within the period specified by the editors, simply as a matter of courtesy, and because they expect reviewers of their own papers to reciprocate.
- It is unethical for a reviewer to intentionally delay a paper, such as in rare instances when a reviewer may have in preparation a closely similar one. Bishop (1984) suggests three ethical courses of action, emphasizing that speed is of essence. A delay may see the reviewer suspected of plagiarism.
- Until a paper is accepted for publication, it is unethical for a reviewer to cite or incorporate ideas from the paper he/she has just reviewed without prior consent from the editor and author. Ideas and concepts can come from many sources when developing your own research projects. It would be difficult to filter all our research ideas to ensure that unpublished manuscripts (that you recently reviewed in depth) did not contribute to your own research. It is essential, however, that you acknowledge the source of these ideas to the best of your ability.
- It is quite acceptable to submit a previously rejected paper to another journal, and sometimes to the same journal, if
CONCLUSION
A request to review a paper should be considered as an honour. You have been recognized as an authority or leader in your field of expertise, perhaps by an editor or by recommendation of a colleague, or even the author.

Chances are, if you provide good reviews, you will be asked again. Good reviewers are highly regarded by editors. By reviewing the manuscripts of others, you will become a better communicator and more educated about your field. The experience is enlightening, and will assist you to become a better scientist. Frequent reviewing of manuscripts enhances your reputation among your colleagues and administrators and increases your chances for promotion or for becoming an Associate Editor of one of the journals.

In 1997, the AIC began issuing the three scientific journals in electronic format on the World Wide Web in addition to the hard copy versions. As more and more papers are published electronically, there has been a movement towards the release of non-peer reviewed articles in electronic journals. At the first (1996) AIC Workshop on Scientific Writing and Presentation, Vessey (1997) predicted a near-complete conversion of print-on-paper to electronic scientific journals within 10–15 years, but indicated that the vast majority of electronically released scientific papers will continue to be peer reviewed. Janzen (1996), another speaker at the same workshop, echoed the same viewpoint.


How to reply to referees’ comments when submitting manuscripts for publication

Hywel C. Williams, PhD
Nottingham, United Kingdom

Background: The publication of articles in peer-reviewed scientific journals is a fairly complex and step-wise process that involves responding to referees’ comments. Little guidance is available in the biomedical literature on how to deal with such comments.

Objective: The objective of this article is to provide guidance to novice writers on dealing with peer review comments in a way that maximizes the chance of subsequent acceptance.

Methods: This will be a literature review and review of the author’s experience as a writer and referee.

Results: Where possible, the author should consider revising and resubmitting rather than sending an article elsewhere. A structured layout for responding to referees’ comments is suggested that includes the 3 golden rules: (1) respond completely; (2) respond politely; and (3) respond with evidence.

Conclusion: Responding to referees’ comments requires the writer to overcome any feelings of personal attack, and to instead concentrate on addressing referees’ concerns in a courteous, objective, and evidence-based way. (J Am Acad Dermatol 2004;51:79-83.)

Plenty of guidance is available on conducting good research, and Web sites of most scientific journals give clear and helpful instructions on what is suitable for submission and how to submit. Yet where does one obtain guidance on replying to referees’ (peer reviewer) comments once the manuscript is returned? I could find little in the literature dealing with this important topic. This article attempts to address this gap by providing some helpful tips on how to reply to referees’ comments. In the absence of any systematic research to determine which strategies are best in terms of acceptance rates, the tips suggested below are based simply on my personal experience of publishing approximately 200 articles, refereeing more than 500 manuscripts, and working as an editor for 3 dermatology journals. I have presented some aspects of the work previously in two workshops with groups of British Specialist Registrars in dermatology, and I am grateful to them for helping me to develop the learning themes.

I have deliberately not entered into any discussions on the quality of peer review or the value of peer review in publication because it is still hotly debated if peer review really helps to discriminate between good and bad research or whether it simply improves the readability and quality of accepted articles. Instead, I have decided to stick to providing what I hope is helpful and practical guidance within the system that already exists.

THAT LETTER ARRIVES FROM THE JOURNAL

After laboring for many months or years on your research project and having written many manuscript drafts to send off your final journal submission, a letter or electronic-mail message from the journal arrives several weeks later indicating whether the journal editor is interested in your manuscript. At this stage, it is every author’s hope that the manuscript is accepted with no changes, yet such an experience is incredibly rare—it has happened to me only twice; and these were both commissioned reviews. More commonly, one of the following scenarios ensues.
Table I. Three golden rules of responding to referees’ comments

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<th>Rule</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Answer completely</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Answer politely</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Answer with evidence</td>
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Accept with minor revision

If you are lucky, the letter will ask for only minor revisions. In such circumstances, it is probably best to simply get on with these changes without invoking too much argument. If you send the revised manuscript back to the editor quickly, it is still likely to be fresh in his or her mind, and you will probably get a speedy acceptance.

Major revisions needed

The most common form of letter is one that lists 2 or 3 sets of referees’ comments, some of which are quite major. In such circumstances, you will need to work hard at reading and replying to each referee in turn, following the layout and 3 golden rules (Table 1) that I will develop later in this article. Such a process can take days to complete, so do not underestimate the task. Only you can decide whether such an investment of time is worthwhile. My advice is always to revise and resubmit the same journal if the comments are fair, even if responding to them takes a lot of time. Some authors go weak at the knees when requested to do a major revision, and instead simply send the manuscript elsewhere. This is understandable, but the authors should still try and make improvements to the manuscript in light of the referees’ comments. Authors should also be aware that in certain fields of research, their work is likely to end up with the same referee when they send their manuscript to another major specialty journal. It will not go down well with that referee if they see that the authors have completely ignored the referees’ previous comments. So, generally speaking, my advice is to put in the time needed to make a better manuscript based on the referees’ comments, and resubmit along the lines suggested. If you do submit to another journal, you should consider showing the latest journal the previous referees’ comments and how you have improved the article in response to such comments—some journal editors feel positively about such honesty (J. D. Bernhard, MD, written communication, November 2003).

Journal requests a complete rewrite

Only you can decide if the effort of a complete rewrite is worth it. If it is clear that the referees and editor are interested in your manuscript and they are doing everything they can to make detailed and constructive suggestions to help you get the manuscript published, it might be a safer bet to follow their wishes of a complete rewrite. It might be difficult for the editor to then turn you down if you have done exactly what was asked of you. If, on the other hand, the request for a complete rewrite is a cold one, i.e., without suggestions as to exactly what needs to be done and where, then it might be better to reflect on the other comments and submit elsewhere.

Referees may recommend splitting a manuscript if it is part of a large study that tries to cram in too many different results. Such a request from one of the referees may appear like a gift to the author—two for the price of one. But a word of warning—if you are going to draft the original manuscript into two related manuscripts, there is no guarantee that both will be accepted. The best thing under such circumstances is to have a dialogue with your editor to test how receptive they would be to having the manuscript split into two.

Unsure as to rejection or possible resubmission

The wording of some journal response letters can be difficult to interpret. For example, phrases such as “we cannot accept your manuscript in its current form, but if you do decide to resubmit, then we would only consider a substantial revision,” may sound like a rejection, yet in reality, it may indicate an opportunity to resubmit. If you are unsure on how to read between the lines, ask an experienced colleague or, better still, someone who works as a referee for that journal. Failing that, you could simply just write back to the editor to ask for clarification. Sometimes, a journal will ask you to resubmit your article in letter format rather than as an original manuscript. You then have to decide if the effort versus reward for resubmission elsewhere is worth it, or if you are content to accept the bird in the hand principle and resubmit your original manuscript as a letter.

