Preparing teachers to respond to student writing

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Abstract

Responding to student writing is one of the most challenging aspects of the writing instructor's job, and it is certainly the most time-consuming. Preparing future teachers to respond to L2 writing thus becomes an important aspect of any pre-service training course. In this paper, the author describes her own approach to training writing instructors in an MA TESOL seminar, using the “approach/response/follow-up” outline found in Ferris and Hedgcock [Ferris, D. R., & Hedgcock, J. S. (2005). Teaching ESL composition: Purpose, process and practice (2nd ed.). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates]. Additional sections describe special considerations for language-based feedback and ideas for working with in-service writing instructors.

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The process of giving feedback to students’ writing...fills me with anxiety because I am afraid that it will not help but only confuse the student more.

I now realize how frustrating responding to student essays can be.—English 215B (“Teaching ESL Writing”) student journal entries.

Most experienced writing instructors know that providing feedback to their students is the most time-consuming and challenging part of the job. Future writing instructors in L2 teacher preparation programs tend to view the endeavor with alarm, often citing response to student writing as the primary reason why they would rather do anything than become an L2 composition teacher!

In teacher preparation courses that focus entirely or partially on writing, I spend substantial time (e.g., in my graduate course, 4 weeks of a 15-week syllabus) on response issues, including teacher written commentary, teacher–student conferences, error feedback, and peer response.
options. Further, as I have written and spoken on these matters over the years, I have had a number of opportunities to address in-service teachers at a variety of institutions, including faculty across the disciplines.

In this paper, I will describe the training sequence I use with pre-service teachers, including special considerations for language-focused feedback. I will end with a discussion of how my approach to working with in-service instructors has evolved and how it differs from what I say or do with teachers at the beginning of their careers. In outlining the pre-service training sequence, I use the same structure found in Chapter 5 of Ferris and Hedgcock (2005, pp. 193–203): “Approach, Response, and Follow-Up.”

**Approach**

**Reflection**

The “approach” section is where I present the various issues, questions, and options available in responding to student writing, including consideration of previous L1 and L2 research on teacher feedback. However, I am in agreement with Richards (1998): “Rather than viewing the development of teaching skill as the mastery of general principles and theories that have been determined by others, the acquisition of teaching expertise is seen to be a process that involves the teacher in actively constructing a personal and workable theory of teaching” (p. 65). Thus, before I get into specific issues or suggestions, I start with reflection, specifically having my graduate students remember and discuss their own experiences with having received teacher feedback on their writing and then articulate their own questions and fears about providing feedback to their own future L2 writing students (see Ferris & Hedgcock, 2005, p. 184). I am especially interested in their responses to the final question (about their own questions and concerns) and tell them that, while I expect to cover most or all of the points they raise over the next several weeks, they should feel free to ask me again if I miss something or do not go over it as thoroughly as they need me to.

Though I have been leading variations of this discussion in my classes for well over a decade, I am always stunned at what I hear from students about the feedback they have received from their own teachers. One woman just recently described for us how her high school English teacher would rip up her papers in front of the whole class, saying, “That’s what I think about your paper!” A graduate student in my most recent class talked about a community college instructor who told him, in response to his first freshman English paper, that “not everyone is cut out for college” and maybe he should consider becoming an auto mechanic. Though sometimes students also talk about being motivated, inspired, and encouraged by their former teachers, the horror stories outnumber the good ones by at least five to one. I would venture to say that there are far too many writing teachers out there who are at best insensitive, and at worst, abusive and hostile towards students. It is a sobering realization for me and for my students when we have these discussions, but it also gives me a platform to explain that their own recollections

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1 Though I teach several different writing-related teacher preparation courses at the graduate and undergraduate levels, the sequence described in this paper is specifically for a MATESOL course entitled “Teaching ESL Writing.” This course is required for MATESOL students and is an approved elective for MA students in our department’s graduate certificate in teaching composition. Most students in this class are preparing to teach adults at the postsecondary level.
demonstrate how important it is to think carefully about how we interact with our students about their writing.

Principles of response

As to an “approach” to responding to student writing, the first thing I say is that we all have one, whether we realize it or not. Without training or without reflection on what has or has not worked well for us as student writers, we sit down with a student writer or with a stack of student papers, and we do something with them—because we must. My job as a teacher—educator is to get my students thinking more systematically about what they do when faced with those real-world tasks, and it starts with an approach, a philosophy, or a set of principles about responding. The principles I use to frame this discussion are again taken from Ferris and Hedgcock (2005, Fig. 5.1, p. 190; see also Fig. 1).

This outline allows me to discuss both practical and theoretical issues simultaneously and to pair research findings along with real-world examples. The first three principles are practical ones. One of the first things I want to tell students is that, in my view, an enlightened approach to response includes a judicious mixture of teacher feedback (which can be oral, handwritten, or electronic), peer review, and guided self-evaluation. Along with the principle that teachers need not feel that they should address every single problem they see on each student paper, this addresses head-on one of the biggest concerns that both pre-service and in-service teachers have about response: fatigue, burnout, or becoming “a composition slave” (Hairston, 1986).

To communicate these principles effectively, I have to step back and discuss two background issues. First, peer response and self-evaluation are not just cop-outs for lazy or exhausted teachers. As to self-evaluation, I point out that the mere act of rereading and rewriting one’s own paper usually results in at least some improvement; have they not found that to be true in their own writing? I cite studies such as Fathman and Whalley (1990) or Ferris and Roberts (2001) which, among other things, yielded the findings that even students who simply rewrote or self-edited with no input from anyone improved their end products at least somewhat. As for peer response, I point out the value of writing for different audiences and readers and that the dynamics of receiving praise and suggestions from classmates differ substantially from those of obtaining feedback from an authority figure such as a teacher.

Second, I need to disabuse these future writing teachers of the notion that their job (and their students’ job) is to produce the “ideal text” (see Brannon & Knoblauch, 1982) through their feedback and students’ revision. The most important end-product, I argue, is each student’s progress and increasing awareness of and skill in using various strategies to compose, revise, and edit their own work. To the degree teachers can let go of the idea that if their students’ papers are not perfect, it is the failure of their teaching and especially their between-draft feedback, they can have more realistic and less compulsive expectations of their own efforts and student outcomes.

Another issue I discuss at some length is that of teacher “appropriation” of student work. While agreeing with Reid’s (1994) thesis that some teachers may overanalyze their fears of appropriation and thus abandon their students by refusing to give them any constructive criticism at all, I also believe that teacher appropriation is alive and well at all levels of instruction; that it is, as 1980s L1 and L2 composition theorists argued, damaging to student writers (e.g., Brannon & Knoblauch, 1982; Sommers, 1982; Sperling & Freedman, 1987; Zamel, 1985); and that all writing teachers must struggle to find the correct balance between intervention (helpful) and appropriation (harmful).
Before leaving the issue of appropriation, I provide several specific suggestions as to how they can avoid appropriation, such as making “hedged” suggestions 2 (“Maybe you could. . .”), staying away from crossing out or rewriting student texts, giving explicit permission to students to disagree with or choose not to utilize a teacher or peer suggestion as long as they can explain why, and asking students to include a revise-and-resubmit cover memo explaining how they did/did not apply feedback they received.

