# Providing Feedback on Student Writing

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also been popularized through the foundation he created to support cancer research, the

Livestrong Foundation.  Throughout Armstrong's career, he repeatedly denied allegations of any

kind of doping.  Towards the end of his career, he practically laughed at the charges.  Then, in

2012, the United States Doping Agency (USADA) charged Armstrong with using performance

enhancing drugs and banned him from competitive cycling for life.  He was also stripped of his

titles.  At this time, Armstrong did not admit to any doping, he also chose not to appeal the decis

in court.  Yet, a few months later on the Oprah Winfrey show, Armstrong publically admitted to

using PEDs throughout his career.  This interview met with much fanfare from the media, howe

the coverage mostly focused on the fact that he admitted to doping, not that he lied and

cheated for over a decade….

cs: use ;

cs

Pattern of error: comma splice

Marking pattern

writing – whether a student is writing a chemistry lab report or an essay on Shakespeare – the meaning and message of the assignment can be enhanced by strategically crafting prose. Here are some examples of stylistic criticism that an instructor can provide a student with[1]:

x Sentence variety Adding sentence variety to prose can give it life and rhythm. Too many sentences with the same structure and length can grow monotonous for readers. Varying sentence style and structure can also reduce repetition and add emphasis. Long sentences work well for incorporating a lot of information, and short sentences can often maximize crucial points.

x Conciseness The goal of concise writing is to use the most effective words. Concise writing does not always have the fewest words, but it always uses the strongest ones. Writers often fill sentences with weak or unnecessary words that can be deleted or replaced. Words and phrases should be deliberately chosen for the work they are doing. Like bad employees, words that don't accomplish enough should be fired. When only the most effective words remain, writing will be far more concise and readable.

x Achieving emphasis Emphasis by repetition of key words can be especially effective in a series. Emphasis can also be achieved by establishing a pattern through repetition and then breaking that pattern to emphasize the non-conforming part.

Like grammatial errors, such stylistic choices often occur in patterns as well. Every writer has habits, tendencies in his/her sentence crafting that reveal themselves as patterns of construction. By identifying for students what their tendencies are, they can understand how to break or enhance them in order to create more meaningful and effective prose. The following is an excerpt from a student essay on performance enhancing drug use in professional sports:

wordy: "To spectators, the meaning of sports is the joy of watching, but for athletes the meaning is winning."

[Sports events are seen as being a fun competition that everyone can enjoy watching.

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can help instructors best decide how to teach students to fish, rather than catching the fish for them.

_____

Indicating the error:

Forrest (walk) to the store.

Assumes that the student can identify what is wrong
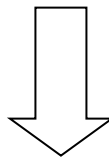with the circled information, and can correct it him/herself

:

Indicating      and naming the error:

S-V

Forrest walk to the store.

⇩

Assumes that the student cannot identify the error,
but that he/she can correct it him/herself

⇩

This method provides students with the essential building blocks for improvement.  It does not, however, give them a model of what to emulate.  The instructor has communicated two things: the information needed to investigate the rhetorical concept behind the error, and, that the student is on his/her own to determine how to fix it.

Indicating, naming, and correcting            the error:

S-V: walks

Forrest walk to the store.

⇩

Assumes that the student cannot identify,
or correct the error him/herself

⇩
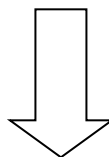
This method places all the power with the instructor, and allows the student to participate minimally.  Benefits include enabling the student to investigate the error (because the instructor has named it), as well as providing the student with an accurate model.  The drawback is that the pen is never in the student's hand – the instructor is doing all the work.

Students will often write sentences that are awkward, but very rarely should instructors write "awk" for an in-text mark. This is a vague descriptor of a problem that almost always has a specific root. In order for the student to improve, he/she needs a specific error identified for them rather than a broad (and sometimes subjective) label. The following are examples from student writing.

An "awkward" sentence:

The soccer player returned to the clinic where he had undergone emergency surgery in 2004 in limousine sent by Adidas.

While this sentence is awkward, marking it as "awk" is only a vague description. The reason it is awkward stems from the bracketed misplaced modifier (mm).

The soccer player returned to the clinic where he had undergone emergency surgery in 2004 in limousine sent by Adidas]

mm: move

By identifying a specific error, the instructor is giving the student a chance to learn from his/her mistake.

Using the "wrong word":

sv: summarizes

This idea is important to Gladwell's article because it summarize the thought society that the "winners" will always gets the good life.

While the instructor could mark ww here (wrong word), this is only a vague description of the problem. The reason this is the wrong word stems from subject verb agreements (sv). The use of "gets" confirms that this is a pattern of error for this student.

