Wicked Fast WAC: Tips for Providing Feedback on Writing Assignments

I. Feedback pitfalls:

- Too much
- Too little
- Too negative
- Too much on each sentence and too little at the end
- Too focused on lower-order rather than higher-order concerns.
- Too cryptic
- Too frustrated
- Too focused on aspects of the paper that are not outlined in the assignment sheet
- Too time consuming

Higher-Order Concerns

◎ Thesis statement
◎ Quality of argument/ideas
◎ Evidence used correctly
◎ Logic of conclusions
◎ Use of topic sentences
◎ Organization of paper
◎ Follows assignment?
◎ Demonstrates understanding of course material

Lower-Order Concerns

◎ Spelling
◎ Grammar (agreement)
◎ Formatting (font, spacing)
◎ Citation
◎ Punctuation
◎ Sentence structure
◎ Vocabulary/word choice
◎ Style

II. Questions to ask ourselves:

1. How can/do we use feedback to motivate students?
2. How can/do we use feedback to develop relationships with students?
3. How can/do we provide feedback that not only helps the student improve this one paper but is also transferable beyond this paper?
4. How can/do we provide feedback on drafts while also maintaining work/life balance?

III. Silent conversation: review the materials below and respond with the following (using either comments or a different color)

- What questions do you have?
- Do you use any of these approaches and do they work?
- Do you intend to try any of these approaches?

IV. How we work in the RWC: Task-based approach.

Tips for Providing Feedback on Writing Assignments

Here are some strategies for providing thoughtful feedback without multiplying our workload:

- Write feedback as if you are writing a letter with a greeting and by signing your name at the end.
- Specifically identify what your students are doing well. Be concrete; a spoonful of sugar doesn't work. If you say, "good ideas here," name the good ideas.
- Don't focus on sentence-level issues unless they impede meaning. If that is the case, try to figure out what the root cause is. Here are some questions that can help: is the student multilingual or from a multilingual household? Is the difficulty of the content causing the student's writing to be convoluted (if they were writing about something simpler might their sentences be easier to understand)? Are they struggling with the course readings? Did they not devote any time to editing/proofreading? Marking or correcting all unclear sentences doesn't teach students how to do it better next time around but figuring out the root cause can help you help the student.
- When possible, speculate as to why students might be struggling with a particular assignment, reading, or idea. When students understand why they are getting something wrong, it will help them get it right.
- When possible, comment on progress the student has made.
- Use the students' own papers to demonstrate that they know how to do something they are not doing elsewhere in the paper. For example, if you see them applying a concept they learned in class in one place, but not in another, let them know.

- Experiment with different technologies for providing feedback and students what forms of feedback are most useful for them: I give some of my feedback through an oral recording now and others in google docs.

Make the most out of your time devoted to feedback:

- Provide feedback to the class as a whole by identifying trends. That is to say, name what your entire class is doing well and what they need to continue to work on.
- Repeating yourself? Cut and paste comments for one student to another.
- Do not mark every error/problem you see. This takes too much time and overwhelms the student. Save most of your feedback for an end comment or letter.
- Tie your feedback to the larger goals of the course, and emphasize its usefulness for the next assignment and for their life beyond college.
- Avoid posing a long list of questions or telling students to "consider" or "think about." Instead, tell the student **one thing** he/she could *do* to improve this paper or next time around.
- Assign models/sample papers that you can use as a touchstone in your feedback.
- When students' writing demonstrates that they do not understand the reading, help them become better readers by sending them back to the text with a specific reading (and writing) task and by scaffolding reading with videos and podcasts.
- Suggest that students ask generative AI for feedback and to share the feedback generative AI provided and how they used it.

Purdue OWL's **A Translingual Approach to Feedback on Student Writing**

Responding to student writing within a translingual paradigm requires students' active engagement in the process and teachers' willingness to negotiate with the student.

- Approach unconventional use of English as sites of negotiation rather than mark it as poor practice or error;
- Use questions instead of statements to create space for negotiation when noticing unconventional practice of English. This requires teachers to always assume that students make certain rhetorical and linguistic moves intentionally to achieve certain purposes;
- When interrupted by practices of code meshing or code mixing that involve the use of languages other than English, teachers should suggest using footnotes or other clarification techniques to facilitate understanding;
- Most of the translingual practices are manifested at the lexical level. Writing teachers should be cautious against being over tolerant when translingual writing is used as an excuse to account for other global issues in student writing, such as coherence and organization;

- Feedback should also invite students to fully unpack any unfamiliar use of English, as a means to build rapport with their audience;
- When giving feedback, teachers should not neglect the potential rhetorical context to which the student is likely to transfer the writing skills practiced in the writing classroom.

A Template for End Comments

1.   **Say back:** Articulate the student's argument/thesis/question/claim/purpose as you understand it.

2.   **Identify at least one specific thing the student has done well:** If students know what they are doing well, then they are more likely to continue to do that thing well. If students are revising the piece at hand, the student has no real motivation to go back and revise unless he/she has something to build on. Avoid the "spoon full of sugar" approach; instead, specifically name what the student is doing well.

