Writing Assignments and Feedback: An Introduction
Learning to write is a life-long process, and college students are still in the early stages of this process. Compared to skilled writers, novice writers are less likely to plan before writing (they plan while generating text), to build connections between adjacent sentences (sentences that relate to the overall topic feel “good” to them), and to engage in global revisions that improve the organization and cohesion of their work. Instead, they surface-edit features like spelling and grammar rather than focusing on meaning (Berninger, Fuller, & Whitaker, 1996).

The mental activity of writing is resource-intensive and not a mere extension of how we speak. Expert writers hold in mind and compare multiple representations, including information about the content they want to convey, the meaning of the text they have just written, and possible interpretations of that text by prospective readers. As one researcher explained, “Thinking is so closely linked to writing, at least in mature adults, that the two are practically twins. Individuals who write well are seen as substantive thinkers, [and] the composition of extended texts is widely recognized as a form of problem solving” (Kellogg, 2008, p. 2).

Today, the national movement for writing across the curriculum does more than simply promote clear writing: It is a movement to improve learning and critical thinking through writing. To facilitate conversation about writing at CMU, this document explains the difference between writing-to-learn and learning-to-write assignments, summarizes recommendations from experts on writing pedagogy, and describes some time-saving suggestions for instructors. A final section discusses standard University Program (UP) and Writing Intensive (WI) courses.

If you are new to the field of writing pedagogy, two resources are a good place to start. John Bean’s Engaging: Ideas: The Professor’s Guide to Integrating Writing, Critical Thinking, and Active Learning in the

“Writing, properly understood, is thought on paper. ..The reward of disciplined writing is a mind prepared to think.”

– The Neglected “R”: The Need for a Writing Revolution
Writing Assignments and Feedback

*Classroom (2011)* is a straightforward summary of research findings and techniques (including numerous examples to help you design and grade writing assignments).

Ohio State University’s Writing Across the Curriculum Program sponsors a resource website that addresses such issues as developing assignments, coaching writing, and grading. (Search for “OSU Writing Across the Curriculum Resources.”) Also, visit the Harvard Writing Project for online resources, including *A Brief Guide To Responding To Student Writing* and student writing guides (Harvard Writing Project, 2007).

### Writing-to-Learn Versus Learning-to-Write

Writing-to-learn (also called writing-to-discover) assignments are opportunities for students to explore their thoughts about course material, learn course content, and analyze ideas. Exam essays, journal entries, and reaction papers are three writing-to-learn tasks.

Writing-to-learn assignments include informal writing that may receive minimal or no feedback and no letter grade. Instead, instructors may simply record that these assignments were completed for credit. For example, a course with a research proposal as a final product could include an early assignment in which students brainstorm and comment on possible research topics. For this assignment, the instructor will not be involved in editing for grammar or issuing a formal grade.

Many assignments in college courses involve writing assigned primarily to learn a task other than writing. For example, the sequence of assignments leading up to a research proposal could include an annotated reference list in which students explain why they selected each reference. For this assignment, the instructor would assign grades based on the quality of the references and the rationale for each choice.

The most labor-intensive assignments are those that help students learn the writing conventions of a discipline. For example, a capstone course could involve a sequence of assignments leading up to a research proposal, with students submitting a draft for feedback and then a revised submission for grading. For assignments like this one, the primary goal is to teach students to communicate effectively. When problems with grammar and punctuation impede the clarity of students’ narratives, most instructors focus on patterns of error.

Appendix A illustrates one way to think about writing-to-learn versus learning-to-write assignments. (For more information, consult Penn State’s online resources by searching for “writing-to-learn vs. learning-to-write.”)

### Recommendations from Pedagogy Experts

The five recommendations reviewed here summarize a large body of literature on best practices for helping students with their writing.

