

# SUPPORTING STUDENT WRITING WITHOUT KILLING OURSELVES

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# AGENDA:

Part I: Managing the Workload

Part II: Responding to Papers

# BUT FIRST . . .

- Choose a group reporter, someone:
  - Who is comfortable speaking in public
  - Whose voice can be heard well in a large room
  - Who can read bad handwriting

# PART I: MANAGING THE WORKLOAD

## HERE'S WHAT WE KNOW:

- Speech is a biological imperative; writing is *not*
- Working memory can only deal with 3-7 items at a time
- It takes 1,000 hours of individual practice to achieve *amateur* status as a writer; 15,000 hours to achieve mastery

# PART I: MANAGING THE WORKLOAD

- Kellogg's data assumes writing in a FIRST language that is NOT character based . . .
- In today's test culture, students often develop/are taught writing practices that can be counter-productive
- These are the neural networks that our students have, whether we like it or not

# AS A RESULT, “ASSIGN AND WRITE” WILL OFTEN LEAD TO:

- Last minute papers
- Shallow thinking and lots of error
- Plagiarism
- Frustration on our part (and fewer assigned papers?)
- Students going into the work place unable to write (or think) very well

# THE “PROCESS” APPROACH

- Brainstorm/Prewrite
- Draft
- Revise
- Edit/Proofread

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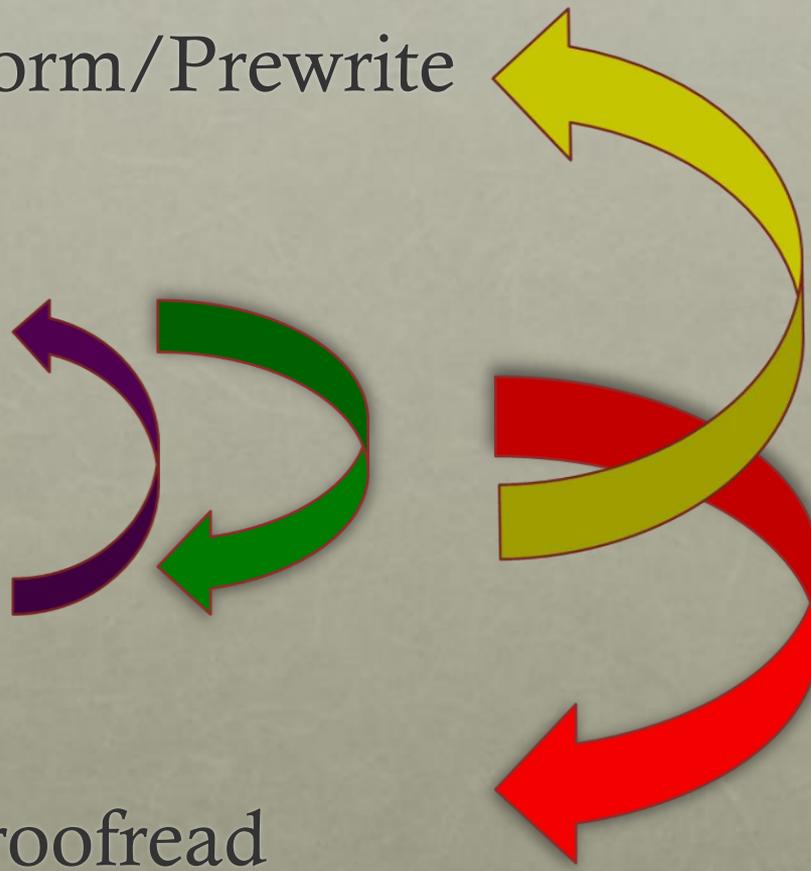
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# COACHING THE WRITING PROCESS

## THE CRUX

- Content improves with more revisions
- Grammar and surface-level writing improve with more revisions
- Students have no idea what we mean by “revision”
- More drafts can mean more work for us

# TIME- AND LABOR-SAVING DEVICES

- Conferences
  - Traditional
  - No-preread
  - Group
- Workshops
- Peer Responding

Please note: done well, these methods will also improve the quality of interaction and learning in your classroom!

