Faculty Conversations About Teaching

In our faculty conversation, we will address strategies for using feedback to achieve greater learning. How to provide our students with feedback that is goal-directed, tangible, actionable, timely and ongoing. What are workload and time management tips (e.g., use of technology, rubrics, etc.) to allow for richer and timely feedback?

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My Opening Idea or Definitions
Provide a 50-150 word opening statement with your understanding of the most interesting or important aspects of this topic (to you and your teaching).

Commenting and giving feedback often feels as if it requires a great deal of our effort (sometimes with very low payoff in terms of changes to what students do).

On the flip side, many students find our responses to their writing confusing, unclear, and ominous. Despite these issues, it is possible to cut down on time spent grading, as well as to provide students with directed feedback that supports their learning.

What Have I Tried?
Summarize 3-4 approaches, emphases, scenarios, or assignments, each briefly explained (50-100 words each) so that participants can envision your past and/or current teaching experiences, whether successful or still evolving.

I practice "feedforward" over "feedback." That is, focus your comments on what you would like students to do differently to make their drafts stronger instead of on what they have not done well.
- Set out to respond to the student's ideas, grasp of content, or presentation of information over simply noting the "problems." Even just one "global" comment (for instance, about how the student has or has not fulfilled the criteria of the assignment) can coach the student toward stronger work.
- Ask open-ended questions that will ask the student to think more deeply or to include new information in a draft.
- Offer suggestions for how the student might solve a particular problem in a draft or draw stronger connections in their work. (e.g. "As a reader, I felt you needed a little more explanation of X." Or, "I don't see you using the ideas we discussed in class here, how might you use the discussion we had about X to extend this paragraph.")

Faculty Conversations: How to Increase Quality Feedback & Save Time!

What Am I Exploring? What Am I Interested In?
Provide a list of 3-4 questions, activities, or options that you have been considering as you continue to adapt your teaching approaches.

I am exploring alternatives to traditional teacher comments. Discussions about drafts-in-process and effective models may be as helpful as written feedback.

- You might ask students to meet with you in one-on-one conferences or in small groups; these often take less time than sitting down with each paper individually;
- Class discussions of the goals for writers in your field can help students understand why and how their writing matters;
- Models and examples are often very helpful for students and can save you time by establishing what you value and comment upon. You can refer back to that paper in your comments, as well.
- Experiment with audio comments using screen capture software such a Jing or Audacity.

What are some Best Practices, Tips, or Resources I'd Like to Share with Other Faculty?
If you could recommend a list of 3 core values, teaching tips, and/or resources (articles, books, and links) that faculty across disciplines could find helpful to Increase quality feedback for students, while also saving you time, what would your list include?

Scholars of student writing development have suggested that a focus on sentence-level error may be counterproductive for the struggling student writer. (And, a focus on error may misdirect your attention away from what a student has to say or the development of relevant content/knowledge.)

- Use a system like Haswell's "minimal marking" to send the message to students that effective writing includes attention to surface-level presentation, and that they are responsible for learning about the errors they make and how to polish their own drafts. (For many students this attention to detail does take years of practice.) You can find adaptations of Haswell's approach online.
- Point out one or two sentence-level issues in an early paragraph of a draft; then, ask the student to find other examples of this issue in later paragraphs.
- Ask students to create an "error log" early in the semester, keeping a list of the most common sentence-level struggles they encounter and preparing themselves to look for those issues before they submit a draft.
- Build in time for revisions, multiple drafts, peer review/response, or a trip to the writing center for higher stakes assignments. Even strong writers benefit from slowing down, talking with others, and workshopping their works-in-progress.