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# The Elements of Teaching Writing

A Resource for Instructors  
in All Disciplines

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## What Can You Do with Student Writing?

### **Key Elements**

#### **The Silent Transaction 48**

In preparation for reading, responding to, and evaluating student writing, pause to consider what you are about to do and why, along with some potential alternatives.

#### **An Approach to Avoid: Reading Student Writing with Grading as a Goal 49**

The proper place for grading is at the end of the process of reading and responding to student papers, not at the beginning. The process should begin with reading. Be wary of becoming one of three types of graders: the grading machine, the instructive grader, the copy editor.

#### **What Students Prefer 53**

Students value thoughtful feedback that engages them in dialogue with their teachers. They see this feedback as an essential part of the writing process and as a foundation for their development. You cannot expect good writing to matter to them if it does not appear to count in your approach to response.

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1. Read through each paper receptively, letting it communicate whatever it is trying to say.
2. Compose a reply to the writer as a set of organized comments at the end of the paper, on the back, or on a separate page.
3. When you have written the final comments, go back into the student's text and insert specific questions, suggestions, or praise.
4. Then, if necessary, determine the grade.

**Using (and Saving) Time Wisely 58**

You can adapt the method for responding to student writing to a wide range of circumstances and course sizes if you keep some basic principles and techniques in mind:

- Give reading essays priority over grading them.
- Avoid line editing and random, reactive comments.
- Respond to key issues you have identified and emphasized in advance as important.
- Respond to the writer as a reader, in final comments that emphasize the most important features of the paper.
- When you return to the text, limit yourself to comments you can be reasonably sure the writer will understand and put to use.

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Ask students what they think of their work before they turn it in. In class, students can write a note to you on the backs of their papers about strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement.

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**The Silent Transaction**

The question of what you should do with student papers arises at a particular moment in the conventional process of assigning and evaluating student writing. You have given students an assignment due in a particular class period; your students have (you hope) completed this assignment by the deadline. And during that class, or at the end, you say, "Please turn in your papers."

Freshly completed, unmarked papers then sail quietly across the sea between students and teacher like new little ships, into your hands. What will happen to them next is up to you.

In later sections of this chapter we will suggest ways in which you can interrupt and alter this silent transaction. Initially, however, we'll assume that you will next do what students are fully conditioned to expect: take these papers home or to your office, where you will eventually read, evaluate, and mark them. And when you have finished this task, in another class period these little ships will sail back in various conditions to their owners, who will find out how well their writing weathered the journey.

Even if you perform your expected role in this exchange, you have a number of options. After you receive student papers, in other words, there are several possible answers to the question *What should I do with them?* Before you begin to do whatever seems the normal, natural, or right thing to do, without thinking, it can be useful to pause to consider what you are about to do and why, along with some potential alternatives.

**An Approach to Avoid: Reading Student Writing with Grading as a Goal**

If we found you at work on a pile of student papers and asked, *What are you doing?* most of you would say you were *grading* these papers. Of course *grading* covers the whole process of reading, writing comments, and evaluating papers, but it is not just a random figure of speech. Teachers say they are *grading* papers because the ultimate necessity of assigning grades tends to assert a cognitive priority over the entire task, from beginning to end. Grading becomes the aim of the exercise.

After all, you would not say you were *grading* other written material you read: professional articles, novels, letters from friends, or even drafts that colleagues ask you to review. When we approach writing receptively, as a form of communication, we usually say we are *reading*. And if that communication is part of a dialogue — an exchange — we then *reply* or *comment*. *Grading* is a kind of reading and response we reserve almost exclusively for student writing.

Grades assume this control over our approaches to student work because they are the main forms of currency in undergraduate education and the most powerful symbols of achievement. At the end of the term and for most course projects, grading is a necessity, not an option. For this reason there is no point in arguing that grading systems should be abolished or that we should pretend grades are unimportant. Instead, we need to consider the ways in which the institutional importance of grades tends to define student writing — for teachers and for students — as an object of evaluation, not as a form of communication.

While we can't deny this importance, we can reduce its negative effects by putting grading in its appropriate place.

The proper place for *grading* is at the *end* of the process of reading and responding to student papers, not at the beginning. This process should begin with *reading*.