The outright rejection

Usually this type of letter is quite short, with very little in the way of allowing you an opportunity to resubmit. Outright rejection may be a result of the manuscript being unsuitable for the journal or because of “lethal” methodologic concerns raised by the referees that are nonsalvageable. For example, doing a crossover clinical trial on lentigo maligna with an intervention such as operation that has a permanent effect on patient outcomes in the first phase of the crossover study. Sometimes the editors, who are always pushed for publication space, simply did not find your article interesting, novel, or important.
enough to warrant inclusion. You will just have to live with that and submit elsewhere.

Dealing with outright rejection of your precious sweat and toil may not be easy, especially if the journal has taken ages to get back to you. You have two main choices at this stage. If you believe that the referees’ comments are grossly unfair or just plain wrong, you can write to the editor to appeal the decision and ask for new referees. The success of such appeals depends on how confident you are that their decision was out of order and whether the real reason for rejection was indeed based on those comments transferred to you. Appeals such as this are rarely successful—I have done it twice with the BMJ, and failed both times.

The other (better) option is to stop snivelling, pick yourself up, and resubmit elsewhere. If you do this, it is important that you read and objectively assess the referees’ comments from the journal that has turned down your manuscript. This is for two reasons: (1) those comments may improve the article, and (2) as stated earlier, your manuscript may end up with the same referee even if you send it to another journal. If you are really convinced that your manuscript is earth-shattering, then you should not automatically resubmit to a journal that might offer easier acceptance. It has been my experience that sometimes a manuscript that was rejected by a medium-ranking dermatology journal is subsequently accepted by a higher-ranking one—such is the unpredictability of peer review and journal editor preferences.

**THE 3 GOLDEN RULES OF STRUCTURING YOUR RESPONSE LETTER**

**Rule 1: Answer completely**

It is important that all of the referees’ comments are responded to in sequence, however irritating or vague they may appear to you. Number them, and repeat them in your cover letter using the headings such as “Reviewer 1,” then “Comment 1,” followed by “Response.” What you are doing here is making the editor’s and referees’ jobs easy for them—they will not have to search and cross-reference a lot of scripts to discover what you have done—it will all be there in one clean document.

Typing out or paraphrasing the referees’ comments as a means of itemizing the points also achieves two other things: (1) it forces you to listen to what the referees actually said, rather than what you thought they might have said when you first read their comments; and (2) it helps you to understand how many separate points are being made by the referee. Quite often, you will just receive a paragraph with several comments mixed together. In such a situation, you can split the paragraph into 2 or 3 separate comments (eg, comment 1.1, 1.2, 1.3), then answer them in turn. Even if some of the comments are just compliments, repeat these in your cover letter followed by a phrase such as “we thank the referee for these comments.”

**Rule 2: Answer politely**

Remember that nearly all referees have spent at least an hour of their personal time in refereeing your manuscript without being paid for it. If you (as a lead author) receive a huge list of comments, it usually means that the referee is trying very hard to help you improve the manuscript to get it accepted. Rejection statements are usually short, and do not allow you an open door to resubmit.

It is quite all right to disagree with referees when replying, but do it in a way that makes your referees feel valued. Avoid pompous or arrogant remarks. Although it is only human nature to feel slightly offended when someone else dares to criticize your precious work, this must not come across in your reply. Your reply should be scientific and systematic. Get someone else to read your responses before sending them off.

Try to avoid opening phrases such as “we totally disagree” or “the referee obviously does not know this field.” Instead, try to identify some common ground and use phrases starting with words such as “we agree with the referee, however…” A list of helpful phrases that I have developed over the years is given in Table 2 for guidance.

**Rule 3: Answer with evidence**

If you disagree with the referee’s comments, don’t just say, “we disagree,” and move on. Say why you disagree with a coherent argument or, better still, back it up with some facts supported by references that you can cite in your reply. Sometimes those extra...
references are just to back the point you make in your cover letter, but occasionally you may add them to the revised article. Some kind referees go to the trouble of suggesting missed references or how you might reword important areas of your document. If providing the references or rewording makes sense to you, just go ahead and incorporate them. It is quite legitimate to use the referee's comments to add some extra text and data if their comments require it, although if this amounts to more than a page, you would be wise to suggest it as an option to the editor. Another option is to suggest that the extensive additions would be better placed in another subsequent article.

Sometimes, if there are no clear published data to strongly support your methodologic approaches, you can discuss this with an expert in the field. If he or she agrees with your approach, then you can say so in your reply. For example, "although other approaches have been used in the past, we have discussed this statistical methods with Professor So-and-So who agrees that it was the appropriate analysis."

TIPS ON DEALING WITH OTHER SCENARIOS

Referees with conflicting viewpoints

At first, this scenario might appear very difficult to the novice, yet it should be viewed as a gift. You, the author, have the choice of which viewpoint you agree with the most (or better still, the one that is right). Then it is simply a question of playing one referee against the other in your reply. You can always appeal to the editor by asking him or her to make the final decision, but give them your preferred option with reasons.

The referee is wrong

Referees are not gods, but human beings who make mistakes. Sometimes they do not read your manuscript properly, and instead go on at length about their hobbyhorse whereas, in fact, you have dealt with their concerns elsewhere in the manuscript. Try to resist the temptation of rubbing their nose in it with lofty sarcastic phrases such as "if the referee had bothered to read our manuscript." Instead, say something like "we agree that this is an important point and we have already addressed it on page A, paragraph B, line C."

Sometimes the referee is just plain wrong about something. If so, it is silly to agree with the referee, and you are entitled to a good argument. If you are confident that you are right, then simply argue back with facts that can be referenced—the editor can then adjudicate who has the best evidence on their side.

The referee is just plain rude

Anyone who has done clinical research will realize just how difficult it can be, and there is no place for rudeness from referees. I find it sad that senior academics can sometimes forget their humble beginnings when they referee other's work. Nearly all journals provide clear guidance to their referees to avoid remarks that they would find hurtful if applied to their own work, yet some ignore such advice and delight in rude or sarcastic comments, possibly because of envy or insecurity. In such circumstances, all you need to do is complain to the editor and ask for another nonhostile review.

The dreaded request to reduce the manuscript by 30%

Such a request typically comes from the editor who is pushed for space in his or her journal. I have to confess that, for me, this is the comment that I dread most of all because it is often accompanied by referees' comments, the response to which usually involves making the article longer than the original submission. A general reduction in text by 30% basically requires a total rewrite (which is slow and painful). It is usually easier to make a brave decision to drop an entire section that adds little to the manuscript. Ask a colleague who is not involved in the manuscript to take out their editing knife and suggest nonessential areas that can go—even though the process of losing your precious words may seem very painful to you. Discussion sections are usually the best place to look for radical excisions of entire paragraphs. Background sections should be just one to two paragraphs long—just long enough to say why the study was done, rather than an exhaustive review of all previous literature. Please do not skimp on the methods section unless you are referring to a technique that can be put on a Web site or referenced.

CONCLUSION

Referees are human beings. The secret of a successful resubmission is to make your referees feel valued without compromising your own standards. Make your referees' and editor's life easy by presenting them with a clear numbered and structured response letter. Provided, you have made a good attempt at answering all of the referees' comments in a reasonable way by following the 5 golden rules, many referees and editors are too weak at the stage of resubmission to open another round of arguments and resubmission. In my experience, I spend up to 90 minutes on the initial refereeing of a manuscript, but only around 20 minutes on a resubmission. However,
if you miss some comments completely or your manuscript changes do not correspond with what you say you have done in your cover letter, this will chance your referee to spend hours going through your manuscript with a fine-tooth comb. If he/she finds lots of little errors, this leads to a possible deserved rejection.

Like a good marriage, resubmitting your manuscript in light of your referees' comments is a process of give and take.

The author wishes to thank Dr Jeffrey Bernhard for his constructive comments and for references 5 to 7.

REFERENCES

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Mid-stakes Writing
&
Appropriate Response Practices
The Franklin College Writing Intensive Program
Assigning & Responding to Mid-stakes Writing

What is a mid-stakes writing assignment?

