Get Good Writing from Students: Some Principles

- Provide assignments with clear criteria & instructions.
- Encourage short, informal writing exercises that help students address a larger project’s criteria.
- Get students to critique sources in class & share the critiques.
- Provide opportunities for students to synthesize what they know (e.g. have them write “discovery drafts” or ask them periodically to sum up what they’ve learned).
- Build revision & re-drafting into the responses you give.
- Indicate no more than two or three patterns of problems with style or grammar & ask them to keep records of these problems for future copy-editing.
- Get students periodically to review “back work” and that they can incorporate.
- Praise whenever possible.

Types of Commentary that Help

A teacher’s comments serve several functions for student writers.

Making connections: Students can learn to relate their previous work to future work. E.g. “How could you relate your summary of this article to the in-class writing we did last week on your occupational interview? How might both help you in terms of synthesis for your Strategic Career Planning project?”

Anticipating: Students can learn where their work is applicable to an upcoming assignment. E.g. “With some further explanation, you could fit this fine passage of your skills assessment into the Valuing section of your final project.”

Suggesting development: Students can learn where they’ve hit on an important concept but need to push it further. E.g. “Your cover letter adequately demonstrates the concept of comparing your present and anticipated career decisions, but what specific examples can you give of how your course in web page design will apply to your work in elementary education—especially if your future school lacks adequate technology? Consider the Analysis section of our upcoming project.”

Facilitating critical thought: Students can learn how to question the implications of their research. E.g. “Now that you’ve critiqued Knott’s article about the place of calculus in advanced engineering positions, consider what you wrote in your journal about your math skills. What steps might you need to take? How can you apply this to the Applications section in your final project?”

Revising: Students can learn how to clarify or change what they’ve written. E.g. “Because your resume shows a lot of unrelated experience to your current major, how—in your final project—can you more clearly trace the educational decision making you’ve done in the past year?”

Practicing Response

Please read over the drafted sample of student writing that you’ve received with this handout.

Search for parts of the draft to which you can respond, with a particular eye on helping the writers plan ahead to revise the final assignment on Strategic Career Planning.

Write out your responses on the draft.

Once you’ve written responses to “higher order concerns,” point out 3-5 concerns you might have about style or grammar.

Write a response that addresses grammatical concerns, again considering how the response will help the student in her future revised assignment.

Note the grammar check-list on the other side of this handout.
Below is a “discovery draft” a student wrote after he did some research on the job of an art historian. The drafting assignment required him informally to sum up what he learned from his research about the job. The next step he must take in this assignment is to revise the “discovery draft” into a formal research report that contains sections on (1) a job definition, (2) required educational preparation, (3) professional ethics, (4) well-known professionals in the area, (5) theories, (6) changes in the profession, and (7) controversies.

Please read through the draft. Provide a comment or two about what you think is strong in this draft. Then identify three important kinds of revision the student should do. Finally, identify 3-5 grammatical issues you feel the student should address. Simply place the number of a grammatical problem in the right margin beside the line where the grammatical problem occurs:

Becoming an Art Historian

An art historian must be a sort of Renaissance Man/Woman, due to the fact that Art History is a very interdisciplinary field. A professional in this discipline must be very well rounded. They need to know the history of the people that made the art, in which they study this makes them historians. In researching the history they may need (or will need to know if they plan on doing any major research) to the language that the people speak or spoke, this would make them linguists and anthropologists. When an art historian gets into say architecture or the details of Celtic Design, or even the art of a modern artist such as Sol Le Wit, they will need to know a thing or two about various math subjects, like geometry, algebra, or trigonometry. I also believe if the art historian is going to write about art they need to be in tune with art itself. Know the different techniques of doing art from oils to marble sculpture. If they can't explain how some forms of art are done how can they say whether the craftsmanship is good or bad? Finely, an art historian or even an artist needs to know how to write about art. Artist/art historian needs to know how to take all the found information, and then present it to there peers or the general public in a way that they can understand it, with out having to be all of the above, a writer, a historian, an architect and so on.

