



Tips for Responding to Student Writing

Thomas Hilgers
Monica Stitt-Bergh



Tip #1

The more time you spend designing and explaining the assignment, the less time you'll spend responding.



Assignment Design

- Give students explicit evaluation criteria
 - E.g., criteria grids/scoring rubrics
- Make annotated models available
- Longer assignments: build in checkpoints
- Repeated assignments: emphasize different aspect each time

Tip #2

Decide what type of feedback and/or comments you will provide when you design the assignment.

Feedback/Comment Options

- Use a “+, ✓, –” system for exploratory writing
- Write comments only on drafts that will be revised or on assignments that will be repeated

Tip #3

Give up “respond-as-you-go.”

Choose 2 or 3 areas on which the student writer should work.

Commenting Strategies

- Adopt role of a coach (shed roles of corrector, editor, judge, justifier of grade)
- Read through several without making comments
- Limit comments to criteria given on the assignment sheet/rubric/criteria grid
- Make at least one specific positive comment

Commenting Strategies (continued)

- Avoid over-commenting
- Start with higher-order concerns
- Comment on lower-order concerns only when higher-order concerns are satisfactory

Higher-order Concerns*

1. Does the draft follow the assignment?
2. Does the draft address an appropriate problem or question?
3. What is the quality of the argument (or quality of the ideas presented)?
4. Is the draft organized at the macro level?
5. Is the draft organized at the micro level?

* From John Bean, *Engaging Ideas* (Jossey-Bass, 2001)

Lower-order Concerns*

6. Are there stylistic elements that you find particularly annoying or are inappropriate to the genre?
7. Is the draft free of errors in grammar, spelling, and punctuation?
8. If applicable: Does the draft follow style guide rules for citations?

* Based on John Bean, *Engaging Ideas* (Jossey-Bass, 2001)

Tip #4

Before you write a comment, ask yourself:

- a) what is the purpose of the comment?
- b) what do I want the student to do with the comment?

Weak & Better Comments

Weak

You raise many important issues, but your organization is weak. The paper was lacking support. Where is the development of ideas?

Weak & Better Comments

(continued)

Better

You raise three important points on your second page, which I circled. But they get lost amid all the other points you are making. On your next draft, what if you focus on just those three and explain them (with supporting evidence)? The other points are interesting, but in this short paper you will not be able to discuss them all.

Weak & Better Comments

Weak

Your literature review is comprehensive. Well done. You brought in all the right studies, including a few I wasn't aware of (thank you!). But you used too many quotations.

Weak & Better Comments

(continued)

Better

Your literature review is comprehensive. Well done. In psychology we usually summarize research findings rather than quote. In your revision, try to summarize what you quoted. Your lit review will only be half as long.

Your turn . . .

In pairs or groups of 3, create a criteria grid for both students and the instructor to use with this assignment:

Write a persuasive essay on one of these propositions:

- A. Schizophrenia is a brain disease.
- B. Schizophrenia is a learned behavior.

[see handout]

Tip #5

Deal with grammar problems in useful ways.

Dealing with Grammar Problems

- Myth: correcting students' errors will make them better writers
 - If you edit, do so for only 1-2 paragraphs, and/or
 - Put a "✓" next to every line with an error
- Assignment design: inform students if correct grammar is required & state the penalty for errors on the final draft
- Require that students proofread and edit before submitting their final draft

Dealing with Grammar Problems (continued)

- Strategies for students
 - Read aloud
 - Read & check the last sentence, then second to the last, and so on until the first sentence is checked
 - Find a friend

Tip #6

Ask students to self assess.

Self-Assessment Options

- Students use criteria grid on their own writing
- Students answer questions such as
 - What did you do well in this draft?
 - What problem(s) did you have while working on this piece?
 - How did you solve the problem(s)?
 - What will you do to improve your next draft/piece of writing?
 - What would you like me to comment on?

Tip #7

Teach students to assess each others' writing.

Peer Review

- All writing starts as “writer-based” and only gradually becomes “reader-based”
- Goal is to help the writer, not necessarily to correct or fix

Peer Review (continued)

- Students apply criteria grid to a peer's writing
- Use samples, annotated models, or excerpts to bring criteria to life



Thank you!

For more tips and strategies on using writing
in your courses, visit the Mānoa Writing
Program website:

www.mwp.hawaii.edu

Thomas Hilgers: hilgers@hawaii.edu

Monica Stitt-Bergh: bergh@hawaii.edu