As the term would imply, a mid-stakes writing assignment falls somewhere on a
continuum between a low-stakes and a high-stakes writing assignment. Let’s refresh
our memories on the distinction between these two. Here’s Peter Elbow in his essay
“High Stakes and Low Stakes in Writing”:

[Low stakes writing can be described as] frequent, informal assignments that
make students spend time regularly reflecting in written language on what
they are learning from discussions, readings, lectures, and their own thinking. [. . .]
These pieces are low stakes because individually they don’t have much
effect on the final grade. [. . .] When we require students to turn in a draft of a
high stakes essay a week or more before the final version is due, the draft tends
to function as a low stakes piece. (?) emphasis added.

Here are some key elements of low-stakes assignments, then:

1. They are informal, by nature;
2. Their goal is to help students reflect on their learning;
3. They don’t “count” for much, in terms of a student’s grade; and
4. They require only minimal feedback because typically the primary audience for the
piece is the student herself, and because typically there is no expectation that the piece
will be revised.

High-stakes assignments, on the contrary:

1. Are formal, by nature;
2. Have as their goal the opportunity for students to demonstrate their
learning/knowledge;
3. Count for a high-percentage/points toward a student's final grade; and
4. Require more substantial feedback because typically the primary audience for the
piece is someone other than the student, and because typically the piece will be revised,
often multiple times. [And w/o feedback, students will—Nancy Sommers has told us—
revise in “narrow and predictable ways.”]

SO: low- and high-stakes assignments are distinguished by their pedagogical goal
(writing-to-learn or writing-to-demonstrate-learning, respectively) as well as by their
“stakes” (how evaluated and how they affect the student’s final grade).

SO: again, what would distinguish a “mid-stakes” assignment?

1. Informal or formal?
2. Reflect on learning or demonstrate learning?
3. Count heavily toward student’s final grade?
4. What kind of feedback required? [Audience? Revision?]
Conferencing with Students
One-on-One Writing Conferences
(Office Hours)

"This is what we can all do to nourish and strengthen one another: listen to
one another very hard, ask hard questions, too, send one another away to
work again, and laugh in all the right places."

—Nancy Mairs, Voice Lessons

In this chapter you will learn

- how to prepare for and conduct effective one-on-one writing
  conferences.
- how to use questions to encourage students to take responsibility
  for their own writing.
- how to use activities to involve students in revision.
- how to use constructive praise to teach and reinforce good skills.

As a TA, you will frequently be able to help students individually during your of-

cice hours. When students come to you for help, they may ask you to read their

draft and tell them what they need to “fix” in order to get a good grade. You must

remember you are there to teach, however, not to rewrite the paper for the stu-

dent. Even if you think you have a great idea for improving the paper, you must

take care not to usurp the student’s authority. Remember: This is the student’s

paper, not yours. The only way the student will learn to write well is by making

his or her own decisions about how to revise. Besides, the student—who knows

best what he or she has to say—is likely to come up with a better plan for the

paper than you could.

This chapter discusses how to conduct effective writing conferences by

preparing carefully, using questions and activities to encourage independent

thought, teaching skills and concepts as needed, and using praise effectively.

Technology Tactics

It is possible to conduct one-on-one writing conferences online.

- **Asynchronous communication.** Email correspondence in which a pe-

  riod of time elapses between each message and reply is an example of

  (continued)
**Technology Tactics (continued)**

asynchronous communication. This type of online writing conference has several benefits. First, you and the student must put all your thoughts in writing, and writing about writing further enhances instruction. Second, because there is a delay in communication, you and the student may take time to thoroughly think through questions and comments before replying. And third, there is an electronic record of your “conversation” that you and the student can print out and refer to later.

- **Synchronous communication.** A conversation that you might have in an online chat room is an example of synchronous communication. Just like asynchronous communication, you and the student must put all your thoughts in writing, thereby enhancing the writing instruction. The benefit of synchronous communication, however, is that you and the student may hold a face-to-face conversation in real time on a particular date and at a particular time. If your school does not provide access to an online chat space, you can access free online chat services through Yahoo! at <www.chat.yahoo.com> and MSN at <www.chat.msn.com>. (Registration is required.)

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**Prepare Carefully**

Tell students to come to the conference with a completed draft and specific questions to ask. The following are some typical questions students might ask:

- "Does this fit the assignment?"
- "Is the format all right?"
- "What do you think of the overall structure?"
- "Did I include enough specific information?"
- "Can you understand what I’m saying?"

You can prepare for the conference by anticipating such questions and being sure you understand the assignment and the professor’s expectations. If possible, get the student’s draft early so you can read it before the conference and consider specific areas that may need attention. Also, have a plan in mind for helping the student. (See the Teaching Tip box on p. 74 for a list of open-ended questions to use during conferences. See also the Teaching Tip box on p. 76 for some hands-on activities to use during conferences.)

Set up your meeting space in a way that allows you and the student to work productively. Be sure you have useful resources available, such as the written assignment instructions, sample papers, any texts the students are writing about, a writing handbook, a dictionary, pencils, and scratch paper. Arrange the table (or desk) so that you and the student can sit side by side. (See Figure 8.1.)

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**Figure 8.1. Seating Arrangement for a One-on-One Writing Conference**

This way, you can both see the paper and you feel like partners. Make sure the student has a pencil in hand, ready to make notes on his or her paper.

**Begin the Conference**

As the student comes in, greet him or her by name and perhaps just chat for a minute or so. Before long, turn the attention to the concern at hand. Start with a nonthreatening question such as "How’s the paper coming along?" or "What can I do to help you?" Try to get the student to lead the conversation.

If you haven’t already done so, and if it is shorter than five pages, take the time to read the student’s draft before you begin to talk about it. (After all, you can’t really advise a student if you haven’t read the paper.) Either you or the student can read the paper aloud; there are advantages to either choice. If you read it out loud, the student hears his or her words more objectively. If the student reads it, he or she can stop at will to talk about certain parts that sound “off.” Avoid reading the paper silently while the student waits. This could make the student feel awkward or think that you are judging his or her paper.

**Use Questions to Draw the Student Out**

As you talk together about the paper, guide the student with open-ended questions. (See the Teaching Tip box on p. 74.) Phrase your questions in a way that encourages the student to think. Avoid questions that demand a certain answer. Be truly open to learning from the student.

In the following dialogue, a fictional “TA Terrible” demonstrates an ineffective way of using questions with “Lost Lonnie.” (Note: Even if you find yourself on occasion using some of the same tactics TA Terrible does, know that you are not a terrible TA. This is tricky stuff, and we all have lapses. You can make..."
a bad moment or two with the overall intent and quality of your interaction. You can be TA Terrific.

**TA Terrific:** "How can you make this thesis clearer?"

**Lost Lonnie:** "I don't know. I thought it was clear. I did my best."

Instead, see how TA Terrific draws Lost Lonnie out and helps him discover the problem.

**TA Terrific:** "Tell me about what you want to say in this paper."

**Lost Lonnie:** "I want to show how the effects of X and Y cause Z. But... I didn't really say that in my paper, did I? I'd better fix that."

---

**Teaching Tip: Questions to Use in One-on-One Conferences**

The following questions can be used in one-on-one writing conferences to help students focus their papers, organize their ideas, and discover more specific support.

**To Help Writers Focus Their Papers**
- "What are you mainly trying to say here?" 
- "What do you think the teacher is looking for in the paper?"
- "How does this paper meet the requirements of the assignment?"
- "Why did you choose this topic?"
- "Which is the most important part of the paper? Why?"
- "Is there anything that doesn't seem to fit in the paper?"

**To Help Writers Reconsider the Order of Their Ideas**
- "What did you tell about first? Second? Third?"
- "Why did you choose this particular order?"
- "What effect would different orders have on the reader?"