The last two “principles” (Fig. 1) address the balance between encouragement and constructive criticism and the need to consider feedback as an ongoing conversation between a teacher and each individual student. With regard to encouragement, I return to our initial discussion of their own memories of teacher feedback and share with the graduate students the opinion (based both upon research and experience) that L2 student writers are not as sensitive to or offended by teacher criticism as their American-born counterparts might be—or, for that matter, as touchy as they themselves likely are. This is an important point, as many American teachers are so afraid of appropriation and of demoralizing or traumatizing their students that they provide no criticism or corrections whatsoever, merely glowing positive comments. These pre-service teachers are reassured by survey research (e.g., Ferris, 1995; Ferris & Roberts, 2001; Leki, 1991) that indicates that L2 writers know that they need expert feedback and correction—they are well aware that they are not proficient English academic writers—and that far from being offended by it, they will be disappointed, anxious, or even resentful if teachers withhold it.

That said, it is also important to remind these future teachers that encouragement is important, that everyone benefits from it, and that they must strive to identify and articulate what the student writer has done well before launching into a fix-it list. 3 Here I also provide them with some real-life examples of teacher feedback that is less than encouraging or helpful (Fig. 2).

I finish the discussion of “Approach” by reminding them that every student is an individual and that their feedback to students should be personalized rather than rubber-stamped or generic-

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2 One of my graduate students recently reminded me that hedged suggestions could sometimes confuse or mislead L2 writers whose awareness of American English pragmatic phenomena may not be as well developed as it is for native speakers or those who have lived in the U.S. all or most of their lives. See Ferris (1997, 2001) for further discussion of this important point.

3 I am also honest with them that it can be a challenge, with some student papers, to find anything encouraging to say—but that they should at least try to do so!
sounding. Practical suggestions for providing individualized feedback might include the following:

- Use their name and sign yours (letter format);
- Refer to previous work and progress (or persistent problems) that you see;
- Collect and read entire files (drafts, previous feedback, worksheet);
- Get to know students individually through questionnaires, journal entries, conferences, and discussions.

Finally, having impressed my students with the dangers of appropriating or discouraging students, I finish this discussion of guiding principles with a bit of pep talk, using the following quotation as a framework:

"...teachers need to remember that written commentary, rather than being a tedious burden, is a critical instructional opportunity for both teacher and student. Reading a student paper and giving feedback that meets the student’s needs allows the instructor to make a personal investment in each student’s progress and to provide or reinforce instruction given in class. Bearing this in mind, the instructor needs to see the process of reading the paper, identifying and selecting key feedback points, and constructing comments in ways that communicate clearly and helpfully to the student as a dynamic, creative, cognitively demanding process. (Ferris, 2003, p. 123, emphasis added)"

I remind my own students that thoughtful feedback tailored to the needs of an individual student and his/her evolving text and writing is a gift, and perhaps the most important thing a writing instructor can do for his/her students. Because several truths are thus in tension—(1) teachers can appropriate, overwhelm, or otherwise discourage or mislead students through their feedback; (2) students will most likely pay close attention to the feedback teachers give them and will try to do what the teacher tells them to do; and (3) well done feedback can be a motivator as well as a “critical instructional opportunity”—we then turn our attention to specific practical strategies for providing effective feedback.

Response

Having spent some time discussing a philosophical approach to feedback, I tell pre-service teachers that, before they sit down face-to-face with a student or sit down with a set of student papers, they need to articulate their own approach or guiding principles and communicate them to their student writers. Examples of such a philosophy might include a selective, rather than comprehensive, approach to feedback—“I will focus on the two to four most significant feedback points in this paper, rather than addressing every single problem/error I see”—or an approach in which students do structured peer review or guided self-evaluation to do their first revisions before the teacher provides substantive feedback, or a decision to focus more extensively on content or rhetorical issues than on language issues in the earlier stages of a
paper’s development. Whatever the philosophies are—and I stress that there are different ways to look at most of these issues—I tell these future teachers that they should have some principles that guide their work and that these principles should be made transparent to their students from the outset of the writing course so that there are no misplaced expectations.

Whether I am discussing content-focused or form-focused feedback, I do try to steer trainees toward a selective, prioritized approach to responding rather than attempting to address every problem they see in every student paper. The first reason for this is practical—they will exhaust themselves and overwhelm their students if they provide an excessive amount of commentary or correction. I tell them true stories about teacher-marked student papers I have seen where the teacher literally wrote more (in marginal comments and a summary end note) than the student did! This, I argue, is more than a bit out of balance! Secondly, being selective and prioritizing reminds these future teachers that their long-term goal of moving students toward improved writing and increased autonomy in assessing and revising their own work is more important than the short-term aim of “fixing” the particular paper under construction.

To be true to the goal of selectivity and prioritization, I tell students that the first step in responding to a student paper is to read it through from start to finish without marking anything. I tell them that this will be hard for them. I tell them that they may need to sit on their hands or lock their pens/computers in another room to follow this advice. I am also honest with them that when I give this same suggestion to in-service teachers, they look at me like I am crazy, and some will openly disagree with me from the floor. Nonetheless, I challenge them to at least try it my way before dismissing the advice as unnecessary or unworkable.

Secondly, we discuss one of the biggest fears or questions inexperienced writing teachers have about feedback: where to begin. Some pre-service teachers look at a sample student paper and are so overwhelmed with its obvious problems that they do not know how to prioritize. Others have the opposite problem: They are so inexperienced at looking at student writing at all that they do not know what to look for or what constitutes a problem or issue or feedback point that their commentary should address.

I discuss with them that there are at least four possible sources to consult in deciding where to begin, what to look for, and which issues to emphasize. First, they should consult the course rubric or grading criteria if such instruments exist. If there is an external (departmental, institutional, etc.) set of standards by which student progress will eventually be judged, it is part of the teacher’s job to make students aware of these criteria and to provide feedback that will help them progress toward meeting the standards. (See Appendix B for an example of a feedback checklist based upon departmental grading criteria.) Second, they should consider the specifications of the particular task or text type on which students are working. For example, if students have been asked to describe a personal experience and analyze its significance, the instructor might want to comment on how well the student writer told the story and if they analyzed the experience adequately. Similarly, if students have been asked to take a stand on an issue raised by sources they have read, the teacher might want to comment on how effectively the writer has stated and defended his/her opinion or how well s/he has utilized ideas from the required sources. In other words, as the task changes, the nature of the issues the teacher might address in feedback should change as well.

