



Designing Effective Writing Assignments Series

PART 3: Strategies for Increasing the Efficiency of the Grading and Feedback Process

No matter how well designed a writing assignment is, the grading process will likely take longer and be more intensive than other types of activities for you and your TAs. However, this is time well-spent, as research has shown that timely feedback focused on learning outcomes plays an important role in helping students learn (Ambrose et al., 2010; Chickering & Gamson, 1987; Kuh, 2008). You can make the feedback and grading process much more efficient by designing clear assignments and allowing your students plenty of time to ask questions. Here are a few strategies to get you started, adapted from Bean (2011) and Glenn & Goldthwaite (2014):

Strategies	Teaching Suggestions
Set clear expectations	Make your expectations clear in both the writing assignment prompt and your evaluation criteria, and allow time for questions when you introduce an assignment. The clearer you are up front, the less time you will need to spend correcting misunderstandings when grading.
Break the assignment up	Consider assigning multiple short writing projects throughout the term, rather than a single long project at the end. This will cut down on grading time overall, especially during the already busy end-of-term.
Check-in with students	Have your students send you a short prospectus or a paragraph explaining their thesis. This can offer you an opportunity to check-in with your students and catch mistakes or misunderstandings early, saving you in feedback time later.
Schedule strategically	Consider your and your TA's schedules when assigning due dates for writing projects, and if possible, stagger due dates if you are teaching multiple classes.
Identify common feedback trends	While grading, create a list of comments you make repeatedly on students' papers, and then use this list to revise your assignment so that it is clearer for future classes. Also, go over your list with your students when you return their papers, so that they can have a clearer understanding of your expectations on future writing assignments.
Consider allowing revisions/rewrites	Bean (2011) argues that the time an instructor spends providing feedback is largely wasted unless students <i>do something</i> with that feedback. Therefore, he suggests that instructors should comment on late-stage drafts and allow rewrites. This also has the benefit of improving the overall quality of the writing received from students.

However your assignment is designed, Herrington (1981) argues that ultimately, "if the teacher treats the resulting writing as unimportant, or merely samples of writing, then the students begin to resent having to write" (p. 124). Nelson (1990) concurs, noting that students rely on instructor feedback to help them understand course and instructor expectations; without that feedback, students may have trouble evaluating and improving their writing as the term progresses. Therefore, you should carefully consider how you and your TAs will provide feedback on your students' writing.

Additional Resources

Additionally, please see our resource series titled "[Effective Feedback](#)," for more strategies and suggestions on providing effective feedback on a variety of different types of activities.



Citation

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