You can't accurately respond to or fairly evaluate something you haven't read. The grade you assign, in the end, reduces the complex qualities of written communication to a single value, and you can assess those qualities only through reading the paper as an attempt to communicate. In turn, you can respond effectively only as a reader. If someone sent you a letter and you returned it with a grade of B+ justified by a brief comment (such as "You have some good ideas, but your letter needs to be reorganized with the main idea stated in the first paragraph"), the writer would be dissatisfied and justifiably offended. Yet this is the kind of response that most student writers have learned to expect and settle for, from teachers who are primarily *grading* their papers.

Teachers usually think of themselves as graders from the beginning of the process because they think grading is the end: the ultimate goal. Like most student writers, they want to be done with the process from the moment they begin, so compressing all the dimensions of the process (reading, commenting, correcting, evaluating) into a single operation seems the most efficient way to get the job done. But making grades a primary goal of reading papers is not necessarily the most efficient approach, and doing so has a number of unfortunate effects.

#### *The Effects of Reading with Grading as a Goal*

- Doing so encourages student writers to believe that "the grade is all that really matters." They learn to think of their own writing not as a form of communication but as an object of evaluation.
- However important they might be as symbols of accomplishment, grades don't say very much about writing, and teachers who are primarily grading don't tend to say much about writing either. Their responses become justifications of the grade, reduced to the impoverished, binary language of evaluation: *good / bad, right / wrong, strong / weak, successful / unsuccessful*. When we feel we should translate our responses as readers into the voice of a grader, that translation usually carries us in the wrong direction and is a waste of time.
- As you move through the paper, grading as you read will tend to produce fragmented comments and corrections that replace or distract from thoughtful comments on the whole piece or general suggestions for revision.
- While reading student papers receptively to find out what they have to say can be interesting, grading or "correcting" papers is usually a tedious, frustrating process.

Teachers who evaluate and mark papers while they read do so for a variety of reasons that correspond with very different styles of "grading papers." Efficiency is one of these motives, but not the only one. In

fact the most inefficient methods fall into this general category as well. The following are three recognizable types of graders, with distinct motives and methods.

- *The grading machine.* Teachers who are really just grading papers read only to determine the grade, which they usually place at the end, sometimes with a general comment or two. Such teachers often approach an essay as though it were a multiple-choice exam, searching for certain "points" — right or wrong answers. Reading essentially as optical scanners, they make few marks in the text, if any, or leave little check marks in the margins. Students often ask us, "What do those little check marks mean?" Suggesting that they simply register the grader's passage through the paper, one student referred to these checks as "grader droppings"; another called them "tracks."
- *The instructive grader.* More conscientious teachers read papers in an instructive frame of mind. Because they want most of all to be helpful, they pause to provide comments, corrections, and questions in the text while they read, along with more general summary comments and suggestions at the end. This style of grading is standard, traditional practice for professional writing teachers and for other teachers who hope to improve student writing. Comments in the text and margins might include leading questions about the substance of the paper (*Is this the only explanation Banks offers?*); notation of errors (*sentence fragment*); praise (*Good point!*); or notes on writing style (*awkward sentence; use the active voice; wrong word*), sometimes marked in editorial code (*awk; pass.; ww*).
- *The copy editor.* While they read, the most thorough graders feel compelled to mark and correct everything that conflicts with their own literary tastes and standards. They correct, or at least mark, errors in spelling, punctuation, and grammar. They cross out and rewrite sentences, rearrange information in paragraphs, substitute words, and point out false statements and misconceptions. These teachers really want to rewrite the paper or to show the student in detail how it should have been written.

Here is a sample of the work the grader as copy editor might produce:

*makes*  
 What ~~kind of characteristic~~ must a teacher have to be con-  
 sidered as a good teacher or a poor teacher? There are many  
*separate teachers* *distinct*  
 ways to differentiate a teacher into two simple categories. The  
 question is, what are two words that best differentiate two

different teachers? I believe that the <sup>terms</sup> best words are "Effective" and "Ineffective" <sup>are preferable.</sup>

When classifying <sup>s</sup>

In order to put a teacher in a certain category, there are <sup>various aspects to consider such as</sup> a lot of things to cover. Intelligence, personality, education, <sup>and</sup> etc. <sup>Finding which covers of above</sup> In order to find a word that consist all the subjects <sup>is nearly impossible</sup> mentioned above would be even more difficult. How about in-

telligent and ignorant? The words "Intelligent" and "Ignorant," <sup>for example, refer to</sup> only deals with a teacher's brains. How about "Happy" and

"Grim"? <sup>refer to</sup> These words only deals with the personality aspect of <sup>Intelligence; the terms</sup> "Effective," <sup>however, a wide variety of characteristics.</sup> the teacher. The word "Caring" <sup>best describes all aspects.</sup> <sup>[new paragraph]</sup>

Of these three ways of grading papers, *instructive grading* is by far the most useful to student writers, who can sometimes find in specific and general comments a pattern that will improve their work on the following assignments. Because the specific comments in the text occur in the process of reading, however, they will not clearly indicate patterns unless the final comments point to these patterns in retrospect. Some of the efficiency gained in reading and responding at once will be lost, in terms of value to the student, in the clutter of particulars.