# CONFERENCES

An out-of-class discussion, usually one-on-one and usually relatively early in the writing process, between the instructor and the student regarding his/her paper.

# TRADITIONAL CONFERENCES

- Collect drafts ahead of time
- Read and comment on them ahead of time
- Discuss with students

# NO-PREREAD CONFERENCES

- Collect drafts ahead of time
- Read/skim **during** conference while student writes:
  - Changes already know going to make
  - Changes considering
  - Questions for you
- Discuss, beginning with student's comments

# NO-PREREAD CONFERENCES

A brief exercise:

- Standard questions for students as instructor reads
  - Changes the students already know he/she is going to make?
  - Changes the student is considering?
  - Questions the student has for the instructor?
- What additional/alternative questions that would be appropriate for your course?
- Please write down the title of your course *and* the additional questions on a note card

# GROUP CONFERENCES

- Students sign up for a time; that becomes their group
- They exchange papers ahead of time
- They read ahead of time and respond to a list of questions you provide
- You read ahead of time and comment on papers
- Meet as a group and discuss
- Their responses are graded
- (You may then use these same groups for peer responding)

# GENERAL CONFERENCING GUIDELINES

- Students sign up ahead of time
- Papers all due at the same time, regardless of conference schedule
- There's a penalty for missed conferences/late papers/incomplete papers
- Students should attend with notebooks and pens

# GENERAL CONFERENCING GUIDELINES

- @20 minutes for individual conferences; 45-60 for group conferences
- It's okay to cancel one day of class per major assignment
- Students should always be placed in a position to take responsibility for their papers

# WORKSHOPS

A class discussion, lead by the professor, of a student paper (past or present) or a published essay that models both positively and negatively how an assigned essay should be written.

# GOLDEN RULES

1. Students need training
2. Students need time
3. There should be a written record of student responses
4. These responses should be graded

# PEER RESPONSE SESSIONS

A structured, guided discussion between students about a formal draft of their papers.

# GOLDEN RULES:

1. Students need training
2. Students need time
3. There should be a written record of student responses
4. These responses should be graded

# VARIATIONS:

- In-class responses, either read out loud or not
- 2 x 2 peer responses (John Bean)
- Out-of-class reviews (John Bean)

# OR . . .

- What if, instead of writing reflection journals, students wrote on-line blogs . . .
- What if, once the blogs were all up, students were then required to read and comment on X number of their peers' blogs . . .
- What if they were given specific questions/ideas to think about while responding?
- What if the authors of these blogs were then required to revise their reflections based upon the comments of their peers?

# A BRIEF EXERCISE:

Consider the questions on the handout.

- Which would be appropriate for the kinds of writing assignments you give in your classes?
- What are one or two additional questions you would like students to consider as they examine each other's papers?
- Please write down the title of your course *and* the additional questions on a note card

# Three Case Studies

# VARIATION #1: PAUL

1. 1<sup>st</sup> Draft: No Pre-Read Conference
2. Workshop of a current paper from a student
3. 2<sup>nd</sup> Draft: Peer Response (take home)
4. Final Draft: Written Comments

# VARIATION #2: KATHERINE

1. 1<sup>st</sup> Draft: Group Conferences
2. 2<sup>nd</sup> Draft: In-class Peer Responses (same groups)
3. Final Draft: Written Comments

# VARIATION #3: BOB

1. 1<sup>st</sup> Draft—written response and conference
2. 2<sup>nd</sup> Draft—Peer Response
3. Final Draft—Minimal Comments

# YOUR TURN: JOT SOME NOTES!

- What process can you see being effective for your students and the types of assignments you give?
- What process can you see being effective given your own schedule?
- What process can you see being effective given your personality/pedagogical style?
- Discuss with your neighbor

Questions?

Concerns?

Ideas?