Third, if this is not the first paper of the term, the teacher might also provide feedback tailored to the needs and progress of the individual students. For example, if on a previous paper the student had trouble with focus or development, the teacher might want to raise the issue again on a subsequent paper, either to encourage the student for improvement or to remind the student that it is still a problem. Finally, feedback provided by the teacher might focus on lessons recently
given in class, such as selecting and integrating quotations, verb tense shifts in narratives, effective inter-paragraph transitions, and so on. (See Reid, 1994, for more examples of how teacher feedback might elicit memories of concepts taught in class.) Because this “what to look for” issue is a big one for pre-service teachers, I spend a fair amount of time on it, going over sample rubrics, checklists, and assignment prompts to discuss possible feedback points these tools might raise. This issue is also a focus of the second set of practice exercises that we do later (see Appendix B and discussion below).

Having discussed a general approach and some specific tools for identifying feedback points, we then turn our attention to the mechanics of providing clear and effective commentary. We talk about whether marginal commentary or an end/cover memo (or a combination of both) is preferable, whether to use questions or statements, and how to avoid jargon that might confuse students. I provide a number of examples of “jolting jargon” (Fig. 3) and “questionable questions” (Fig. 4). As to the “jargon,” I point out that either grammatical terminology (“Inc Sen”) or rhetorical terms (“introduction”) may not be transparent, especially to L2 writers, and that teachers should assume nothing unless they have either assessed students’ prior knowledge or taught the terms to students themselves.

Questions are trickier, as many teachers have been trained to utilize them in responding, both as a way to avoid appropriation (e.g., by using an indirect question to make a suggestion: “Can you give an example here?” rather than giving an order: “Better give an example!”) and as a way to signal that the teacher is an interested reader who is “conversing in the margins” with the student writer. While questions can be a useful tool in teacher feedback, there are several ways in which they can go astray with novice L2 student writers. First, the student may not recognize a question as an indirect speech act and thus ignore the suggestion, frustrating and confusing the teacher, who thought s/he was politely making his/her expectations clear. Second, even if the student understands the question, s/he may not know how to incorporate the desired information into his/her evolving text. Third, if the teacher’s question is too roundabout or abstract (as in Example A in Fig. 4) or irrelevant to the student’s purposes (as in Fig. 4, Example B), it is unlikely to help the student writer improve his/her paper or learn much about writing.

**EXAMPLE A:**

**Student Original:**
But it was unbelievable that when I visited New York City.

**Teacher Comment:**
INC SEN (in margin)

**Student Revision:**
It was unbelievable that when I visited New York City.

(From Zamel, 1985, pp. 89-90.)

**EXAMPLE B:**

**Teacher Comment:** Your essay needs an introduction.

**Student Revision:** My name is Le. I am 19 years old. I have black hair and a girlfriend...

[Source: Buckley, L. (personal communication).]

Fig. 3. Jolting jargon.
After we have talked about principles and techniques and looked at a number of (mostly bad) examples of teacher commentary, we turn our attention to some hands-on practice activities. We begin with the dramatic example of Antonio (also discussed in Ferris, 2003), a college freshman who had immigrated to California from Mexico five years earlier. Antonio was asked to write an essay on “the effects of being a member of a minority group.” This essay is shown in Appendix A. As his thesis shows, he began writing with the intent of discussing the negative effects of his experiences, but as he wrote, he apparently discovered that he had positive things to say about the “journey” or “adventure” of becoming bicultural. However, his teacher remained firmly committed to the “negative effects” thesis in his essay introduction (which she had praised in a marginal comment: “Great thesis!”), insisting that he change the content of his conclusion to “make this fit your thesis.” As we see from the revised conclusion, Antonio obediently attempted to comply, literally changing his text to reflect what his teacher wanted rather than what he really felt or wanted to say, but he was only able to sustain the negativity until halfway through the new paragraph! Even the most untrained reader can easily see that the revision is worse than the original and that the ill-considered teacher feedback is to blame for this downward slide.

In the first set of exercises (Appendix A), I give the students Antonio’s entire paper, an unmarked first draft, the teacher-marked first draft, and then the revised draft after he received feedback, and I ask them to complete the following tasks, first individually, then in a small group, and then with the whole class:

1. Look at Draft A (unmarked). What observations do you have about the strengths and weaknesses of this first draft?
2. Now look at the teacher’s feedback. What observations can you make?
3. Now look at Draft B. To what extent do you think the teacher’s comments were helpful to the quality of the paper and to Antonio’s development as a writer? Why?
4. If you were Antonio’s teacher, would you have done anything differently? Explain.

The students usually identify strengths and weaknesses in Antonio’s first draft but are generally impressed with his ideas and expression. 4 They enjoy his use of an opening anecdote and find his upbeat self-discovery, as demonstrated in his conclusion, quite charming. When they

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4 In our institutional context, they are aware that Antonio’s writing is pretty good for a student at this level completing a timed task during the first week of the term.
read the teacher’s comments, they note in particular the confusing and contradictory advice given in the margins of paragraph 3 and the very directive, appropriative tone both in paragraph 3 and in the end note, where she tells him to change statements about how being a member of a minority group made him “stronger” to “weaker”—in essence, to lie about his own opinion and experience so that everything “fits.” While they do note a few helpful things about the teacher’s commentary, such as the suggestion at the end of paragraph 2 to add more detail about the “first day” story, they agree that the revised draft, in which paragraph 3 is deleted and the conclusion, as already discussed, has indeed become “weaker,” is an eye-opener as to the possible effects of teacher commentary on student revision. Ideas for what they might have done differently had they been Antonio’s teacher include making the suggestion that Antonio rewrite his thesis in the opening paragraph (rather than changing the rest of his paper to “make” it “fit [his] thesis”) and that they would read the entire paper carefully before writing comments in the margins.5

Walking my graduate students through this analysis activity not only makes the issue of appropriation extremely real to them but raises a larger and even more daunting truth: Students will, indeed, attempt to address teacher feedback in order to please us, so we as teachers need to take that responsibility very seriously so that we do not mislead them. At this point, I also briefly review for them research that demonstrates that student writers, contrary to popular myth, are far more likely to read, consider, and attempt to apply teacher suggestions than to ignore them (e.g., Conrad & Goldstein, 1999; Ferris, 1995, 1997, 2001, 2006; Goldstein & Conrad, 1990; Patthey-Chavez & Ferris, 1997; Sperling & Freedman, 1987; Straub, 1997).

