The Love Sandwich

Responding to Student Writing as Readers

by Cindy Slates, Writing Lab Coordinator, CCSF English Department

Goal 1) develop skills for responding to student writing
Goal 2) increase understanding of the reading/writing process

Questions for Reflection

• What do my comments communicate about how power is used in the classroom?
• What is the purpose of my feedback—to help students improve or justify grades?
• How much time do I have to offer feedback? How much time should I spend?
• What can I do to prepare students in advance so that they excel in their writing (and reduce the need for constructive feedback)?

How would you respond if your teacher wrote these comments below?

What are the power dynamics between instructor and student?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Omit this paragraph:</th>
<th>These arguments are not convincing.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>You might consider omitting this paragraph.</td>
<td>Explain why this is the case.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How does this paragraph connect to your main argument / claim?</td>
<td>How could you demonstrate this claim with evidence from our text?</td>
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</tbody>
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Annotation comments

A one sentence summary
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Types of Feedback

Descriptive—Spontaneous Reactions
This is so interesting because... / What an interesting connection to...
This makes me think of...
I love iced coffee drinks, too!
I'm intrigued by this notion because...

Descriptive—Observations (about the text / the reader’s experience of the text)
I notice this paragraph addresses two different topics.
I feel lost here because earlier you say...
I'm having trouble picturing this.
This connects to your thesis!
I'm not sure how this evidence relates to the topic sentence.
Here's your summary of the literature!
Based on your thesis, I predict you will analyze several factors influencing drug use.

Prescriptive / Evaluative
Nice explanation—I really understand the ramifications of the tax increase!
Your vocabulary choices are sophisticated! / Good job using words in context from our vocabulary list!
I'm not sure what you mean here. Is there another way to say this?
Say more!
I feel like there's some background information that I need to understand this fully.
Your intro is strong here because...

Critical Thinking: How/Why/Should?
I wonder how tenants would respond to this.
Should everyone agree?
How would insurance companies accomplish this?
Why do healthcare providers need to know this?
What's the historical context for this?

Experimental: What if? / Conditional
I wonder what the effect would be if your conclusion becomes your intro?
What if you imagined a reader who has never heard of this innovation?
If copays increase, what will happen?

not taking away a personal power
Criteria for Effective Feedback

☐ Don’t write too much and grade holistically—studies show too many comments are overwhelming.
  ☐ Prioritize 2-3 types of Higher Order Concerns (HOCs—big conceptual ideas) and 1-3 types of “Later” Order Concerns (LOCs—grammar / style) even when more problems exist. Limit marginal notes to 2-3 instances of HOCs & 3-7 instances of LOCs per page.
  ☐ Be consistent with HOCs and LOCs—if you suggest completely re-envisioning a paragraph, grammar comments on that same paragraph conflictingly suggest keeping the sentences with some fix-ups.
  ☐ For LOCs, focus on a pattern of errors, and do not mark every instance! For the first instance, I underline the error, place a check-mark on the left-side, and name the error. I check-mark later instances, underline where the error occurs, but do not label it.

☐ Maintain student ownership of the writing and use your power humbly.
  ☐ Think of your feedback as a dialogue—use a conversational albeit professional tone that demonstrates engagement with student ideas—be curious, reflective, and respectful as though reviewing a colleague’s work.
  ☐ Respond as a reader: “I see how you connect this idea to your thesis.”; “As a reader, I’m confused about why faculty should implement these changes.”
  ☐ Write under students’ sentences or to the side to maintain student authority. Try not to cross-out their words; use [brackets] or underline.
  ☐ Assume students have amazing ideas and are “on to something.”
  ☐ Use shared, accessible language that you have explained in class.
  ☐ Use blue / purple ink rather than “bloody” tear-me-apart red—or even better, use erasable pencil so you can revise.

☐ Be specific. Writing “good” does not communicate what is good about the writing or ideas and provides no model for what to do in the future.

☐ The relationship between marginal notes and End/Cover comments should be clear—the praise, constructive feedback, and questions in the margin should explicitly connect back as the specific examples of your summarized feedback.
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- Balance formative and summative comments—students benefit from specific ways to revise or improve on the next assignment as well as from observations / evaluations of the current “final product.”
  - Connect specific areas needing improvement to specific resources on campus or online and to strategies for improvement
  - Invite students to work with you during office hours
  - Pointing out what students are doing well—or describing what you observe in the writing—is just as instructive as pointing out areas needing improvement—as long as you are specific.