**Discuss the Value of Writing, the Writing Process, and the Goals of Your Assignments with Students**

Instructors promote transparency in teaching and learning when they explain the value of particular skills, the learning process, and how course features and assignments are designed to promote learning. Transparency in teaching and learning methods produce benefits in the courses using those methods and positively affect future learning (University of Nevada, Las Vegas, 2014).
Writing Assignments and Feedback

Depending upon your goals, some of the following findings may be of interest to your students.

► **Writing skills are valued by employers.** Today, writing is a “threshold skill” for hiring and promotion (National Commission on Writing, 2004, p. 3). In a survey of business leaders, respondents reported that two-thirds of salaried employees in large U.S. companies have writing responsibilities, and half of all companies surveyed reported that writing skills factor into promotion decisions.

► **Writing increases engagement with course material.** The relationship between course writing and learning has been described as “stunning” (Light, 2001, p. 55). According to Richard Light, the relationship between the amount of writing for a course and students’ level of engagement—whether engagement is measured by time spent on the course, or the intellectual challenge it presents, or students’ level of interest in it—is stronger than the relationship between students’ engagement and any other course characteristic. (p. 55)

► **Writing helps students develop a deeper understanding of the material.** Writing can result in greater learning than note-taking or studying (Bazerman et al., 2005), and assignments that require critical reflection, problem solving, and the application of knowledge are especially productive (Reynolds, Thaiss, Katkin, & Thompson, 2012).

► **Writing improves reading.** The writing process draws attention to the structure of narratives, resulting in improved reading skills (Graham & Hebert, 2010).

► **Writing assignments can improve critical thinking and problem-solving skills.** It is not enough for professionals to understand a body of material; often, their jobs require them to organize information from multiple sources, evaluate that information, and make decisions. Writing is a vehicle for learning the component skills of problem solving in the disciplines (Bean, 2011).

Your students may also enjoy learning about some of the differences between novice and skilled writers that were discussed at the beginning of this handout. Taking time to share your personal challenges with writing, and the strategies you used to become a better writer, can help students to feel they are part of a community of life-long writers. And by clearly explaining how the structure of your writing assignments achieves various goals, you can dispel the idea that writing in your course is merely busy work.

**Select Writing Tasks That Encourage Reflection, Skill-Building, and Critical Thinking**

The structure of writing-to-learn assignments determines whether and how students benefit. In one meta-analysis, assignments that required students to connect course concepts to their own experiences (i.e., personal writing) were the least effective, whereas the most promising assignments prompted “metacognitive reflection” by asking students to examine their learning process, level of understanding, or reactions to content (Bangert-Browns, Hurley, & Wilkinson, 2004; p. 38). Overall, writing-to-learn interventions had a small but positive impact on achievement.

Here are examples of writing tasks that serve different purposes (Bean, 2011):

► **In-class writing breaks.** Some instructors periodically spend 2–3 minutes of class time on reflective writing. In discussion classes, for example, instructors can pose a question and ask students to write their responses for a few minutes before inviting them to share their results. Another technique is the “minute paper” (Angelo & Cross, 1993), in which students react to questions posed during formal lectures, such as “What is currently puzzling you?” (Bean, 2011, p. 204). Writing breaks give students time to think and organize their thoughts before sharing with the class, help instructors monitor how well students are tracking the material, and redirect students’ attention to classroom activities.
Summary, summary/response, and “what it says/what it does.” Asking students to write short summaries of assigned material builds reading skills and prepares them for class discussions. An interesting alternative is to let students choose how they want to present the information (for example, as a narrative, an outline, or graphic, such as a concept map).

A related approach is the “double-entry” notebook: Students start by writing a one- to two-page summary (which they can use to review article details at a later time), and then write a page of reflection in which they analyze the argument, refute it, take the argument further, etc.

An exercise that draws attention to the “structural function” of text is “what it says/what it does” (Bean, 2011, p. 170). For this assignment, the instructor lists the first few paragraphs of an article, summarizes each paragraph in one or two sentences on the left, and describes what the paragraph accomplishes on the right. Students are directed to complete this process for the remainder of the article (or a specified portion). This assignment improves reading skills and can help students understand the structure of writing they find difficult to master (e.g., the Discussion section of a research report).

