

Questioning Assumptions: What Makes for Effective Feedback on Student Writing?

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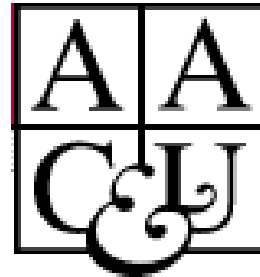
“Teaching is interaction.”

Lou Kelly

University of Iowa

High-impact teaching practices, part of the Wisconsin Experience

- writing-intensive courses are a high-impact practice (Association of American Colleges and Universities)



a presentation in three parts

- some characteristics of effective feedback
- some advice, informed by research and experience
- some components of feedback on student writing

Part 1

SOME CHARACTERISTICS OF EFFECTIVE FEEDBACK ON STUDENT WRITING

a little crowdsourcing

- What is one thing that characterizes effective feedback on student writing?
- Please team up with ONE colleague at your table (ideally someone you do NOT already know) and exchange your ideas
- 2 minutes!

Effective feedback on student writing . . .

- mirrors conversation with student-writers and their ideas; is dialogic
- arrives fairly promptly
- is understood and actually used by students
- engages with ideas and arguments and analyses
- signals genuine interest and respect
- identifies strengths and potential in papers
- includes background (Sommers) (references to class, a reading, the assignment, a conference, an earlier draft . . .)

Effective feedback on student writing . . .

- follows explicit **evaluation criteria**
- identifies **ways to improve and deepen thinking**, analysis, persuasion, organization, clarity, power, precision . . .
- signals **priorities** for what to work on next
- **motivates** students to care about their writing and about their revision or next writing project
- **inspires revision** (Sommers)
- is **manageable** and sustainable **for the instructor** to do

Part 2

**SOME KEY CONCEPTS AND ADVICE,
BASED ON RESEARCH AND EXPERIENCE**

some advice for effective feedback

- GLOCs before LOCs
- with major papers and projects, stretch out the process and create opportunities for dialogue about ideas and writing
 - deepen your students' understanding of the thinking and writing task
- create and share evaluation criteria
- give some summative, holistic feedback, in an end comment

In feedback and conversations, focus on Global before Local Concerns

Global Concerns

- Does this paper respond to the central task of the assignment?
- Does it do the work that this genre of paper is supposed to do?
- Does it have a strong central claim or argument?
- Is it effectively organized for readers?

Local Concerns

- Where can the style be improved?
- Where are there problems with citation format?
- Where are there grammatical mistakes?
- Where can word choice be improved?
- Are there proofreading mistakes?

Stretch out the process

- Feedback on student writing actually begins LONG before you receive a stack of student papers; it begins with how you design writing assignments and how you integrate them into your course

NSSE (National Survey of Student Engagement) Findings

- What matters for better learning:
 - the kinds of writing projects faculty assign (aim for really **substantial, meaning-construction** tasks)
 - **clear instructions**



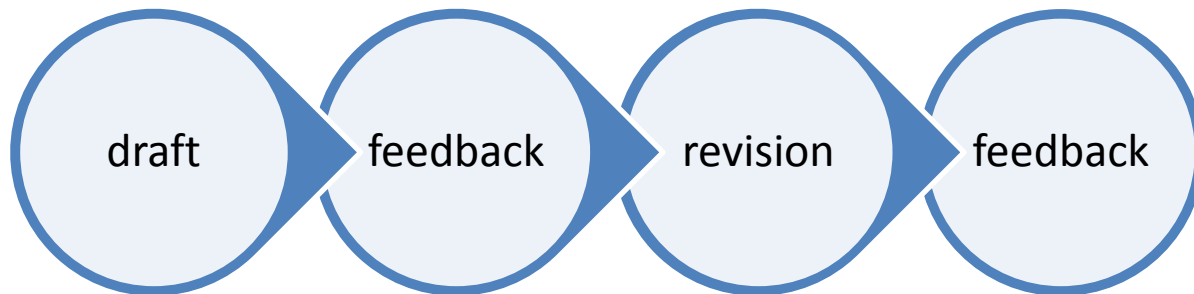
interactive writing process



Robert Gonyea, Indiana University (2010)

ways to interact around writing projects

- discuss the central task in the assignment
- discuss evaluation criteria
- discuss models
- do some brainstorming and planning
- build in peer review or workshops



create and share evaluation criteria

- evaluation criteria or rubrics (explicit criteria are especially important for introductory-level courses [grad as well as undergrad]; and for students less experienced writing in your discipline and in the genre you're assigning)
- helpful to instructors and to students

feedback form for a library-based research paper

Professor Caitilyn Allen, Plant Pathology

understanding of problem

thoroughness of research

analysis

clarity

originality

writing

organization

clarity

grammar, usage

overall grade

rubric for a research proposal

clear introduction or abstract (your choice), introducing the purpose, scope, and method of your project.

