

# DUKE UNIVERSITY THOMPSON WRITING PROGRAM

## Strategies for Responding to Texts of Multilingual Writers

Faculty feedback on students' texts not only has a major impact on revisions to a particular text, but also on students' motivation to positively engage with the process of writing in the future

### Aim for balance

Balance your constructive comments with positive or encouraging comments. To support your students in remaining motivated about the cyclical process of writing, revising, and growing as writers, avoid harsh comments.

### Define priorities

Prioritize comments on your major areas of concern. If commenting on language issues, consider primarily focusing on points in the text where comprehensibility is impaired.

### Consider intercultural writing norms

Recognize that writing is accented culturally and linguistically. Learning to adjust writing norms of structure, style, and language for your course is a continual process for these students. Some writing cultures value:

Circling around an idea	Revealing the thesis late in the paper
Using pronouns without clear referents	Surprising the reader in midstream
Not citing, assuming educated readers know who said something	

Instead of commenting "New information does not belong in the conclusion," consider "In U.S. academic writing, we typically..." or "In scholarly writing by anthropologists..."

### Provide focused feedback

If you mention that part of the text is confusing, ask a question that helps the writer understand your concern. And if you comment that the text is strong, explain its specific strengths so the student writer 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 endless memorization. In either case, hearing the rule or correct form does not mean it has been learned. Do not expect a writer will be able to correctly use an aspect of language simply because an error has been marked and explained.

### Challenges of gerunds and infinitives

Same meaning. Both correct for U.S. English:	They like skiing.	They like to ski.
Same meaning. One correct for U.S. English:	They dislike skiing.	?They dislike to ski.
Different meanings. Both correct for U.S. English:	They stopped skiing.	They stopped to ski.

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

Saying that almost all grammar errors need to be corrected before you will read a text.  
Writing handwritten notes that are small, scrunched, or use abbreviations. If your student cannot understand your comments, your effort in making them will be wasted.

### Supplemental reading:

Ferris, D. (2018). "They said I have a lot to learn": How teacher feedback influences advanced university students' views of writing, 4(2), 4-33. <http://www.journalrw.org/index.php/jrw/article/view/114/83>

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