Assessing and Responding to Student Writing

*Spring Institute on Teaching with Writing*
Communication Across the Curriculum
“Look at this paper! Students these days can’t write at all. 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. Why do I bother?”
Today’s Objective
To think *strategically* about our response to student writing

**Awareness**
- your patterns of response
- a wider range of approaches
- how students interpret/react

**Choices**
- the most effective approach, given the assignment, stage of writing, and student ability
Exercise 2:

Look at the three response styles (a, b, c) in handout 2.

• What name would you give each style?
• Which is your “go to” approach when working with student drafts?
• Why—what are the benefits; what purpose does this kind of commentary serve?
The guy usage
^ man said he disagreed

I comment line by line
I mark every error
I correct it for them

The Editor
Editor: **Benefits/Costs**

- It’s easier to do it for them
- It’s satisfying
- Modeling can help (if you explain WHY)
- Advanced writers may be able to emulate

- It can take a LOT of time
- Students feel overwhelmed
- Wasted effort if student needs significant content revisions.
- Writers will produce “cleaner” text but won’t learn; errors may persist.
- Students lose ownership.

- Reserve for later drafts
- Explain patterns of error, model, & ask them to “apply throughout”
- Limit to three
- Use X next to line
I decide on the verdict
I insert evaluative labels
I expect students to translate my verdict into revisions
Judge: **Benefits/Costs**

- It’s easy, fastest approach
- It’s satisfying
- Later, number of comments +/- can justify grade
- Encourages ownership; YOU figure it out (for advanced writers)

- Summative labels suggest writing is “done”, can discourage revision.
- Labels often not instructive; they know THAT the text is weak or strong, but not WHERE, WHY, or HOW to revise.

-RESERVE FOR FINAL DRAFTS
-QUICK EVALUATION WITH ADVANCED WRITER
-FOR ASSESSMENT, NOT TEACHING
The Process of Revision
(Flower et al.)

Detect → Diagnose → Apply Strategy

Judge

? 

Editor
How do you define this?
This contradicts your previous point!
You see 3 causes?

I set priorities
I narrate my interpretation & reactions
I index my comments
I teach, as needed
I suggest resources

The Helpful Reader
Helpful Reader: Benefits/Costs

• They become aware of the reader, start to internalize the reader
• They can better diagnose problems & opportunities
• They learn new strategies
• They begin to set revision goals

• Not as helpful for one-draft papers (unless repeating)
• More advanced writers may not need as much explanation.
• Becoming a helpful reader takes determination, takes up-front effort.

- USE WITH NOVICES
- USE on 1st DRAFTS
- READ WHOLE DOC/SECT BEFORE COMMENTING
- TRY RUBRICS
- TRY END COMMENT + A FEW MARGINAL ONES
- CONSIDER AUDIO RESPONSE
- BEWARE TRACK CHANGES
- USE GUIDED PEER REVIEW
Exercise 3:

Read handout 1 again.

- Develop a checklist or rubric to prioritize criteria. Comment as a helpful reader.

- Try an end comment with limited marginal comments OR fill in your rubric

- Later, try an audio comment or Word’s comment program if you haven’t yet
TIPS

**Beforehand**
• Give them the rubric WITH the assignment.
• Have them develop and test the rubric with you on a sample.

**When drafts are due in class**
• Give writers 5 minutes to proof, write 1-2 self review on back.
• Have a peer check for ONE thing. They should mark instances; writer should revise.
• Do guided peer review or demo on one aspect of the paper. Give writers time to apply before collecting.

**When you need to reduce the workload**
• Train PLAs/TAs with rubric; they grade. Spot check.
• Have students choose 2-3 best pieces & revise for portfolio.
• Use comments for first draft; points-only rubric + end comment for final.
• Use cumulative sequence.