

Teaching with Writing (TWW) Tip

Responding for Revision

Teaching with Writing



Rationale: Students don't always make use of our comments on papers, and faculty can question the value of commenting. Too many comments can be overwhelming, time may be tight, and students may not recognize what substantive revision looks like.

Show students examples of substantive revision vs. proofreading

Project or hand out a de-identified student excerpt from a previous class or different section: a paragraph from a preliminary draft followed by the same paragraph with a few typos corrected, and then a substantively revised version of the original. Ask students to describe the kinds of changes made in the revision, and what those revisions accomplished.

Respond to a preliminary draft that will be resubmitted

Comments on graded drafts often go unread or are interpreted as mere justification for the grade. Students are more likely to make use of comments on a preliminary draft. Respond quickly enough to give students time to revise. A key to revision is time management—for both writers and responders.

Respond like a reader in conversation

Rather than "Your argument is confusing," write "The argument confuses me here—can you sort out and develop a hierarchy of contributory causes?" One or two specific, revision-oriented comments can be more useful than extensive copyediting or numerous broad, generic comments. Note how the comment also focuses on the writing rather than the writer.

Focus your response on one or two global issues

Don't respond to everything. Pick one or two "big picture" issues for the student to work on: perhaps the focus needs to be sharpened. Perhaps the analysis needs more depth. Perhaps the organization is confusing. In addition, tell students explicitly why you make the sorts of comments you do, and what you expect them to do with those comments.

Point out genuine strengths

Students need to know when and what they are doing well, and how they can extend those successes. For instance: "This source analysis begins to do the kind of critical work we've discussed. Can you extend it, and do likewise with other sources you use?"

Don't copyedit:

Save sentence-level response to errors and stylistic matters for a later draft, so students don't feel that they only need to clean errors when they really need to rethink their project. When you do mark sentence level issues, focus on one or

two patterns of error that most interfere with meaning; note the first couple of instances, and tell the students that they are responsible for finding and correcting other instances throughout the paper.

Require a Revision Memo

Require students to submit a revision memo (with their final draft), which explains their revision choices and feedback responses. See the [April 2013 TWW Tip](#).

Comment: Revision is a mysterious process to less experienced writers. Pull back the curtain: respond strategically, and structure assignments to require revision and reflection.

Learn more:

- * [Feedback Toward Revision](#) (George Mason University)
- [Minimal Marking](#) (UC-Irvine)
- Bean, John C. *Engaging Ideas: The Professor's Guide to Integrating writing, Critical Thinking, and Active Learning in the Classroom*. 2nd ed. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008).

Questions? Visit us online at <http://writing.umn.edu/tww/index.html>

Check out this semester's Teaching with Writing events: Log in to your ULearn account: ulearn.umn.edu. Use the search for C4W to view all events hosted by the Center for Writing.

Further support: Contact a member of the WAC (Writing Across the Curriculum) team for a phone, email, or face-to-face teaching consultation: <http://z.umn.edu/twwconsultation>

Our purpose is to provide practical strategies for teaching with writing. Our goal: to offer timely and pragmatic support to faculty members and instructors who teach with writing in undergraduate and graduate courses in all disciplinary areas.