Problem-based writing assignments. Traditional term papers, in which students summarize information on a topic of their choosing, may not be productive for first- and second-year students because these assignments prompt a number of immature writing styles, including “all about” (encyclopedic) and “data dump” writing (unorganized patchworks of information; Bean, 2011, pp. 26–27).

According to Bean, alternative styles ask students to support an argument, solve a problem, or view material from different perspectives. In a course on child development, for example, a traditional paper assignment might ask students to “write a five-page paper on any school policy you select.” A problem-based approach might describe a school board’s decision to reduce the number of recesses each day, explain that parents are upset about this decision, and ask students to write a five-page response supporting or refuting the board’s decision.

Other strategies include asking students to analyze the implications of data (either raw or compiled in tables or graphs) for a particular question, write a dialogue between two individuals who hold opposing viewpoints on an issue, or create an original work (e.g., a poem or painting representing a historical conflict) and then explain why elements in that work were selected and placed as they were.

Evidence converges on two conclusions: (a) when the goal is to promote “deep learning,” (Bean, 2011, p. 97), the type of writing assignment is more important than the amount of writing assigned; and (b) three features characterize effective assignments (Consortium for the Study of Writing in College, 2009):

Interactive components. Deep learning is associated with assignments that encourage students to view writing as a process of asking questions and problem solving, or as a conversation they have with themselves or their readers. Interactive components include such things as informal assignments requiring them to brainstorm ideas before writing drafts, peer review or a visit to the Writing Center, and opportunities to rewrite.

A meaning-constructing task. Tasks are “meaning constructing” when they ask students to think critically about a problem that matters to them or to a specified audience.

Clear expectations for the assignment. Effective assignments clearly explain the learning goals and standards for success. Annotated models and grading rubrics are the most explicit ways to present grading criteria.

Discuss Audience, Purpose, Genre, and Evidence

Often, instructors are so familiar with the styles of writing in their disciplines that they neglect to explicitly discuss the audience, purpose, genre, and types of evidence they have in mind for their writing assignments. It is important to discuss these issues because most students do not stop to think about
their audience before writing (Sommers, 1980), and they typically write for their instructors. As a result, students often neglect to define key terms and jump into specifics before establishing the topic.

Instructors can help students adjust their writing for different purposes by articulating audience and purpose. On an essay exam, for example, an instructor might ask students to “Explain ______ to a friend who has not taken a sociology course” (naïve audience) or “Write a memo to your project manager laying out your best case against the team’s decision to ______” (hostile audience; examples based on Bean, 2011, pp. 42–43).

Genre—the “distinctive features of structure, style, document design, appropriate subject matter, or other markers”—is a difficult concept for students (Bean, 2011, pp. 46–47). Be aware that some genres value digressions and surprises, whereas others value thesis-driven prose. Students will appreciate when you explicitly lay out the conventions expected for your assignments, which they may grasp more readily if you provide them with one or more models of high-quality work.

Teaching students to find and evaluate the quality of evidence in your discipline is an important learning outcome. In addition to discussing evidence in class, it is helpful to provide a handout on finding and evaluating evidence, perhaps with computer screen shots to help students navigate databases and interpret the information in individual source records. (See Appendix B for ways to help students understand the preferred writing conventions for your assignments.)

Provide Models and Rubrics

In a national survey, one of the course features that mattered most to students was “clear guidelines, outlines, and/or evaluation rubrics for all major course assignments or activities (i.e., offers clear expectations for how assignments are to be created and graded)” (udluniverse.com, 2014, p. 1, emphasis added). The fact that students rated this item so highly tells us that novices appreciate a transparent educational experience, one in which instructors provide models and grading rubrics that clearly convey expectations.

