

Grammar: Getting Students to Turn in Edited & Proofread Papers:

1. Three typical types of responding & giving feedback

a. Teacher as Editor

- i. “If I don’t correct the mistakes, who will?”

“Obviously the student never learned to write. I better show her how to do it.”

- ii. Assumptions

- (1) Teacher’s job is to correct; student’s job is to dutifully make the teacher’s changes
- (2) Errors occur because the student can’t write in Standard English
- (3) When a teacher corrects the errors, the student is learning how to write in Standard English

b. Teacher as Supporter

- i. “This student has many great ideas. I want her to say more.”

- ii. Assumptions

- (1) Teacher’s job is to encourage full expression and engagement with content
- (2) Errors are not important (on drafts)
- (3) The writing belongs to the student; the teacher should not take over

c. Teacher as Minimal Marker

- i. “The student has many great ideas; she needs to fix errors before turning in the final version.”

- ii. Assumptions

- (1) Teacher’s job is to guide students by pointing out strengths and weaknesses
- (2) Content must be finalized before editing and proofreading
- (3) The writing belongs to the student. The student needs to take responsibility for locating and correcting errors and improving content

2. Reasons why students submit writing with grammar errors

- a. Students did not carefully proofread and edit
- b. Errors can occur because the students do not understand what they are writing about—it may be a content problem, not a language problem
- c. When teachers correct the errors, students are not learning how to locate and correct errors themselves

3. Strategies to reduce grammar and usage errors

- a. Explain (disciplinary) language conventions; distinguish between grammar/usage errors and style “errors”
- b. Explain why error-free writing is valued
 - i. Errors harm the image of the writer
 - ii. Errors obscure the meaning of the writing
- c. Require drafting and polishing (not merely a final draft)
- d. Teach students to proofread & require proofreading
 - i. “F” activity to heighten awareness
 - ii. *Read aloud*
 - iii. *Start at the end*
 - iv. *Find a friend*
- e. Advise students to use spell- and grammar-check
- f. Practice minimal marking on drafts
- g. Discuss common errors; tell students which errors irritate you
- h. Have zero tolerance days
- i. Arrange in-class editing sessions
- j. Refer students to outside resources

4. Strategies to improve students’ style

- a. Distinguish between grammar/usage and style (e.g., between subject-verb agreement errors and use of passive voice)
- b. Emphasis
- c. Flow and coherence
- d. Signal relationships

Count the number of letter Fs.

FINISHED FILES ARE THE RE-
SULT OF YEARS OF SCIENTIF-
IC STUDY COMBINED WITH
THE EXPERIENCE OF YEARS.

Errors that harm the writer's image

(examples taken from Kantz & Yates and Beason)

Nonstandard verb forms

These movies seemed to be reran over and over.

Homonyms (e.g., you're/your; their/there; too/to; were/where; it's/its)

I'm not saying that you're child definitely suffers from this phobia, just that it's a possibility.

Sentence fragment

No explanation as to why one phrase sounds better than the other, leading me to guess that grading is just subjective.

Run-on sentences

The topics are good they cover a lot of controversial issues.

Subject-verb agreement

The family and home is important in making this country a wonderful place to live.

Word-ending errors

In our analysis, we believe we have treated each option fair and concluded that the Stacker method is the best.

Wrong preposition in verb phrase

We could of run to breakfast faster than the bus got us there.

Sources

- Beason, L. (2001). Ethos and error: How business people react to errors. *College Composition and Communication*, 53(1), 33-64.
- Kantz, M. & Yates, R. (1994) Whose Judgments? A Survey of Faculty Responses to Common and Highly Irritating Writing Errors. <http://www.ateg.org/conferences/c5/kantz.htm>
- Leonard, D. J., & Gilsdorf, J. W. (1990). Language in change: Academics' and executives' perceptions in usage errors. *Journal of Business Communication* 27(2), 137-160.
- Hairston, M. (1981). Not all errors are created equal: Nonacademic readers in the professions respond to lapses in usage. *College English* 43(8), 794-806.

How to Help Students Turn in Error-free Writing

1. Pay attention to process

Emphasize to your students that writing is a process with several (recursive) stages: planning, drafting, revising, editing & proofreading. Inform students that they must spend enough time working in each stage to produce a final product that meets both content and language standards. [If a student turns in a final version that contains too many errors, you can return the paper (ungraded) and allow the student a day or two to correct the errors.]

If you are teaching a Writing-Intensive Focus class or if you want to devote more time to developing students' writing skills, set deadlines for the different stages. For example, you could sequence a writing assignment in this way:

1. Planning: Out of class, students generate ideas for a writing assignment. In class, they sharing their ideas with classmates (or with you in a 5-minute conference).
2. Drafting: Set a draft due date on which students submit a well-developed draft. They receive feedback on the content from you or a classmate.
3. Revising: Students use the feedback to revise the content.
4. Proofreading: After revising the content, require that students proofread. This can be done in or out of class. If done out of class, ask students to turn in the draft with their editing corrections handwritten on it. If done in class, students can exchange papers or you can put the papers in the front of the room and each student must edit one or two.

2. Provide proofreading strategies

Require that all students proofread and edit their revised writing assignments. Below are several useful techniques:

Read Aloud

Native speakers have an "ear for language." Capitalize on this by asking students to read their revised draft aloud. Tell students to read exactly what they have written (using a pencil to point at each word or using a blank sheet to reveal one line at a time is helpful). When they stumble, hear a problem, or notice a typo, they can fix it and then continue. After they have made changes and reprinted, students should carefully reread each sentence that they changed.

