CCAC

Center for communication
Across the Curriculum

Office: Project Building, 2nd Floor

Website: www.wpi.edu/+writing

Phone: 508 831 5503

Director: Lorraine Higgins, Ldh@wpi.edu

Responding to Written Drafts
Center for Communication Across the Curriculum

I. Preparing for and Organizing Your Feedback

If you read/comment on the draft ahead of time:

Re-read the assigned question/topic. Number paragraphs for easy reference. Read through the whole paper, then go back and review individual sections or paragraphs on which you may want to comment.

Limit written comments to a few. Write comments about specific ideas/sentences in the margin, and underline those parts of the draft to which they refer. You may want to write a more general comment at the end. Praise what's done well and note important goals for revision.

When you discuss the draft with the writer/s:

Make sure everyone has a copy of the paper and a pen.

Read the assignment question and the paper together. You may want to read a paragraph or a section at a time, stopping to discuss possible revisions as you go.

Encourage the writers to contribute to the discussion and to mark down new ideas or suggested changes as they emerge.

II. Giving Effective Feedback: Global and Local Comments

Readers may focus their comments on *global* and/or *local* issues in a text. Global issues concern larger rhetorical features that often span a paragraph or more of text. Local issues concern sentence level problems related to grammar, usage, and punctuation.

> *TIP: It is often more helpful, especially in initial drafts, to comment on global issues. Local issues are best addressed in the final revision stage, especially if the writer is expected to make significant content changes before then.*

Global Issues

<u>Relevance:</u> Is the information in the text relevant to the intended purpose, assignment, or audience?

Why are you discussing the price of this equipment? I thought your intention was to explain the design of this particular machine?

You really didn't address the second question of the assignment.

Doesn't your sponsor already know what it does? Is this addressed to them?

<u>Content:</u> Do you understand what is being said (the answer, key point, argument)? Does the text contain erroneous or conflicting information? Are there striking omissions--lack of evidence/cites for key points, missing background information or definitions, failure to take up obvious rival points of view?

Let me see if I understand. It looks like your answer is yes, that you agree with this hypothesis, and the main reasons are these three. . .?And did you get that third piece of information from a book or. . .?

In paragraph #2, you seem to suggest that this treatment is helpful, but in this section, you present evidence to the contrary. I'm a bit confused about where you stand on this.

You repeatedly claim that solution A did not work. Why not?

To understand this issue fully, I really need to know what a nucleotide is and how it works.

That's not my understanding of the results. You may want to double check these figures.

<u>Organization:</u> Do you understand how one part of the paper relates to other parts? Are advanced organizers (headings, abstracts, topic sentences) used to help the reader navigate the text?

You were talking about magnetism previously, but you seem to be shifting to a different topic here. What's the connection?

This point is central to the whole methods section, but it's really buried down in paragraph #7. How can you make it more visible?

The question has three parts, yet you respond in two paragraphs, blending two answers together all in one very long paragraph. I find it hard to tease out your points.

<u>Style:</u> Is the language, tone, and look of the piece appropriate and readable?

Kat: This sounds very defensive to me. You may want to think about how this will affect the reader's willingness to read on.

I'm having trouble wading through these long sentences full of technical jargon.

---

*Tips: Try to **mirror key points** to see if you understand the gist of the paper. Make **explanatory statements**, not just evaluative ones. E.g., "I'm confused here because this contradicts what came before," NOT "This is unclear." Ask **constructive questions**; don't "give orders":   "How is this paragraph connected to the rest of the paper?"   NOT "You should insert this paragraph between paragraph 2 and 3."*

Local issues

If you mark up a first draft sentence by sentence, the paper will be covered with comments, and the writer will not know how to prioritize and focus her revisions. Besides, the content itself may change drastically in the next draft. It takes a great deal of energy to copy edit someone else's text, and it may not be appreciated or necessary in a first draft.

That said, sentence level errors in grammar, usage, and punctuation can certainly have global effects if they are sustained and repeated throughout a paper or if they continue to occur in final drafts. They can interfere with a reader's confidence in the writer and his ability to make sense of her text.

> TIP: If repeated error occurs, you should **name the pattern of error** you are seeing and **point to one example** of it rather than pointing out and correcting every instance. For example, "Your paper is full of comma splices such as the one I circled in sentence one." Or "You repeatedly string together bits of quotations rather than quoting the entire passage. As a result, I can't tell which ideas are yours and which are the author's."

In later drafts, have the writer read the paper out loud, and she will hear errors that she may not see. Another proofreading trick is to read the paper backwards, one sentence at a time. If you are proofing another's paper, put an X on the line where an error occurs or circle the error. The writer can later find and correct it herself. In working with a team, discuss how you will divvy up editing tasks. Use a writing handbook, and visit the CCAC for any persistent problems with writing at any stage.

If you have further questions about writing and/or response strategies, visit the Center for Communication Across the Curriculum in the Project Center, 2nd Floor. email: wpi.edu/+writing