

We sorted the seven principles into four key categories of teacher responses: Development and Specificity, Purposeful Commenting, Correctness, and Extra-Textual Response. Within these categories I shall explain briefly what is meant by each principle and then discuss the ways in which all seven seem applicable to responding to writing in the disciplines.

Development and Specificity

Our first principle deals with the length and language of teacher comments (principle 1: our readers write well-developed and text-specific comments). Unlike the teachers in our study, many teachers write undeveloped, cryptic comments such as those in the following list. These comments appear in the margins of student texts, often without any clear indication as to what words, phrases, or sentences are being referred to.

Undeveloped Comments

vague

do we?

tense!

tone?

all people?

good use of quote

Although the comments in the next list are certainly not long, they make specific references to elements in the texts, and they set up a conversational model for the interaction between teacher and student.

Developed Comments

What's your main point here? If it's that you disagree, put that idea up front and explain.

You have given us a summary of the article. Why? You can give your view.

Are you implying here that time for prayer would give protection? If you're not saying that, then how is a reader intended to take this sentence?

Of course, it takes time to write such conversational comments as these. If one has a large stack of papers before him, it is one thing to go through and write one-word responses (such as "good," "vague," "tone," "style") in the margins; it is quite another to talk with the students about what the reader sees (and doesn't see), understands (and doesn't understand), in the text. One might argue that there simply isn't enough time for these conversations. The teachers in our study were mindful of this problem, as illustrated in the subsequent discussion.