A model can be an example of high-quality work or (preferably) a comparison of lackluster versus excellent work. Experts recommend annotating models to point out common mistakes and desirable features. When instructors do not want students to read a completed paper, sections of an assignment can be replaced with Lorem Ipsum (unreadable filler text, which is available online). See Appendix C for a permission slip allowing use of student work in instructional models.

Sample grading rubrics are available online. For examples of rubrics for research paper, posters, and other types of assignments from Cornell College, search for “Focusing on Assignments.” By entering “rubric maker” into a search engine, you will also find online tools for building rubrics. Finally, Blackboard’s resources for faculty include descriptions of rubric options for assignments posted on Blackboard.

The following are two pieces of advice for creating rubrics (from Cornell College, 2014, para. 1):

► **Use descriptive language rather than evaluative language.** For example, you might explain the criterion of “evidence” by stating “The argument is supported by findings from multiple peer-reviewed journal articles” rather than “The evidence is excellent.”

► **Use descriptive labels for degrees of success** (“Expert,” “Proficient,” etc.). By avoiding the use of letters representing grades, or numbers representing points, there is no implied contract that qualities of the paper will “add up” to a specified score/grade or that all dimensions will be of equal grading value.
Craft Feedback That Motivates Learning

Effective feedback is crucial for writing development. Though students vary in their enthusiasm for feedback, they believe they deserve to receive it and accurately report that it improves their writing (e.g., Ackerman & Gross, 2010; Dorow & Boyle, 1998). Not all styles of feedback are equally well received or effective, however. Based on decades of study, writing instructors recommend the following practices (Bean, 2011; Harvard Writing Project, 2007).

► **Structure sequenced deadlines into writing assignments.** Having students submit pieces of writing early, and at several different times, allows for multiple points of intervention in the process. For example, early submissions of research questions and thesis statements can let instructors consider and respond to issues in budding drafts before students have committed a great deal of time pursuing those questions. Early rough draft deadlines and peer review sessions help students stay on top of deadlines, learn from evaluating peers’ drafts, and receive feedback they might not otherwise receive from their instructor (Bean, 2011; Flower, 1998; Nilson, 2003).

► **Provide moderate amounts of feedback.** Excessive feedback overwhelms students and reduces their motivation to improve. In one experiment, marketing students rated a feedback-heavy condition no better than one with no feedback at all; positive feelings about feedback and the instructor were highest among students who received an intermediate level of feedback (Ackerman & Gross, 2010).

► **Make positive comments.** Pointing out what students are doing well is encouraging and helps them identify practices that are working (e.g., “good point,” “great move here”; Harvard Writing Project, 2007, p. 3). In addition to motivating students, pointing out strengths in marginal comments (e.g., “great transition”) provides instructors with opportunities to reinforce what students already know (e.g., “Can you connect sentences in this paragraph with stronger transitions, as you did in the last paragraph?”). In end comments, mention strengths of a submission before discussing weaknesses.

► **Comment on patterns of strength and weakness.** It is best to read a paper through to identify patterns of strengths and weaknesses before writing comments. Then, mark examples of each pattern only once or twice on the paper. Students will probably walk away thinking about no more than three or four points, so it is important that instructors prioritize before selecting comments.

► **Be clear.** Comments like “be more specific” and “you haven’t really thought this through” are often bewildering to students (Bean, 2010, pp. 318–319). Instead, be explicit about how a draft can be improved (e.g., “You seem to be making several points here without developing them. Break into separate paragraphs and develop each?” p. 325).

► **Write in anything but red.** Emphasize that you are responding and coaching—not correcting.

► **Encourage students to fix sentence-level errors themselves.** It is easy to fall into the habit of copyediting, but there is no evidence that correcting sentence-level mistakes improves the overall structure of students’ writing. As John Bean pointed out (2011), research shows that students are capable of correcting over half of their errors and that errors increase as the cognitive difficulty of assignments increases. Therefore, many of these errors disappear as students revise and gain more intellectual command of the material.