Correction

## Purpose

Instructors typically make comments in the margins of student writing. Often these comments assess the content of the paper – identifying both positive and negative developments of the ideas that the student is presenting – but they can also criticize the quality of the prose. The purpose of these comments is to engage in a dialogue with students, help them understand how they can improve.

## Method

When crafting in-text comments, generally best practice is to ask the writer questions, rather than make statements. Asking questions opens a dialogue and invites students to reflect on the choices they've made, and why they have made them. Fundamentally, this encourages them to think, and to understand that they are part of the assessment process.

## Example phrasing

How does this prove […]?
How does this relate to […]?
How can you […] more effectively?

Why is […] necessary?
Why do you […]?
Why have you discussed […] here, rather than […] where it logically makes more sense?

What are you trying to say?
What exactly do you mean?
What is the main idea in this [paragraph/sentence]?

Where is your […]?

## Purpose

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Strengths and Weaknesses:

## Example phrasing

While the content and organization of end comments should be tailored to each individual piece of writing, it can be helpful to have some generic phrasing to draw from.  Whenever possible, refer to specific paragraphs or page numbers that demonstrate the identified strength or weakness.


This essay demonstrates excellent […]

## General best practices

9   Address student by name
9

| Rubrics |
|---|

## Purpose

A rubric is effective in making writing assessment concrete and specific, rather than abstract. There are many benefits to rubrics:

- x They help the instructor know what he/she is looking for.
- x They provide clear expectations for the student to work against.
- x They help the student understand the connection between his/her product and the instructor's feedback.

## Method

While an instructor needs to assess both content and the quality of prose, this document will only discuss the latter in detail, as content assessment varies widely by paper topic and discipline. However, here are some common criteria for assessing the content of a paper:

- x Central Argument
- x Development
- x Support
- x Research
- x Assignment Fulfillment

When assessing prose, there are many categories of criteria. Rubric development stems from the purpose of the assignment, and the pedagogical philosophy of the instructor. Following is a list of sample criteria and a list of descriptors that instructors may choose from when creating a rubric to evaluate student writing.

## Criteria

The following is a comprehensive list of the criteria an instructor can assess in a student paper. It is organized as a zooming lens, moving from global to local criteria.

{the logical sequencing of information

Instructors must keep in mind that they need to balance the feedback between the quality of prose and the content; they also want to avoid overwhelming students with too much feedback. Therefore, instructors are not likely to use all of these criteria in their rubrics. Depending on pedagogical philosophy, some instructors might believe that categories like Proofreading are implicit in the assessment and do not need to be make explicit in a rubric. Categories like Word Choice might be omitted in science writing assessments because the purpose of those assignments doesn't often necessitate breadth of vocabulary. A common practice is to pair complementary criteria (examples to follow).

Depending on the genre of writing, the basic components of an essay can serve as criteria options for the rubric as well:

- x Title
- x Thesis Statement
- x Introduction
- x Body Paragraphs
- x Conclusion

Again, these can stand alone in the rubric or be grouped together, depending on the nature of the assignment (example to follow).

## Generic    Descriptors

Following is a list of descriptive words that instructors can include in their rubrics.  These can also be helpful when crafting in-text comments and end comments.

Reflexive descriptors (e.g. "convincing" or "not convincing"):

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Convincing | insightful | reasoned | creative | defined | compelling |
| thoughtful | focused | appropriate | engaging | critical | developed |
| credible | consistent | effective | intelligent | sophisticated | purposeful |
| Logical | strategic | clear | controlled | comprehensive | |

Descriptors to convey average performance:

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Adequate | sufficient | competent | basic | simple | minimum |

Descriptors to convey weaknesses:

Limited          inappropriate  unre  EMC 1( )Tj  0.0020 Td  (c)Tj  0.43-oÉ    LL    A*f*!  <ß  g          4(0Ü
                          eopsémple

## Example Rubrics: Narrative

Example #1[2]

| | Excellent | Good | Satisfactory | Unsatisfactory |
|---|---|---|---|---|

## Further resources

<u>Books</u>:
- x The Everyday Writer by Andrea Lunsford
- x The Practical Tutor by Emily Meyer and Louise Z. Smith
- x Responding to Student Writers by Nancy Sommers (available from Bedford/St. Martin's press)

<u>Online</u>:
- x The Writing Center at San Jose State University: http://www.sjsu.edu/writingcenter/
- x The Online Writing Lab at Purdue University (OWL): http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/

<u>A Person</u>:
- x I am available to talk or meet with any instructor that may have questions about this document, or a particular challenge with providing feedback on student writing.

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