Welcome to WAC Week

Upcoming Workshops

• Using Writing to Support Learning, Critical Thinking, and Inclusion at an Emerging HSI
  Thursday, November 9th | 2:00 to 3:00 pm Mountain Time | Zoom and In Person

• Using Generative AI to Enhance Student Engagement with Course Content
  Friday, November 10th | 9:00 to 10:00 am Mountain Time

Learn more at writingcenter.colostate.edu/wac.
Welcome to WAC Week

Small Grant Applications

**Goal:** Develop one or more writing activities or assignments

**Support:**
- Consultation with an experienced writing instructor
- Materials development
- Outcomes assessment appropriate for demonstration of teaching effectiveness

Learn more at writingcenter.colostate.edu/wac/grants.
Responding to Student Writing Effectively and Efficiently

Sue Doe and Mike Palmquist
Colorado State University
A Quick Overview

Dispelling some myths about responding to student writing

Exploring purposes for responding – and how they differ across assignment types

General strategies for key assignment types (e.g., writing to learn)

Strategies for increasing efficiency
Using writing activities and assignments well ...  
• Requires expertise in grammar  
• Always requires a great deal of time  
• Is another way to make life easier for writing faculty  
• Reduces time I can spend on course content  
• Doesn’t have an impact beyond the grade. Students don’t read—and don’t care about—instructor comments.
Students Don’t Care? … Not Really the Case

View “Beyond the Red Ink: Teachers' Comments through Students' Eyes” at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PKfLRz7h7gs.
Getting Started with Responding

Read the entire set of assignments first. If you’re working with a large set, scan them to get a sense of the work.

Plan to use both summary AND marginal comments. Consider having marginal comments substantiate your summary comments.

Be prepared to offer reader-response comments in the margins—rather than only “diagnostic” comments on observed deficiencies.

Remember that your goal is formative, to help students improve. Use forward-looking comments, such as “Next time...” ( “HINT”—How to Improve Next Time)
Some Guidelines

Focus on the most important advice a writer needs at this time. You might focus only on content, only on understanding or effective application of a method, or primarily on effective communication.

Point out spots where the reader is making good decisions in the writing. There's always something good to point out.

You can’t—and shouldn’t—comment on everything.

Connect the grade to your evaluation criteria.

Substantiate the summary comment with marginal comments that explain where the work comes up short or meets/exceeds expectations.
Point out the strengths of the work.

Identify the main problem(s) to be addressed in future writing.

Provide specific suggestions for how to improve based on the main problem(s) you’ve identified.

Thank the student for their efforts.
Some Values and Ethics

01
Respect Students. Respond to them as peers.

02
Offer Positive Feedback. Research tells us that telling someone what they're doing well has more impact than telling them about deficiencies.

03
Beware of Fatigue. Focus on your message and how well it is being targeted to your students. Ask whether you’ve said too little—or too much.
Responding to Writing in Courses Across the Curriculum
Why Assign Writing Tasks?

- To support student learning
- To engage students in course content
- To support development of disciplinary critical thinking skills
- To prepare students to participate in disciplinary discourse

These break down into the three primary varieties of writing across the curriculum:
  - Writing to Learn
  - Writing to Engage
  - Writing in the Disciplines
Purpose: Writing to Learn

• Goal: Helping students remember and understand information
• Example Task: Lists, Questions, Summaries, Explanations
• Stakes: Low
  • Assignments are typically ungraded
  • The focus is on accuracy of remembering and understanding; writer-based prose is expected
  • Writing quality is not typically an issue
• Response Types:
  • Collect and respond to students as a group, pulling out examples
  • Check (or check plus, check minus, missing)
  • Points (0 / 1 or some sort of scale)
  • Grade (but this is rare)
Purpose: Writing to Engage

- Goal: Helping students practice and gain control over disciplinary processes and critical thinking processes (e.g., applying, analyzing, evaluating)
- Stakes: Low to High
  - Assignments are longer (more than two pages but less than five)
  - Assignments are typically graded
  - The focus is on applying knowledge gained through the course; attention to audience (typically the instructor) is expected
  - Writing quality is important, but not viewed through a disciplinary lens
- Response Types:
  - Narrative Response
  - Points
  - Grades
Purpose: Writing in the Disciplines

- Goal: Helping students learn how to communicate in their discipline or profession
- Stakes: Typically High
  - Assignment length is consistent with genres typical of the field
  - Assignments are graded
  - The focus is on communicating with other professionals; attention to audience is required
  - Writing quality is important; particular attention is paid to disciplinary norms for style, tone, evidence, methods, and so on
- Response Types:
  - Narrative Response
  - Points
  - Grades
Designing Writing to Learn Activities

- Keep it focused and straightforward
- Define the length
- Provide an example
- Set a deadline
Responding to Writing to Learn Activities

- Keep your response as simple and efficient as possible.
- If possible, use points rather than grades; better yet, use a check system (done well, done acceptably, done poorly, not done).
- Focus on content; writer-based prose is acceptable.
- If the writing is difficult to understand, consider referring the student to the writing center.
Designing Writing to Engage Assignments

- Provide a fairly detailed set of directions
- Clarify the relationship between the assignment and course content
- Provide an example
- Set a length limit and a deadline
Responding to Writing to Engage Assignments

- Provide formative and summative comments
- Provide an overall assessment through grades, points, or narrative feedback
- Focus primarily on content but identify larger issues with writing quality (e.g., use of examples, organization)
- If the writing is difficult to understand, consider referring the student to the writing center
Designing Writing in the Disciplines Assignments

- Provide a fairly detailed set of directions
- Clarify the relationship between the assignment and course content
- Provide an example
- Set a length limit and a deadline
Responding to Writing in the Disciplines Assignments

- Provide formative and summative comments; use reader-response feedback; offer detailed feedback
- Provide an overall assessment through grades, points, or narrative feedback
- Focus on both content and disciplinary writing norms
- If the writing is difficult to understand, consider referring the student to the writing center
Pursuing Efficiency in Complex Assignments

- Ensure your assignment is detailed and clear
- Provide example documents
- Develop instructional materials
- Use peer review and require that it be submitted with the final draft
- Require revision after peer review
- Require reflection about what changed as a result of peer review
Seeking Support for Assignments

• Work with the WAC Program to develop an effective and workable design
• Consider the role of TAs and GTAs.
• Consider support from writing faculty (e.g., team teaching)
• Seek advice from experienced colleagues (and borrow effective assignment designs)
Some Useful Reminders

• You can’t respond to everything in a document.
• You are providing formative feedback students can use down the road.
• There are real people on the receiving end of your comments.
“The best kind of commentary enhances the writer’s feeling of dignity. The worst kind can be dehumanizing and insulting—often to the bewilderment of the teacher whose intentions were kindly but whose techniques ignored the personal dimension of writing.”

- John Bean
Reaction
Comments
Discussion

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Visit WAC@CSU at
https://writingcenter.colostate.edu/WAC