3.   **Name two or three things (tops!) that the student needs to work on**. It's tempting to identify all of the problems that need fixing, but it is unreasonable to expect students to learn everything they need to learn as writers, readers, and thinkers all at once. Learning new skills and concepts slow process. Be aware that students will sometimes backslide.

4.   **Provide the student with manageable tasks that will help him/her work on these things.** Often you'll hear students say: "I know what I need to do, but I don't know how to do it." Help them with the **how.** For example, if students are not defining their terms, suggest that they do the following: "Before you complete the next assignment, be sure to identify at least three key terms and define them." Or, if a student has not understood the central argument of an assigned reading, direct the student to: "Return to the article and reread the title, the beginning, and the end (first three paragraphs and the last four). Mark key concepts and terms (words that are repeated in the title, beginning and end). Using at least three of these concepts (the ones you think are central to the author's point), write the author's argument in 1-2 complete sentences." Rather than focus on the negative, this type of feedback provides students with a concrete approach and a goal for the next assignment.

Task-based approach to writing center work.

Sentence-level issues

We have the best of intentions when we mark or correct all of the errors in a student's paper, but this is not the best use of our time. When we correct students' papers, they are not likely to learn how to find and fix these problems themselves. When we cover our students' papers with marks, they are likely to lose hope or interest. How can we better help students whose writing is unclear to us?

Look for patterns: Mark, name, and fix one or two instances of pattern problems on one or two pages of a student's paper. Ask the student to find and fix them in the remainder of the paper.

Prioritize: If a student has a number of pattern problems, don't expect that student to learn to fix them all at once. Focus first on errors that prevent the student from conveying his/her ideas. Identify the error for the student and provide him/her with a handout or a link that explain the rules.

Purdue's OWL: Others have taken the time to explain these problems and their solutions so that you don't have to. Once you've identified a problem, email the student the relevant link: http://owl.english.purdue.edu/

Build in extra time for students to proofread their own papers: You might ask students to proofread papers the day after they were due.

Don't expect multilingual writers to lose their accents: Don't mark students' down if they write with an accent since they won't be able to eradicate that accent over the course of the semester, nor should they. For example, multilingual writers might not use articles where they are expected or they might write longer sentences or they might use prepositions that sound off to us. Feel free to mark these items and explain how they sound to you, but don't mark down their grades.

Don't mark writers down for writing in dialects other than standard English: Just because something sounds ungrammatical to you, doesn't mean it is. Keep in mind that linguists agree that dialects follow their own grammatical rules. If the genre and audience of the assignment requires "standard English" then point out sentences or patterns that don't adhere to standard English but don't mark the writer's grade down.

Rewrite Proposal

Want to give students the opportunity to revise without multiplying your workload?

For some students the concepts and modes of thinking presented in a particular course take some time to sink in or "click." These students would benefit from the opportunity to revise earlier writing assignments. It can be painful to read the same unsuccessful student paper twice, *but* if the student's work improves dramatically, it's gratifying for both teacher and student.

Here's one way to ensure that students genuinely revise a piece and will learn from the process:

Rewrite Proposal Letter (optional)

You may rewrite one of your writing assignments for a higher grade. Please realize that making superficial changes does not constitute revision and that you are not guaranteed you a better grade. In order to receive a better grade your piece must improve holistically. Your grade will not go down.

If you are interested in rewriting one of your assignments, you are required to submit a proposal. Your proposal will be accepted if you complete the following tasks.

Step 1, Rereading: Before you begin writing you should reread the assignment sheet and your paper.

Step 2, Marginalia: Respond in the margins to my marginal comments. Please be specific in your response. If you intend to change something, indicate how you will change it. If you don't understand something, explain what it is that doesn't make sense. Please use a different color ink.

Step 3, Letter: Write *persuasive* letter explaining to me that if given the opportunity, you could improve your essay dramatically.

In this letter you should:

- Explain what hindsight reveals to you. What was your initial response after rereading your essay? Why do you think you can improve it? **(intro paragraph, 1 graph)**
- Respond directly to my end comments **(1-3 paragraphs).** Be very specific about how you could address these comments in a rewrite. When possible, explain *how* you intend to change what needs changing. For instance, if I wrote that you need to represent the project and overarching idea of a source you've incorporated, you will need to return to the source, read for the author's argument, and incorporate that argument here in the letter. This does mean that you will actually need to do some revision work to meet the requirements of the proposal. This work will help you rewrite.
- Detail a strategy for revision that extends beyond my end comments (**1-2 paragraphs**). In other words, you should identify intended changes other than those I specifically suggested. What do *you* think needs rewriting? How do the changes I suggested lead to other changes?
- Reread the sources you are working with in light of my comments and your argument. What does rereading the sources you are working with reveal to you? Name at least one thing you've uncovered from rereading the essays you've incorporated. **(1 paragraph)**
- Sign your letter.

References

Bartholomae, David. "The Study of Error." *College Composition and Communication*. 31.3 (1980): 253-269. Print.

