Seven Ways to Respond to and Assess Writing (and Reduce Your Workload)

**2. Assign “Oral Drafts”**

Tell students ahead of time that they will be presenting their drafts as a 2-3 minute talk to a small group. Each listener is required to ask one question afterward, and the speaker must reply. **SPEAKERS MAY NOT SIMPLY READ!**

Break the class into groups of 3-4 and tell students each is to listen carefully and fill out a form while presenter speaks, responding to the following:

- **CONTENT OF TALK**: (2 key points)
- **ORGANIZATION**: (a summary)
- **DELIVERY**: (how did the speaker make the talk interesting?)
- **QUESTIONS**: (what needs explaining, illustrating, elaborating?)
- **OVERALL**: (level of preparation & ability to provide more information)
- **COMMENTS**: (identify strongest aspects of talk, offer suggestions for improvement)

The speaker receives the response sheets and turns in a revision with a précis of which responses helped most and how she’s going to revise.

**3. Get “Revision Contracts”**

Ask students to turn in drafts. Find one that looks good, but still needs work. Cross out any identifying information, and ask the writer if you can use it as a model. Prepare a handout, transparency, or webpage version of the draft. As a class, discuss the model’s strengths. Get students to provide constructive suggestions for improvement or ask questions. Then tell students to read over their own drafts and list at least 4-6 specific ways they can improve their work. Get them to write out these lists as “revision contracts.”

Later, the students should turn in their first drafts, their contracts, and their revisions.

**4. Use Peer Review Sheets**

Tell students to exchange drafts. A partner responds the following questions:

- Which are the strongest & weakest points of the draft— and why?
- What specific grammatical improvements can be made? (partners can refer to item # of 20 common errors)
- What did the writer teach you?

Partners might take 10-15 minutes to respond in class, or you might ask them to take them home and bring responses back the next class.
5. Have Students Edit for the Most Common Errors (from Lunsford & Connor, Everyday Writer)

Students can use this list to edit their own or a partner's work.

1. Missing comma after introductory element: Frankly I don’t know. (Frankly, I don’t know.)
2. Vague pronoun reference: If they took them, they’re waiting, too. (If the girls took the kids, the girls are waiting, too.)
3. Missing comma in a compound sentence: She walked but I rode. (She walked, but I rode.)
4. Wrong word: There costing us a nominal leg. (They’re costing us an arm and a leg.)
5. Missing commas with a restrictive element: Jo who’s the boss quit. (Jo, who’s the boss, quit.)
6. Wrong/missing verb ending: Yesterday, he walk the dog. (Yesterday, he walked the dog.)
7. Wrong/missing preposition: They called the rally in Union Street. (They called off the rally on Union Street.)
8. Comma splice: I came, I saw, I ate. (I came. I saw. I ate.)
9. Missing/ misplaced possessive apostrophe: The boys mom took the cats’ bell away. (The boy’s mom took the cat’s bell away.)
10. Unnecessary tense shift: Cary was laughing until she slips and falls. (Cary was laughing until she slipped and fell.)

6. Use a General Assessment Scale (for large classes)

Many rubrics for assessment exist. A simple, yet effective one has the following categories for scoring:

1. The paper shows knowledgeable application of a key principle or concept pertinent to course material.
2. The paper is developed fully & explores the issues with depth, complexity, & sufficient detail.
3. The paper demonstrates clear, focused, unified, & coherent organization.
4. The paper is stylistically proficient, using rhetorical strategies & language appropriate to the occasion.
5. The paper evidences competency with the conventions of Edited American English.

Many papers can be read quickly & scored with this rubric. No rubric, however, can take the place of specific feedback about where a writer performs well & where she might try to revise or develop further.

Scoring: A=4, B=3, C=2, D=1. Add the scores for each category & divide by 5.

7. Plan Drafting Conferences

Provide students with a sign-up sheet organized around 10-15 minute time slots (figure in break times for yourself). Have them sign up either for one-on-one conferences or small-group conferences (3-4) with you. Get the writer(s) to do most of the talking. Questions for starting the discussion might include:

- What’s your main point or argument?
- How did you develop it?
- What parts of the draft are you happiest with?
- What do you think needs improvement, as you look back at the assignment requirements?
- What information did you decide not to include?
- Which source(s) helped you the most?
- Who’s read or discussed your draft with you—and what did that person have to say?