literature review—six quality scholarly sources; clearly summarized; connection to your proposed research clear.

significance of topic

Statement of problem—gap in knowledge about the topic; hypothesis if appropriate.

proposal of how your study will help fill the gap—what new knowledge it might provide.

clear methods section—description of measurements, tools for measurement, reasons for choosing tools, sample, reasons for sample choice.

organization and logical progression of ideas at the paragraph and whole-paper levels.



rubric for a research proposal

correct use of citation style (APA)

style/language—clear actors as subjects of your sentences; active voice when appropriate.

style/language—concision and cohesion between sentences and paragraphs.

style/language—elegant use of tropes and schemes, when appropriate.

careful editing/proofing.

By Matthew Pearson.

analytic rubric with levels of success, on an informative news story in journalism, Prof. Katy Culver

Graded requirements	Subsets	Emerging	Developing	Mastering
	Scale	C-F	B-BC	A-AB
Lead	Fit to story, concision, engagement, appropriate tone	Lead misses point of story or is buried; wordy; inappropriate for audience; unnecessarily passive; inaccurate	Lead has one or two strong elements but fails in other, e.g., hits correct point but is excessively wordy	Lead accurately and succinctly draws in audience with key idea (straight) or engaging elements (feature)
information

rubrics need to be tailored to a particular genre and level

- Anson, Dannels, Flash, and Gaffney (2012), “Big Rubrics and Weird Genres: The Futility of Using Generic Assessment Tools Across Diverse Instructional Contexts”
- “generalized standards [for evaluating student writing projects] are unproductive and theoretically misguided.”



an end (overall) comment

- In most cases, students really benefit from a thoughtful end comment, something holistic, that conveys overall success and reacts to overall argument and insights and organization and priorities for what to work on (very difficult to convey these in marginal comments)

Part 3

COMPONENTS OF FEEDBACK ON STUDENT WRITING

three kinds of written comments

- editorial feedback
- directive feedback
- facilitative feedback

editorial feedback

- ~~cross-outs~~
- rewritten words, phrases, sentences
- corrections
- additions
- labeling grammatical errors (e.g., “verb tense”)
- re-ordered material . . .
- no explanation of the changes
- no overall or general feedback

directive feedback

Directive feedback clearly tells or coaches a writer what to do or not to do.

“Avoid repeating your introduction in your conclusion. Close the discussion with your insights.”

“Use a semicolon between two sentences. This is a comma splice.”

“Provide an example to make your point clear. This takes out the guess work.”

facilitative feedback

Facilitative feedback asks students to engage with their work more critically (e.g. revise argument, consider audience, or offer another perspective).

“According to Foucault, what is the relationship between seeing and power? Show you understand the theory.”

“Did you consider looking at the issue from the parents’ perspective to present a stronger counter-argument?”

“Do all teenagers use Facebook or is this an assumption? This claim requires research and support.”

- Martha Davis Patton and Summer Smith Taylor, “Re-evaluating Directive Commentary in an Engineering Activity System” *ATD [Across the Disciplines]* 10 (2013). Web.



samples of colleagues' feedback

- From Jen Kaiser in Biocore:
 - “Ah! This is a clearer explanation of what’s happening. So is it that pH8 then opens stomata? Or keeps them open? There’s a key difference there. It still isn’t clear how pH→opening or how ABA works in the system.”
 - [at the end of a paragraph] “Any sources?”
 - “Great idea to include this graph. This info would fit better in the intro. That way you can reference it here rather than bringing in new info.”

samples of colleagues' feedback

- From Prof. Jim Raymo, Sociology
 - [a marginal comment at the end of the 1st paragraph, a paper on religious switching] “I would suggest being more explicit (either here or later in the paper) about the limitations of existing data. The bottom line is that you are not able to temporally link change to other life events, right? In theory, this could be dealt with using well-constructed life-history data, no? What else does panel data give you. Think about this.”