This loss is much greater in the case of *copy editing*: the most inefficient method of responding to student work. However virtuous and dutiful your reasons for falling into the practice of line editing, most of that labor will be lost on your students. Those who will not rewrite the paper will simply register the mass and weight of your corrections in relation to the grade, without looking closely, and will perhaps conclude that they need to do better next time — a value you could have gained simply by saying, *This paper is error-ridden and disorganized. You need to do better next time.* Those who will rewrite the paper will simply make all of your corrections that they can decipher because you have, in effect, assumed responsibility for the quality of their work.

*An important exception:* Used with the methods we suggest later, line editing a single paragraph or passage can be a useful way to point out specific patterns of error, the need for sentence revision or paragraph reorganization, and problems of style. If you refer to this edited portion in your final comments, as an example of the work that needs to be done in the whole paper, you can give students the benefit of careful editing without assuming full responsibility for revision.

## What Students Prefer

Teachers often feel that they are primarily graders because they assume that undergraduates are most concerned about the grades on their papers. The emphasis attached to this assumption feeds a self-fulfilling prophecy.

When we ask undergraduates what kinds of responses they really want, however, they tell us they are not satisfied even by a high grade without thoughtful responses from their teachers. Instead, students who care at all about their work want indications that their papers have been read, as pieces of communication, by a real human being, who then responds as a reader. They realize that their teachers might be very busy readers who don't have time to reply at length or in great detail. But they appreciate any response that answers their lingering questions when they turn in a paper: *How did the paper work? Did you understand what I was trying to say? What do you think of it?*

Our anecdotal evidence is supported by extensive long-term research on student writers conducted by Nancy Sommers and her staff at Harvard University. Based on studies of more than four hundred undergraduates through their four years at Harvard, this research indicated that students value thoughtful feedback as an essential part of the writing process and as a foundation for their development. One of the participants in the study noted, "Everyone told me that I would feel anonymous at college, but the feedback made me feel as if someone was paying attention to me, reading my work, making me feel seen and heard." In turn, Sommers found, "Students report feeling insulted and angry when they receive little or no feedback on their writing" ("Responding" 2). The overwhelming majority of these undergraduates wanted more detailed feedback on their papers, including guidance on drafts and earlier stages of the writing process.

Regardless of length and detail in the feedback, however, students most valued thoughtful replies that engaged them in dialogue with teachers who had made an effort to understand what they were saying.

According to the study, some of the most useful types of comments were

- questions that stimulated further thought
- brief summaries of what the reader got out of the paper
- descriptions of difficulties the reader encountered
- even highly critical feedback that was constructive and respectful

All of these preferred responses presumed that the teacher had thoroughly read and tried to understand a particular paper as an attempt to communicate and was not simply registering its points of correspondence or misalignment with a grading template.

College students are in some ways very sensitive and responsive to their teachers' real aims and methods. In the interests of getting higher grades, meeting expectations, and using their own time more efficiently, they will adopt the values your grading style seems to emphasize and reward.

If you habitually read and respond to essays as if they were dumping grounds for facts and points to be checked off, your students will dump into their essays everything they know, with the assumption that you will find a relevant point if it is in there somewhere.

In other words, students' aims and motives as writers will adapt to your aims and motives as a reader of their work, and you cannot expect good writing to matter to them if it does not appear to count in your approach to response.

### A Basic Method for Responding to Student Writing

Everything we have said thus far suggests a way to approach the stack of papers you have received for evaluation.

1. *First sit back and read through each paper receptively, letting it communicate whatever it is trying to say.*

And do so, we sometimes advise teachers, "with your hands behind your back," resisting the temptation to comment and correct while you read. An effective piece of writing should engage your attention at the beginning, tell you where it is going (or at least clearly turn you in that direction), and carry you smoothly toward a destination or conclusion. While you are reading, therefore, you can register the extent to which the writing has those effects on you, along with the places where you get confused or lost, run into a patch of fog, remain unconvinced, or get sidetracked. Do you arrive, finally, at a real destination, or back where you started, or at some illogical conclusion, or nowhere at all? To keep track of these effects and other responses, you can make notes on a separate page.

