

WAC Workshop: **Evaluating Student Writing Efficiently and Effectively**

Efficiency

1. Create a hierarchy of questions and suggestions that guides your evaluation of your students' work so you don't feel like you have to address every problem in every draft.

High Order Concerns

- Ideas/Content
- Organization
- Development
- Style
- Overall clarity

Low Order Concerns

- Sentence Correctness
- Mechanics
- Spelling
- Grammar

2. Create simple guidelines for self-critique that help students respond to their own writing. This may save you time in the long run if they become adept at catching their own errors. Questions you may ask students to answer:

- What is your main idea?
- What is your pattern of organization?
- Have you supported all your claims with specific examples?
- Have you proofread for mechanical errors?

3. Give students some responsibility for evaluating each other's work; all writers benefit from becoming a critic and editor and their knowledge of course content may be reinforced by reading what their classmates write.

4. Teach students to use grammar and style guides to help them correct their own errors: *A Commonsense Guide to Grammar* and *The Bedford Guide to the Research Process* are good ones.

Effectiveness

1. Allow students to revise their writing. This reinforces the idea that written expression is an integral part of the learning process. In the long run, it also saves the instructor time because students learn, through practicing revision, how to improve their own work independently.

2. Give positive feedback whenever possible. Even the most error-filled paper usually has something redeeming about it, a place where the writer, once encouraged, can get a new start.
3. Do not grade early drafts of writing assignments. Putting a grade on a paper you want students to keep working on shuts down the incentive to revise.
4. Plan personal conferences for difficult or sensitive problems. In some cases, no amount of written commentary will bridge the gap between you and a misunderstanding student.
5. Respond with specific suggestions for improvement wherever you can. “Awkward” or “Unclear” go only so far in telling the student how to make the paper better.
6. Don’t separate form from content. When a proposition is awkwardly stated it is often poorly understood. Consider the clarity of a paper as analogous to the clarity of the writer’s ideas and understanding of course content.
7. Provide students with comments and suggestions that help them learn the tools they need to evaluate the next draft on their own. Making students responsible for assessing their own work fosters independent learning.