

# Writing Matters

Writing Across the Curriculum  
Southwestern Community College

Volume V  
Number 3

## Reminder!

Entries for the WAC Essay Awards are due to the WAC Coordinator by 4 PM on Wednesday, April 3.

Rules and entry forms can be found at [www.southwesterncc.edu/wac](http://www.southwesterncc.edu/wac) or outside Oaks 101B.

## “How is this supposed to be helpful?”

The question above runs through our students’ minds too often when we hand back writing assignments. Simply giving a grade with no feedback or giving feedback that the student doesn’t understand won’t help that student improve as a writer. And, because writing is thinking on paper, poor or nonexistent feedback won’t help a student become a better thinker, either.

So how do we give feedback that is helpful, that encourages students to become more critical in their thinking and more clear in their writing? First, look at your feedback from your students’ perspective. Second, make the process easier on YOU so you’re more likely to give the feedback students need. Finally, spend a bit of time reviewing the feedback with students, or have students respond to your feedback so you know they have read and understood it.

## Streamlining Feedback on Student Writing

Anyone who uses writing in their classes knows that reading and grading student writing is a time-consuming process. Hour after hour is devoted to grading and feedback, but there are ways to streamline the process.

Experimenting with various styles of feedback may help you find a quicker, more efficient way of completing the task. This efficiency not only makes grading easier on you, but it is also easier on your students to understand what you’re asking for and how to

improve their writing (and thinking) for the next assignment.

Good feedback is clear to students, helps them think through the issues in their writing, and causes them to become better thinkers and writers, not just better editors or error correctors.

Comments should focus first on the content of the writing and the quality of the critical thinking. Then you can turn your focus to editing/grammar/mechanics. Therefore, not only do you need to make the task easier

for you so you’ll be more willing to give feedback, but you also need to be sure that students are reading and using the feedback you’ve given. Let’s explore the options you have.

One useful way of giving students a leg-up on your writing assignments is to create a “Frequently Made Comments” handout to give in class and/or post on Blackboard. Consider including the issues you’ve seen frequently in the writing you’ve graded in the past. This handout can also

include the shorthand marks you may use to indicate these issues and explanation for ways students can avoid those mistakes in their writing.

For many of us, typing is faster than handwriting, so another option is electronic feedback. One way to offer this is to use Microsoft Word’s comment feature. In addition, Bluebeam is a useful program to create a pdf of the document and insert comments, editing marks, symbols, etc.

*continued on pg. 2*

**Criticism, like rain, should be gentle enough to nourish a man’s growth without destroying his roots. —Frank A. Clark**

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## Streamlining Feedback (cont'd)

Either way, you may find that using electronic methods will speed your grading process and make your feedback better.

Another option is to try writing or typing feedback on a separate piece of paper. If students hand in a hard-copy of their writing, using a separate piece of paper may help by giving you more space to write out full comments.

Restricting yourself to the margins of the student

paper can often stifle the feedback so it becomes truncated and difficult to understand.

Keep in mind the importance of marking but not necessarily correcting all editing mistakes. You can often let students figure it out, then turn their papers back in for a few added points. This process works even better if they also must include a brief explanation of what they fixed and why.

Above all, be sure that

your comments are clear not just to you, but (more importantly) to your students. Make sure you write exactly what you mean and also make sure that students understand the feedback. If you simply write “expand” next to a paragraph, what do you mean by that? If you write, “Not accurate analysis” would a student understand what you mean by “analysis”?

Finally, go over the feedback in class by discussing the most

frequently made mistakes, or have students write a response to your feedback so you know they have not only read it but understood it as well.

Giving feedback is a crucial part of helping our students learn not just to be better writers but to be better thinkers as well. By making the feedback process easier for you, you are more likely to give the kind of feedback that students will understand and find beneficial.

Have a research paper  
but you don't know what to do?

## Research RESCUE

A Complete Guide to Successful Research Writing

Seminar Dates: Tuesday, March 19, 11 a.m.  
Jackson Campus, Founders 124

Wednesday, April 3, 2 p.m.  
Jackson Campus, Founders 124

Presented by Jennifer Hippensteel (WAC Coordinator) and  
Vickie Lepore (Librarian)

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Southwestern  
COMMUNITY COLLEGE

## A Free Research Seminar for Students

Have you assigned a research project for students this semester? Do you want your students to have extra support in completing their projects successfully?

On Tuesday, Mar. 19 at 11 AM and Wednesday, Apr. 3 at 2 PM, WAC Coordinator Jennifer Hippensteel and Librarian Vickie Lepore will be offering a free research seminar to students. We will cover the research process itself and give helpful advice on writing research and using various formats. Please encourage your students to attend one of the sessions (we offer two different days and times to help with scheduling). We will meet in Founders 124.