2. *Compose a reply to the writer as a set of organized comments at the end of the paper, on the back, or on a separate page.*

Here are some suggestions for composing your response:

- Reply to the writer of the paper in your own voice as the intended reader.
- Begin with the general and move to the specific. It is often a good idea to begin by summarizing what you believe to be the purpose and/or argument of the essay; you can then assess the means by which it successfully got its message across; and finally, suggest possible improvements in two or three of the most important areas. Or you might begin with what you've determined to be "the heart of the matter": the most

important thing you would need to say if you could say only one thing. To the extent that you can, then explain in greater detail what you mean or point out a couple of other issues or patterns. Or you might decide to concentrate on issues you have been emphasizing in class as important to this paper, such as the development of counterarguments or the definition of terms.

- Put your reply in the form of a short letter or note, addressed directly to the writer. Even if it is very brief, you should write legibly in full sentences. We can't expect our students to value complete, continuous, coherent writing if we reply in scrawled fragments and codes (*Nice job but some frag's — see WR, G5*).
- Take the time occasionally to reread your end comments. What will the student learn from your response? How might it affect the student's future work? Does it recognizably describe the paper you have just read, in terms that acknowledge what this student had to say about this subject? Have you avoided making comments about the writer's character or work habits, distinguishing between the paper and the student? Is your tone that of a friendly ally or of an exasperated and exhausted target of deliberately bad writing?

Even in response to unsuccessful papers, constructive criticism will identify the potential for better work, in a receptive tone.

#### Two Sample End Comments on Weak Papers

The following are comments on a paper on what makes writing interesting in social research, from a sociology course on social research literature:

Anthony,

I really enjoyed reading this as far as it went, but it didn't seem to get finished for some reason, or perhaps it ended up illustrating the very problem it tried to describe. The notion that real communication originates with the self, and that fully public discourse is banal, is very interesting — perhaps even partly true. But it certainly limits the potential of language in situations that are not "intimate." How do you account for the value of academic writing, for example, or find reasons to produce it as a student writer?

I'm genuinely curious. As the subject of your essay moves from private toward public discourse, your own writing diminishes, becomes less vivid, and finally vanishes altogether. You can see this change in the length of paragraphs and sentences and in the qualities of language. How can you restore balance and sustain the lively voice with which you began?

The following are comments on a hypothetical *Science News* release on solar neutrino research developments, from an astrophysics course:

Roberto,

I truly like your idea: detecting neutrinos by running the nuclear reactions in reverse. This is very clever and you are right to build your article around it. As a news article on this important development, however, your account lacks narrative flow and engagement. After all, it is your job to communicate, and you might as well make this as easy and interesting as possible.

The narrative flow is sometimes broken by information that seems out of place — for instance, where you cite the cost of the project and where you say “brings into question the origins of the universe.” In both cases there is no buildup beforehand or explanation afterward. Can you find other spots where the same thing happens?

And because your idea is exciting, you should treat it accordingly. Believe me, if there were evidence that the sun were generating energy twice as fast as people thought, we would go through the roof! Yet you don't seem very excited about your fascinating results and don't present them with the drama they deserve. And a sense of drama is, again, partly a matter of narrative flow: organization.

3. *When you have written the final comments, go back to the student's text and insert specific questions, suggestions, or praise. Try to limit most of these points to illustrations of things you have said in the final comments.*

You can often do this most efficiently by numbering (or otherwise coding) specific points in your final comments and inserting those numbers beside relevant examples in the text. Some teachers simply note in the comments that they have underlined or circled examples of the pattern they have described: ambiguous sentences, assertions that need supporting evidence, ideas that deserve further emphasis, points that could be developed in revision, especially fluent passages, or types of errors. Pointing out a passage that works exceptionally well can be the most valuable response, because such a passage represents a model of the standards the student is already capable of reaching.