One strategy for dealing with grammatical errors is “minimal marking” (Haswell, 1983), in which instructors withhold or lower a grade until the student submits a revision (e.g., “Shelly, this submission has so many grammatical mistakes that your ideas are not shining through. Edit and resubmit.”). When instructors wish to provide more feedback, another strategy is to mark lines that contain errors, with or without symbols/phrases that describe the type of error (e.g., “number agreement”).

Appendix D illustrates the difference between revision-oriented and editing-oriented feedback. Appendix E describes some ways instructors use free or inexpensive text-replacement software to reduce the time it takes to provide feedback on papers.
Keep the focus on ideas and organization. Do not lose sight of the intellectual purpose of assignments. Emphasizing the quality of a critique, argument, or synthesis reinforces the purpose of writing and reduces the disadvantage experienced by many international and first-generation students. (See Appendix F for a discussion of working with international students.)

General Education Writing Goals and Requirements

At Central Michigan University, the General Education Program’s writing requirements affirm our commitment to helping students develop their thinking skills through courses that provide meaningful writing experiences and feedback. Policy includes writing requirements for standard University Program (UP) courses, Writing Intensive (WI) courses in the UP, and WI courses in the majors.

Writing in Standard UP Courses

According to The General Education Program: A Basic Documents Set (Central Michigan University, 2015, p. C-17), “University Program courses must derive at least 20% of the final grade from an assessment of meaningful writing. University Program courses may be exempt from the writing requirements if they derive 20% of the final grade from meaningful computation or public speaking.” Writing-to-learn assignments and exam essays are two of the many types of meaningful writing that support course objectives.

Writing in WI Courses

(This section describes requirements that went into effect for entering freshman in fall, 2014. Consult the General Education Program for policy updates.)

In addition to enrolling in standard UP courses, students at CMU fulfill writing requirements by enrolling in four WI courses. Preferably, entering freshmen will take two WI courses in the University Program during their first two years and two within a major.

There are different requirements for WI courses in the UP and WI courses in the majors. However, both types of courses must include at least 18 pages of writing OR must base 70% of the course grade on an evaluation of student writing. In addition, students must receive feedback on some of these pages before revising and resubmitting their work (3–5 pages for UP courses and 10 pages for courses in the majors). For all WI courses, students should demonstrate their ability to:

- Use writing as a tool for learning course content.
- Engage in a process of drafting, revising, and editing assignments that integrates feedback into a graded final product.
- Select, analyze, and evaluate information/data from sources.
- Draw valid conclusions from information.

In addition to the above, students taking WI classes in their majors will demonstrate the ability to:

- analyze, evaluate, and develop arguable and/or researchable theses;
- use writing to engage in the inquiry methods appropriate to a discipline or profession;
- use the discourse conventions of a discipline or profession (e.g., lines of argument, genre features, writing style, citation format, etc.); and
- produce finished products that communicate effectively within disciplinary contexts.

Varied writing assignments count toward the 18-page requirement in WI courses (see Appendix A), from ungraded assignments that encourage reflection or analysis (low workload assignments) to formal papers that model disciplinary conventions (high workload).
References


**Photographs courtesy University Communications**
# Appendix A

## A Grid for Thinking About Writing Assignments

(Steve Bailey, Director of the Composition Program)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning Purpose</th>
<th>Assignment Purpose For Example: Research Proposal</th>
<th>Assignment Components</th>
<th>Peer Review</th>
<th>Revision</th>
<th>Instructor Feedback &amp; Focus</th>
<th>Grammar Issues</th>
<th>Formal Grade</th>
<th>Use in a Writing Intensive (WI) Course?</th>
<th>Workload</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learning to Write</td>
<td>To learn how to write research proposals</td>
<td>Prewriting, working draft(s), peer or instructor review, final draft</td>
<td>Possibly</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>On working draft &amp; final draft—focus is on writing skills</td>
<td>Yes—focus on patterns of error</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Possibly for courses in the major (to learn disciplinary conventions)</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning a task other than writing</td>
<td>To learn how to identify an appropriate research topic</td>
<td>Final draft</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>On final draft—focus is on the quality &amp; appropriateness of the topic proposed</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes—but for WI would need a working draft and feedback to count these pages toward the revision requirement</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing to learn or writing to discover</td>
<td>To brainstorm possible research topics</td>
<td>Short, informal writing</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Minimal or no feedback</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No—credit or check-system</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B
Discussing Writing Conventions with Students