- Organize your comments
  - Format End/Cover comments as a Love Sandwich:
    - ♥♥♥ Strengths ♥♥♥
    - ### Area(s) for Growth and Specific Strategy ###
    - ♥♥♥ Encouragement for Improvement ♥♥♥
  - Use an organizational strategy for marginal notes; for example, LOCs check-marked on the left-side, HOCs comments on the right; purple for HOCs, green for LOCs.
  - If you use symbols to make grading simpler / uniform, be sure to provide a key for students to interpret.
  - Use grading rubrics as a tool to sort comments into categories such as “strengths” and “areas for improvement” or “HOCs” and “LOCs”
  - Use Error Logs for students to learn how to correct grammar patterns (1-3 types of errors and no more than 5 instances of each error per Log).

- Read student work twice: the first time holistically without taking any notes; the second with notes. (Or the first time focus on HOCs; the second on LOCs).

- Write sentence examples at the bottom of a page to demonstrate a sentence correction—one sentence should be incorrect, the other correct, making sure the sentences differ only in the area in which you are demonstrating the rule.

- Write legibly!

- Grade when you are in a good mood and well-rested!!!!!
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Other Ideas

- Conferencing—provide comments face-to-face.
- Word Comments—provide typed marginal notes via Word Comments.
- Track Changes—you can carry on a dialogue with students on their papers. Students can submit questions for your feedback, and you can respond.
- Screen-casting—provide comments to writing online via audio recording.

How to Prepare Students

- Do the assignment yourself and keep a metacognitive journal—you will learn a lot about the challenges of the assignment (and how to help others).
  o Make a list of useful sentence structures and vocabulary that may be necessary to do the kinds of critical thinking you are asking for and share the list.
  o Make sure the writing task you want students to do is explicitly stated in one or two sentences and is clearly located on your assignment. Remember that summarizing or describing are very different activities than analyzing. While a paper may require more than one kind of thinking and writing, which task is the main task? State that! The more effective your assignment, the stronger the writing will be.
- Provide a Grading Rubric when you pass out the writing assignment.
- Build in assignments that break down the writing process. In general, multiple drafts lead to success.
- Tell students to read their work out loud and proud from a printed copy—not their phone or computer—to catch grammar errors and see the overall connections in their writing. Tell them they should be proud of their work and should make it their best as though it were submitted for their job!
- Adapt Rubrics for Peer Review—studies show that completing a draft before it is due and sharing it with a peer increases success.
- Share a sample successful paper, especially on a non-related topic, and use it to model how to give feedback during peer review (or use a student’s paper).
- Let students know about the English Lab—when there is not a long line of English students signed up for tutoring, the English Lab will work with any CCSF student who is writing a paper for their CCSF class on a drop-in basis.
- After returning graded work, assign a reflective activity for students to interact with and respond to your comments; for example, they could summarize your
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comments and then make an action plan for the next assignment; Error Logs
also require interaction with your feedback.

End / Cover Comment—Sample

Deidre,

I'm impressed by the connection you make between the increase in health problems
in the US and the rise of insurance costs. I was particularly interested in the trends
you cited from the 1990s in paragraph five.

Now that you have improved how you select relevant support for your claims, work
on elaborating more and making connections to your thesis. For your next paper,
consider using a journal to keep notes on the class readings, answering the question:
how do the claims in this text affect society? Free-write as much as you can—you
may have more to say in your paper, which will improve your grade.

Also, use the online Bedford Guide and Learning Curve sites available on the English Lab
Web Resources page to learn how to identify subject / verb agreement errors
(www.ccsf.edu/english/WebResources). I'd love to meet with you in office hours to
go over these notes in more detail.

Keep up the good work! I see how you are developing this semester into a talented
researcher.

Cindy

Resources consulted:

Elbow, Peter. “High Stakes and Low Stakes in Assigning and Responding to Writing.”
“Giving Feedback on Student Writing.” Sweetland Center for Writing. University of
“How to Provide Constructive Feedback—That Won’t Exasperate Your Students.”
Graduate School of Arts and Sciences Teaching Center. Columbia University.
Sommers, Nancy. “Responding to Student Writing.” College Composition and