



a place of mind

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

Providing Effective Feedback on Writing Assignments

**Writing Across the Curriculum Program
May 2, 2016**



Workshop Objectives

By the end of today's workshop you will:

1. Recognize techniques to provide efficient feedback on writing assignments;
2. Practice giving feedback on a piece of writing using revision-focused feedback techniques; and
3. Reflect on your own strategies for giving feedback.

Purpose of providing feedback on student writing

- Why do you give students feedback on their writing?
- Gibbs and Simpson (2004-05) define six roles for feedback:
 - To correct errors
 - To further student understanding by explaining
 - To suggest specific tasks that increase learning
 - To help students develop general skills, by focusing on these rather than content
 - To have students reflect on their understanding
 - To motivate students to continue studying

Purpose of providing feedback on student writing

- Feedback diagnoses problems in the work, identifies gaps between the work and the standard (Price *et al.*, 2010)
- Feedback is...“information about how we are doing in our effects to reach a goal” (Wiggins, 2012)
 - “Each time you swung and missed, you raised your head as you swung so you didn't really have your eye on the ball. On the one you hit hard, you kept your head down and saw the ball.”
- Feedback is a coaching process (Bean, 2011)



Challenges when providing feedback on writing assignments

- Standardizing the feedback (and marking)
 - Diedrich (1974) study
 - Universal reader (Broad 2003)
- Finding time to give detailed feedback
- Getting students to actually use the feedback



Reducing the time needed to give feedback on writing

- 1) Focus on revision-based feedback instead of editing (Bean 2011; Hope College 2013, review in Underwood and Tregidgo 2006).
 - Identify “higher-level” or early concerns and “lower-level” or later concerns.

EXHIBIT 5.2

Editing-Oriented Commenting Strategy

Spell author's name correctly!

Garit Harden and Peter Singer have both written essays that are thought provoking. Hardin has the strongest argument, on the other hand, Singer has some good things to say too but his arguments aren't as strong as Hardin's because he is too idealistic. Meaning he believes people will give up things like color TV and stereos to thrid world poor people even though they (the rich people) will have earned these things (TV and stereos) through their own hard work. This is what I don't like about Singer. Hardin believes in private property and I do too.

Another weakness of Singer is . . .

Lookup to, too, two

Don't put antecedents of pronouns in parentheses after the pronoun.

frag.

EXHIBIT 5.3

Revision-Oriented Commenting Strategy

Garit Harden and Peter Singer have both written essays that are thought provoking. Hardin has the strongest argument, on the other hand, Singer has some good things to say too but his arguements arent as strong as Hardins because he is to idealistic. Meaning he believes people will give up things like color TV and stereos to thrid world poor people even though they (the rich people) will have earned these things (TV and stereos) through their own hard work. This is what I don't like about Singer. Hardin believes in private property and I do too.

→ Another weakness of Singer is . . .

Good transition but implies that previous paragraph was about a "first weakness" — e.g., Singer's idealism?

In your next revision break the weaknesses of Singer into separate chunks and develop each. Also edit for sentence errors!

Is this your first point about Singer — "A first weakness of Singer is that he is too idealistic" (?) Expand and explain

Excellent insight here — different attitudes about private property are at the heart of their differences — but you raise the point and then drop it without development

Reducing the time needed to give feedback on writing

1) Focus on revision-based feedback instead of editing (Bean 2011; Hope College 2013, review in Underwood and Tregidgo 2006).

- Identify “higher-level” concerns and “lower-level” concerns.

- Consider the stage of the assignment.

- Identify the goal or learning objective to focus on (e.g. content-specific, structure-specific, style-specific)

Reducing the time needed to give feedback on writing

- 2) Employ a minimal marking technique to correct sentence-level errors (grammar, mechanics, etc.,) (Haswell 1983, Hyland 1992).

Example 3

- X We apologise for the inconveniency. It was all because
- X certain reasons that things turned out that way. We did
- XX sent a driver to the airport but it broke on the way.
- Secondly about the hotel. The group had to take another.
- We booked the cheapest and a reasonably good one.
- Going to the Hilton was impossible because bookings
- X are made one month early.

(Taken from Hyland 1992)

Reducing the time needed to give feedback on writing

Category of Error	Number of Errors Checked in Margin by Teacher	Number of Errors Correctly Emended by Students	Percent Corrected by Students
Semantic Signalling (capitalization, underlining, quotation marks, apostrophes)	97	74	76.3%
Syntactic Punctuation	142	81	57.0%
Spelling (including hyphenation)	132	74	56.1%
Grammar (including tense change, omission of word, pronoun disagreement)	30	16	53.3%
All Errors	401	245	61.1%

(Taken from Haswell 1983)

Reducing the time needed to give feedback on writing

3) Comment on drafts rather than on final products (review in Gibbs and Simpson 2004-05)

- Students pay more attention to feedback on earlier drafts (Ferris 1995).

- Focus on formative feedback. What can they use in the next draft, assignment or exam?

- Put minimal comments on the final version. Become the judge at the end of the process.

Reducing the time needed to give feedback on writing

4) “Less is more” – minimize comments (Werner 2013, review in Underwood and Tregidgo 2006)

- Trying focusing on one specific type of feedback or limit the number of comments (e.g., 3-4 margin comments per page).

- Limit comments to 2 sentences, but more than one word.



Reducing the time needed to give feedback on writing

5) Use models feedback to give feedback to large groups

- Do not comment on individual papers and grade them rapidly.

- Choose a strong example from the current class (or a previous class) to explain the grading and provide feedback.

