

# Evaluating Student Writing

## Pre-Writing

1. Give clear assignments. Let students know exactly what will be expected of them and how they will be evaluated.
2. Give students an evaluation sheet that specifies the weight you attribute to each aspect of the assignment. If students know what you consider important, they will focus on those areas.
3. If time permits, allow students to review each other's papers. This pre-editing may eliminate some problems before the papers are turned in for evaluation.

## Post-Writing Evaluation

1. Read all the papers through quickly before you begin making evaluations. This suggestion may sound like a waste of precious time, but it can actually save you time. If the students have misunderstood the assignment, you can become aware of that fact before you've spent hours marking the same problem on every paper.
2. When you begin evaluating final drafts of assignments, allow yourself enough time to adequately read and respond to what students have written. However, set a reasonable limit to the amount of time you will spend on each paper—and stick to it. You could possibly spend hours on some papers and still not say or mark all that you think needs attention; the students, though, cannot readily digest too many comments, so stick to the most important points. General, global comments are usually most effective.
3. Focus on the aspects of the assignment that you feel are most important; e.g., if you are primarily interested in seeing what students have learned, you may not want to mark every spelling or comma error. If content is most important, then the majority of your comments should be directed toward content.
4. Correcting grammar: First of all, don't do it. There is no need for an instructor to correct student errors. You may want to make general comments about the nature of errors (e.g., "you have a serious problem with fragments"), and you may want to mark one or two errors for illustration, but you do not have to mark and/or correct every error. That is the responsibility of the student. If the student writes at a level that makes understanding difficult or if the student's writing is so full of errors that you cannot read the paper without interruption, then you may want to refer the student to the Writing Center or to a private tutor to find assistance in improving those weak areas.

5. Don't feel that you must continue to labor through the reading of a paper that is filled with grammar and usage errors. You may hand the paper back and tell the student that you will grade it when the errors are gone. Or you could reduce the grade of the paper considerably and in your grading comments let the student know that the grade is low because of the plethora of errors. Again, don't feel obligated to identify for the student every error in a paper. Proofreading and editing are the responsibility of the student.
6. To save time writing evaluation comments, give the student a description of your grading criteria. If you assign a B, the student can read your grading criteria to determine why the paper was given a B, how he/she could improve the paper to earn an A, etc. If students are concerned about getting more feedback, they can make appointments to see you in your office or send you an e-mail.
7. Finally, keep in mind that your aim in evaluating student writing is to read what students have written and then judge how well they have responded to the assignment. Focus on the issues that you value, and allow the students to do the majority of the work. It is through this work that students learn.