

Student guide to giving text comments

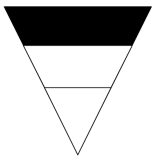
The ability to present scientific results, theories and reasoning in a way so that the intended audience can grasp the message, is a task that scientists and engineers are increasingly faced with. Through regular and structured feedback on written exercises, the writer's ability improve. The writer will find out his or her strengths and what can be developed and how. In addition, the ability to identify strengths and weaknesses in your own and others' texts will sharpen when you provide feedback yourself.

Feedback within DiaNa is given using a special form for text commentary. The comments are divided into three areas, which all reflect important aspects of a text:

- Context and content
- Structure and disposition
- Language and formatting

Feedback using a response form is a method advocated in research on language and learning (Løkensgard Hoel 2001). The aim is to pick up the larger and more comprehensive comments and not initially focus on the details.

The purpose of the text comments is that the writer should be helped to develop, not that the text should become perfect in time for the next submission. The focus for the feedback provider is to highlight what works well in the text, as well as provide suggestions for improvement. Below are suggestions on what you can comment on within each section of the form.

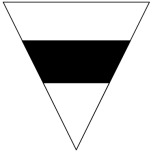


Overall impression, context and content Comment on your overall impression. Do you think that the content of the text is placed in a context? Is the take-home message of the text clear? Are scientific terms well explained, is the language engaging and colorful? Also comment on the content of the text. Is the subject well defined, are all relevant facts included, are the illustrations well selected? Are the facts presented in the text correct?

All texts are written in a context - they have a purpose and are aimed at a target audience. It is natural to write at a basic level to schoolchildren compared to writing to colleagues in your own field. The adaptation to the target group affects both the choice of words, subject contents and models. One should be clear about the purpose of the text and use the words, examples and metaphors that the target audience understands. E.g. comment on the following:

- Are the results and/or information relevant to the purpose of the text?
- Are technical terms well explained and are good metaphors and models used in order to give the reader a better understanding?
- Do you think that the target audience can absorb the main part of the content of the text?
- Comment in a positive way on the parts of the text that are well explained. Make the writer aware of what is incomplete or unclear.

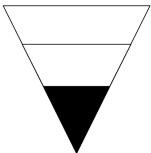
- Do the illustrations contain good information and a proper level of detail?
- Do you get the feeling that the writer is engaged in the text's subject?
- Where is the emphasis of the text?



Structure and disposition Comment on the structure of the text, the choice of title, the division into introduction, main text, and conclusions. Also comment on the text disposition, the division into paragraphs and layout.

A text with good structure is easy to read, has a logical sequence and the text's various parts fit together in a natural way. Dividing the text into paragraphs of just the right length makes it easier for the reader. Headings can be used to inform the reader about the content of the paragraphs.

- Does the title attract reading and does it tell you what the text is about?
- Is there a clear introduction that makes you want to read further?
- Is there a logical sequence in the text, a "red thread"?
- Is there a clear ending with a conclusion or does the text just end?
- Does the ending connect back to the introduction or is there some "twist" (a question, a quote, a thought, etc.) that allows one to embrace the message of the text?
- Does the writer start new paragraphs at good places or they end up in the middle of a continuous part of the text? Would changing paragraphing improve readability?
- Would a different layout increase readability?



Language and formatting Comment on the texts language and vocabulary. Is the language balanced and varied? Is the structure of the sentences clear? Are there any spelling or writing errors? Does the text and references follow the given format?

- Is the language vivid and open, it is dry and stiff or is it close to the spoken language?
- Are technical terms used correctly?
- Are the sentences of a good length, are there any ambiguous references, is the punctuation right?
- Are there words that recur more often than necessary, do many sentences start with the same words, have good words been chosen for descriptions?
- Are table heads, figure legends, axis titles, data series, etc. reported according to instructions?
- Are there spelling errors or typos that recur?

Some advice on how to give good text comments

Feedback is given to help someone to develop their communicative skills. To give feedback involves reading through the text and note what is good and what can be developed. Everyone can improve their communicative skills through practice. By taking many small steps in the right direction, a gradual development occur.

Avoid formulating new proposals in the feedback as it is important that the writer feels that it is his/her own text even after a revision. There is also a risk that the writer accepts new formulations without reflecting on them. The feedback is summarized under the appropriate section and should be as specific and clear as possible and explain why something was good or how something can be developed.

When giving feedback it is important to be **concrete, specific and constructive**. The feedback "you have a bad sentence structure" does not give the writer more confidence in future writing situations and no guidance on how he/she can develop. A more constructive feedback on the other hand gives the writer a better chance to develop: "Since many of your sentences are very long and has many subordinate clauses, I think that they are difficult to read. If you divide the long sentences into shorter ones, the readability will increase and one can focus more on the content."