Years of writing in a field can lead to disciplinary blinders that prevent instructors from viewing writing tasks from a student’s perspective. Over time, we forget that most of the narratives students read do not model the conventions of our disciplines and that other instructors give advice that differs from our own. For example, consider some of the features that two instructors at Central Michigan University—one a psychologist and one a law professor—expect in excellent writing:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Writing Feature</th>
<th>Psychology Research Paper</th>
<th>Legal Argument</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Narrative point of view</td>
<td>First person narrative (e.g., “In two studies, we tested the prediction that...”).</td>
<td>Third person narrative (e.g., “In a breach of contract case, the amount of damages a plaintiff is entitled to is measured by...”).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tense</td>
<td>Past tense for the Introduction, Methods, and Results; present tense for the Discussion.</td>
<td>Past tense for facts; present tense for conclusions (e.g., “The pedestrian was scared and had nightmares, but these do not constitute a physical injury.”).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citation density</td>
<td>Moderate (one or two citations the first time a finding is mentioned in a paragraph).</td>
<td>Heavy (each concept documented by a citation).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citation format</td>
<td>APA format.</td>
<td>Chicago Manual of Style (the preference of this instructor as stated in her assignments).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As this table illustrates, there are good reasons why students might envision a broader range of acceptable writing choices than their instructors have in mind. Partly due to a lack of shared expectations, instructors sometimes lament about the quality of students’ final products. (“I keep telling them to include citations, but they don’t sufficiently document the evidence!”)

Especially when writing is assigned to teach disciplinary conventions, it is helpful to address writing choices by (a) laying out the range of possibilities for each writing feature and (b) discussing which writing choices meet expectations for an assignment. Instructors can use handouts like the one on the next page to organize in-class discussions about dos and don’ts for particular assignments. Finally, checklists at the end of assignments can draw students’ attention to common mistakes before they turn in work.
The Citation-Density Continuum

FEW CITATIONS

Example (from Reynolds, 2014, para. 1):
Regular exercise may alter how a person experiences pain, according to a new study. The longer we continue to work out, the new findings suggest, the greater our tolerance for discomfort can grow.

MANY CITATIONS

Example (from Leo, 2001, p. 1002):
... First, in the initial aftermath of Miranda, some police began immediately complying with Miranda, while others ignored the decision or failed to recite part or all of the required warnings to suspects in custody. After a brief adjustment period, however, virtually all police began to regularly comply with the letter, though not always the spirit, of the fourfold warning and waiver requirements.

Class Discussion Notes

Assignment Topic/Purpose:

Requirements for Using Outside Resources:

Acceptable Citation Style(s):

Density and Location of Citations:

References


Appendix C
Permission Slip to Use Student Work in Instructional Models

This permission slip can be used to obtain permission to use student work in instruction when the work can be de-identified (scrubbed of names and other identifying information, such as voices and images of individuals). De-identified models can be posted in a form that permits downloading.

Permission slips should be kept on file for as long as the models are used in instruction. The permission slip content should not be altered by the instructor without consultation with General Counsel.

Permission to Use My Work in Instructional Materials
Many instructors use samples of students' work to illustrate common mistakes and exceptional performance.

Please select an option below to let me know how the work products you produced for (designator, course name, section number, semester and year) can be used for instruction:

1. My de-identified work products for this class (i.e., work with my name and identifying information removed) can be used to produce examples for instruction. My instructor can alter my work to produce these examples.