**To Help Writers Be More Specific**
- "Could you explain this to me further?"
- "Tell me more about why you believe this is true. What evidence do you see for this?"
- "Help me to see this in more detail."
- "How might someone disagree with what you are saying?"
- "How could you respond to an alternate interpretation?"
- "Are there any variables you haven't mentioned?"

---

Questions are usually an excellent way to encourage students to take responsibility for their papers. However, be careful of questions that seem to judge and direct rather than truly invite careful thought. For example, when a TA asks, "Why did you choose this support?" the student might think the TA means, "This support is really bad. I need something different." Instead, a TA could say, "Tell me more about why this is true." This kind of request would still lead to a careful consideration of evidence, without sounding judgmental.

Whether you use questions or requests, be sure to give the student time to think about his or her response. Don't rush in with an answer of your own to "help." Silence is used for thinking; don't let it make you or the student nervous. If the question is particularly difficult, ask the student to write about it while you busy yourself in some other way for a couple minutes, so the student won't be distracted by your looking at him or her. You could go get a drink or look up something in a book.

Practice using questions and requests to encourage student thought, and look forward to hearing the student's answers. Keep a list of general questions handy to refer to during conferences until you get the knack. (See the Teaching Tip box on p. 74.) Your attitude in asking the questions is probably the most important determinant for their effectiveness. You need to be truly interested in what the student thinks. Look forward to learning from the student's answers and enjoy coming to understand the student's ideas.

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**Use Activities to Get the Student Involved in Revision**

Along with questions, activities encourage students to work on their papers during conferences, under your coaching and direction, so you can be sure they know how to apply what you've been talking about. In the following example, TA Terrific simply evaluates Lost Lonnie's paper without giving any guidance on how Lonnie could improve it.

**TA Terrific:** "Your structure really needs work."

**Lost Lonnie:** "OK... I guess I'll fix it... later."

On the other hand, TA Terrific uses an activity to get Lonnie working on his paper immediately, under the TA's supervision.

**TA Terrific:** "Tell me about your structure. How have you organized your paper?"

**Lost Lonnie:** "Gee, I don't know. It just kind of came out that way."

**TA Terrific:** "OK. Let's see what you've got here. Take this pencil and write the main idea for each paragraph in the margin. Then let's see how those ideas connect to each other."

By being guided through an activity that forces him to think about his structure, Lonnie learns a strategy that he can use again on his own in the future. Also, by doing the activity together, the TA can be sure that Lonnie understands the principles she's been trying to teach him.
When Appropriate Teach Skills and Concepts

Though most students learn best through careful questioning and guided activities, sometimes they just need instruction. In the following scene, the student has come to the TA for specific assistance.

"What's the answer?"

Direct teaching: Describe the qualities of a good thesis. Include:

- Is it a summary?
- Does it have an introduction?
- Is it concise?
- Does it contain examples?

Follow-up question: What is the thesis of your paper? How do you think you would like to see the information presented in your paper?

"What is the question?"

Direct teaching: Read the assignment instructions again, giving added information you might have learned from your readings with the professor. Review the answer you think would be correct. Direct teaching: Read the assignment instructions again, giving added information you might have learned from your readings with the professor. Review the answer you think would be correct.

Follow-up question: What is the key idea of this paragraph? How do you think the professor would respond to this question?

Teaching Tip: Activities to Use in One-on-One Conferences

The following activities can be used in one-on-one writing conferences to help students focus on structure, development, and transition.

- Give students some prewriting and suggest that they choose one main idea for each main idea. Have them go through their paper and highlight the main ideas. Encourage them to write a main idea for each main idea. Then give them a thesis statement that includes all their main ideas.

- Have students consider the following questions:
  1. What is the thesis of this paper?
  2. What are the main ideas in this paper?
  3. How are the main ideas related?
  4. What is the organization of this paper?
  5. How can you improve this paper?
  6. What is a thesis?
  7. What is the purpose of the paper?

- Encourage students to write a main idea for each main idea. Then give them a thesis statement that includes all their main ideas.
Chapter 8: One-on-One Writing Conferences (Office Hours)

Use Constructive Praise to Build Students’ Confidence

When working individually with students, you will want to build their confidence by praising their work. Praising specific good points in students’ writing teaches them what they should continue doing. Pointing out when you are truly impressed with a certain aspect of their writing—a great title or a strong transition, for example—warms any writer’s heart and can motivate hard work on the rest of the piece.

Praise can be counterproductive to learning if it is used inappropriately, however. Insincere praise will only make the student distrust you. If you give general praise, students may think they don’t need to improve. Comparing students to their peers usually just leads to bad feelings. Praise that ignores students’ ideas gives the impression that the paper’s content is unimportant. Following is an example of a poor use of praise.

_Ty Terrible:_ “This is a really great paper. It’s better than any other paper I read.”

_Lost Lornie:_ “Gee, I thought I needed to work on it more. I guess I should just turn it in the way it is. I mean... now I’m sure I’ll get an A.”

On the other hand, praise that is specifically anchored to certain parts of the paper can teach and reinforce a general principle. Students need to know what they are doing right so that they can do those same things again next time. The following is a good example of using praise to teach.

_Ty Terrible:_ “I like the way your thesis clearly predicts the structure of your paper. Notice how each main transition in your paper links back to the thesis.”

_Lost Lornie:_ “Thanks! I worked hard on the thesis and structure. And I can see how the transitions help the reader. But I wonder if I have enough support in the second section. Do you think I need to include more specific evidence? And what about the wording of the conclusion? Do you think it works?”

Used appropriately, praise can motivate original thinking in students, build confidence while leaving room for improvement. Effective praise might address the ideas in the paper, focus on effective writing processes, and value originality. The following are some examples of effective uses of praise.

- “Your ideas on XYZ were very creative. You made me think about the topic in new ways.”
- “It was easy to follow your argument because the structure of your paper follows the plan you set forth in your introduction.”
- “The evidence in this paragraph is compelling. These quotes from the text convince me of your claim.”
- “Using the colon in this sentence really sets the reader up for the startling assertion you make.”
- “Notice how the sentences in this paragraph connect to each other. You do a good job repeating key words to keep the paragraph unified.”

In your conferences use praise liberally, but make sure it is sincere and specific, not just meant to make the student feel good. In other words, make sure your praise is constructive.

Conclusion

One-on-one writing conferences are in many ways the ideal teaching situation because you can tailor the teaching activities to the particular needs of an individual student, and you can coach specific skills as the student writes.

For more effective writing conferences, prepare carefully, help the student to feel comfortable as you begin, teach through questions and activities, and use specific, sincere praise to encourage progress. Before completing a conference, ask the student, “What are you going to do with the paper next?” Suggest writing down the main areas to work on so that the student will remember to practice the skills he or she has been learning. Then follow up. Ask about progress next time you see the student. When you grade the final draft, point out areas of improvement. Show that you care about the student’s learning.

Chapter Checklist

☐ Encourage students to come to conferences prepared with plans, specific questions, and all the necessary materials (drafts, resources, notes, etc.).
☐ Have the assignment sheet, a writing handbook, a dictionary, and scratch paper available. Be sure you understand the assignment and the professor’s priorities.

(continued)
Chapter Checklist (continued)

- Try to read the draft before you meet with a student. Think of a plan for helping the student address the paper's weaknesses.
- Sit side by side, with the writing project where you both can see it.
- Use open-ended questions and specific activities to encourage students to evaluate their own writing. Let them have "power of the pen."
- Follow up and be supportive. Determine if the students have had problems implementing the plans and changes you discussed.

Applications to Your Own Situation

1. Draft a dialogue for a bad conference in your discipline. Then draft a dialogue for a model good conference.
2. Perform one of these dialogues in front of a group of TAs and discuss it.
3. Think of five open-ended questions you could use when meeting with a student in your class. Keep the list nearby during conferences as a handy reference.
4. What might be a common problem for a student completing a writing assignment in your class? Devise an exercise that would help a student address that problem during a conference.

