Types of Comments

There are many ways to deliver writing feedback to students. Our research on this campus shows that students respond positively to a range of feedback styles—provided the feedback is timely, detailed enough that students can understand it, and includes positive affirmation as well as constructive criticism.

Margin comments—these comments take the form of markings on pages of student text that guide the student through the reader's experience of the text. Successful margin comments identify areas of the paper that are working well and explain, briefly, why they are working well, as well as areas for improvement and actions students might take to move their writing forward.

➢ <u>Pros:</u> Margin comments often tag specific sentences or paragraphs in a text; students can easily find the issue you are referring to and act to improve that section of the text.

➢ <u>Cons:</u> Since margin comments often tag specific sentences, students inexperienced with revision may think that only one sentence needs to be fixed and may approach revision with a check-list mentality.

End comments—these comments take the form of a short, summative paragraph at the end of the paper. Successful end comments usually find something to praise, then raise a question or two, and then offer 1-3 concrete action steps that students can take as they revise their paper or as they prepare to write the next paper in the course.

➢ <u>Pros:</u> End comments are concise; students don't often get overwhelmed. By identifying issues in the paper overall, but not prescriptively telling a student what to do in each instance the issue occurs, end comments may push students toward independent thought as apply broad comments to specific examples.

➢ <u>Cons:</u> End comments are concise; students often don't understand the full scope of the issues outlined in the paper, or can't easily find the them. End comments are often brief, so students may not know how to apply them.

Audio comments—these comments take the form of recording, either on a cell phone or through course management software like Moodle or Notebowl. Audio comments work like end comments or margin comments—except the message is spoken out loud.

➢ <u>Pros:</u> Audio comments allow you to control the tone of your comments with your speaking voice in a way that some students report feels more conversational and less harsh. Audio comments can be used like margin comments (where a professor tags a certain sentence or paragraph) or like end comments.

> ➤ Cons: Some students are unsure of what to do with audio comments if they have never received them before. There could be a learning curve as you begin to record comments.

Oral comments—these comments are delivered in person, either in office hours or scheduled paper conferences before or after a draft is due. Successful meetings often allow an ethos of conversation to guide them. Rather than launching into a lecture of what is wrong with a paper, professors might ask students about their experiences writing the paper and holistically address writing as a process.

> ➤ Pros: Meetings allow students to participate in the feedback delivery process. They can tell you about their goals, their struggles, and their successes in their own words so you better understand how to meet them where they are in their writing process. Students can ask questions if they are confused, or ask you follow-up questions if your initial comments do not go deep enough.

> ➤ Cons: If students do not take careful notes, they report not being able to fully remember—and then act on—elements of the conversation when they approach writing and revision. It can be helpful to ask them to email you a brief summation—3-4 sentences—of their understanding of the meeting after it occurs.

Grading rubrics—rubrics feature a clear set of writing expectations and usually accompany the assignment prompt so that students are aware of your standards ahead of time. It is often a good idea to list higher order concerns (like content or structure) first and lower order concerns (like spelling and grammar) last so that students attend to higher order concerns first in their writing process.

> ➤ Pros: Students know what you will be looking for in an essay and often appreciate knowing how their grade will be determined. When used alongside another method of commenting, rubrics can be very helpful.

> ➤ Cons: Some students use a rubric like a check-list and may superficially engage with the items you outline. Rigid rubrics with points assigned to each line may encourage students to focus on the points earned in a way that can be unproductive.