samples of colleagues' feedback

- From Prof. Charles Cohen, History Dept., on a revised paper in a Colonial American History course
 - “You’ve substantially improved the paper, weeding out extraneous arguments, clarifying previously unclear statements, and even adding new material. You’ve developed a powerful thesis statement, and have directed your material towards supporting it, although occasionally, as noted, you weaken the focus. You make a few questionable statements: . . .”

alternatives to written feedback

- conferences
- audio feedback
- screen-capture feedback

the learning record

- for smaller classes
- “an architecture and process for documenting student progress and achievement”
- students build a record of their work every week, evidence that they review and evaluate
- students use evidence from their written (and other) work to argue, in writing, using clearly established criteria from the professor, that they have demonstrated achievement at particular level
- the professor responds to students’ self-evaluations
- Prof. Jim Brown, Department of English, UW-Madison (brownjr@wisc.edu)
- learningrecord.org

the learning record

- From a student's learning record at mid-term time:
 - I am going to carve out an argument for an AB, which is where I think I am by this point in the semester grade-wise. I am choosing to argue for an AB, because I think that there are elements of both grades in my work thus far, as evident on the LRO . . .
 - My learning record demonstrates significant development across the five dimensions of learning as well. In terms of my confidence and independence, I have become more self aware in my abilities as can be seen in my observations, my collaborative works with _____, and my request for an extension on this midterm. My skills and strategies have been exemplified in the quality of my tracing gutter text and my tracing reflection and synthesis. I have the skills at this point, to put rhetorical theory to practice in Comic Life, and I am able to analyze other people's rhetoric, as can be seen with my analyses on Wordsworth, Y: The Last Man, and A History of Violence. . . .

the learning record

- From the instructor's response to the student:
 - This is a thorough and fair evaluation of your work. As you note, your work fits the criteria for an A, and the only real issue was with the lateness of the Learning Record. . .
 - You've done a wonderful job linking the work we're doing in this class to other spaces and activities (in particular, mock trial), your work in ComicLife with _____ is already paying dividends, and your tracing project demonstrated a sophisticated rhetorical sensibility. This is an excellent LRO.

What if it's impossible to do ideal
feedback?

- feedback forms or checklists

cals.wisc.edu/moodle/feedbackmanager/



Feedback Manager

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About Feedback Manager

Background

Feedback Manager, inspired by Eric Mazur (Harvard), was developed in Moodle as part of the Quiz Module at UW-Madison. Programmer Bruce Barton, DoIT, and a development team headed by Professor Robert L. Jeanne (Entomology) worked with faculty/staff who teach in the Introductory Biology 151-152 course to create the tool to meet the objectives and needs of UW-Madison instructors. Feedback Manager was beta-tested in Spring 2009. The core development team included Lillian Tong, Amber Smith, David Hatfield, and Jenny Heyrman. Assistance was provided by Sue Weier (Learning Support Services) and Rachel Bain (Chemistry).

Funding

Funding was provided by a competitive grant from the Provost's Technology Enhanced Learning Program to the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences with Robert L. Jeanne as primary investigator in 2008-2009. Continued development is provided by a Technology Enhanced Learning Continuation grant to the College of Engineering with Steven Cramer, Robert Jeanne, Robert Kohlhepp, Greg Moses, and Lillian Tong as primary investigators (2009-10). This continuation grant is a collaboration between the two colleges (each of which had developed materials and tools in Moodle in the 2008-2009 competition). The

Feedback Manager—instructor's view for reading and grading

Question: **Inheritance of behavior** Using complete sentences and no more than about 50 words, describe evidence showing that behavior is inherited and explain why it is convincing .