Working with Your Professor

1. Ask your professor what specific expectations for conferences he or she may have.
2. Discuss the possibility of requiring students to have a conference with you before a paper is due. Ask what the student should bring—such as a thesis statement, an outline, a bibliography, and/or an early draft—to the conference.

In this chapter you will learn

- how to help groups of students practice and improve their writing skills.

In-Class Help Sessions and Workshops

"Tell me and I forget. Show me and I remember.
Involving me and I understand."
—Chinese proverb

When many students need help with the same kind of problem, you can teach skills more efficiently in a group setting. Maybe you've noticed a certain problem has come up consistently in the last set of papers and you want to avoid seeing the same problem next time. Perhaps you've heard from several students that they are confused about the requirements for the assignment, and you suppose that even more students are confused but are afraid to tell you. Possibly you've noticed that students are having trouble reading scholarly papers as they do their research. A group workshop is an excellent way not only to teach skills to the whole class at once but also to allow students opportunities to practice those skills.

Group teaching could occur in many settings. Perhaps as a TA you already have responsibility for a required out-of-class help session. Perhaps your professor might let you take some time during class. You might offer an optional help session for those who have a certain concern with the assignment. In any case, planning this workshop well is essential to its success, and this chapter will help you do just that.

Planning a Workshop

As you plan, remember that students learn best by doing, especially when they are learning a skill, such as writing. You wouldn't teach children to swim by lecturing in front of a chalkboard. Instead, you jump in the water with them and guide their efforts as they practice. In much the same way, in your writing help session or workshop, you teach a brief mini-lesson, then allow time for students to actually practice while you move among them advising and giving feedback on their progress.
High-stakes Writing
&
Appropriate Response Practices
Writing Comments on Students' Papers

Whenever I conduct workshops in the marking and grading of student writing, I like to quote a sentence from William Zinsser's *Writing to Learn* (1988): "The writing teacher's ministry is not just to the words but to the person who wrote the words" (p. 48). I value this quotation because all of us as teachers, late at night, having read whole stacks of student essays, sometimes forget the human being who wrote the words that currently annoy us. We lapse into sarcasm. We let our irritation show on the page. Perhaps nothing involves us as directly in the messiness of teaching writing as our attempts to comment on our students' essays. We know how we feel ourselves when we ask a colleague to read one of our drafts (apologetic, vulnerable). But we sometimes forget these feelings when we comment on students' papers. Sometimes we do not treat students' work in progress with the same sensitivity that we would treat our colleague's.

The best kind of commentary enhances the writer's feeling of dignity. The worst kind can be dehumanizing and insulting—often to the bewilderment of the teacher, whose intentions were kindly but whose techniques ignored the personal dimension of writing.

Imagine, for a moment, a beginning tennis class in which we ask George to give his first performance. In skill category 1, serving the tennis ball, poor George goofs up miserably by whacking the ball sideways into the fence. Here is the instructor's feedback: "You didn't hold the racket properly, your feet weren't lined up
right, your body was too stiff, you didn’t toss the ball in the correct plane, you threw it too high, you didn’t cock your wrist properly, and you looked awkward. Moreover, you hit the ball with the wood instead of the strings. Weren’t you paying attention when I lectured on how to do it? I am placing you in remedial tennis!”

Although we are far too enlightened (and far too kind) to teach tennis this way, the analogy is uncomfortably apt for the traditional way writing teachers have taught writing. Ignoring the power of positive reinforcement, writing teachers have red-penciled students’ errors with puritanical fervor. These teachers have of course aimed for the right goals—they want to produce skillful and joyful writers, just as the tennis instructor wants to produce skillful and joyful tennis players. But the techniques have been misguided.

Students’ Responses to Teachers’ Comments

Part of the problem is that our comments on students’ papers are necessarily short and therefore cryptic. We know what we mean, and we know the tone that we intend to convey. Often, however, students are bewildered by our comments, and they sometimes read into them a tone and a meaning entirely different from our intentions.

The extent to which students misread teachers’ comments is revealed in Spandel and Stiggins’s study (1990), in which the investigators interviewed students about their reactions to teachers’ comments on their papers. Students were asked to describe their reactions to specific marginal comments that teachers placed on their essays—either what they thought the comments meant or how the comments made them feel (pp. 85–87). When a teacher wrote, “Needs to be more concise,” students reacted this way:

Confusing. I need to know what the teacher means specifically. This is an obvious comment. I’m not Einstein. I can’t get every point right. I muffed. I thought you wanted details and support. This frustrates me! Define “concise.” Vague, vague.

When a teacher wrote, “Be more specific,” students reacted this way:
You be more specific.
I'm frustrated.
I tried and it didn't pay off.
It's going to be too long then.
I feel mad—it really doesn't matter.
I try, but I don't know every fact.

When a teacher wrote, "You haven't really thought this through," students reacted this way:

That is a mean reply.
I guess I blew it!
I'm upset.
That makes me madder than you can imagine!
How do you know what I thought?

When a teacher wrote, "Try harder!" students reacted this way:

I did try!
You're a stupid jerk.
Maybe I am trying as hard as I can.
I feel like kicking the teacher.
Baloney! You don't know how hard I tried.
This kind of comment makes me feel really bad and I'm frustrated!

The conclusions of this study are worth quoting:

Negative comments, however well intentioned they are, tend to make students feel bewildered, hurt, or angry. They stifle further attempts at writing. It would seem on the face of it that one good way to help a budding writer would be to point out what he or she is doing wrong, but, in fact, it usually doesn't help; it hurts. Sometimes it hurts a lot.

What does help, however, is to point out what the writer is doing well. Positive comments build confidence and make the writer want to try again. However, there's a trick to writing good positive comments. They must be truthful, and they must be very specific [p. 87].

To improve our techniques at commenting on our students' papers, then, we need to remember our purpose, which is not to point out everything wrong with the paper but to facilitate improvement. When marking and grading papers, we should keep in mind that we have two quite distinct roles to play, depending on where our students are in the writing process. At the drafting stage, our role is coach. Our goal is to provide useful instruction, good advice, and warm encouragement. At the end of the writing process, when students submit final copy, our role is judge. At this stage, we uphold the standards of our profession, giving out high marks only to those essays that meet the criteria we have set.
The Purpose of Commenting: To Coach Revision

When we comment on papers, I have argued, the role we should play is that of coach. The purpose of commenting is to provide guidance for revision, for it is in the act of revising that our students learn most deeply both what they want to say and what readers need for ease of comprehension; revising means rethinking, reconceptualizing, "seeing again"—for in the hard work of revising, students learn how experienced writers really compose.

As mentioned briefly in Chapter Thirteen, there are two strategies for ensuring that your comments will help stimulate revision. The first is to comment on drafts a week or so before students are to submit their finished papers. When using this strategy, I prefer to comment only on late-stage drafts, after the writers have gone through peer review. Because I do not like to read handwriting, I ask for a typed late-stage draft.

The second strategy, which is my favorite method, is to allow rewrites after I return the "finished" papers. Because not all students will choose to rewrite, this method is less time consuming for me, and the quality of the writing I initially receive is higher. By allowing rewrites, I can gear all my comments toward revision and yet feel comfortable applying rigorous grading standards because I know that students can rewrite. Moreover, the opportunity to improve less-than-hoped-for grades inspires many students toward serious revision.

From a teacher's standpoint, commenting to prompt revision, as opposed to justifying a grade or pointing out errors, may also change one's whole orientation toward reading student writing. (Recall the difference between the revision-oriented and the editing-oriented commentary on the student paragraph in Chapter Four, pages 67–69.) You begin looking for the promise of a draft rather than its mistakes. You begin seeing yourself as responding to rather than correcting a set of papers. You think of limiting your comments to the two or three things that the writer should work on for the next draft rather than commenting copiously on everything. You think of reading for ideas rather than for errors. In short, you think of coaching rather than judging.

