

## Assessing Writing – A Tip Sheet

### Writing to Learn (WTL)

Examples: free writing, responses to readings or lecture, letters, peer review responses, developing questions

- Assign plentiful WTL activities to facilitate understanding and increase retention of course material. WTL assignments should be low stakes, low assessment. (They may be assessed on a “check plus/check/check minus” basis and folded into a participation grade, for example.)
- WTL assignments can serve a *formative* function – to gauge understanding or interest to help you adjust instruction.
- WTL assignments can be shared with peers and form the basis for discussion.
- WTL assignments are an easy way to add writing to your curriculum without significantly increasing your workload.

### Writing to Create Knowledge (WCK)

Examples: research papers, interviews, observations, dissertations

- Have students write in forms that reflect the moves valued in your discipline.
- Scaffold larger assignments by breaking them into pieces including writing-to-learn pieces.
- Make room for audience feedback for the developing draft at multiple phases. (Peer response, for example.)

### Methods of Response/Assessment

No response/minimal assessment

- Best for WTL assignments.
- Focus is placed on the learning experience rather than the product.
- Can be quickly skimmed and used for formative purposes.

Conferencing

- Can be with the professor, a teaching assistant, classmates, or a peer consultant in the CEW.
- Let the writer know about your experience with the draft. What is working? What do you like? What are two things that the writer could further develop?

Marking Papers/Holistic End Comments

- What you mark signals to the writer what you consider most important in the writing. Marks should reflect most important outcomes.
- Students need to know what they are doing well as well as areas for improvement.
- In all of your comments, make sure that you are setting the student up to retain ownership over their draft. Marking all over the text (especially inside the text) signals *your* ownership over the text rather than the students’.

- In general, when it comes to commenting, less is more. (Focus your messages to avoid overwhelming/discouraging the student.)
- What you say will affect how the student feels about their next step in the writing process. (Students take faculty messages very seriously.)
- For an end comment, consider noting two things you like about the draft and two things you would like to see the student work toward improving.
- If global revision is expected, don't focus on sentence level issues. Send the message that sentences will change substantively in the revision process.
- Editing student writing does not help students to become better writers or editors. If you want the student to focus on sentence level issues, focus on one or two of the most interfering pattern of errors. Mark one or two instances instructively (name the error & how to repair), and then a few other instances suggestively (just an underline.)
- Don't feel compelled to address proofreading issues in every draft; focus on what is most important as a learning outcome in the draft. Provide students with helpful information about their editing/proofreading process.

Rubrics (see attached samples)

- Begin by generating a list of what you value in the particular assignment.
- Should correlate clearly with the assignment sheet.
- Order strategically.
- Keep student audience in mind.
- Avoid over-legislating or fragmenting the writing process and product.
- Can be used to guide student writing if provided ahead of time.
- Can be co-constructed with students.
- Use for larger/higher stakes assignments.

### **ESL Writers**

- Recognize the challenge of doing University-level work in a second (or third!) language.
- Consider how much of your grading is based upon surface features of writing and how much is based upon content. (Make sure the ratio you have determined is applied equally to all students.)
- If giving feedback on sentence mechanics, be sure to narrow and focus. Emphasize writer development rather than "product fixing."
- Connect ESL writers with resources. (Conversation and Writing support in CEW and through ELI)
- Be aware of cultural differences that affect writing and student-craft. (See our website "WID and Second Language Writing".)

**Sample Rubrics:**

**Peer Review Rubric for Group Assignment #3: Social, Economic, Environmental and Global Impacts of a Civil Engineering Infrastructure System or Element**

**Name:**

**Reviewer:**

	<b>Poor</b>	<b>Still needs work</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>Excellent</b>
The paper begins with an informative title				
The introduction frames the topic and answers the question "who cares" (what larger conversation is the writing responding to?)				
The paper provides an informative account of the historical development				
The paper explains the relevant social, economic, environmental and global impacts				
The current condition of the infrastructure system/element is discussed				
The paper includes an assessment of the required investment to improve current performance and sustainability.				
Paragraph Organization (paragraphs should contain points, evidence, explanation, and a sense of purpose)				
The paper flows from one idea to the next.				
The paper's conclusion ties everything together				
The authors have used a minimum of 5 credible sources				
Sentence Level Mechanics (grammar, spelling, overall clarity, etc.)				
All sources are cited correctly (APA)				
List of references is complete and uses correct, consistent format				
The essay is appropriate in length (3-5 pages) and uses correct format				

Two things I liked:

1

2

Two things to work on:

1

2

<b>Rubric—Lesson Plan</b>	<b>Strong (“A”)</b>	<b>Satisfactory (“B”)</b>	<b>An area of concern (“C”)</b>
Core elements of the plan are thoroughly, clearly and vividly presented. (objectives, sequence of activities, differentiation, assessment)			
The lesson plan creates a rich, meaningful, creative experience for students. Reflects “out of the box” thinking. (Level of originality measured here.)			
The lesson plan reflects course content. (For example, writing across the curriculum, the inquiry stance, connecting content with student lifeworlds, seeing the argument in content areas.)			
The lesson plan is presented with polish and professionalism. (Edited, well formatted, etc.)			

**Holistic End Comment**