

Managing the Paper Load and Responding Effectively to Student Writing

Give feedback appropriate to the stage of the writing process:

- **Formative:** Purpose is to provide feedback for revision. Students will often choose not to read formative feedback if there's no opportunity to revise.
- **Summative:** Purpose is to sum up strengths and weaknesses and to give evidence for the final grade. Summative feedback can be brief.

Invest time up front by doing the following:

- **Read and explain** the assignment in class. Try writing a thesis or opening paragraph yourself.
- **Provide students with a list of characteristics** for A/B/C/D/F papers and/or show them an example of an "A" paper and discuss the reasons it received an "A" grade.
- **Clarify your evaluation criteria** and make a criteria sheet/rubric for grading. Give students the rubric well before the paper is due and discuss it with them.
- **Ask students to fill out the rubric for themselves**, using it as a sort of checklist before they turn in the paper.
- **Show students examples of comments you make** on papers and tell them your pet peeves.

Practice minimal marking:

- **Resist the urge to over edit.** Research suggests that it does students more good to find and fix their own errors. Focus on two or three kinds of errors you see recurring. Put a number by the mistake the first time you see it and explain the error. When you see the same mistake, put the same number beside it. No need to re-explain. Syntax errors are harder to categorize (and for students to fix). You can explain what a syntax error is, fix one or two sentences, and mark others for the student to fix.
- **Edit one paragraph thoroughly and explain the errors.** Tell the student it is his/her job to edit the rest of the paper in the way you've modeled and resubmit. If you know the errors are due to carelessness, give the student a late grade when he/she resubmits.
- If you don't allow students to revise and resubmit papers, **ask them to include a cover memo on the next paper** explaining what they have paid particular attention to in this paper based on your comments on their last paper.
- **You don't need to grade all writing the same way**, e.g.: mark "completed/not completed" or "acceptable/unacceptable" or "professional/unprofessional"; use a simple rating scale; comment only on the items you've focused on in the unit. Be sure to tell students what these ratings cover.

The final comment:

- **Appreciate what the student was trying to do** by restating the paper's main point and discussing some of the paper's strengths.
- **Don't give students so many comments they don't know what to do first.** Prioritize and limit your critical comments, and explain briefly why the weak areas present problems for readers.
- **Give students some tips for the next paper.** If this is the only or last paper they will write for you, give them some guidance on how to improve their writing overall and for future courses.
- **Control the size of your handwriting.** Handwriting often gets larger when the teacher is annoyed by the writing.
- **Consider how much time to spend grading work you know has been carelessly done.** Require the paper to be resubmitted with a grade penalty for being late. If you don't want to let the student resubmit the paper, give a grade that reflects your anguish and/or annoyance, and explain briefly your reasons for giving the grade, being direct but also courteous, recognizing that students too must set priorities.