

EFFECTIVE RESPONSE TO STUDENT'S PAPER

Instructors approach the task of commenting on student papers in many different ways, varying from a single grade to a detailed commentary. If comments are viewed as integral to the dialogue about student learning in a particular discipline, then instructors can change the way they comment on student writing. In particular, teachers might ask students to be more reflective about their writing decisions and to communicate these decisions and strategies to instructors, thus forming the basis for effective and responsive instructor comments.

Teachers have a wide range of commenting tools available to them today. In addition to the old-fashioned red-ink comments they use new tools involving the use of such word-processing programs as “track changes” and “insert comment”. They incorporate the use of simple or complex grading rubrics as well as the use of audio files. However, these tools are effective only if they are used in a proper way. Both teacher and student are required to have a clear idea of why a teacher is writing a comment and how a student is expected to react on that comment. Even a well-designed grading rubric is ineffective if the student does not realize or know how to use the information involved.

The great range of literature on instructor responses to student papers implies that instructor's comments are often ineffective because they might be: difficult for reading or understanding; more focused on word-level and sentence-level grammar; taken apart from standards and expectations; vague in their purpose; uncertain with respect to their bonds to the course or discipline; scholastic or deigning in any tone.

For these reasons instructor comments on student papers may actually to be unread. As a matter of fact, the comments of well-intended instructors may provoke students to avoid writing at all. For example, instructors who actually re-write paragraphs for students or who edit out a student's own writing are essentially taking away a degree of ownership over the paper written by students. When instructors

replace their own language for the language of student writing the goal of the paper might turn into an effort to please the instructor and some kind of an exercise in discipline-based thinking.

While one goal of instructor comments on student papers is to justify grades, the primary and long-term goal is to help students both to reach an understanding of content and improve their writing and thinking in that discipline (including their arguments, use of evidence, command over language and ideas, etc). Not only do instructor comments should be connected both to the discipline and to class materials, but these comments should also help students evaluate the effectiveness of expressing their own ideas. Students are required to know how to apply comments to their future writing and thinking in the field of study area. When instructor comments help students develop their writing skills in expressing discipline-based knowledge and using experience to create academic arguments in the discipline, the comments actually help student hold on to their own ideas and develop the means to express these ideas.

There are several types of strategies instructors may use to achieve the goals mentioned above. The widely used ones are the following:

- Student Planning Memo (Proposal)
- Student Planning Memo with Request for Commentary
- Student Response to Instructor Feedback
- Student Self-Assessment of Draft
- Student Writing Process Letter

Instructors can write more effective comments on student papers if they adopt such an effective tool as usability widely used in technical communication nowadays. As it is known, usability is a key element of effective communication measuring the degree to which a text can help users accomplish their goals. If we view instructor comments as a usable text, then we will be able to realize how we should change the way of writing comments on student papers. Our purpose for the comments and our view of how they should be written will be changed.