Start at the end

Proofreading requires close attention to words, sentences, and punctuation marks. When students proofread from the end to the beginning, they are less likely to get "fooled" by their familiarity with the content. Ask students to proofread the last sentence of their piece first. Then they move to the second-to-the-last sentence, and so on until they reach the first sentence.

Find a friend

Nonnative speakers in particular have difficulties writing in standard English. Ask students to find a competent writer to proofread. When students find a friend to help, they should tell their friend to focus on the language instead of the content.

3. Encourage spell- and grammar-check

Popular word processing programs have spell-check and grammar-check features. Encourage students to use them and use them wisely. Remind students that the program can identify possible problems, but it cannot "read." Students need to make the final decision whether to use the program's suggestion.

4. Use minimal marking

When students submit their drafts, resist the urge to correct every error. Instead, put the burden on the student by making a notation on the draft to indicate an error. Options:

- Explain to students that they will find a check (“✓”) in the margin for each error in that line. Tell students that they are responsible for finding the error and correcting it.
- Correct one or two representative paragraphs and then use check marks (as described above) throughout the remainder of the piece.
- Explain to students that each error is circled or underlined. Tell students that they are responsible for correcting the error.
- Focus on one or two types of errors and demonstrate how to correct them. Require that the student check the paper for those types of errors and fix them. (See also #6.)

5. Discuss common errors as a class

If students in your class make the same type of error, you can photocopy several examples (from their writing) and distribute them or put them on an overhead. Show students how to identify the error and how to correct it. Tell them to proofread for this type of error on their next paper(s).

If there are errors that bother you, let students know. Show them examples and how to correct the problem.

6. Have “zero tolerance” days

If certain errors really bother you, get your students to focus on them by having a Zero Tolerance Day. Before a revised piece of writing is due, tell your students that on the due date it will be “Zero Tolerance Day” for X (e.g., comma errors, fragments, subject/verb agreement, its/it’s and there/their). Students must proofread and they must pay special attention to these types of errors.

7. Arrange in-class editing sessions

Writers are usually better at identifying errors in someone else’s writing than they are at identifying errors in their own writing. After students have revised their drafts, set aside class time for an in-class editing session. Explain to students that the purpose is to proofread and edit a classmate’s draft, not to respond to the content. Give them tips on how to proofread (see #2 above). You can assign students to pairs or you can have students take a paper (or two) from a pile and edit it anonymously.

8. Refer students to campus resources for additional help

English Department’s Writing Workshop

Students can sign up for ½ hour tutoring sessions by calling 956-7619. Because the workshop is a teaching service, not a proofreading service, students should arrive with specific questions so the tutor can help them learn to solve the problem.

Mānoa Writing Program Homepage

Students can check out links to grammar sites on the MWP homepage: www.mwp.hawaii.edu. Alternatively, they can search the web for help with grammar and writing.

Learning Assistance (LA)

Students who need to develop research-paper writing, reading, study, or time-management skills can attend workshops or one-on-one sessions at LA, located in the Queen Lili’uokalani Center for Student Services. Call 956-6114 or 956-7927.

Tips to Improve Style

1. Emphasis

(from Noguchi, *Grammar and the Teaching of Writing*)

Many students construct sentences without paying attention to emphasis. Ask students to read each sentence in their piece and decide what part of the sentence or what idea should be emphasized. Suggest that the important idea be placed in the latter part of the sentence. Usually, the last element in a sentence has the greatest weight.

Examples:

Lightning started a major forest fire in 1988 in Yellowstone.

Lightning started a major forest fire in Yellowstone in 1988.

In Yellowstone in 1988, lightning started a major forest fire.

2. Flow & coherence: Given + new structure

(from Noguchi, *Grammar and the Teaching of Writing*)

Students can learn to guide the reader by using a “given + new” structure. The “given” information (known or previously introduced information) should be placed close to the beginning of the sentence and the new information near the end. This concept can also be applied to paragraph structure and transition sentences between paragraphs.

Original:

The women’s field hockey team is a prime example of what a strong junior varsity program can do for the varsity program. Five separate J.V. hockey teams, three of which compete against other schools, make up the women’s field hockey program. The varsity finished as the fourth best team in the nation because of this program.

Revised:

A prime example of what a strong junior varsity program can do for the varsity program is the women’s field hockey team. The women’s field hockey program consists of five separate J.V. hockey teams, three of which compete against other schools. Because of this program, the varsity finished as the fourth best team in the nation.

3. Signal relationships

Students who use the same sentence structure throughout their piece can benefit from learning how to signal relationships within and between sentences. Ask students to question the construction of each sentence (or pairs of sentences) and then take appropriate action.

Ask the question

Take action

Are there two main ideas of equal importance?

Use a connector word like “and” or a semi-colon to connect the two ideas.

Are the ideas of unequal importance?

Put the less important idea in a clause.

Is one idea an interesting side note?

Put that idea between commas, dashes, or parentheses at the appropriate spot in the sentence.

Does one idea contrast with the other?

Use “but” or “however” to connect the ideas.

Are the ideas in a sentence unrelated?

Put the ideas in two different sentences.