

Duke University Thompson Writing Program

Strategies for Responding to Texts of Multilingual Writers

Faculty feedback on particular student texts can significantly impact not only students' revisions of those texts, but also their motivation to positively engage with writing and revising future texts

Aim for balance

Balance your constructive comments with positive ones. Encourage your students to gain confidence in their writing and revising skills by softening comments that could seem harsh. Although a particular draft might not seem particularly strong to you, a student might have spent considerable time and energy in composing it.

Define priorities

Prioritize commenting on major areas of concern that you have emphasized during the semester. If you comment on language issues, consider focusing on points in the text where clarity or comprehensibility seem impaired.

Consider intercultural writing norms

Recognize that writing can be accented culturally and linguistically. Adjusting their writing style for your course assignments could be a significant learning curve for students. Some cultures of writing value:

- Circling around an idea rather than stating it directly
- Revealing the thesis late in a paper
- Using pronouns without clear referents
- Surprising the reader by shifting direction midstream
- Not citing much, assuming that educated readers will know who said something

Frame your comments with context that will help your students adjust to the writing culture you want them to better understand. If you want to teach a student that a thesis statement does not belong in the conclusion for your assignment, add a note about disciplinary or genre conventions (e.g., In US academic writing in the discipline of x, the thesis statement...)

Provide focused feedback

If you comment that part of a particular text is confusing, ask a question that helps the writer understand your concern. If you comment that part of a text is strong, explain its specific strength(s) so that your student may better benefit from your praise.

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Consider the complexities of language

Some aspects of language require learning persnickety rules, while others require intensive memorization. In either case, being shown the rule or correct form does not mean that a writer will be able to immediately learn or apply it. Do not expect a writer to understand how to correctly use or generalize an aspect of language simply because a particular error was marked or explained.

Challenges of gerunds and infinitives

Both forms are correct for U.S. English, same meaning: They like skiing. They like to ski.
Only one form is correct for U.S. English: They dislike skiing. They dislike to ski.
Both forms are correct for U.S. English, meaning differs: They stopped skiing. They stopped to ski.

Resource on gerunds and infinitives: <http://guidetogrammar.org/grammar/gerunds.htm>

Avoid types of feedback that are unlikely to yield results you want

Insisting that almost all grammar errors need to be corrected before you will read a text is counterproductive. This approach could devalue the content and ideas shared by the writer.

Using abbreviations or acronyms in your comments might result in your feedback not being understood. Writing handwritten notes that are small, scrunched, or in cursive could have the same result.

Supplemental reading:

Ferris, D. (2018). "They said I have a lot to learn": How teacher feedback influences advanced university students' views of writing, *Journal of Response to Writing*, 4(2), 4-33.

<https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/journalrw/vol4/iss2/2/>

Macklin, T. (2016). Compassionate writing response: Using dialogic feedback to encourage student voice in the first-year composition classroom, *Journal of Response to Writing*, 2(2), 88-105.

<https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/journalrw/vol2/iss2/5/>

Rene D. Caputo
Duke University ESL Specialist
Thompson Writing Program
r.caputo@duke.edu