

Easing the Paining of Grading Student Writing

Common Challenges:

- Grading is time-consuming and its effect on students' writing varies widely.
- Student writing is plagued by errors and incoherence.
- Students resort to plagiarism.

Research Has Shown:

- The traditional mode of marking papers by correcting errors does not benefit students' long-term development as writers.
- Professors often send mixed messages in their comments: e.g., both copy-editing a paragraph and calling for it to be expanded.
- Specific comments are more effective than stock phrases.

Suggestions:

- Make Students Take Responsibility
 - Self-editing workshops on due dates: have students check their own papers for errors before they turn them in.
 - Have students write cover letters answering global questions about their papers.
 - Have students summarize your response to their writing in a letter. (For a draft, they would summarize what you want them to do for the final version)
 - Peer review: have them correct and comment on one another's papers. Give specific tasks for optimal results.
- Minimal Marking for Errors in Grammar, Spelling, Punctuation
 - Mark an "X" on the end of line containing an error.
 - Look for patterns of errors.
 - Focus on one or two problems, so as not to overwhelm the student.
- Create a Grading Criteria/Rubric
 - Invest in designing and explaining a rubric to students ahead of time in order to save time on the back end of grading.
 - Saves time in grading process.
 - Helps you explain to students what you expect.
 - Helps you to clarify your course and assignment objectives.
 - Raises students' awareness of the educational process.
 - Gives students something concrete to aim for.
 - Help students evaluate their own work before submission.
- Think Big
 - Treat students like apprentice scholars.
 - Give them specific advice.
 - Give them advice they can use in other contexts.

Further Reading:

Haswell, Richard H. "Minimal Marking." *College English*, Vol. 45, No. 6 (Oct., 1983), pp.600-604.

Haswell coined the term with this article and succinctly notes that "the simplicity of this method belies its benefits."

Leahy, Richard. "Conducting Writing Assignments." *College Teaching*, Vol. 50, No. 2 (Spring, 2002), pp. 50-54.

Leahy's article is useful for its descriptions of various ways to create time-saving rubrics for evaluating final essays.

Madraso, Jan. "Proofreading: The Skill We've Neglected to Teach." *The English Journal*, Vol. 82, No.2 (Feb., 1993), pp. 32-41.

Madraso's article details strategies to impart proofreading skills to students. This has the double advantage of freeing professors to evaluate the ideas in the student papers while making students more self-reliant as writers.

Sommers, Nancy. "Responding to Student Writing." *College Composition and Communication*, Vol 33, No. 2 (May, 1982) pp. 148-156.

This is a path-breaking article by a renowned scholar of the teaching of writing. Sommers summarizes the findings from having observed the grading habits of 35 composition teachers at NYU and the University of Oklahoma. The article inspired debate for many years to come.

Sommers, Nancy & Laura Saltz. "The Novice as Expert: Writing the Freshman Year."

College Composition and Communication, Vol. 56, No. 1 (Sep., 2004), pp. 124-149.

This article reports the findings of Sommers' unprecedented long-term study of how students understand teacher comments on their work over the course of their academic careers. The results are often surprising.

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