4. *Then, if necessary, determine the grade.*

When you have completed the previous three stages, you should know (as well as you can ever know) what grade the paper deserves. You can embed the grade into your end comments, as part of your general assessment — especially if you are writing your comments on a computer, so that last-minute changes are possible. Here are some tips for grading:

- Use (and share) your criteria. If you have done a good job of planning and presenting the essay assignment (see Chapter 2), students will know what criteria they were to meet in a particular piece of writing, and you will have your own guide to evaluating their texts. Some instructors, besides making clear the expectations for each essay, also share their overall criteria for what constitutes an A, B, and so on, for papers written for their courses. This guide, in addition to guiding students, can help when it's time to decide on grades.
- Avoid mathematical systems. For reasons that may be self-evident at this point, we do not as a rule recommend determining the grade for individual papers through a system of points: 50 points for content, 20 for organization, 20 for use of evidence, and 10 for sentence correctness. Such systems, in design and execution, are at best arbitrary, and the categories rarely can be cleanly separated. Most instructors find themselves, in fact, manipulating points in order to achieve the grade they want to assign. Best just to assign a grade, knowing that your comments will distinguish the factors on which the grade is based.
- Determine (and announce) your grading policies early. It's a good idea to announce a policy concerning paper grades, late papers, grades for informal writing and drafts, participation, and the course grade on the first day of class, *in writing*. It's always easy to become more lenient; it is very difficult (even wrong) to get tough or establish a policy once the course is under way.
- Keep a careful record of grades, required work other than final essays, attendance, and anything else that will affect a student's ultimate success or lack of it. If you keep careful records and stick to an announced policy, you shouldn't have to worry about challenges to your grades; even more important, you will notice when a student is in trouble early enough to do something about it.
- Be prepared for occasional challenges to your grades. Students do have a right to question grades they consider unfair, and we have a responsibility to consider their reasons. As a matter of policy, however, we refuse to discuss a student's vague discontent or insinuations that the grade on a paper might be too low. In these cases we immediately ask students to explain to us in writing why they believe the grade is too low. Such requests give them further opportunity to demonstrate their skills at reasoned argument. But they rarely use this opportunity.

## Using (and Saving) Time Wisely

The approach we have described is a fairly efficient and very effective way to read and respond to papers in a small writing class or in another kind of course with fifteen or twenty students. But advice of general value to teachers should also apply to much larger courses, where you may have forty papers or more to read in a week, in the midst of other responsibilities. For each four- or five-page paper the steps we outlined might take thirty minutes or more, and this could be more time than you have.

You can, however, adapt the method we have described for responding to student writing to a wide range of circumstances and course sizes if you keep some basic principles and techniques in mind:

- Give reading essays priority over grading them.
- Avoid line editing and random, reactive comments in the text. But make very brief, general comments (*Proofread carefully for typos and spelling. The last paragraph is just a summary, not a conclusion*) that accurately alert the writer to matters of special concern to you.
- Respond to key issues you have identified and emphasized in advance as important. Perhaps write these up as a short list to ensure that you address them in each essay. This procedure will save you time in deciding what to comment on.
- Respond to the writer as a reader, in final comments that emphasize the most important features of the paper.
- When you return to the text, to the extent that you have time, limit yourself to comments you can be reasonably sure the writer can understand and put to use.

These principles and techniques remain important because teachers often waste the most time in their responses to papers when they have the least time and feel rushed. Comments they make in the text become haphazard reactions. Final comments become empty, habitual generalizations (*A good job overall, but there is room for improvement*). Spending more time on the first papers they read, they run out of time later and mark papers with increasing haste. As they tire and become rushed, their responses and evaluations become inconsistent.

If you keep our principles in mind and first determine how much time you can spend on each paper, you can then develop a strategy for using that time most effectively and consistently. These deliberate methods will be almost invariably more efficient than the ones you simply fall into without thinking. If you remember that students want most of all to know how the paper worked for you as a reader and how it could be improved, your most important task is to convey that message first, even if it is the only thing you have time to say. If you have more time, you can elaborate that response.

