

# 1. RESPONDING TO AND EVALUATING WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

*The only general consensus about grading is that there is no general consensus!*

## False Premises About Evaluation:

1. Instructors should write a lot in the margins and between the lines.
2. Instructors ought to know and use a lot of specific grammatical rules and terms if they want to comment effectively.
3. The most effective responses to student writing are instructor-written comments on the final copy.

-Joyce MacAllister, "Responding to Student Writing," p. 59)

## Suggestions for Evaluating Student Writing:

1. Give written assignments that include your criteria for grading\* to make your expectations clear (\*may differ with different assignments). Weight your grading criteria to reflect your course priorities: If grammar and mechanics count, include these in your criteria. (Adapted from Beth Impson, Southwest Missouri State University)
2. Require more than one draft of an assignment:
  - A. Revise early drafts. (**“Coach”**)
    - First address problems of content and structure; don't ask for premature editing.
    - Clear, specific comments on rough drafts or in conferences encourage revision; students will “hear” your comments because evaluation is still to come.
    - Focus on one or two problems at a time in order of priority (content and organization need to be addressed first before sentence-level matters).
    - Use peer evaluation for feedback; if you guide it, it can be very effective. Self-evaluation as a part of peer evaluation is also helpful in revising.
  - B. Edit later drafts. (**“Editor”**)
    - Beware of line-editing every error you see and then giving a contradictory message to develop the paragraph more, etc.
    - Edit or mark first page, not the entire paper. Peer editing can help here.
    - Place a straight line under passages that work or that are pleasing and a “wiggly” line under passages that do not work or that are confusing. (Elbow 1981).
    - Mark errors only the first time that they occur.
    - Comment at end of draft about your concern with grammatical/mechanical distractions, citing one or two specific instances.
    - Use “minimal marking” (Haswell) system: put check marks beside lines where errors occur; student must determine the problem and correct it.
    - Tell students to proofread backwards, sentence by sentence, to find errors out of context.

C. Grade final drafts. (“**Judge**”)

- Make your comments/marks/grade reflect your grading criteria and your assignment sheet.
- Respond positively and personally where possible.
- *What* is said includes *how* it is said: don’t split grades.
- Make comments not to justify the grade but to teach students how to write.
- Once a paper is graded, be careful about allowing further work for a better grade.

You might want to put a sentence such as this on your syllabus or assignment page: “It is socially unacceptable to submit written work with an annoying level of error. You may damage yourself irrevocably in business and professional life if you do so. You might as well learn the habits of careful editing and proofreading now while you are in college.” (John C. Bean)