First name / Surname	Grade	#	Last msg	Student's answer	Individual feedback	Tag	(typical) Grade
Amanda D.	26.75	4	2009-04-07	Ron Hoy was able to show that behavior was inherited by conducting a study on cricket songs. The differences between songs were measured in phrases of chirps and trills. The expected result of two crickets with different songs mating was that the offspring would have a mixture of the parent songs. When two crickets with different songs were mated, the offspring produced a song that was a mixture of the parent songs. Nothing is more convincing than being able to predict the behavior of a certain insect.		F	40 / 40
Jessica S.	70.97	9	2009-05-08	I think inheritance of cricket song is a good evidence, which is a concept of crosses and backcrosses. By comparing the wavelength in chirp and trill phrases, it seems that offsprings (F1) of T. oceanicus wild type and T. commodus wild type have song patterns in between of their parents. When you backcross the F1 with WT of both species again, you can see that their offspring (F2) have song patterns in between of F1 and the WT. Therefore, I think behavior is inherited and it seems convincing to me by looking at this example.		A	35 / 40
Brianna R.	71.05	9	2009-05-08	Hygienic bees resist disease by uncapping and removing infected pupae. When doing crosses between hygienic and non-hygienic honey bees, it resulted in the conclusion that there are genes controlling two traits; the uncapping and the removal. The cross resulted in an F1 generation that was non-hygienic. A backcross yielded a non-hygienic bee, a bee that only uncapped but did not remove the infected pupae, a bee that would remove but not uncapped, and a hygienic bee that uncapped and removed the pupae. The study proved that each behavior was controlled by one gene and that both behaviors are recessive traits.		G	35 / 40
	71.12	9	2009-05-08	Genomics researchers have been able to pinpoint genes that regulate certain behavior patterns in some species of insects. By doing genetic crosses, scientists have revealed that the expression of a given gene results in a behavior, and the absence of that gene results in the insect not expressing the behavior. Genes are inherited so this evidence suggests that behavior also must be inherited.		F	40 / 40
	73		2009-05-08	The classic example that provides evidence that behavior is inherited can be seen in animals that have an imprinting behavior. Imprinting is when a young animal's social interactions with its parents (usually) constitute who the animal will choose as an appropriate partner in life. Imprinting could not have occurred in these animals if the brain had not been "prepared" to some extent; in other words, the brain's genetically influenced development would have to respond to the information it received from its environment (i.e. seeing the parent for the first time). My understanding is that imprinting occurs almost instantly so the behavior would have to be inherited at least to some extent, because it could not be learned in such a short time. While the goslings' behavior is shaped by its environment to some extent, the initial imprinting behavior is inherited and not "learned."		H	30

Instructor's feedback

Tag	Feedback
A	'Seems convincing' is not a good explanation of why it is convincing.
B	One could argue in this case that they're learning what work needs to be done by responding
C	First he did a simple cross of hygienic and non-hygienic strains. The backcrosses were
D	But how do you know, simply by observing, that the food preferences in the two
E	Not quite. Ron Hoy did Mendelian crosses between two species of cricket and got
F	Nice answer!
G	Excellent answer, but way over word limit.
H	Nice my w... but way over

student's name

students' written responses to the prompt

space for instructor to give individual feedback

grade

tagged feedback

sample assignment in Feedback Manager

- From David Abbott in introductory biology:
 - In your own words, and in complete sentences totaling not more than 100 words, discuss the function of the dendritic cell can be likened to the famous midnight ride of Paul Revere on the night of the 18th of April, 1775. During these excursions, Revere warned the Massachusetts countryside that the British were coming. Include in your answer HOW aspects of the innate and acquired

sample assignment in Feedback Manager

- From David Abbott in introductory biology:
 - immune responses, and particularly CD4+ (or helper) T cells, fit into the analogy. Remember, I want to know more about the immunology than the history!

UW-Madison Program in Writing Across the Curriculum

- Workshops for faculty, instructional staff, and TAs on
 - responding to and evaluating student writing
 - on designing effective writing assignments
 - on conferencing with your students on papers in progress
 - on designing and evaluating short writing assignments in larger lecture courses

For more information

- Website with these principles and info about the research sources I've mentioned—
- writing.wisc.edu/feedback

writing.wisc.edu/wac

SOURCEBOOK

13 14

FOR FACULTY AND TAs
TEACHING
COMMUNICATION-B &
WRITING-INTENSIVE COURSES

Program in Writing Across the Curriculum
College of Letters and Science
University of Wisconsin-Madison

some advice and proven practices

Brad Hughes
Writing Across the Curriculum
University of Wisconsin-Madison

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

Questions, reactions?

JOHN C. BEAN

ENGAGING IDEAS

The Professor's Guide to
Integrating Writing, Critical Thinking,
and Active Learning in the Classroom

SECOND EDITION

Learning to Communicate in Science and Engineering



CASE STUDIES FROM MIT

MYA POE,
NEAL LERNER, AND
JENNIFER CRAIG

FOREWORD BY JAMES PARADIS



$$p_2 = \left[\frac{\lambda + \mu}{\mu} \right] \left[\frac{\lambda}{\mu} \right] p_0$$

$n = 2$; again (from

$$p_n = \left[\frac{\lambda + \mu}{\mu} \right]^n p_0$$