

## Personal Reflection on “Student Writing Must Be Graded By the Teacher”

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In Chris Friend’s chapter, “Student Writing Must Be Graded By the Teacher,” the author argues that it is better to train students to give quality feedback on each other’s writing rather than training them to write for the teacher’s approval. There are many reasons for this. First, Friend believes that putting the judgment of writing in one person’s hands rather than spreading out the responsibility to more people in the class results in a missed opportunity for students to learn from a variety of readers about how successfully (or unsuccessfully) they are communicating an intended message. Also, grades and how teachers arrive to them can be a mysterious process that doesn’t ultimately teach students how to improve their work, how to apply feedback from multiple readers, or how to determine what “good” quality looks like, but forces students to narrowly fixate on what one person (the teacher) wants. So, instead of teacher-graded writing assignments, Friend ultimately advocates for course grades coming from how well a student engaged in a peer-to-peer feedback process.

While I agree that grades don’t tell us many meaningful things about the quality of our writing, when I was in high school, no one took peer review seriously. In fact, if you did take it seriously, everyone thought it was weird. Also, I think that even if the teacher did grade students on how well they engaged in peer review, they would still run into the same problem of grades “mysteriously” communicating to students about how well (or poorly) they had done something. If one of Friend’s ultimate goals is to make grades more transparent, this isn’t going to help.

At the same time, when people have an investment in the thing that they’re writing, feedback tends to be more thorough and more useful. The problem is that (some) students don’t care about writing classes or improving their writing skills in the ways that schools want them to improve, and that’s a harder problem to solve. We can’t force students to care about a skill that doesn’t seem that useful to their future, and for most of us, writing essays doesn’t seem very useful.

While I do not agree with the author that student writing should be graded by the teacher is a bad idea about writing, I do think it is very important for students to get feedback from more than one person on their writing so that they can become stronger writers. However, a question that I have for the author is how writing classes can do a better job of showing students why writing matters in any way for the future that they want to have. I also want to know whether student motivation to complete a writing task impacts the quality of their peer review feedback. My sense is that when students feel like they’re jumping through a bunch of meaningless hoops to get a grade, they’re not going to be very invested in what they’re doing regardless of the grading system. The feedback that they give is going to be lazy and bad no matter what.