

Effective and Efficient Feedback on Student Writing

| | Suggestions | Rationale | What does this look like in practice? |
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| Before you even sit down | 1. <i>If at all possible</i> , create opportunities for students to revise their work | <p>If students are not expected or required to engage with or your comments, why write them?</p> <p>Requiring revision ensures that students will need to grapple with and respond to your feedback</p> <p>Grading revised work allows students' grades to reflect <i>improvement</i> and <i>engagement</i>, rather than preexisting writing skills</p> <p>If including revision is impossible, require students to apply your feedback to their next writing project</p> | |
| | 2. Involve students in the writing process by requiring metacognition and self-reflection | <p>Students benefit from <i>metacognitive reflection</i> about their writing, or opportunities to think about how they are writing and why (Flower & Hayes 1981; Wardle 2007)</p> <p>“Meta-awareness about writing, language, and rhetorical strategies... may be the most important ability our courses can cultivate” (Wardle 2007)</p> <p>This also provides an opportunity to discuss and reinforce discipline-specific writing skills and techniques</p> | |

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| Deciding what to comment on | <p>3. Prioritize <i>global</i> writing concerns over <i>local</i> writing concerns</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Global: Audience, purpose, prompt concerns • Local: Paragraph, sentence, and word-level concerns | <p>For many students, “revision” is synonymous with “editing”</p> <p>Emphasizing global-level concerns teaches students how to revise beyond the sentence level</p> <p>It also teaches students how to order their workflow. For example, why spend time fixing passive voice or comma splices if they should really just delete the entire sentence or section?</p> | |
| | <p>4. Limit suggestions to 2-3 main ideas</p> | <p>Too many comments can be overwhelming and discouraging</p> <p>Helping students to identify <i>patterns</i> of error allows them to focus their revisions (or future work) and to see a clear improvement between drafts</p> <p>Limiting your feedback also ensures that you as a grader prioritize comments that are relevant to the assignment objectives</p> | |
| | <p>5. Focus on transferable skills</p> | <p>Feedback on writing is most effective when it is <i>transferable</i> and <i>generalizable</i> (Yancey 2014)</p> <p>While you can and should comment on specifics, focus your feedback more broadly on skills that students can also apply to future writing tasks</p> | |

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| Commenting | 6. Respond as a reader, not as a writer | <p>Responding as a reader vs. a writer draws students' attention to issues of audience and purpose</p> <p>It also reinforces your role as someone who is engaging with the student's ideas and trying to understand, rather than someone who is just looking for mistakes</p> | |
| | 7. Restate student arguments | <p>Restating a student's argument or main point shows them that you are taking their ideas seriously</p> <p>It also models for students <i>how</i> their paper is being read. If your restatement doesn't capture the main idea they were trying to express, it's a clue that their writing might not be as clear as they thought it was</p> | |
| | 8. Balance positive and constructive feedback | <p>Students learn more from <i>positive</i> comments (what they're doing right) than <i>constructive</i> (what they need to work on) (Browning, in process)</p> <p>Be as specific with your positive comments as your constructive comments. Point students to specific places that were effective and reflect back to them <i>why</i> it worked well</p> | |

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| Commenting | <p>9. Acknowledge students' own perceptions or concerns about their paper</p> | <p>If you solicit student feedback or reflection on their writing (see #2), make sure you address their comments!</p> <p>Often, students already know they struggled with parts of the paper and you can save yourself time convincing them that those areas are a concern</p> <p>Sometimes students focus on things that aren't a huge priority and you can provide quick resources or redirect their focus to more urgent areas</p> | |
| | <p>10. Be specific, but don't do the work for students</p> | <p>Provide specific, tangible feedback, but let students work through how to address this feedback in their own writing</p> <p>This one of the reasons that endnotes are often more effective at promoting student learning than marginal comments: when students go back through their paper and work through solutions on their own, <i>they</i> are doing the heavy cognitive lifting, not <i>you</i></p> | |

Some practical (& efficient) suggestions for writing endnotes

- **Read through the entire paper before writing *any* comments**
 - Underline the paper, develop symbols for yourself, or scribble notes on a separate sheet of paper in a way that will help you quickly scan the paper a second time when you get ready to comment

- **Consider typing your responses**
 - If students can't read your handwriting, they can't implement your feedback!
 - Also, if you require students to revise or to implement this feedback on future assignments, you can re-save typed documents to have quick reference of previous feedback

- **Decide on a length for your feedback and stick with it**
 - It's easy to get carried away with endnotes if you're not careful!
 - For smaller classes (<30), I like to do half or full sheets for feedback
 - For larger classes (>30), I like to use quarter sheets for feedback

- **Create a template for your feedback and stick with it**
 - Ex. For a small class with no revision, I might structure my response as follows:

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| 1 st paragraph | Restate student's argument | María—This is an important and timely analysis of XYZ. As a reader, what I took away from your argument was... |
| | Provide positive comments | Your use of XYZ is particularly strong because... Your argument that XYZ raised the critical point that... |
| 2 nd paragraph | Discuss student's self-reflection or evaluation | I agree with your self-evaluation that you made effective use of XYZ. As a reader, this helps to... OR I agree with your self-feedback that you could have used more sources here. Let me know on Paper 3 if you need any help finding resources that do XYZ. |
| | Discuss any noticeable improvement from previous papers | After reading your last paper, I suggested that you work on developing XYZ. I see that in this paper you were able to successfully... |
| 3 rd / 4 th paragraph | Identify 2-3 transferrable skills to work on and explain | NOW, on the next paper, see if you can work on XYZ. Doing XYZ will be helpful because... |

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| | how and why they would make the next paper more effective | Secondly, continue to develop XYZ. You did this really effectively in Paragraph 3 when you said “XYZ.” This was effective because XYZ. Now, see if you can apply it to... |
| 5 th paragraph | Closing | Thank you for your work in the course so far. I look forward to see how you apply these ideas to the next paper! |

- **Create a comment bank of common feedback.** Some examples below:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On the next paper, make sure that you start each paragraph with a strong and arguable topic sentence that captures the main claim of that paragraph. • For the next paper, make sure that <i>your</i> voice remains at the center of the paper. Remember that the readings are a support for <i>your</i> argument, rather than the other way around. Think about our reader as a toolkit: What <i>tools</i> you can draw from these readings to support your claims? • Please come to my office hours before Paper #3 if you want to double-check the requirements. |
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