AUA Brownbag on Responding to Student Writing

Facilitated by Alina Gharabegian

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For your consideration – the principles I use for making marginal and terminal comments on student papers:

1. Determine the purpose of your response to students’ writing and comment accordingly.
2. In their frequency, quantity, and scope, comments should reflect the hierarchy of your concerns about the written product and the writer’s process; hence, make determinations about what you want to comment on and what you want to ignore.
3. Make a distinction between global and local writing issues and determine which you will focus on and why.
4. Provide timely feedback, especially if you expect revisions or replication of a writing skill in a subsequent assignment.
5. In person, provide students with suggestions on how to read and interpret your comments.
6. Be willing to meet with students to discuss your comments.
7. Remember you are responding to the text, not the student, so formulate your comments accordingly.
8. Comment not on all individual “errors” or weaknesses, but on *patterns* of errors/weaknesses (grammar and sentence-level/local).
9. Write both marginal and terminal comments.
10. Terminal comments should be a culmination of (and hence support) your marginal comments.
11. Make comments that show engagement with and approval of the written text, not just criticism or opportunities for correction (focus not just on what’s *not* working, but also on what *is* working in an essay).
12. Use a respectful tone, remembering that students are essentially junior colleagues.
13. Formulate comments as questions rather than prescriptions, especially wherever you note teachable moments for critical thought.
14. Make clear, specific suggestions for future action (revision).
15. Write in complete sentences.
16. Write legibly.
17. Consider marking in pencil or in ink *other than red.*
18. If you are also copy editing, teach copying editing notations to students and use them.
19. Consider building peer review into your classroom practice.