Having discussed principles and guidelines for responding at some length, and then having done a hands-on discovery activity to look at teacher commentary and its effects, we move on to having the pre-service teachers look at a sample student paper and generate their own feedback. The materials for this workshop are shown in Appendix B. Briefly, it proceeds as follows:

(1) The students individually read “Tong’s” paper and complete the Essay Feedback checklist. They then identify 2–4 “feedback points” (areas in which to make constructive suggestions) that arise from this exercise (Practice Exercise 1). In this step, they are not actually writing comments yet but rather thinking about what the most significant issues are in the text that their feedback might address. Following 10–15 minutes of individual work, I have them compare notes in small groups and/or as a whole-class discussion.

(2) In the next stage (Practice Exercise 2), they begin to construct an endnote or a cover memo to Tong by writing one positive comment and two suggestions derived from the previously identified feedback points. They work on this individually for 10–15 minutes and then compare their work in small groups so that they can discuss different approaches to the task and remind each other of some of the principles and techniques of effective response.

(3) In Practice Exercise 3, they go back and write comments in the margins of “Tong’s” paper that highlight or explain the more general comments made during the previous exercise. Again, they work individually and compare notes in smaller groups.

(4) The final stage is for them to reflect on their experience and on the whole training sequence. We talk about what they struggled with and what questions they still have. I complete the

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5 A reviewer of an earlier version of this paper suggested that a helpful extension of this exercise could be to ask the students to construct an improved version of feedback to Antonio’s paper.
workshop sequence by distributing Tong’s paper with my own marginal and end comments attached, so that they can see how I approached the text and task and ask me any questions about it.

By the end of this training sequence (3–4 class hours in total), they have had several opportunities to reflect on their own past and present experiences, have received a lot of information and examples, and have gotten their “hands dirty” with actual student texts.

Still, since effective teacher response is not something one learns quickly (or in a classroom), the final stage of the training sequence involves follow-up.

**Follow-up**

Under the rubric of “follow-up,” my work with pre-service teachers includes three different components. First, after discussing “approach” and “response” with them, we talk about how they should help their own students utilize commentary effectively and hold them accountable for doing so. Many of these suggestions come from work I have done elsewhere (Ferris, 1995, 2003; Ferris & Hedgcock, 2005) and include practical tips, such as giving students time and space in class to read through the teacher’s comments and ask questions and asking or requiring students to provide a “revise-and-resubmit” cover memo with their next draft detailing how they have incorporated feedback they have received or why they have chosen not to. A larger issue to discuss is the endeavor of revision—that students will not necessarily know how to “re-see” a paper and incorporate suggestions from others without encouragement and instruction. In short, teachers should not assume that if they hand or e-mail papers back with commentary and simply say “Your next draft is due Tuesday,” student writers will understand how to revise their work.6

Second, I talk with them about qualitative and quantitative ways to evaluate their own commentary and its effectiveness. Specifically, I introduce them to a teacher commentary analysis scheme developed for a research project (Ferris, Pezone, Tade, & Tinti, 1997), and I ask them to practice using the model by classifying the comments they made to “Tong” during the in-class workshop and then using the results to respond to several reflection questions (Appendix B, Practice Exercise 4).

Third, beyond the two weeks or so we spend in class talking about teacher commentary, they are required to complete a response-and-revision project with an L2 student writer whom they are currently tutoring.7 They are asked to respond to student writing in three distinct ways: “traditional” handwritten commentary, a face-to-face conference, and e-mailed feedback using the “Comments” function found in Microsoft Word (or its equivalent). Then they must collect student revisions written after students have received their feedback. They write a short essay in which they compare and contrast the three commentary approaches and discuss which appeared to work best for them and their tutees and why. The instructions for this project are shown in Fig. 5.

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6 Students in this graduate seminar are also required to submit a portfolio of essays responding to assigned course readings, and they must complete revisions after receiving peer and teacher feedback. Though some resist and resent this assignment, claiming that they are not “process” or “multiple-draft” writers, when forced to go through the steps, many grudgingly admit that they have learned some new things about how revision can improve their own writing and certainly how beneficial it can be for novice L2 student writers.

7 This course requires all students to have an ongoing tutoring relationship with one or more L2 student writers. While they are expected to make their own tutoring arrangements, I offer to assist them by contacting the ESL writing teachers in my department. The final tutoring project, which includes this response-and-revision assignment, is worth a substantial portion of their course grade.
During the course of your tutoring, you must complete each of the following activities at least once. The ordering and timing of these activities is up to you and your tutee.

a. Cyber-Tutoring for one response/revision round (see Ferris & Hedgecock, 2005, pp. 372-373, Application Activity 9.4). If you are comfortable with the Microsoft Word (or equivalent) features entitled “Comments” and “Track Changes,” you might consider incorporating them into your cyber-tutoring. Keep copies of the student’s initial draft, your e-mail correspondence, and the student’s revision(s).

b. Face-to-face conferencing for one response/revision round (see Ferris & Hedgecock, Ch. 5). You will obtain (from the student) a copy of a paper that the student is currently working on (it can be any draft). Read the paper prior to meeting with the student, making notes or pencil checks in the margins about issues you would like to discuss with the writer. Then meet with the student, spending a minimum of 15-20 minutes discussing the student’s thoughts about the paper thus far, any questions or suggestions you might have, and any response or questions the student might have about your feedback. Keep copies of the draft on which you conferenced, the student’s revision of that paper, and any notes you took before, during, or after your conference. You may wish to audiotape the conference for future reference.

c. Written commentary (handwritten) on one draft of a student’s paper. Keep copies of the student’s paper with your comments and of the student’s revision following your feedback.

As part of your final tutoring report, you must submit the following:
A 2-3 page analysis of your response-and-revision experiences in activities a-c above. Discuss (a) What you learned from these responding exercises, including any struggles you had; (b) The effects you observed of your feedback on the student’s revisions; and (c) A comparison and contrast of the three different responding methods (handwritten commentary, cyber-tutoring, and face-to-face conferencing) — which method did you like best/least, and why, and which method seemed to work best/least for the student writer. Appropriate citations to course readings are required.

Fig. 5. Response-and-revision assignment.

This semester-long project gives them real-life practice in working with a student writer and seeing firsthand how the response-and-revision process can work or go off-track. The results are fascinating: While some trainees insist that face-to-face conferences are the only way to go, others found that the time and distance provided by cyber-tutoring worked well for them and their tutees, and some noted that while they and their tutees felt more comfortable with conferences, the revision results were better with written commentary because the student had a clear record of the tutor’s feedback. This exercise illustrates for me and for them that there really are different and legitimate ways to respond to student writing that may vary across students, teachers, and specific contexts.