# PART II: THE RHETORIC OF RESPONDING TO PAPERS



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# FRAME OF REFERENCE

## The Instructor:

- You want to learn
- I want to help you
- The more feedback I give you, the more you will learn
- I need to justify the grade I give you

## The Student:

- I need good grades
- You are the judge
- These marks on the page tell me what I did wrong
- These marks on the page tell me why I got the grade I did
- These marks on the page overwhelm me

# FRAME OF REFERENCE

## The Instructor:

- You want to learn
- I want to help you
- The more feedback I give you, the more you will learn
- I need to justify the grade I give you
- I have 25/50/75 of these papers to grade
- I keep having to say the same things over and over again

## The Student:

- I need good grades
- You are the judge
- These marks on the page tell me what I did wrong
- These marks on the page tell me why I got the grade I did
- These marks on the page overwhelm me

# RESPONDING EFFECTIVELY

Here's what we know:

- Giving students feedback on their papers is a rhetorically challenging situation
- Not surprisingly, students often don't hear our comments in the spirit in which we intend them
  - In their eyes, we are the judge
  - In their eyes, our job is to find their flaws

- Only the best students carry our advice over into the next paper
- If the paper we're responding to is at the end of the semester, then very likely even the best students don't learn much from our feedback
- On some level, this is social.
- On another level, these responses are biological: the human brain can only take in and process so much information at once

Here's what else we know:

- Responding to papers can take a lot of time
- It's easy to get frustrated, grading so many papers and saying the same thing over and over again
- Not surprisingly, often we resort to shorthand
- It's easy to forget that the shorthand phrases we use don't really mean as much to students
  - “Expand”
    - Where? How? Cut what? How do I decide?

# GIVEN ALL OF THIS . . .

Discuss, in pairs or groups, what are some methods we might adopt to allow responding to papers to be *both*:

- More productive for the student
- More efficient in terms of time for us
- Write your ideas down on a notecard

# IDEAS?

# A FEW GUIDELINES TO KEEP IN MIND:

- It isn't necessary—or necessarily effective—to comment on every single thing in a paper
  - Therefore, prioritize . . . What do you care most about in this paper? What's the goal of the paper? What learning is being enacted?
- Beyond that, begin with higher-order concerns
  - In what ways does the paper fulfill the assignment?
  - How effective is the argument?
  - How effective is the overall organization?

# GUIDELINES, CONT.

- Engage the ideas/Create a dialogue
  - Fewer comments with more substance is better
- Build on what the student is doing right
- Whenever possible, focus on patterns, rather than one problem after another problem after another problem after another problem . . .

# A BRIEF EXERCISE

- Read the paper without making comments on it
  - Assignment: *Ask a question you deem important about the work, rationalize the question, and then answer it using textual evidence.*
- Write TWO (and ONLY two!) marginal comments
  - Please remember to prioritize—what most matters to you?  
What patterns do you see?
  - Please attempt to engage the student on an idea level
    - Are there positives upon which you can build?
- Write a brief end-note

SHARE . . .

# AND THEN . . .



# JING . . .

## Advantages

- Captures inflection and nuance
- Caters to digital natives
- Connects end comments with content
- Limited to five minutes = efficient, time-wise

## Disadvantages

- Small learning curve
- Can't be edited
- Limited to five minutes = you have to be organized!

# GRAMMAR AND STYLE

- Address grammar separately:
  - Provide students with a resource for addressing grammar issues
  - Mark **patterns** of grammar error
  - Give students a split grade—for example: B-/F; A/F
  - Allow them one week to turn in both a clean copy of the paper with only grammar errors revised, *and* the marked-up copy
  - Remove the split grade

# WHAT ABOUT RUBRICS?

Upsides (during the writing process):

- Clarifies expectations for students
- Can give students ball-park sense of where they are

Downsides:

- Can seem reductive
- Can seem overwhelming
- Likely won't work if not used *throughout* the writing process

# RUBRICS?

## Solutions?

- Discuss with a partner ideas for using rubrics more constructively *during* the writing process
- Write your ideas down on a notecard

# RUBRICS?

Some ideas . . .

- Use them in conferences, workshops, and peer response sessions
- Better, have *students* use them in these settings
- Even better, have students *develop* the rubric!
- Simplify: Three to five categories, scores of 1, 2, or 3

# A FEW CAUTIONS:

When adopting new pedagogies, remember to:

- Not overwhelm yourself
- Adapt pedagogies to your own style
- Take a few risks
- Revise/adapt after early failures

Final Questions?

Thoughts?

Thank you for your patience.

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