General Strategy for Commenting on Student Drafts:
A Hierarchy of Questions

Commenting effectively on drafts requires a consistent philosophy and a plan. Because your purpose is to stimulate meaningful revision, your best strategy is to limit your commentary to a few prob-
lems that you want the student to tackle when preparing the next
draft. It thus helps to establish a hierarchy of concerns descending
from higher-order issues (ideas, organization, development, and
overall clarity) to lower-order issues (sentence correctness, style,
mechanics, spelling, and so forth). What follows is a sequence of
questions arranged in descending order of concern. My recom-
mandation is to limit your comments to only two or three of the
questions; proceed to lower-order concerns only when a draft is
reasonably successful at the higher levels.

As you read through the following discussion, you might find it
useful to have at hand one or two student papers that you are
currently marking and to try out the suggestions I will make, per-
haps comparing them to your current practice.

Commenting on Higher-Order Concerns

Commentary should be aimed first at the higher-level concerns of
ideas, organization, development, and overall clarity. Here is a
hierarchy of questions you can ask to stimulate higher-order revi-
sion. (These questions assume an assignment calling for thesis-
based academic writing.)

1. Does the Draft Follow the Assignment? If the draft is not fulfill-
ing the assignment, there is no purpose in commenting further. Tell
the writer that the draft is on the wrong track and that he or she
needs to start over by rereading the assignment carefully and per-
haps seeking help from you. I generally return such a draft
unmarked and ungraded.

2. Does the Writer Have a Thesis That Addresses an Appropriate
Problem or Question? Once you see that a draft addresses the
assignment, look next at its overall focus. Does the draft have a
thesis? Does the thesis respond to an appropriate question or prob-
lem? As discussed in Chapter Two, thesis writing is unfamiliar to
students, whose natural tendency is toward "all about" reports,
toward summarizing rather than analyzing, or toward the unfo-
cused dumping of data or information.

Drafts exhibiting problems at this level may have no discernible
problem-thesis structure; other drafts may have a thesis, but one that
is not stated explicitly or is buried deep in the body of the paper, for-
ing you to wander about lost before finally seeing what the writer
intends. Frequently drafts become clearer at the end than they were
at the beginning—evidence that the writer has clarified his or her
thinking during the act of composing. To use the language of Flower
(1979), such a draft is "writer-based" rather than "reader-based"; that
is, the draft follows the order of the writer’s discovery process rather than a revised order that meets the reader’s needs. Thus, drafts that become clear only in the conclusion need to be revised globally. In some cases, you may wish to guide the writer toward a prototypical academic introduction that explains the problem to be addressed, states the thesis, and gives a brief overview of the whole argument. (See the discussion of academic introductions in Chapter Twelve, pages 207-209.) Composing such an introduction forces the writer to imagine the argument from the reader’s perspective. Typical end comments addressing thesis and focus include these:

I can’t find a thesis here, nor is it clear what problem or question you are addressing. Please see me for help.

Your thesis finally becomes clear by the end; for your next draft, move it up to the introduction to help your reader. Open your intro by explaining the problem your thesis will address, and then follow that with your thesis. Also, the reader needs a preview map of your argument.

3. If the Draft Has a Thesis, What Is the Quality of the Argument Itself? What are the strengths and weaknesses of the ideas? Marginal and end comments for this level address questions about ideas. Is the argument appropriate to your discipline? Is the argument logical? Is there appropriate use of relevant and sufficient evidence? Are the ideas developed with sufficient complexity, subtlety, and insight? Is there adequate awareness of and attention to opposing views? Typical marginal comments addressing these concerns might be the following:

Interesting idea!

Nice comparison of X to Y here.

Good point—I hadn’t thought of it in quite this way.

Expand and explain; could you give an example?

Aren’t you overlooking X’s point of view here?

I don’t see how you got from X to Y. Argument is confusing.

This is too much a rehash of X. Move from summarizing to analyzing.

You have covered X well but haven’t addressed Y or Z.

You need to anticipate and respond to opposing views here.

What’s your evidence for this assertion?

4. Is the Draft Effectively Organized at the Macro Level? As writers, we all struggle with organization, often producing final prod-
ucts organized differently from our original rough drafts. Student writers have even greater problems with organization and often need our personal help. When commenting on organization, try considering questions like these: Can the draft be outlined or diagramed? What should be added to the draft? What should be eliminated? What should be moved or shifted around? Are there adequate transitions between paragraphs and sections? Are all details tied to points? Are all points supported by details? Are the purpose, point, and structure of the essay adequately previewed for the reader through a good title and introduction?

Comment on the title, which should suggest the thesis of the piece. If the title is good, praise it. If not, suggest improvements (see pages 209–210).

Comment on the opening paragraph/introduction. The opening should engage the reader’s attention and, in most academic writing, set forth a problem or question that the essay will address. If the opening has a good thesis, praise it.

Look at the opening sentences of paragraphs. These should be transition sentences with forward- and backward-looking elements. Praise good transitions. Point out ways to improve others. In academic writing, paragraphs typically have explicit topic sentences.

Although many students may need personal help in reaching solutions, you can draw students’ attention to organizational problems by placing “readerly” comments in the margins. Typical comments include these:

How does this part fit?
You lost me in that last sentence; I’m getting confused.
What’s the point of this section?
How does this paragraph relate to what you just said?
Your introduction made me expect to hear about X next, but this is about Y.

You’re bouncing all over. I need a road map of where we have been and where we are going.

5. Is the Draft Organized Effectively at the Micro Level? Are paragraphs unified and coherent? Often readers first become aware of organizational problems when they get confused by the writer’s paragraphing. What one often sees in student drafts is a series of short, choppy paragraphs (perhaps in imitation of the paragraphing in print advertisements or popular magazine articles) or, conversely, long
paragraphs that change direction midstream so that the last part of
the paragraph seems to have nothing to do with the first part. Writing
teachers consider a paragraph unified if all the sentences support or
develop the controlling idea, often stated explicitly in a topic sen-
tence. They consider a paragraph coherent if the sentences link to
each other without abrupt leaps or gaps in the flow of thought.

To help students notice problems of unity and coherence in
their paragraphing, you can get mileage out of marginal comments
like these:

Why so many short paragraphs?
This paragraph wanders. What’s its main point?
This paragraph has lots of details, but I can’t see their point.
Add a topic sentence?
You seem to be making several points here without developing
them. Break into separate paragraphs and develop each?
These sentences don’t link to each other. Fill in gaps?

As an example of the kinds of paragraph-level revisions one
hopes to promote, Exhibit 14.1 shows how a student revised a sec-
tion of a nursing research paper in response to teacher commentary.

Commenting on Lower-Order Concerns

Lower-order concerns such as grammatical errors, misspellings,
punctuation mistakes, and awkwardness in style are frequent
sources of confusion and annoyance in student papers. If teachers
try to note them all—especially if the teacher becomes a line editor
and begins fixing them—commenting on these errors can be dis-
mayingly time consuming. In Chapter Four, I argue for a philo-
sophy of error that places maximum responsibility on students for
learning to edit their own work. This philosophy follows Haswell’s
practice of “minimal marking” (1983), in which the teacher tells a
student that his or her paper is marred by sentence errors and that
the student’s grade will either be reduced or unrecorded until most
of the errors are found and corrected. To assist students, instructors
can place an X in the margins next to lines that contain errors, but
following the minimal-marking policy means that the errors them-
selves are not circled or marked.