It can be good to **exemplify** by referring to a particular part of the text!

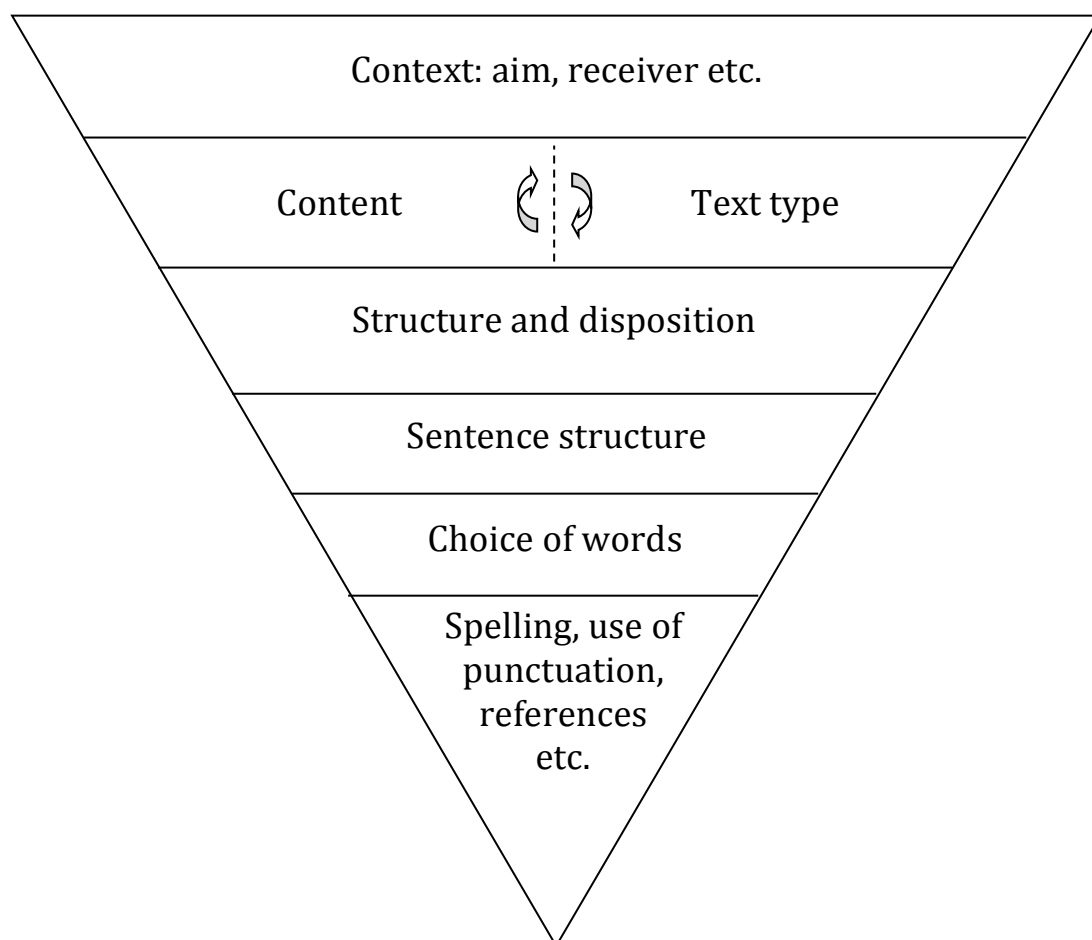
Always start from your own experience - your experience of the text is your own and probably not everyone's. However, of course, a researcher has much more experience of writing within the subject than what a student has.

The feedback provider does not have to write something positive or give development suggestions on all aspects of the text, but **try to get a balance between the positive and the development suggestions** (more of the positive is confidence-building, as long as the comments are honest). No one should get many more suggestions for development than positive comments. If there is much that can be developed, it may be appropriate to focus on the key things that the writer should tackle first, the details may be refined during later exercises.

It is good to complete the written feedback with a clarifying oral comment, it saves feedback time since you do not have to formulate yourself as thoroughly on the feedback form. It also increases the contact between the writer and the feedback provider.

The text triangle

Text Triangle illustrates the writing process and the different types of knowledge and skills that a writer needs. The upper levels of the triangle are more extensive and complex, while the lower ones are more detailed. The better you master the lower levels, as questions about grammar or spelling, the more energy can be used for questions about the structure or content. Although you in practice, most of the time, work on several levels simultaneously, the text triangle indicates a progression from the upper to the lower levels. The upper levels need to be addressed before the bottom ones in order for the text to become good. To provide feedback on the upper levels is challenging but important and can lead to substantial improvements in the text.



The text triangle

According to Torlaug Løkensgard Hoel 2001: *Skriva och samtala. Lärande genom responsgrupper*.