   Printed name: ____________________________________________
   Signature: ________________________________________________
   Date: ____________________________________________________

   May I share your work with other instructors who would like to use it for instruction? (please initial) __________ Yes __________ No

2. My work products for this class cannot be used to produce examples for instruction.

   Printed name: ____________________________________________
   Signature: ________________________________________________
   Date: ____________________________________________________
Appendix D
Editing-Oriented Versus Revision-Oriented Feedback

The purpose of commenting on early drafts is to coach revision. That is, instructors strive to help writers look at their drafts with fresh eyes because it is through the revision process that students really learn how to write.

Too often, instructors focus on correcting punctuation, grammar, and formatting (what Bean, 2011, called “editing-oriented feedback”) rather than asking questions that encourage students to think about the logic, content, and organization of their ideas (“revision-oriented feedback”). As Bean (2011, p. 82) explained, an editing orientation “sends the message that the student mainly needs to correct [sentence] errors (even though the draft, if perfectly edited, would be weak in ideas and structure).” Editing-oriented feedback:

► Can confuse and overwhelm students, particularly in earlier stages of drafting.
► Creates unnecessary work for instructors. (Entire sections of under-developed text may need to be reworked anyway, rendering the original edits obsolete.
► Can distract from more substantive issues in the draft.
► Does not help students identify strengths that should carry over into revisions.

In contrast, a revision orientation “sends the message that the current draft needs to be dismantled and the ideas thought through again” (Bean, 2011, p. 82). The goal of a revision orientation is to help students see their ideas and organization in another light. Revision-oriented feedback offers:

► Praise. Praise affirms writers’ dignities and alerts writers to issues they are handling well. Writers can then emulate that performance in other aspects/parts of their writing.
► Open-ended questions about content. Questions about students’ intents and purposes can encourage them to reflect on the clarity of their arguments and to identify areas of text that might challenge a reader’s comprehension. For example, “Are you setting the reader up for a discussion of this contrast later in the paper, or did you mention this for some other reason?”
► Advice on rhetorical moves that are typical in the genre. This type of advice helps students appreciate how writing choices influence the message readers receive, how transitions influence reader comprehension, and which common moves help writers in the discipline convey their messages.
► Insights into patterns of error. Often, what looks like a page riddled with errors is really only the repetition of a few grammatical errors. Alerting writers to these patterns and making them responsible for addressing them will lessen your work and give students agency over their own language.

The following practices encourage thoughtful feedback and productive responses to feedback:

1. Read through a paper quickly—but without marking—to identify strengths, areas of weakness, and patterns of errors.
2. Note what is positive in the paper.
3. Without over commenting, write notes that will coach students to improve their ideas and organization.
4. Instead of marking individual sentence-level errors, note patterns of errors and ask students to fix these for the next submission.
5. Perhaps write a summary comment that focuses the student’s attention on the most important issues for a revision.

6. Resist the urge to comment extensively on final drafts. At this point in the process, the rubric, a final grade, and your justification are sufficient.

**Editing-Oriented Feedback**

*The Impact of Parental Divorce on Later Development*

There have been dramatic increases in the rate of divorce over the previous decades. As the divorce rate has increased, practicing psychologists and researchers have become more interested in the subject matter. The effects of the matter accompany the increased rate of divorce; this is a topic worth studying for developmental psychologists. Divorce affects the family as a whole—parents, children, and relatives included. 

This high prevalence of marital discourse has led to more studies being conducted on the subject. However, since divorce is an increasingly popular subject, there is large discrepancy between previous studies and the more recent articles. Previous studies focused on divorce as a notion that occurred occasionally in society (e.g., Chase-Lansdale, Cherlin, & Kiernan, 1995). But today's articles regarding divorce have incorporated the increased need for knowledge on the subject, have gone into greater depth and have explored multiple effects of the topic.

