

Responding to Project Writing

Lorraine Higgins, CCAC

What Makes Project Writing so Challenging?

- ⊙ **It's a brand new genre for many students**
- ⊙ **It involves multiple revisions over a short period of time**
- ⊙ **It can involve significant library research and field work, both of which also may require new skills**

Frustration . . .

“Where do I even start. . ?”

“Commenting on these drafts is such a chore. It takes hours. How do I possibly keep up?”

“Students ignored my comments on the last draft. I see basically the same problems in this new draft.”

Editor's Stance: Professor "Fix-It"

- ⊙ **Comments while reading (line by line)**
- ⊙ **Writes profuse commentary throughout**
- ⊙ **Feels compelled to be "thorough," marking every error, even in first drafts**
- ⊙ **Takes overly-directive approach: Crosses out, re-writes *for* the student; provides solutions**

Costs?

- ⊙ **Unreasonable number and mix of comments can overwhelm and confuse students**
- ⊙ **Students lose ownership of and responsibility for the document**
- ⊙ **Students may produce a "cleaner" text, but they don't learn how write one themselves**
- ⊙ **It's incredibly time consuming to edit**

Evaluator's Stance: "Awk" Talk

- ⊙ **Detects weaknesses and (sometimes) strengths**
- ⊙ **Attaches evaluative labels**
- ⊙ **Doesn't provide clear referents or explanation (where? why? how?)**
- ⊙ **Expects students to translate evaluations into revision strategies**

Costs?

- ⊙ **Evaluative labels do not always help students revise. They know THAT the text may be weak or strong, but not necessarily WHERE or WHY. They may not know HOW to address the problems you've pointed out.**

**Helpful Reader's Stance:
Showing Writers How to Meet Readers' Needs**

- ⊙ **Comments strategically. What global and local issues do I need the writer to address at this point? What, as a reader, do I need to *know*?**

- ⊙ **Avoids evaluative labels; instead, *models a reader's reactions and questions*, so students see the effects of their writing.**

- ⊙ **Indexes comments to specific sections of the text.**

- ⊙ **Suggests writing strategies and resources as necessary.**

Responding to Project Writing: A Few Pointers

Beforehand, ask yourself: What are the rhetorical moves or global issues I need to stress at this stage of writing (or in this part of the document)? You may even want to put these into a rubric (checklist, feedback sheet) for yourself and for the students. Attend to and prioritize *these* issues as you comment. Refrain from spending time on less important issues, especially in first drafts.

Avoid line-by-line commenting. Read the entire draft (or section) for the overall gist and organizing logic, THEN go back and comment on the most pressing issues.

Note *patterns* of error instead of correcting individual errors. If necessary, point out examples, provide explanation, refer to handbook or tutoring services.

Index your comments. Use the comment function or underline, point to relevant text. Have students number paragraphs or lines for easy reference.

Disgnose your reactions. If something is confusing, how so? What parts of the text created the confusion? Explain your reaction or ask a readerly question that will help the writer understand the problem from a reader's point of view.

Mirror your reading by writing gists in margins.

Persistent and widespread problems indicate that students need more directive help. Spend a few minutes in class or in your meeting naming and discussing an example and applying revision strategies together. Model how to think about and approach the problem.

Global Issues in Writing

Larger rhetorical concerns that often span a paragraph or more of text, e.g., the organizational structure of an argument, the relevance of the content or the style for a particular audience or purpose, clarity and quality of information, etc.

The first half of your text reviews seatbelt laws, but won't the politicians you're addressing already know this?

In para.2, you suggest that the relationship was good, but in this section, you present evidence to the contrary. I'm confused.

This point seems central to the whole report, but it's buried down here. How can you make it more visible?

That's not my understanding of the budget deficit. How did you arrive at these figures?

Local Issues in Writing

Concerns about sentence level problems, e.g., grammar, spelling, usage, and punctuation.

You use a lot of passive voice in this paper, which makes your sentences long and hard to read (see Sentences 4, 6,10). See active/passive voice in your handbook and try to make these and other sentences in your draft more active for the next draft.

How might you handle local errors in this first draft?

The spread of Hepatitis C could
be the next AIDES epidemic,
it has reached every corner of the
globe and effected over 170
million people. The US has not
been exempt, 3.9 million have
been effected here.

| | |
|--|--|
| State larger social problem, effects 5 pts | |
| Convince reader of significance of problem (evidence) 5 pts | |
| State project objectives clearly 5 pts | |
| Explain how objectives connect logically to problem 5 pts | |
| Mechanics 5 pts | |
| TOTAL 25 pts | |

Criteria

Comments/suggestions

Grading Criteria for Problem Statement Draft

(sample rubric)

Examples

Editor

No—put this sentence at the beginning of the paragraph. You need a topic sentence. Insert: “The mining industry in the South has a history of conflict with the surrounding communities.”

The company [lh1] hopes to solve these labor [lh2] problems [lh3] and it will meet with us to get the workers [lh4] feedback.

Evaluator

Writing here is very weak *Good!*

You need to rework this section *Awk!*

Helpful Reader

Why are you discussing the price of this equipment? I thought your intention was to explain the design of this particular machine (see goal statement in paragraph 1)?

This illustration is very hip and funny, but remember, you are addressing a group of very conservative evaluators who aren't quite sure if they can take you seriously yet.

I see two topics in this long para.—township policies and local customs. What is the real focus? Are these connected?

I'm not convinced; you provide no evidence of this failure, and the figures in your background chapter (see par. 4) actually contradict this claim.

You are summarizing this source rather than using it to make a point about the usefulness of solar technology. What might this

source suggest about Zamora Township's use of the equipment?

CCAC

**Center for Communication
Across the Curriculum**

Office: Project Building, 2nd Floor

Website: www.wpi.edu/+writing

Phone: 831-5503

Director: Lorraine Higgins, ldh@wpi.edu