**Grading and Providing Effective Feedback Handy Hints**

The following two handy hints should help you provide effective feedback while saving as much time as possible when grading.

**1: Use an Annotation Key**

When providing feedback on open-ended questions and essays, you might wish to use an annotation key to highlight similar errors, rather than explaining them again and again in your written feedback (e.g. choose one shorthand symbol for grammatical issues, another for content weaknesses, and another for poor logical development or argumentation etc.).

Spend some time explaining each error that has its own symbol when it first occurs, but afterwards simply mark repeated errors with the same annotated symbol. For example, if you notice a student shifts tense repeatedly within his/her sentences, and this makes the writing hard to follow, you should explain why this is the case at the point in the writing where this first occurs. You may wish to then provide an edited version of the sentence to make it clear what you mean, but try to refrain from editing too much of a student’s work (this is very time consuming and isn’t your job). When the student next shifts tense inappropriately, simply use the same symbol to indicate this.

Consider using different coloured pens for different errors. Depending on the assignment and its length, this can be more trouble than it is worth, and it does make things more time consuming. However, if an assignment is relatively short or if you are only assessing skills relating to a few concepts, it may provide a quick and easy way to group similar errors and/or feedback for improvement together.

Always remember to include the annotation key so that students understand which specific error/weakness relates to each symbol and/or colour.

Use the same symbols and/or colours for the same errors/weaknesses for all assignments that you grade. This will help you save time and may also encourage students to work together to improve their own writing via peer review.

**2: Provide a Brief Feedback Summary**

When you provide a final summary of feedback, try to make comments that could be used to improve the piece of writing, rather than attempting to edit the writing or list each and every specific weakness, which your annotation key and its symbols should already do.

Focus your feedback on one or two key areas of improvement. If a student’s work needs discussion beyond this, consider asking/requiring them to addend office hours to go over feedback in person because this will often be quicker and easier for both parties. When choosing what to focus on, target higher-order concerns over lower-order concerns (see Table 1).

**Table 1: Higher-order concerns are more important in dictating the quality of written work, whereas lower-order concerns can usually be addressed more easily in future writing assignments once students are aware of their specific areas of weakness.**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Example Higher-Order Concerns** | **Example Lower-Order Concerns** |
| Lack of organization (paragraph issues) | Overuse of jargon |
| Poor thesis and development statements | Overuse of the passive voice |
| Weak evidence provided for any claims | Use of inappropriate analogies |
| No citations, or errors in citations | Lack of punctuation |
| Poor logical development/argumentation | Inappropriate style for numbers and units |
| Poor grammar | Spelling errors |

It is easy to overlook the need to praise students for things they do well, especially when time is limited, but it is important to let them know what they are good at. This not only encourages them but also makes sure they don’t spend time trying to improve something that is already satisfactory, so make sure you add positive elements to your feedback.

Encourage students to keep lists of the things they need to improve, so that they focus on these the next time it comes to completing a similar assignment. Suggest that they should read your feedback from past assignments when editing/revising their work to reduce the chance that they make similar errors again (this is common).