Writing Teacher Workload

Most [writing] teachers estimate that it takes them at least 20 to 40 minutes to comment on an individual student paper, and those 20 to 40 minutes times 20 students per class, times 8 papers, more or less, during the course of a semester add up to an enormous amount of time. Nancy Sommers “Responding to Student Writing” (1982)

Student Workload

Since 1986, students write more words and write different kinds of papers:

1986 (Lunsford and Connor’s study)
Mostly personal narratives, with some reports and close reading papers

2006 (Lunsford and Lunsford, 2008)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of paper</th>
<th>Number found in 877 submissions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Researched argument or report</td>
<td>287</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Argument with very few or no sources</td>
<td>186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Close reading or analysis</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compare/Contrast</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal narrative</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Description</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhetorical Analysis</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proposal</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Process analysis</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflective cover letter</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Average Length of Student Essays, 1917-2006

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Ave Paper Length</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1917</td>
<td>162 words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930</td>
<td>231 words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>422 words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>1038 words</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Feedback on Student Writing

Commentary doesn’t work when teachers appropriate or take over the student’s text
Commentary doesn’t work when comments aren’t anchored in the particulars of the text
Commentary works when it is conversational
Commentary works when it connects the writing task to prior classroom contexts and content
Commentary works when it invites students to engage in the learning process

Error Feedback

Students more successful correcting errors in verbs, noun endings, and articles, but less so for word choice and even less successful with sentence structure errors.

Indirect feedback – when teacher indicates in some way that an error exists but does not provide the correction – helps students to make progress in accuracy over time more than direct feedback – when teacher provides correct form for the student (Ferris et al, 2000; Ferris & Helt 2000)
Scoring Rubrics

If we design a scoring guide that aims to make responding to student writing more convenient, standardized, and efficient, we might be successful. But our success will be at the expense of the very relationships and experiences that facilitate learning.

If we design rubrics to participate in and facilitate a larger conversation with students about their writing, the relationships we develop with students can help us address the limitations of rubrics and at the same time help us become more efficient in our response to student writing.


What Scoring Rubrics Can Do...

- Scoring rubrics can clarify teacher expectations for teachers and students… when teachers design their rubrics in conjunction with their assignment learning objectives
- Scoring rubrics offer opportunities for collaborative discussion of writing assignments… when integrated into the design of the course
- Scoring rubrics can help focus multiple assessment and instructional strategies… when writing assessment is directly related to instruction
- Scoring rubrics present opportunities for meaningful assignment sequences… when coordinated with other course activities.
- Scoring rubrics have the potential for helping teachers respond to students efficiently and effectively… when they are seen as an occasion for continuing a conversation about writing rather than as the final word.

Strategies for handling the Paper Load

- Design good assignments
- Clarify your grading criteria
- Build informal writing tasks in to course
- Sequence assignments so that students are turning in early writing
- Incorporate peer review into writing process
- Collaborate with campus Writing Center
- Hold 1-on-1 and/or group conferences
- Develop effective commenting strategies
- Comment minimally on revised drafts
- Make assessment of writing part of the course activities
- Time yourself to stay on task
Using Assessment Findings to Improve Instruction: To Revise and Improve Writing

Overall, the **most** frequent types of revision observed in FYW portfolios (n=174) addressed changes that **preserved, rather than changed the meaning** of the text:
- Source information added, removed, or modified (68%)
- Copyediting that reduced distracting errors (67%)
- Sentence-level changes in word choice, word order, and redundancy (55%)
- Paragraphs added, removed, or moved (55%)

The two **least** frequent types of revision observed addressed attempts students made to complicate their thinking:
- Implications and/or questions articulated (26%)
- Multiple or alternative perspectives are considered (30%).

However, revisions improved essays when the changes addressed complexity of thinking and that were seen to improve essays the most addressed issues of complexity:
1. Source information has been added, removed, or modified to support claims/thesis (.80)
2. Implications and/or questions are articulated showing increased complexity of thought and audience awareness (.74)
3. Multiple or alternative perspectives are considered showing increased complexity of thought and audience awareness (.73)

What can you do to help students complicate their writing?

**Feedback-Oriented**
- In-class Peer Review
- Take-home Peer Review
- In-class Analysis of Peer Reviews
- Instructor feedback
- Teacher-Student Conference
- Writing Center visit

**Reflective**
- Revision Plans
- “Self-Assessment” Questionnaire
- Reflective Essay
- “Track Changes” Drafts
- Portfolio with Reflective Cover Letter

**Modeling-Oriented**
- In-class Discussion of Evaluation Criteria/Rubric
- In-class Workshop on Student Writing
- In-class Modeling of Revision
- In-class Sentence or Passage Revision (Using Computer)

References & Resources