Specific considerations for language-focused feedback

To this point, everything I have described about the training sequence I use with pre-service teachers refers primarily to teacher feedback that is focused on students’ content, ideas, and global organization rather than language issues or errors (though many of the principles, such as being selective, prioritization, etc., still apply). I explain to my graduate students that I treat the topic of error feedback separately not because I necessarily feel that teacher feedback on content and form should be kept separate, but because there are specific issues and techniques for responding to language concerns that warrant distinct attention. Thus, I spend a separate week
1. What is an error? Should we mark for “errors” or “style”?
2. What kinds of errors do ESL writers most typically make?
3. Should error feedback be selective or comprehensive?
4. Should error feedback focus on larger or smaller categories or types?
5. Should feedback be direct or indirect?
6. Should errors be labeled or located?
7. Should error feedback be given in the text or in an end note?
8. How can teachers conserve energy and avoid burnout in responding to L2 student writers’ errors?

Fig. 6. Error feedback: issues, questions, and options.

This one-week training sequence begins again with reflection questions adapted from Ferris and Hedgcock (2005, Chapter 7). The two most interesting observations that arise from this whole-class discussion are that most of these graduate students do not have a distinct “editing phase” as part of their writing process but, in fact, edit constantly as they write, and that they have a number of strategies they use to edit their own work, most of which they have never thought about prior to this discussion, and some of which they admit are not as effective as they would have hoped. We also talk about their fears and questions about providing error feedback to L2 student writers. The most prevalent fear (which someone nearly always sheepishly admits) is that they will confuse or mislead students by providing “incorrect corrections” because of their own discomfort with grammar rules and terminology.

We then turn to discussing the debate over whether error feedback is effective (Ferris, 1999, 2004; Truscott, 1996, 1999), a definition of “error,” and an overview of what the “treatment of error” (Ferris, 2002) involves. As to error feedback itself, we talk about eight “issues, questions, and options” (see Fig. 6). My views on these topics have been covered extensively elsewhere (Ferris, 2002, 2003, 2004; Ferris & Hedgcock, 2005), and I walk them through the arguments and/or research on these questions and, where I have a strong opinion (e.g., on marking errors in larger categories, such as “verbs,” versus smaller categories, such as “verb form” or “modals”), I make my case for it. This presentation also includes a number of examples of errors from student texts and teacher markings of those errors. Then, using “Tong’s” essay again (which they had examined carefully the week before), we do a two-step workshop in which they identify, number, and chart the language errors in seven pre-determined categories and then practice constructing error feedback using one or more of the options outlined for them in the earlier presentation. We then discuss a number of questions about difficulties they encountered or choices they made in marking errors. All workshop materials (with the exception of Tong’s essay, which is included in Appendix B), may be found in Appendix C.

While many L2 writing scholars and teachers continue to experience some queasiness about whether error feedback is appropriate or helpful, in a course on teaching L2 writers, the discussion of how to help students with language problems is one of the most important topics on the syllabus, one of the ways in which working with L2 writers is legitimately most distinct from teaching L1 writers. Thus, in addition to this in-class discussion, presentation, and workshop, students must incorporate two distinct types of “error conferences” into their tutoring project and write up an analysis of their findings. The procedures for both may be found in Ferris and

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8 This is followed in my syllabus by a separate week on peer response, which touches again on many of general feedback issues raised in the discussion of teacher response.
Hedgcock (2005, Fig. 7.3). The first type is conceptually similar to a miscue analysis in evaluating students’ reading. The student and tutor each have a copy of the student’s paper. The student is asked to read it aloud and is advised to orally make any corrections on the spot if s/he notices any errors. The tutor makes notes in one color ink on his/her copy of the paper as to errors the student is able to catch and correct. Then the tutor reads the paper aloud, stopping at points of errors that the student missed in the first reading, to see if the student can catch the error when it is called to his/her attention by the tutor’s pause. The tutor notes these corrections in a different color ink. Then the tutor and the student discuss what they found. My graduate students note that, in doing this exercise, they get a very clear idea of the patterns of error that the student is truly unaware of and unable to correct without assistance—but also that they and the student writers are both pleasantly surprised at how many errors the writer can find and self-correct through this simple exercise. The tutors have also commented that in some instances, these conferences are very time-consuming (and frustrating), and that perhaps a shorter excerpt from the text would serve the purpose equally well.

The second conference involves the student submitting a paper, the tutor highlighting errors they have found in several categories (but not labeling or correcting them), giving the paper back to the student, and the student then numbering, charting, and correcting the marked errors. These materials are the sources for the conference. The tutor reviews with the student errors made in charting and in self-editing and asks the student for insights as to mistakes they made and why they could not successfully categorize or self-correct the errors even when the errors are pointed out for them. This process gives the student and teacher insight as to the student’s linguistic and metalinguistic knowledge (or lack thereof) and increased awareness of the student’s editing strategies and their relative (lack of) success. These required error conferences benefit the student writers (tutees) themselves because they provide a forum for focused attention on areas of their writing about which they typically feel very anxious and in which they need a lot of help. They benefit the pre-service teachers (tutors) because they provide in-depth, contextualized, and analytic practice in recognizing and dealing with students’ written errors.

Though these three weeks of in-class instruction and practice, together with the out-of-class assignments, admittedly leave some of my graduate students “wanting more” (to quote a recent essay), they at least are well grounded in the issues and struggles they face and the range of techniques and choices available to them. While only time and additional experience will build their confidence and their skills in responding to student writing, my hope is that they will at least have some materials to review and fall back on.

Response training for in-service instructors

As mentioned at the beginning of this article, over the years I have had occasion to speak to in-service teachers on issues surrounding teacher commentary and error feedback. These instructors have included L2 writing instructors, other writing instructors, and faculty across other academic disciplines. While many of the principles and techniques outlined above are also helpful, and even eye-opening, to these more experienced teachers, I have found myself presenting the material from some different angles and even adding a few things that perhaps would be premature for the pre-service audience. I will briefly outline the areas of difference below.

Approach

I talk to these diverse groups of instructors about why they respond to student papers: to justify a grade? Because students (or supervisors) expect them to? To provide formative feedback that
will help students with current papers and/or with future writing in their class or beyond it? The purpose for response will determine in a large part how they will approach the task. Particularly when talking with instructors who assign and evaluate student writing, yet who are not writing instructors, it is important to acknowledge that the techniques and advice that might be given to composition instructors cannot and should not be rubber-stamped onto classes where class-wide multiple-drafting with between-draft teacher feedback for every student might not be feasible.