The beauty of this policy, from a teacher’s perspective, is that
abandoning the role of proofreader and line editor saves substan-
tial marking time. More importantly, it trains students to develop
new editing habits for eliminating their own careless errors. Stu-
dents learn to pore over their drafts with a “reader’s eye,” to use a
grammar handbook, and to keep lists of their characteristic errors.
Violence against women is a significant issue. Statistics vary on how many women are battered. Fifty percent of all women will experience battery at some point in their lives (Walker, 1979).

"One in every fifty pregnant women may be beaten, making abuse during pregnancy more common than the incidence of placental previa or gestational diabetes" (Campbell, 1986, p. 179).

Sexual frustration, mood swings, and general anxiety about the future often occur in pregnancy.

Violence against women is a significant issue for obstetrical nurses. Although statistics vary, some researchers estimate that fifty percent of all women will experience battery at some point in their lives (Walker, 1979). There is no reason to believe that such violence diminishes when the women are pregnant. In fact, nursing research performed by Campbell (1986) estimates that "one in every fifty pregnant women may be beaten, making abuse during pregnancy more common than the incidence of placental previa or gestational diabetes" (p. 179). The causes of this abuse include sexual frustration, mood swings, and general anxiety about the future associated with pregnancy.
Students with severe sentence-level difficulties may even be motivated to take another writing course or to seek tutorial help. The point, in any case, is to make students responsible for their own editing. (See Chapter Four for a full discussion of this complex and politically charged matter.)

Even though I think it is important not to circle errors or to line-edit a student’s draft, there are many helpful kinds of comments you can make on drafts to address lower-order concerns. The following questions can serve as guides for commentary.

1. Are There Stylistic Problems That You Find Particularly Annoying? Every teacher has pet peeves about style, so you might as well make yours known to students and mark them on drafts when they start to annoy you. What distinguishes stylistic concerns from grammar errors is that grammar errors are violations of the structural conventions of standard edited English. Relatively stable rules of correctness govern pronoun cases, subject-verb agreement, dangling modifiers, parallelism, and sentence completeness. In contrast, stylistic concerns involve rhetorical choices—matters of effectiveness and grace rather than right or wrong. Wordiness, choppiness, or excessive use of the passive voice are rhetorical or stylistic, not grammatical, matters.

I have my own set of pet peeves about style that I like to make known to students. (In fact, I distribute a little handout about them in my classes.) Here are my own personal top three annoyances. (I invite readers to make their own “top three” lists.)

Lazy use of "this" as a pronoun. Some writers (I think of them as lazy) try to create coherence between sentences by using this as a pronoun referring sometimes to a noun in the preceding sentence but more often to a whole idea. No grammatical rule actually forbids using this as an all-purpose pronoun (although some handbooks call the practice "broad reference" and frown on it), but its overuse can lead to gracelessness, slippage of coherence, and outright ambiguity. Here is an example:

Original Version

As a little girl, I liked to play with mechanical games and toys, but this was not supported by my parents. Fortunately, a woman math teacher in high school saw that I was good at this and advised me to major in engineering. But this turned out to be even more difficult than I imagined.

Improved Version

As a little girl, I liked to play with mechanical games and toys, but my parents didn’t support such “boylike behavior.” Fortunately, a
woman math teacher in high school noticed my talent in math and physics and advised me to major in engineering—advice that turned out to be even more difficult to follow than I had imagined.

Wordiness. Even though I am not always able to practice what I preach, I prefer a succinct, plain style uncluttered by deadwood or circumlocutions. I urge students to cut and prune their drafts to achieve economy and tightness. Here's an example:

**Original Version**

As a result of the labor policies established by Bismarck, the working-class people in Germany were convinced that revolution was unnecessary for the attainment of their goals and purposes.

**Improved Version**

Bismarck's labor policies convinced the German working class that revolution was unnecessary.

*Excessive nominalization.* Powerful writers express actions with verbs. In contrast, writers infested with nominalization—often contracted through unsafe intercourse with bureaucrats, psychobablers, and educational administrators—convert actions into nouns. Instead of saying, "Effective writers express actions with verbs," the suffering nominalizer prefers to say, "For the production of a prose style that utilizes the principles of writing that are most highly regarded as effective, the expression of an action through the use of a verb is the method most highly preferred." Not only are such sentences longer and deader, but they are also less clear. (For excellent advice on how to recover from nominalization, see Williams, 1985.)

To help students overcome my top three peeves, I usually line-edit an early occurrence of a flabby passage and then ask the writer to do the same sort of thing throughout.

2. *Is the Draft Free of Errors in Grammar, Punctuation, and Spelling?* Although I have argued that teachers should not circle errors in grammar, punctuation, and spelling, I do not mean that these errors should go unmentioned. On the contrary, they should be mentioned emphatically, and some stick-and-carrot strategy should be applied to motivate students to find and fix them. My strategy is to write an end comment like this: "Sally, your grade has been reduced for excessive sentence-level errors. Please find them and fix them; then resubmit paper, and I will raise your grade." (How high I raise the grade depends on how successful the student is in reducing the number of sentence errors.) If I think students need extra help finding the errors, I sometimes place X's in the margin next to lines with rule-based mistakes. Another
approach is to line-edit one or two paragraphs for a student and then ask the student to do something similar for the rest of the draft. If you line-edit, however, be careful to distinguish rule-based mistakes from stylistic choices. When you cross something out, for example, students often do not know if what they did was "wrong" or just stylistically unpolished. Therefore, in addition to line editing, you need to explain in a marginal comment why you made the changes.

Another strategy for helping students with sentence errors is to note characteristic patterns of errors. Shaughnessy (1977) demonstrated that what often looks like a dozen errors in a student's draft may really be one error repeated a dozen times. If you can help a student learn a rule or a principle, you can often clear up many mistakes in one swoop. Sometimes teaching a principle is a simple matter (explaining the difference between it's and its); at other times, it is more complex (explaining when to place a comma in front of and when not to). Even if you do not explain the rule or principle, helping students recognize a repeated pattern of error is a real service.

Sam, you have lots of sentence errors here, but many of them are of two types: (1) apostrophe errors—you tend to use apostrophes with plurals rather than possessives; (2) comma splices (remember those from English class?).

Some Suggestions for Writing Revision-Oriented End Comments

On the last page of a student paper, a teacher usually writes a summarizing end comment. If teachers think of their end comments as justifying or explaining the grade, they tend to emphasize the bad features of the paper ("This is why I gave you a C"). But if they think of their purpose as guiding revision, their end comments can be more affirmative. A paper that deserves a C as a final product is often an excellent draft even though it has not reached finished-product standards. I sometimes tell my students that a good draft is to a final product as a caterpillar is to a butterfly: all that's missing is the metamorphosis.

In making effective end comments, the teacher needs to imagine the butterfly while praising the caterpillar. The purpose of the end comment is not to justify the current grade but to help writers make the kinds of revisions that will move the draft toward excellence. The strategy I recommend is to follow a strengths–major problems–recommendations formula: I try to write an end com-
ment that sums up the strengths of the draft, that identifies the main problems to be worked on, and that makes a few specific suggestions for what to do next. Here are some examples of end comments that follow this formula:

Pete, you seem to be on the right track with quite a few very promising sections, but your ideas are thin, lacking both focus and development. Please make an appointment with me (or the writing center) to work on finding a better focus and a thesis for this paper.

Excellent draft, Sarah. Although I had trouble at first seeing your problem and thesis, along the way you present very interesting ideas. I especially liked your section on the Mapplethorpe photographs. But in many places I was lost. For your next draft, you need to do the following:

1. Rewrite your introduction so that it more clearly introduces the reader to your problem.
2. Work on organization. I could find your thesis, but many of your paragraphs have no topic sentences and aren't clearly linked to your argument. Also, as I have noted in the margins, many places need more development.
3. Rethink what you are saying about Sontag. I think you misread her argument, especially in paragraph 2.

Paula: When this essay is good, it is very, very good. I like very much your discussion of Diem's leadership and the rise of dissent in Vietnam. Your consideration of our fears of not being taken seriously by Diem is also strong. In these discussions, you set your ideas clearly and with strong evidence.