Now granted that a person in this field need not be an expert in every subject but they must have the general knowledge in order to survive in the field or to do any breakthrough work. In some case how ever one will need to be an expert in the another field. For example, I would not be able to do research on history of early Roman monuments with out having a good foundation of Latin. It would be like trying to read a Japanese newspaper and not being able to read Japanese. Ethical responsibilities are a big issue in the art world today. This question can go in many different directions. I could address the ethnical responsibility of art museums, both to the public, or to each other. A good example of this would be the British Museum of Art, and their collection of Greek art and artifacts. These art works were basically stolen from Greece during the turn of the century and into the mid 1900's. The question is do they keep the art or should they be asked to give it back to the people of Greece.

Another ethical topic is on censorship. To censor or not to censor, and what role does the artist or the art historian play in this question. Does the artist sacrifice his own creativity to satisfy the public or the government? Does the art historian only write about the artwork that the museum likes, does the art historian go with his heart and cover the art that he likes? This is a topic that can not be answered in just a few lines of writing this could go on for pages.

There are many important people in the art world to look to for both outstanding art, rule breaking non-traditional art, and art theory. The spans of artists in itself are by the thousands. If I had to choose three artists from three different survey classes I'm not sure that I could do it. But lets see, Modern art, I would have to say Picasso, Monet, Marcel Du champ. For the Renaissance art time period I would choose Michel Angelo, Peiter Bruigal, and Leonardo Divinchi. For the art of early times I would name three groups of people who made for great change in the way are is done, the Greeks, the Egyptians, and the Celts. These lists are only of my own opinion, and sure they could be backed up but there are so many artists out there that some one else could com and pick a list such as I have and back it with just as good of information.

There are also many important theories in the art world. For instance the right brain left brain theory or the German theory of gestalt principles. These principles are all very useful in the anylizing of art and how it works. Not just how it works for the artist but how it works for other people, how it might or might not move them.

Everyday there are new changes occurring in the world of art history, whether it be the translation of a text or it be the find of an art work though to be lost in WWII. These changes change the history. Sometimes it is a major change sometimes it is almost irrelevant to anything else but still considered a change. On important change that has happened recently is the cleaning of the Sistine Chapel art works. Over the many 100's of years the paint of these frescos have been covered in the dirt of the ages. Also metal beams in the buildings walls have eroded causing pieces of the building to fall off, including pieces of the frescos. Now the change is the cleaning and restoration. In some ways this relates back to the ethnical question of before do we save this art work for future generations and if so to what extent? If the work is save the restoration may change to look of the work if they don't save it, the work won't be there. In this case it is a win lose question.
In art history there will often be dispute concerning various facts about art. For example one scholar might say that the Mona Lisa is dated 1479 and then another might say that it was dated 1499. When this happens and it has not been proven false by others, but there is substantial information to back both dates the work usually becomes date something like this Mona Lisa c.1479-1499. There are other problems among scholars that exist such as an art works origins or artist some time scholars will even argue as to who made a discovery. These problems present obstacle for the art student in becoming knowledgeable of the art works at hand. However this is once again part of the changes that happen with in the field. A few years down the road scholar a may very well prove beyond a doubt that the Mona Lisa was indeed done in 1479.

The art historian should think in all these terms. They should think of all the other disciplines in relation to art. They should ask questions is this the real date and if so why, what proves this. Art historians should always think with an open mind, especially when it comes to ethics. As far as emotions go, this is a very key concept to art the artist creates art with emotion whether he know it or not. How this art affects others will be different. If the artist can get the viewer to see through his eyes that's great if he does not then that fine too, because art and the experience that it creates is different for each person.

Comments for revision:

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.)
11. Unnecessary pronoun shift: If one tries, you’ll win. (If one tries, one will win.)
12. Sentence fragment: All gone. (The cake is all gone.)
13. Wrong tense/verb form: If I saw the police, I would of drove slower. (If I’d seen the police, I would have driven slower.)
14. Lack of subject-verb agreement: The biggest part of her chores are done. (The biggest part of her chores is done.)
15. Missing comma in series: Lions, tigers, bulls and bears, oh my! (Lions, tigers, bulls, and bears, oh my!)
16. Non-agreement between pronoun/antecedent: To each their own. (To each her own.)
17. Unnecessary comma(s) with a restrictive element: The play, Othello, moved him. (The play Othello moved him.)
18. Fused sentence: I liked it I cried. (I liked it. I laughed.)
19. Misplaced/dangling modifier: We saw whales with binoculars. (We used binoculars to see whales.)
20. Its/it’s confusion: Its a red car on it’s side. (It’s a red car on its side.)