**Considering diverse students**

When speaking with instructors who are not trained to work with L2 writers, it is important to confront some of the fears and even resentment some of these teachers feel about dealing with these students and their texts. Recently, I sat on an interview panel to hire new composition lecturers. One of the interview questions asked about the candidate’s experience and strategies with having multilingual student writers in the same class as native speakers. An otherwise stellar candidate responded, “I am not trained as an ESL teacher,” and added that she would outsource such students to the campus writing center or refer them to web sites—basically, that she felt no personal responsibility to take any extra initiative to meet their needs. This response not only saddened me, it angered me to the point that I argued strongly (and unsuccessfully) against hiring her. In contrast, other interviewees talked about how they would give those students extra attention, meet with them one-to-one during their office hours, talk with them about their language backgrounds and how it might inform or interfere with their writing in English, and so forth. When I am speaking to faculty who are not trained as ESL teachers, I try to steer them toward the latter set of responses, encouraging them, for instance, to allow students they perceive as at-risk to submit preliminary drafts of assignments for feedback or to revise them later, even if such options are not practical or necessary for the entire class.

**Self-evaluation**

As noted by Richards and Lockhart (1996), “In-service workshops designed to improve teaching skills often have only short-term effects and rarely involve teachers in an ongoing process of examining their teaching” (p. 2). Thus, a final topic I broach with in-service instructors is ways to evaluate the effectiveness of their own feedback. I tell them that I assume their attendance at this workshop or conference means that they care about their feedback and about their students’ progress and want to improve the effectiveness of their techniques. So after going through some options and suggestions, I suggest four distinct ways they might look at their own responses and their effects on student writers. The first two are the quantitative and qualitative evaluation tools already discussed (Appendix B, Practice Exercise 4) in the section on preparing pre-service teachers. The other two involve tracing the effects of their own commentary on students’ subsequent revisions (see Ferris, 1997, and Fig. 7) and surveying their students on reactions to and preferences regarding teacher commentary (see Ferris, 1995, and Fig. 8). While most teachers would not likely utilize all four options, they might try one or more, at least with a sampling of their students’ writing. Generally speaking, I find that writing

1. Not revised
2. Positive effects
3. Mixed effects
4. Negative effects

Fig. 7. Tracing the effects of commentary on student revision or subsequent writing (see Ferris, 1997).
instructors and faculty across the disciplines are all very eager to receive practical advice about feedback and how to help student writers most effectively—and they are highly motivated to feel that the substantial time and energy they utilize in reading and responding to student writing has been well spent.

Final thoughts

Teacher educators preparing current and future teachers to respond to student writing face an uphill battle. First, response to student writing is extremely challenging to do well, and it takes considerable reflection and experience—not to mention a basic commitment to devoting the energy it takes to really accomplish the task successfully—so in preparing teachers, considerable thought must be given to breaking down the principles and the task into language and steps that different teachers in diverse contexts can utilize. Second, the teachers being prepared feel antipathy towards the topic and the task. Pre-service teachers can feel something close to terror: will my feedback tear the heart out of my students? Will it harm their writing and impede their progress? And—will the effort that good feedback clearly requires mean that as a writing teacher, I will never have a life outside of work? One comment I always get from pre-service trainees is that they cannot believe how much time they spend in responding to just one or a few student papers, and they cannot fathom how they can possibly cope with an entire class or even several classes. In contrast, while in-service teachers recognize (albeit grudgingly) that they probably cannot opt out of the responsibility to provide feedback, they feel frustrated and resentful about the time it takes and uncertain as to whether, at the end of the day, they are really helping anyone.

And yet, as any experienced instructor knows, teacher feedback is a large part of the package of being a writing teacher. Some would argue that it is the biggest and most significant part. As with any other type of work, we can do it well or we can do it poorly. Recently I was in an airport van in Chicago, and the driver was communicating with his dispatcher. Clicking off his transmitter in disgust, the driver commented, “Some people never get any better at doing their jobs!” Antonio’s teacher had over 20 years experience as an ESL composition instructor when she provided the feedback discussed in this paper. As Richards and Lockhart (1996) put it, “Experience is the starting point for teacher development, but…it is necessary to examine such experience systematically” (p. 4). Experience alone will not make a teacher an effective responder, but solid principles, useful techniques, and thoughtful reflection and evaluation probably will. Teacher educators can play a very important role in helping classroom teachers transform a typically tedious and tiring task into one that is satisfying, creative, and even stimulating. But it will not be easy.
References


Appendix A

Activity: Analyzing Teacher Commentary & Its Effects

Background: Antonio was a freshman student originally from Mexico. He had been in the U.S. for five years and had graduated from a Sacramento-area high school. Last fall he took LS 86 (an ESL reading/writing class two semesters before the college composition level). The attached essay drafts are from an assignment in which students were asked to write on the “effects of being members of a minority group.”

Task:

1. Look at Draft A (unmarked). What observations do you have about the strengths and weaknesses of this first draft?

2. Now look at the teacher’s feedback. What observations can you make?

3. Now look at Draft B. To what extent do you think the teacher’s comments were helpful to the quality of the paper and to Antonio’s development as a writer? Why?

4. If you were Antonio’s teacher, would you have done anything differently? Explain.

Antonio’s Paper (Draft A)

“Going to another country will be perfect for you,” my father told me that right before we moved to California. He told me that because none of my two sisters didn’t go to college, so he taught that I was going to do the same thing as they did. I lived in Mexico for fourteen years, I came to the United States without knowing a single word of English. At the beginning I was afraid because I didn’t know nobody, I didn’t know the language and the culture was so different. Being a member of a minority group has effected me negatively because I being descrimineted so many times that I lost the count.

Being a member of a minority family is so hard, that when I came to the U.S. I never imagine that this would happen to me. For example the first day I went to school, in my English class most of the students were making fun of me just by the fact that I didn’t know English. In my country I never passed by this situation before, so this situation really desmotivated me to go to school.
After all this struggle I think my father was right to bring me to this country because I have more opportunities here than in Mexico, for example know I know two languages, being a minority made me more stronger in the way I think, I understand more about other cultures. For example, some people have a way of dressing, which are only allow to wear certain things and sometimes even only expose certain parts of the body. Also I learned about that some people have different ideals, which other people see this unusual and strange but we have to accept and respect other cultures.

I understand both of my cultures and this makes me feel good about my self because I know what my identity is and I feel proud of who I am. Being a minority is like journey, is like a adventure, like story that at the begining you passed by a lot of obstacles but at the end there is a happy ending. Each one of my cultures have special things that I like and enjoy very much. For example the language that is spoken, traditions that each one has, beliefs, customs, and ideals. I wouldn’t change any of this for nothing and I’m very happy with who I am.

Antonio’s Paper: Draft B (Revision)

“Going to another country will be perfect for you,” my father told me right after we moved to California. He told me that because neither of my two sisters went to college, so he realize I was going to do the same thing as they did. I lived in Mexico for fourteen years. I came to the United States with out knowing a single word of English. At the beginning I was afraid because I didn’t know anybody. I didn’t know the language and the culture was so different. Being a member of a minority group has effected me negatively because I been discriminated so many times that I lost count.

