

## RESPONDING TO STUDENT WRITING

1. Expect errors and allow for experimentation.
2. Try to avoid appropriating the student's text. Asking questions can get students thinking about alternative choices.
3. Consider providing reader response comments—that is, responses that a reader rather than a teacher might make. Reader response comments help students see the rhetorical nature of their communications and help them see how writing actually fits into the world beyond the classroom.
4. Read student texts to find meaning, not simply to find mechanical errors. Avoid the temptation to comment only on form and to focus entirely on errors.
5. Evaluate higher-level concerns (e.g., purpose, audience, context) first, since these concerns inform lower-level decision making such as how formal the writer's style needs to be.
6. Evaluate lower-level concerns within the context of higher-level concerns (e.g., emphasize status-marking errors because they most seriously affect ethos).
7. Balance advice and criticism with praise. Students need to be made aware of what they do right as well as what they wrong. But be genuine.
8. Try not to overwhelm the student writer with a lot of comments on every page. One way to limit comments and marks is to limit what you're looking for. Some mechanical errors just aren't very serious. Research has even shown that readers frequently don't perceive these errors. So why mark them? On the other hand, some errors are very serious, even status-marking and need to be marked. See the handouts **Not All Errors are Created Equal** and **The Top 20 Errors That Students Make**.
9. Prioritize problems you find with the text and communicate your priorities to the student as clearly as you can. Avoid contradictory messages, such as giving task-specific, sentence-level commands that suggest the need for simple editing as well as more general comments that suggest a need for more global revisions, revisions that would make the sentence-level revisions unnecessary.
10. Focus comments. Look for error patterns and focus on them.
11. Avoid being vague. For example, "Awkward" is a vague comment. We may understand what it means, but most students don't. Avoid using vague symbols, too. Most students don't know publisher's symbols.
12. Devote end comments to discussing content, organization of the whole, major strengths, and major weaknesses of the text.