

## RESPONDING TO STUDENT WRITING

1. Frontload your efforts so that what you have to respond to is better than it would be otherwise and so that students learn more:
  - clarify your expectations and state them explicitly in the assignment
  - make sure that the course gives students a chance to practice the kinds of thinking that you expect in their papers
  - give students a chance to talk about their thinking and writing in progress
  - discuss, with your class, excerpts from successful sample papers, written by students; talk about what specifically makes these papers successful
  - use peer review
  - build process and revision into the assignment by requiring students to submit drafts by certain dates; then have students revise based on responses they receive from you and from peers
  - hold conferences with students to discuss their work in progress
  - anticipate and head off common problems--by sharing your evaluation criteria, by discussing samples, by giving students a chance to see other students' work in progress, by getting students to talk and ask questions about assignments, by teaching students some of the skills they need to succeed with this paper (e.g., how to examine sources critically, how to review a book, how to incorporate source material into a paper, how to organize the discussion section of a scientific report, how to use the documentation system you want students to use . . .).
2. Decide on, put in writing, share, and discuss evaluation criteria.
3. If you are sharing responsibility for a course with other faculty or TAs, meet with them to discuss responding and grading.
4. Communicate with your students about your feedback. If you make shorthand notes in the margin (e.g., "awk" for "awkward phrasing"), give them an explanatory list of the marks you often make so they may decode. But don't stop there! In addition to sharing your evaluation criteria, spend time in class discussing the kinds of feedback you're giving, and give students the opportunity to ask questions about your responses.
5. Have students submit self-evaluation sheets with their papers.
6. Have students submit previous graded papers from your course with new papers. You will then be able to respond to and guide students' development as writers.
7. Respond in ways appropriate for the particular type of writing, for that particular stage of development (drafts vs. finished papers, journals vs. research papers).
8. Consider holding conferences to discuss your comments individually with students, because, without discussion, written comments on papers are often ignored or misunderstood.
9. Develop an evaluation checklist, tied to your evaluation criteria. Although you won't want to limit your response to checks on a list, using a list can help ensure that, in your response, you're emphasizing what you decided matters most in an assignment.

10. In your response, emphasize large-scale issues--quality of ideas, arguments, experimental or research design, depth of analysis, findings, use of evidence, focus, clarity of main idea, development of ideas, logic, understanding of course concepts, etc.
11. In your comments, identify specific strengths.
12. Don't feel compelled to comment on everything that's wrong or that could be improved. Research shows that students are often overwhelmed by voluminous comments and thus miss an instructor's main suggestions. If you can, first emphasize the strengths of a piece of writing (praise is a great motivator), and then identify and explain the one or two main ways in which a piece of writing could be improved.
13. Resist the temptation to edit or rewrite page after page of a student's paper. If there are problems with grammar, word choice, style, and punctuation throughout a paper, your time is better spent identifying and illustrating corrections for the problems in one section of the paper. Indicate in your comments that similar problems appear in the rest of the paper. Then meet with the student to discuss these problems and to ask the student to revise the entire paper, paying special attention to the problems you have identified in part of it. Offer to meet again to provide additional help and to respond to the revision, and encourage the student to arrange at least two appointments with a Writing Center instructor for more help.
14. Make both your praise and your criticisms as specific and clear as possible. Beware of the potential for miscommunication when you use abstract or unspecified terms in your comments, terms that your students may not understand (e.g., "flow" and "focus" may not mean the same thing to your students as they do to you; and what specifically makes a section "good" needs to be clear to the student-writer).
15. Don't waste much time responding to what may be minimal efforts. Your time is probably better spent talking with the student to discuss the situation.
16. Share and discuss some successful papers with the whole class when you return papers.
17. "Publish" some student writing in a copy-shop packet, which both current and future students in your course can read. By broadening the audience for students' writing, this kind of publication casts student-writers as experts on their subject matter and encourages them to do their best possible work.