However, there are other hills and valleys here as well. You need to focus the reader on your primary concerns in an introduction. You need to expand your consideration of the military and bring in more evidence toward the end. For your revision, pay particular attention to my marginal comments, where I note the places that need more expansion and development. This is perhaps one draft away from an A.

Conclusion: A Review of General Principles

The following list summarizes the main principles of commentary discussed in this chapter.

General Procedures

1. Comment first on ideas and organization: encourage students to solve higher-order problems before turning to lower-order problems.
2. Whenever possible, make positive comments. Praise strong points.
3. Try to write an end comment that reveals your interest in the student’s ideas. Begin the end comment with an emphasis on good points and then move to specific recommendations for improvement.

4. Avoid overcommenting. Particularly avoid emphasizing lower-order concerns until you are satisfied with higher-order concerns. If writing lacks focus or a thesis statement and a plan for supporting it, it is premature to worry about paragraphs or sentence structure.

5. As you read the essay, indicate your reaction to specific passages. Particularly comment on the ideas, raising queries and making suggestions on how the argument could be improved. Praise parts that you like.

6. Resist the urge to circle misspellings, punctuation errors, and so forth. Research suggests that students will improve more quickly if they are required to find and correct their own errors.

**Marking for Ideas**

7. The end comment should summarize your assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the writer’s ideas. Challenge writers to deepen and complicate their thought at a level appropriate to their intellectual development.

**Marking for Organization**

8. Use marginal comments to indicate places where structure becomes confusing.

9. Praise good titles, good thesis statements, good transitions, and so forth.

**Marking for Sentence Structure**

10. Although I recommend against marking or circling sentence errors, you might consider placing X’s in the margins where they occur. When you return the papers, either withhold a grade or lower the grade until students who made substantial numbers of errors have reedited their work. Most students should be able to find and fix a majority of their errors. Students with severe sentence-level problems may need to seek personal tutoring.

11. Note places where sentence-level problems cause genuine unclarity (as opposed to annoyance). Marginal comments such as “Tangled sentence” or “This passage is garbled” help the writer see where problems occur.
Some Further Principles

12. Try to make comments as legible and as straightforward as possible. As anyone knows who has looked at papers graded by a colleague, teachers' comments are frequently difficult to decipher. They are often unintentional examples of first-draft writing—clear to the writer but baffling to others.

13. Whenever possible, use one-on-one conferences instead of commenting on papers. Perhaps my most frequent end comment is this: "You're making real progress. Please see me so that I can help you move to the next stage." An invitation for personal help is particularly useful when the student's problems involve higher-order concerns.

14. Finally, think of your commentary as personal correspondence with the student, something that makes your own thinking visible and permanent. Try to invest in your commentary the tone of a supportive coach—someone interested in the student as a person and in the improvement of the student's powers as a writer and thinker.
Important Criteria for Journal Style Lab Reports
(BIOL 1103L and 1108L)

Title

Introduction

Methods
Results

Discussion

Literature Cited

General
Responding to Local Issues
The Franklin College Writing Intensive Program
Responding to Local Issues: Clarity, Conciseness, Coherence

"[R]eaders will appreciate your writing more the less you make them work" (Pechenik 94)

Pechenik’s tips for revising for clarity:

- Note the advantages of summarizing a study in the order in which steps were undertaken. See Pechenik 93.
- Think twice before leaving more than two nouns together. See Pechenik 93.
- Avoid pronouns with unclear antecedents. See Pechenik 95. Frequent use of the pronouns it, they, these, their, this, and them in your writing should sound an alarm: Probable ambiguity ahead.
- Avoid problems with and. See Pechenik 97.

Pechenik’s tips for revising for conciseness:

- Make every word count; Avoid “running jumps.” See Pechenik 100.
- Eliminate unnecessary prepositions. See Pechenik 102.
- Avoid weak verbs. See Pechenik 103.
- Do not overuse the passive voice. See Pechenik 104.
- Make the organism the agent of action. See Pechenik 105 (but don’t anthropomorphize the organism; see Pechenik 111).
- Incorporate definitions into your sentences. See Pechenik 106.

Pechenik’s tips for revising for coherence:

- Use transitional words and phrases. See Pechenik 107.
- Use repetition and summary of key ideas. See Pechenik 108.

WIP principles for responding to local issues:

- As ever, remember that you are a reader not an editor: minimal marking rules apply; frame problems as readability issues.
- Look for patterns of error. What may seem like 12 errors, may be one error made 12 times.
- Provide strategies for not only correcting error but editing for it.
The Top Twenty “Local” Errors:

1. Wrong word
2. Missing comma after an introductory element
   Determined to get the job done we worked all weekend.
   In German nouns are always capitalized.

3. Incomplete or missing documentation
4. Vague pronoun reference
5. Spelling (including homonyms)
6. Mechanical error with a quotation
7. Unnecessary comma
   This conclusion applies to the United States, and to the rest of the world.
   Many parents, of gifted children, do not want them to skip a grade.

8. Unnecessary or missing capitalization
9. Missing word
10. Faulty sentence structure
    The information which high school athletes are presented with mainly includes
    information on what credits needed to graduate, and thinking about the college which
    athletes are trying to play for, and apply.
    People who use marijuana can build up a tolerance for it will want a stronger drug.

11. Missing comma with a nonrestrictive element
    Marina who was the president of the club was first to speak.

12. Unnecessary shift in verb tense
13. Missing comma in a compound sentence
14. Unnecessary or missing apostrophe (including its/it’s)
15. Fused (run-on) sentence
    The current was swift he could not swim to shore.
    Klee’s paintings seem simple they are very sophisticated.

16. Comma splice
    Westward migration had passed Wyoming by, even the discovery of gold in nearby
    Montana failed to attract settlers.
    We hated the meatloaf, the cafeteria served it every Friday.

17. Lack of pronoun-antecedent agreement
    Each of the puppies thrived in their new home.

18. Poorly integrated quotation
19. Unnecessary or missing hyphen
    This paper looks at fictional and real life examples.

20. Sentence fragment
    We returned to the drugstore. Where we waited for our buddies.

Student D

Ecology Lab

When walking through the Botanical Gardens, our class made many observations which indicated that succession has occurred and is still occurring. I will give specific details or evidence on why I believe this is. Succession is defined as the act or process of following in order or sequence. From the walk and examining not only the ground but also the tree's which embodied the land it was clear to see that the Garden was definitely a product of succession. We could see the beginning signs of succession as the position of the tree's began to bend their limbs and entire structure, or the slope in the land began to increase due to constant rainfall. These beginning stages of succession will lead to greater evidence on what truly happens on the land over time.

At different points on our walk we took not of the different levels of the ground and different valleys that were made from the down pour of water. When we place the soil judging tool into the water we could see at different places on the walk how the amount of organic material varied. On lands that were higher up the amount of organic material was not as much, but when we got to lower depths of the garden we found that the amount of organic matter that sits on top of the soil was much more than at higher levels. In lecture we were told that it takes around 100 years for one inch of soil to come in to place in nature. This is a very long time, and in this 100 years the amount of work done on the ground from its surroundings is tremendous. These abiotic factors (ie. The non-living components of the environment, such as air, rocks, soil, water, peat, and
effect the all of the gardens by shifting and moving from visitors, rainy days or even windy days. It is these abiotic factors that make the garden what it is today.

The walk through the gardens I felt as we got deeper and deeper into it the more we could find occurring. I feel that lots of the animals live on the inner most portion of the garden because that's where they feel the most safe, and not around the outskirts. The soil is more moist in the heart of the garden I believe because the water may start on the outskirts of the garden and with the sloping nature of the ground it allows the rainfall to travel from all throughout the garden. After time the ground will form more streams and ponds all as a result of succession.