

Responding to Student Writing: Tips on Grading and Providing Constructive Feedback

Professor Jaffer Sheyholislami

School of Linguistics and Applied Language Studies

jaffer_sheyholislami@carleton.ca

Today's goals:

- Discuss your concerns about grading as a TA and share strategies as a group
- Provide suggestions for and practice in giving clear and useful feedback to students on their academic writing
- Offer strategies for developing a grading rubric

Memorable feedback

- Take a few moments and jot down some notes on the feedback you have received in the past on your writing.
 - Which comments do you remember?
 - What makes those comments particularly memorable?

Why do we grade?

- Evaluate students' skills and knowledge
- Grading as a 'chance to teach'
(Lindemann, 1995)

Ways of approaching feedback

- Editing
 - Do **not** copyedit **everything**
 - Just point out **common errors**
 - You may choose to copy-edit **one** paragraph
- Marginal comments / End comments
 - Marginal: Explain your questions, good, awkward: say why
 - End comments: Focus on one or two points that can really improve the paper significantly
- Rubric / Checklist

Discussion activity: Challenges and Strategies

Challenges / Concerns?

- In pairs or small groups come up with a list of grading challenges and concerns that you may have

Strategies?

Good general practices to keep in mind

- Always remember to balance the positive with the negative
- Discuss the writing not the writer
- Limit your feedback to 'teachable moments'
- Respond as a reader (Giltrow, 2000)
 - Record your reactions as a reader
 - Explain when you are having difficulty reading and why
 - Report when the reading is going well and why

The anatomy of helpful feedback

- Identification—Does the work meet the criteria?
- Explanation—Why or why not?
- Translation—How can the current success or lack of success be translated into an improvement in future written work.

Source: Bellows, N. *Three Step Process of Commenting on Student Work*

For example:

“What evidence could support this claim? The strength of this argument depends on the evidence that supports it. In the future, consider looking at [xxx source] to support this claim”

Practice

- Individually:
 - Formulate a response to the writing sample you have been given
- In pairs or threes:
 - Share your responses

Developing criteria for grading

Why is identifying the criteria important?

- Help you to be consistent
 - Help students to understand what is being assessed
 - Help save you time when grading
 - Help to create a shared language of assessment between you and the student
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- What are some possible areas of assessment to consider when grading student's writing?

Tips for developing your grading criteria

- Analyze the assignment sheet
- Discuss the assignment with the Professor / other TAs
- Pick out higher order concerns vs. lower order concerns

Practice

In small groups:

- Using the assignment sheet below as an example, which items from our list would you consider to be ‘higher order concerns’ when grading this particular assignment?

Essay 15%

As we have seen throughout our first term of study, there is lots of variation in the way that psychologists and researchers look at questions in the field. For this assignment you will need to choose a particular issue covered in the first half of the course that you found interesting and conduct some research to locate three articles on that particular topic. You will need to ensure that each article deals directly with the issue or question you have selected. Once you have chosen three articles, write a 5-page critical analysis of the issue you have selected. This paper should be a synthesis of your sources, critically analyzing each of the researchers’ positions on various aspects of the issue, not just a summary of the articles.

Working with your Professor / Supervisor

- Clarify grading expectations generally
 - Assignment goals
 - Grading rubric (if one exists) or desired emphasis on content, form, etc.
 - Citation preferences
 - Information that has been communicated to students in class about the assignments
 - Time expectations per paper
 - Recording grades

Working with your Professor / Supervisor

- Other helpful resources you can ask for
 - Ask if there are other TAs in the course that you can benchmark the first few assignments with
 - Ask if the Professor is willing to grade a few assignments with you
 - Ask if the Professor is willing to grade a few assignments as models i.e. this is an A paper, a B paper, etc.

Working with your Professor / Supervisor

- When challenges arise...
 - Plagiarism
 - Students struggling with language
 - Other

Writing Centre Services

- 50-minute, one-on-one writing conferences with trained writing tutors
 - Book appointment at the Learning Support Services desk on the 4th floor of the Library
- Writing workshops, Thesis Support Groups, TA Consultations
 - Check the website or email Katie Bryant, the Coordinator at katie_bryant@carleton.ca
- For more information
 - visit our web site at www.carleton.ca/wts