Being a member of a minority family is so hard, that when I came to the United States I never imagined that this would happen to me. For example the first day I went to school, in my English class most of the students were making fun of me just for the fact that I didn’t know English. In my country I never went thru this situation, so this situation really desmotivated me to go to school. But anyhow, the next day I went to school, and the rest of the days even know they made fun of me.
This class was like my worst long nightmare I had in my life, but what I feel proud of my self is because I didn’t drop the class.

Being a minority for me is like a bad journey, or like a nightmare with out a ending or like a story that at the beginning you go thru a lot of obstacles. Each of my cultures have a special things that I like and enjoy very much. For example the language that is spoken, traditions that each one has, beliefs, customs, and ideals. I wouldn’t change any of this for anything in the world.

“Going to another country will be perfect for you,” my father told me that right before we moved to California. He told me that because none of my two sisters didn’t go to college, so he taught that I was going to do the same thing as they did. I lived in Mexico for fourteen years, I came to the United States with out knowing a single word of English. At the begining I was afraid because I didn’t know nobody, I didn’t know the language and the culture was so different. Being a member of a minority group has effected me negatively because I being descriminated so many times that I lost the count.

Being a member of a minority family is so hard, that when I came to the U.S. I never imagine that this would happen to me. For example the first day I went to school, in my English class most of the students were making fun of me just by the fact that I didn’t know English. In my country I never passed by this situation before, so this situation really desmotivated me to go to school. –What happened? You forgot the ending to your story. What were the bad effects on you? Did you drop out?

After all this struggle I think my father was right to bring me to this country because I have more opportunities here than in Mexico, for example know I know two languages, being a minority made me more stronger in the way I think, I understand more
about other cultures. For example, some people have a way of dressing, which are only allow to wear certain things and sometimes even only expose certain parts of the body. Also I learned about that some people have different ideals, which other people see this unusual and strange but we have to accept and respect other cultures.—*Why? Explain why this is important.*

I understand both of my cultures and this makes me feel good about my self because I know what my identity is and I feel proud of who I am. Being a minority is like journey, is like a adventure, like story that at the beginning you passed by a lot of obstacles but at the end there is a happy ending. Each one of my cultures have special things that I like and enjoy very much. For example the language that is spoken, traditions that each one has, believes, customs, and ideals. I wouldn’t change any of this for nothing and I’m very happy with who I am.

*Antonio: This is a very good draft! Par. #2 has a great topic. Now add more specific details! Show me why the situation made you lose your motivation. Par. 3 has a good idea but it does not fit your thesis. Change it to “weaker”! Add more specific details in your example.*

### Appendix B

#### Teacher Commentary

**Practice Exercise 1: Identifying Possible Feedback Points**

*Background:* “Tong” wrote the attached essay on the topic of “lies,” based upon a brief newspaper article the class had read the day before, during a 50-minute class period during the first week of the semester. The prompt specifically was:

*Background:* Goodrich points out that there are many reasons why people lie and that there may be appropriate times to lie as well as times when lying may be harmful.
**Task:** Considering these arguments, please write a clear, well organized essay that answers the following question:

*Are lies always harmful or sometimes appropriate?*

You must specifically cite ideas from the reading using appropriate summary and/or quotation(s). **Also be sure to include ideas from your own experience and/or the lives of people you know to support your opinion.**

**Your task:** Read Tong’s paper (p. 2) and complete the “Essay Response Form” (p. 3), which was derived from the departmental course grading criteria. Then identify 2-4 possible feedback points, based upon your reading of the paper, considering both the task and the grading criteria.

**Possible Feedback Points:**

1. ____________________________________________________________

2. ____________________________________________________________

3. ____________________________________________________________

4. ____________________________________________________________

What, in your view, is the order of importance of these feedback points?

_____________________________________________________________

“Tong”

| Everyone have been a liar once in their life. People who lie intentionally to harm others are bad people and their lies are harmful too. However, there are lies that are done with good intention. So, there are times that lies are appropriate. A lie is either a good or bad one base upon the liar’s intention. Only one person can really tell whether a lie is intended to harm or do good. Many people lie with good intention. There were times where kids were upset that they didn’t get to finish their candy. Parents are not evil. Many parents would lie that they would like to have some candy too in order to reduce the amount of candy their kid is consuming. The kid may realize that the parents may just set the candy aside and accuse them of lying, but the parent’s intention was good. If the kid would continue on to finished the candy it would be bad for the kid’s teeth and health. When parents lie its usually not that they are intentionally |
trying to harm, but to provide the kid with good 
teeth and health in the future.

Some people lie when judging others. In the 
article “Lies Are So Common Place, They Almost 
Seem Like The Truth,” by Terry Lee Goodrich, the 
author points out that most guest at a dinner would 
ever said a prepare meal was terrible. Instead, most 
would lie and complement the meal. Many people do 
so to protect the other person’s feelings. The 
intention was not to offend a friends feelings after all 
the hard work he had done to get dinner ready. 
Sometimes it is better to lie and not hurt your 
friends.

Lying can sometimes be necessary. An 
example is when you feel threaten by the situation 
that is given then lying may be the only options. 
There are times where you need to protect yourself 
and the only way to do so is by lying. No matter how 
bad the situation maybe majority of the people lie 
with good intention. If they were to told the truth 
they would of face serious problem. Protecting 
yourself is always good intentions.

Lying is such a negative word. However, if use 
correctly with good intentions lying can be 
appropriate. Wanting the best for your child is a 
good intention. To appreciate your friend’s hard work 
is a good intention. Protecting yourself also is a good 
intention. So, lying is appropriate if use with good 
intentions.

Sample Essay Feedback Checklist

I. Response to Prompt/Assignment

_____ The paper responds clearly and completely to the specific instructions in the prompt or assignment.
_____ The essay stays clearly focused on the topic throughout.

II. Content (Ideas)

_____ The essay has a clear main idea or thesis.
_____ The thesis is well supported with several major points or arguments.
_____ The supporting points are developed with ideas from the readings, facts, or other examples from the 
writer’s own experiences or observations.
_____ The arguments or examples are clear and logical.
_____ Opposing viewpoints have been considered and responded to clearly and effectively.

III. Use of Readings

_____ The writer has incorporated other texts into his/her essay.
_____ The ideas in the readings have been reported accurately.
The writer has used summary, paraphrase, and quotations from the readings to strengthen his/her paper.

The writer has mastered the mechanics of incorporating ideas from other texts, including accurate use of quotation marks and other punctuation, accurate verb tenses, appropriate identification of the author & title, and effective integration of quotations into the writer’s own text.

IV. Organization

There is a clear beginning (introduction), middle (body), and end (conclusion) to the essay.

The beginning introduces the topic and clearly expresses the main idea.

Each body paragraph includes topic sentences which are directly tied to the main idea (thesis).

