

Responding to writing assignments efficiently & effectively

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Today's workshop is the first of several writing-oriented sessions presented by faculty from English & Journalism's writing program. See the CITER web site for more.

To help you deliver more efficient and effective responses immediately, I begin with practical suggestions you can apply to courses you're teaching now. Then I offer design principles adaptable to upcoming assignments. I conclude with approaches best integrated into future course and curriculum design.

I welcome your questions today or at any time in the future.

Practical techniques relevant for most responses

1. Begin responding soon after assignments are submitted.
2. Read through all student work before starting to make comments.
3. Use a timer to limit response time per student.
4. Using a pencil, make your comments neatly—or type and print.
5. Offer praise as well as constructive criticism.

Designing assignments with response in mind

1. Offer clearly stated objectives carefully articulated with course goals.
2. Make assignments as short as possible! Quality beats quantity every time.
3. Describe your approach to providing feedback. Make your expectations for revision clear.
4. Test your assignments with students and other readers.
5. Include assignment design in course-level assessment.

Approaches to response you can engage in the future

1. When appropriate, limit detailed comments: offer one paragraph for the whole assignment, or respond only to certain sections, or focus on just a few objectives.
2. Deliver a brief response, and offer more detail via conferences.
3. Commission a prior review—a self-evaluation or peer critique—then build on it.
4. Respond by creating a form based on assignment objectives, course objectives, and frequent errors observed in student work, then filling it out for each student.
5. Learn to differentiate between common issues in writing: poor understanding of the assignment; lack of knowledge of course content (knowledge, skills, or method); lack of understanding of disciplinary forms or styles; hasty or ineffective revision; careless errors or underachievement; or genuine problems with organization, usage, or grammar.