Here are some further suggestions for adapting our strategies to your own circumstances and inclinations:

- Before writing any comments, skim the entire batch of papers (or read at least three or four) to gather a sense of the range of approaches and qualities you are likely to encounter and to create a clearer basis for evaluating individual papers.
- As you read through a batch of papers, begin to make a list of common patterns and problems. Rather than repeating the same comments on many of the papers, you can explain these patterns in a handout to all of the students.
- If problems in a paper are baffling or require complex instruction, simply note the general issue and ask the student to see you during office hours to discuss the problem.
- More generally, think of your responses not as the last and only word on the student's writing but as part of a broader dialogue that might include discussion during or after class, e-mail exchanges, or conferences. Nancy Sommers's Harvard study indicated that undergraduates greatly appreciate that dialogue, which makes written evaluation less a form of absolute judgment.
- For related reasons, one of our colleagues asks each of his students to buy a tape cassette, tape-records his responses to their papers, and returns the cassettes with their papers so they can hear what he has to say. He finds that he can say more in less time, his comments are literally voiced in ways that humanize the process, and his students pay closer attention to his spoken response.
- Limit yourself to two or three important observations and make them as clear as possible. Students are more likely to register a couple of strong messages than a litter of disconnected comments.
- It is almost always more efficient and effective to return responsibility for the writing to the writer than to assume that responsibility yourself. For example, if you are bothered by numerous spelling errors, do not correct them or even mark them with *sp*. Instead, you might count them in a passage and just say, *There are ten spelling errors on the first page alone*. If the writers care at all, they will try to find those errors; if they don't care, correcting their spelling will not solve the problem. Questions (*Does this conclusion follow from your argument?; Where does Locke actually say this?*) are also efficient ways to return responsibility to the writer. Descriptions of your experience as a reader (*I could follow your argument easily until page 3, where I got hopelessly lost*) have similar effects.



- Even if you do not assign revisions, keep copies of your comments on papers, so you can recall your advice and keep track of changes in a student's work. Writing comments on a computer or as e-mail messages makes this easier and saves a lot of paper.

In Chapter 9 we offer more detailed accounts of these and other methods for including and evaluating writing in large classes.

### Breaking the Silence: The Student's Role in Response

We have thus far assumed that when students bring completed papers to class, you will fulfill your conventional role by collecting these papers, reading and evaluating them outside class time, and returning them with your comments and grades. Although this is what students will expect you to do, there are interesting and time-saving alternatives.

For example, this conventional role presumes that evaluating the writing is entirely your job and that the writers' own perceptions of their work, including their doubts and dissatisfactions, become irrelevant when they turn in their papers. You are supposed to tell them how well their papers worked with the assumption that they don't know, when in fact students often do know quite clearly or have false perceptions you should know about.

Why not ask *students* what they think of their work before they turn it in?

Students are surprisingly honest in their self-assessments, probably because a cost/benefit analysis favors honesty. In other words, praising a paper they know is flawed might invite your criticism; emphasizing weaknesses might have the same effect. As a consequence, students will often give you very useful assessments, along with the reasons for which they are dissatisfied with their work, such as *I know the paper falls apart at the end, but I was running out of time and couldn't find a way to tie it all together*, or *My summary of Dawkins sounds wrong somehow, but I really had trouble understanding the reading*.

This exercise takes very little class time and can save you a lot of time and guesswork when you later read and comment on the papers. If the writers do recognize their own strengths and weaknesses, you can simply reply, *I agree completely with your assessment. Those changes will greatly improve the paper*. If they recognize a problem but don't know how to resolve it, you can offer very focused advice. If they fail to see central problems or imagine problems you do not see, you can address those conflicts in your comments.

### The Student Response Exercise, and Variations

#### The Basic Approach

- In class, before students turn in their papers, ask them to look over their work quickly and write a note to you on the back — along with notes in the text if they like — explaining the strengths and weaknesses they see or ways the paper could be improved.

#### Variations

- Ask students to tell you in their notes what they think you will say about their papers.
- Ask them to tell you what changes they would make if they had two more days to work on their papers.
- Tell them to respond to the previous question on a separate piece of paper, collect only those notes (so you will know what they said they would do), and without collecting the papers give them two more days to revise.
- If you want to see the original version and offer guidance, collect the papers and the notes, reply to the notes with further suggestions and changes, and give them two more days to revise.
- You can conduct the exercise out of class. When you collect the papers, tell students to send you e-mail messages explaining the changes they would like to make, and reply to them by e-mail. (Students need not receive back the papers because they are, of course, stored on their computers.)
- You can also break the silence of paper submission (or make this submission less submissive) by asking pairs of students to exchange papers, read them, and make written suggestions for revision on the back or on separate pages. For this exercise there are also variations, similar to those above. You can give the writer time to reply to the reader's suggestions; you can also conduct this exchange out of class through e-mail messages, copied to you.

All of these options encourage the treatment of student writing as communication between and among human beings, in human voices, with mutual acknowledgment that the complex qualities of written language cannot be (or in any case should not be) reduced to evaluative codes.