



Literacy at Hartford Public High School

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Correcting an Essay

<http://usm.maine.edu/wac/assessingstwriting.html>

Assessing and Evaluating Writing

Too much commenting is often overwhelming and frustrating for teachers (“there is so much in need of correction” and “students don’t pay attention to my comments”). Too many comments are also overwhelming and frustrating for students. Students can only take in so much information about a paper at one time and can be overwhelmed by papers covered in the literal and proverbial red ink. Particularly because writing is such an egocentric activity, writers often feel overloaded by excessively detailed feedback about their writing. Excessive detail may also make student writers feel as if s/he utterly lacks competence in writing or as if the teacher is taking control of the paper.

Focusing your commenting energies thus has benefits for students and faculty. It leaves students in control of their writing so that they can consider revising--or at least learning from the experience of having written the paper. It benefits faculty by enabling teachers to address the most important elements of a paper rather than getting bogged down in detail

Composition experts recommend that teachers comment on two or three of the most important features of a paper, determined either by the criteria for the assignment or by the seriousness of the effect on a reader of a given paper. One way to do this is to identify “2 priorities for revision;” “priorities” emphasizes that the suggestions are not the only possible things to revise, but are among the most important.

Handling Grammar and Mechanics

You don’t need to be an expert in grammar to give students meaningful feedback on grammar, punctuation, mechanics or style. In some instances, you don’t need to comment on grammar or mechanics at all. For instance, if you use short and/or impromptu writing-to-learn assignments, you probably don’t need to comment on or correct grammar. It is confusing to students; marking errors on writing-to-learn assignments detracts students from the main purpose: learning ideas.

In instances where you must comment on grammar and mechanics, you can save time and maximize feedback by using a shorthand that works for you.

Remember: CAPT subtests does not factor into the score writing errors. As long as the writing is clear and understandable, spelling mistakes, lapses in punctuation and mechanics, and grammar errors are ignored. Still, students should be aware that there is a right and a wrong way to put their thoughts into written form.

You can certainly make students responsible for polishing their papers. Formal papers do need to be edited and corrected, but it is not necessarily the job of the teacher to do this. Some ways to ensure that students edit carefully include

- basing a significant portion of the grade on the ease of reading and grammatical, mechanical, and stylistic correctness
- refusing to grade papers until they are polished
- suggesting or requiring an appointment with a writing tutor, and
- offering opportunities for peer review.

Using Explicit Criteria and Assessment Rubrics

NEASC requires that each school develop checklists or rubrics to assess or grade students’ writing. The criteria for excellent writing can be used as a grading rubric. Teachers in each department must employ school-wide rubrics or departmental rubrics. Using all or some portion of these criteria gives students feedback on writing strengths and areas for improvement and allows the teacher to grade/evaluate written work.

Students benefit in a variety of ways when teachers make the criteria for writing assessment very explicit. Students learn what is expected in their writing and they begin developing the ability to do focused self-assessment. In addition, when teachers discuss the criteria in relation to a particular assignment, students gain enhanced understanding of how to apply principles of effective writing in a specific context.

Remember: Excellent writing

- is clear and well organized;
- conforms to conventions relevant to its purpose and audience;
- draws on the vocabulary of the discipline and language as a whole to convey its point convincingly;
- is accurate, relevant, and precise, giving credit to outside sources.