Each body paragraph is well organized and includes a topic sentence, supporting details, and a summary of the ideas.

Coherence devices (transitions, repetition, synonyms, pronoun reference, etc.) are used effectively within and between paragraphs.

The conclusion ties the ideas in the body back to the thesis and summarizes why the issue is interesting or important.

V. Language & Mechanics

The paper is spell-checked (typed essays only).

The paper is proof-read and does not have serious and frequent errors in grammar, spelling, typing, or punctuation.

The paper is double-spaced and has appropriate margins all around.

The paper is legible (handwritten papers).

Practice Exercise 2: Constructing an Endnote

We have looked at Tong’s paper, identified and prioritized possible “feedback points,” and discussed characteristics of effective written commentary. Now imagine you are constructing an endnote to Tong.

First, write at least one sentence that highlights the strengths or positive aspects of the paper as you see them. Be specific!

Second, choose your top two feedback points and write a comment for each that will help Tong to understand the problem and give him some ideas about how to revise it. (For this exercise, do not focus on language issues. We will have a chance to do that later.)

1.

2.
Practice Exercise 3: Constructing Marginal Commentary

Now that you have identified feedback points and practiced constructing an end note, go back to the paper and add any marginal comments that might encourage the student and/or provide more specific illustrations of the points you raised in your end note. (Do not, for the time being, point out language issues. We’ll deal with those at a later point.)

Practice Exercise 4: Analyzing Your Commentary

1. Go through your comments (both marginal and end comments) and number them consecutively. For comments that are lengthy or which cover more than one issue, use your own best judgment as to whether to count them as one long comment or several shorter ones.

2. For each numbered comment, complete the attached chart, indicating the comment’s length, intent, the presence/absence of hedges, and the relative text-specificity of the comment. Explanations with examples for each coding category are provided below. Then complete the second, “totals” chart.

3. After completing the analysis charts, respond to the following reflection questions:
   a. Do my comments reflect my own philosophy of response? Do they reflect my own sense of (a) the major needs of this student/text; and (b) my understanding of the course grading criteria and the specific task?
   b. What is the balance between marginal and end comments?
   c. What is the balance between positive and critical comments?
   d. To what degree are my comments personal and text-specific?
   e. Are my comments clear and specific? If I have used any questions, are they helpful? Will the answers to the questions, if provided, potentially improve the paper?
   f. Have I struck the proper balance between being clear and helpful yet allowing the student to retain ownership of his paper?

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Analytic Model & Codes for Teacher Commentary

A. Comment Length (Number of Words)
1= Short (1-5 words)
2= Average (6-15 words)
3= Long (16-25 words)
4= Very Long (26+ words)
B. Comment Types

1= Ask for Information/Question
   EXAMPLE: Did you work out this problem with your roommates?

2= Direction/Question
   EXAMPLE: Can you provide a thesis statement here—What did you learn from this?

3= Direction/Statement
   EXAMPLE: This paragraph might be better earlier in the essay.

4= Direction/Imperative
   EXAMPLE: Mention what Zinsser says about parental pressure.

5= Give Information/Question
   EXAMPLE: Most states do allow a waiting period before an adoption is final—Do you feel that all such laws are wrong?

6= Give Information/Statement
   EXAMPLE: Iowa law favors parental rights. Michigan and California consider the best interests of the child.

7= Positive Comment/Statement or Exclamation
   EXAMPLE: A very nice start to your essay! You’ve done an impressive job of finding facts and quotes to support your arguments.

8= Grammar/Mechanics Comment/Question, Statement, or Imperative
   EXAMPLES:
   * Past or present tense?
   * Your verb tenses are confusing me in this paragraph.
   * Don’t forget to spell-check!

C. Hedges

0= No hedge

1= Hedge included:
   * Lexical hedges: “Maybe,” “Please,” “might,” etc.
   * Syntactic hedges: e.g., “Can you add an example here?”
   * “Positive Softeners”: “You’ve raised some good points, but...”

D. Text-Specific Comment

0= Generic comment (could have been written on any paper)
   EXAMPLE: Nice Intro

1= Text-Specific Comment
   EXAMPLE: Why is the American system better for children, in your opinion?

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Analysis Charts

<table>
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<th>Comment #</th>
<th>Length</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Hedge</th>
<th>Text-Specific</th>
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<td>Ask for Information</td>
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<td>Request/Question</td>
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<td>Request/Statement or Imperative</td>
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<td>Give Information (any form)</td>
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<td>Grammar</td>
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<th># of Hedges</th>
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Appendix C

Workshop: Finding & Classifying Errors in Student Writing

Read “Tong’s” essay again and:

- Number each error consecutively.
- Classify each error according to the categories below (from Ferris & Hedgcock, 2005, p. 291).
- Complete the chart.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Error Categories</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Verb errors</td>
<td>All errors in verb tense or form, including relevant subject-verb agreement errors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noun ending errors</td>
<td>Plural or possessive ending incorrect, omitted, or unnecessary; includes relevant subject-verb agreement errors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Article errors</td>
<td>Article or other determiner incorrect, omitted, or unnecessary.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wrong word errors</td>
<td>All specific lexical errors in word choice or word form, including preposition and pronoun errors. Spelling errors only included if the (apparent) misspelling resulted in an actual English word.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sentence structure errors</td>
<td>Errors in sentence/clause boundaries (run-ons, fragments, comma splices), word order, omitted words or phrases, unnecessary words or phrases, other unidiomatic sentence construction.</td>
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<td>Spelling errors</td>
<td>Errors in spelling (other than those already classified as word choice)</td>
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<td>Other errors</td>
<td>Errors that do not fit into previous categories (may include capitalization, punctuation not already included in above types, and so on)</td>
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<td>ERROR NUMBER</td>
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<td>TOTALS</td>
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</table>

When you are finished, compare your findings with your classmates and instructor. What problems did you encounter or what did you struggle with as you completed this exercise? What has it taught you about the processes involved in responding to students’ errors?
Responding to a Student's Language Errors (adapted from Ferris & Hedgcock, 2005, Application Activity 7.3)

Directions. Use the results of the error analysis you completed to do this exercise.

1. Choose an error feedback method (or combination of methods) we have discussed—direct correction, highlighting or underlining errors, marking errors with codes or verbal rule reminders, check marks in the margins, verbal end comment—and provide feedback as if you were going to return it to the student writer for further editing.

2. Reflect upon and discuss the following questions:
   a. What did you see as the student's biggest problems or needs, and why?
   b. Did you opt for comprehensive or selective error correction, and why?
   c. Why did you select the feedback method(s) that you did (consider both student needs as identified by your error analysis, error type, and arguments about more/less effective feedback types)?
   d. Now that you have analyzed and responded to a student's language errors, what do you think you still need to learn or practice in order to be able to provide error feedback successfully with your own students?