- Places responsibility for using feedback onto student (Underwood and Tregidgo 2006).

Reducing the time needed to give feedback on writing

6) Create a feedback script for recurring comments

Script for homework and in-class participation marking:

–“Please seek help for your writing at the UBC Writing Centre if you want to really improve your essay writing skills.”

–“Your mark will improve significantly if you try to contribute to our class discussions.”

–“When someone else says something, think about whether you agree or disagree and WHY.”

(Examples from J. Dee 2015)

Reducing the time needed to give feedback on writing

7) Use peer review for early drafts

- Periodic unmarked peer review of small assignments can increase marks on exams (Forbes and Spence 1991, review in Gibbs and Simpson 2004-05).
- Peer feedback tends to give a balance of advice and praise (Cho *et al.* 2006).
- Peer review by multiple peer motivates more revisions (complex type) than expert review (Cho and MacArthur 2010) and greater improvement (Cho and Schunn 2007).



Reducing the time needed to give feedback on writing

7) Use peer review for early drafts

- Students typically require practice to provide thoughtful comments.
- Students can evaluate peers' work according to set questions or the assignment rubric.
- Peer review can also focus on reader experience by using “responding” techniques (Elbow and Belanoff 1989).

Encouraging students to use feedback and get involved in the writing process

- Effective feedback includes specific positive comments (review in Underwood and Tregidgo 2006).
 - Students view constructive criticism as positive.
 - Best comments are clear about the changes needed (directive).
 - Praise motivates students and helps them gain confidence (Beason 1993), but is preferred when it is explained and linked to the work (Straub 2006).
 - Students are more likely to read and use feedback when positive comments are included.

Encouraging students to use feedback and get involved in the writing process

- The feedback provides the student with something they can act on.
 - Expand upon “Good job” or “Needs work”.
- Specific feedback often relates to a goal in the assignment.
 - e.g. “As you prepare a table poster to display the findings of your science project, remember that the aim is to interest people in your work as well as to describe the facts you discovered through your experiment. Self-assess your work against those two criteria using these rubrics. The science fair judges will do likewise.” (Wiggins, 2012)

Encouraging students to use feedback and get involved in the writing process

- The feedback does not focus on the grade (e.g. focus on how the paper would lose readers).
 - Students may not even look at feedback when a grade is provided (review in Underwood and Tregidgo 2006).
 - Try describing your reaction (e.g. “I was confused by...”).
- The assignment process encourages revision.
 - Multiple drafts, provide ongoing feedback.
 - Make sure that the feedback is timely (review in Gibbs and Simpson 2004-05).
- Make sure feedback is consistent.

Feedback examples

- “Needs to be more concise”
 - “Confusing. I need to know what the teacher means specifically.”
 - “Define concise.”
 - “I thought you wanted details and support.”
 - “Vague, vague.”
- “Be more specific”
 - “Be more specific.”
 - “It's going to be too long then.”
 - “I'm frustrated.”

(Examples from Spandel and Stiggins 1990)

Feedback examples

- “You haven't really thought this through”
 - “This is a mean reply.”
 - “That makes me madder than you can imagine.”
 - “How do you know what I thought?”
 - “I guess I blew it!”
- “Try harder!”
 - “I did try!”
 - “You're a stupid jerk.”
 - “Maybe I am trying as hard as I can.”

(Examples from Spandel and Stiggins 1990)

Feedback examples

- How would you respond to the advice?
 - “Omit this paragraph”
 - “You might consider omitting this paragraph”
 - “I wonder what you gain by having this paragraph here”

(Taken from How to Provide Constructive Feedback – That Won't Exasperate Your Students, Graduate School of Arts & Sciences Teaching Centre, Columbia University)

Feedback examples

- How would you respond to the following comments?
 - “These arguments are not convincing”
 - “Explain why this is the case”
 - “I find this statement less than convincing”
 - “Your point might be clearer if you state, point by point, your opponent’s view as clearly and objectively as you can. Then you can deal with each of the arguments and show the weakness in the position”

(Taken from How to Provide Constructive Feedback – That Won’t Exasperate Your Students, Graduate School of Arts & Sciences Teaching Centre, Columbia University)

Feedback examples

- Instead of “vague” try:
 - “Which research finding are you referring to here?”
 - “I don't understand your use of the underlined phrase. Can you rewrite this sentence?”
 - “Can you provide specific details to show what you mean here?”

Feedback examples

- Instead of “confusing,” “what?” or “???” try:
 - “I lost the thread of your argument. Why is this information important? How is it related to your argument?”
 - “You imply that this point supports your argument, but it actually contradicts your point in para. 3.”
- Instead of “good” try:
 - “This excellent example moves your argument forward.”
 - “Wonderful transition that helped clarify the connection between the two studies you are summarizing.”

(Taken from Clarkston and Barker 2014)

Feedback examples

- Remember, students engage with comments that are specific and positive:
 - “Your paper might be clearer if you state, point by point, your opponent's view, as clearly and objectively as you can. Then you can deal with each of his arguments and show the weaknesses in his position.”
- Students lose motivation and feel frustrated by comments that are viewed as criticisms or do not suggest or lead to actions they can take.
 - “These arguments are not convincing.” “You've missed his point.”

(Examples from Straub 2006)



WAC Program Services

- Workshops
 - Writing Assignment and Assessment Design
 - Strategies for Student Success
 - Teaching Succinct and Accurate Science Writing
- Community of practice (2nd Tuesday of the month)
- One-on-one consultations
- Class visits to discuss writing assignments
- TA training



Contact the WAC Program

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