Haswell, Richard. "Minimal Marking." *College English*. 45.6 (1983): 600-604. Print.

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Jack,

I'm really excited about your project, and I think it has the potential to lead to positive change on our campus.

Your suggestions are excellent and you make a strong case for creating programming that will support students who are aiming to stay sober. You are a strong writer especially when you are talking about your experiences and when you are talking about reasons college students use drugs and alcohol.

Here are some suggestions for revision:

1. Rewrite your first paragraph by including your purpose for writing, by including current stats, and by paraphrasing the stats.

2. Your use of sources tends to be a little clunky and not quite right for a letter. So, here's a model for how to make it smoother:
   It's important to recognize that there is a difference between substance abuse and addiction and that substance abuse can lead to addiction. Substance abuse is…. National Institute on Drug Abuse defines addiction as a "chronic, relapsing disorder characterized by compulsive drug seeking and use despite adverse consequences. It is considered a brain disorder because it involves functional changes to brain circuits involved in reward, stress, and self-control."

3. How could you appeal to Dean Balch? I know how this would make your life better but how would it improve her life? How is it better for the university? (for one thing, it would improve retention rates!)

4. Could you write a conclusion that draws on pathos? Tell her why it's important for you to finish your education and get a degree!

I'm excited to see your next draft!

Best,

Professor Savini

Jack Ashley
English Comp
Prof. Savini
Apr 16, 2023

Dear Dean Balch,

  I am writing to you about an issue that impacts many students at WSU and students across the nation. You may already know that currently there are approximately 31% of US college students who report symptoms of alcohol abuse. Approximately 80% of US college students have abused alcohol. Between 1993 and 2005, the proportion of students who abused Tranquilizers like Xanax and Valium increased by 450%. [Facts And Statistics Of College Drug Abuse - Addiction Center](#) doesn't even mention the rates of nicotine addiction and dependency which is yet another issue plaguing college the lifestyle. These staggering statistics are the exact reason why I would like to make a change among college students and our campus.

  I myself have struggled with addiction and recovery and am currently recovering and sober from almost every substance that I used. For probably 6 or 7 years now I've wrestled with these destructive habits and have gotten sober a number of times and eventually relapsed each time. I have been through rehab programs and as of now, I have kicked some of my addictive habits while I still have a few of them. The reason I am writing to you is to say that we need some extra help for students struggling with addiction in college.

  Drug and alcohol addiction in college students can result in both short- and long-term consequences, such as diminished academic achievement. Substance misuse can lead to a reduced GPA, less time devoted to studying, absences, incomplete coursework, dropout, or expulsion. Additionally, engaging in hazardous or unsafe activities may also occur while under the influence, creating an overall unsafe atmosphere for campus life.

  One of the most concerning issues on college campuses across the United States is the high prevalence of substance abuse and addiction among students. In fact, college students represent one of the largest groups of individuals who engage in substance misuse. This can be attributed to a variety of factors, one of which is the popular culture of drug and alcohol use in many college environments. Many students feel compelled to use drugs or alcohol in order to fit in with their peers. The pressure to conform to social norms and be accepted within one's social group can be immense, and substance use is often seen as a necessary component of this process. For some students, this may involve attending parties or other social events where drugs and

alcohol are readily available. Unfortunately, this behavior is so widespread that it is almost impossible to avoid exposure to drugs and alcohol on and off campus, only making it more dangerous for college students to go from substance misuse and abuse to dependence and addiction.

The issues I'd like to address are, being sober in college, and recovery options on and off campus. Being one of the many currently struggling with being sober in college, I can say first hand that it is incredibly difficult due to the amount of readily available substances. Going from being an avid smoker/drinker/user to being completely sober in a matter of weeks was one of the most difficult things I've ever had to do, but it was also the best thing I could have done, and I'm sure many others who have been through a similar experience would same the same. We need to accept students' decisions to stay sober and respect their decisions to abstain from participating in drinking culture. My personal suggestions for addressing this issue include:

1. Sober residence halls which would give students who are choosing to remain sober an actual place to live where it is not acceptable to participate in any kind of substance use.

2. Hiring a licensed therapists to assist with maintaining being sober.

3.Relapse prevention programs: Other schools across the country already offer things like relapse prevention programs and recovery programs etc. Currently there are 152 Collegiate Recovery Programs (CRPs), which enable students to continue their recovery process alongside their studies. I think it's about time we see how many students this impacts and incorporate some of these options on campus.

Not only will you provide the means for a safer and cleaner campus environment, you will also improve the enrollment retention rates. With so many students including myself who have struggled or are currently struggling with addiction recovery, it's hard to watch most state run schools turn a blind eye, which is why our campus needs to be different and provide that extra help for those students. I for one have never felt better being sober, many of my sober friends could say the same, it has improved my sleep, eating, studies, and i've even started going to the gym. My grades reflect the difference being sober has made in my life, and I want that for the students at Westfield State going through what I did.

Thank you for your consideration,
Jack Ashley