**Revision-Oriented Feedback**

*The Impact of Parental Divorce on Later Development*

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Appendix E
Tools for Commenting on Student Work

Many professionals use text-replacement macros to avoid repeatedly typing frequently-used phrases and blocks of text. Each text-replacement software package has its own capabilities and directions for defining macros, but all import a block of text into your document after you type a few keystrokes that define each block of text.

Two text-replacement packages are widely used by college professors: Building Blocks (also called Quick Parts) and ShortKeys, with some composition instructors using more powerful tools, such as Essay Grader.

**Building Blocks**
If you are working on a document in Microsoft Office 2007 or 2010, you can import built-in Building Blocks (e.g., a preloaded cover page, watermark, header, etc.) or ones you define and add to the Building Blocks organizer. A document prepared by CMU's Office of Information Technology summarizes how to define, edit, and use Building Blocks (consult https://team.cmich.edu/sites/chsbs/computersupport/blog/Lists/Posts/Post.aspx?ID=3).

**ShortKeys**
ShortKeys is an inexpensive software package you can load on a single computer, use from a flash drive, or purchase with a license for both applications. Unlike Building Blocks, ShortKeys allows you to replace text when commenting on a wide variety of document types, including pdf format. Some departments have a multiple-user license, so check with your department before purchasing a single copy.

**Essay Grader**
Essay Grader is an example of a tool that allows instructors to write their own comments but also comes pre-populated with comments in various categories (praise, organization, etc.). This tool will assemble comments into summary paragraphs.
Appendix F
Working with International Students

In a documentary by Wayne Robertson (2005), international students shared the following differences between expectations for writing in their home cultures and those of their U.S. instructors:

► A Ph.D. student from Malawi described the time she performed poorly on a paper that required her to critically analyze a school lunch program. Because the citizens of her country could be arrested or harmed for criticizing the government, the student stepped lightly in her essay.

► A Japanese student described how the standard essay in Japan consists of an introduction, development, a turning point, and a conclusion. This style, which is largely unfamiliar to U.S. readers, starts by describing two seemingly unrelated topics. The turning point introduces an element of surprise that is highly valued in Japan.

► A student from Vietnam explained that she would lose points in her home country for including material that went beyond what was presented in class.

► A Turkish student discussed why long, elaborate sentences were valued in Turkey. In addition to increasing the pleasure of reading, Turkish writers include various types of punctuation solely to appeal to the reader’s visual aesthetic.

► A Chinese student contrasted the U.S. obsession with citations with the relaxed approach in China, where sharing and group activity are highly valued.

These examples illustrate why international students often arrive in the U.S. with different views on the organizational structure of good writing, the relationship between writers and readers, the use of source material, and even the desired characteristics of a sentence. In other words, the structure of academic writing in the U.S. is not the most logical or desired form of writing—it is a style, shaped by history and culture, that has to be learned.

In addition to needing to master unfamiliar writing conventions, international students face a multitude of other challenges, including topics that are unfamiliar or uncomfortable to discuss, exams that are too long for non-native speakers to complete comfortably, and instructors who focus on minor grammatical errors. To help international students learn and gain confidence, the experts in Wayne Robertson’s documentary recommended the following practices:

► Just as we expect that individuals from abroad will speak with an accent, recognize that students writing in a second language will make minor grammatical mistakes. Ask whether these mistakes are getting in the way of understanding the student’s ideas. If they are not, focus on the ideas.

► Meet individually with international students to get a sense of how comfortable they are with writing in their first language. Also ask them what type of feedback on papers will help them learn best. Students will give different answers but usually can state their preferences.

► Design tests so your international students have time to complete them or can finish after the scheduled period (along with other students who need 10–15 minutes of additional time).

► When possible, and without compromising course goals, select topics that students are equally familiar with and can discuss without fear. Provide background materials and context, if necessary, to provide a level playing field for students.