

Providing Feedback on Students' Writing

Feedback can be defined as any input from reader to writer that provides guidance for revision. The objective of feedback is to encourage students to improve their writing.

1. When should feedback be provided?

A paper with the final grade on it is considered 'dead' by most students, and they tend to ignore the feedback on such papers. Thus, providing feedback along with the final grade is not useful. Feedback on preliminary drafts is more effective.

2. What about oral feedback?

Oral feedback is also effective on preliminary drafts, because it provides direct interaction between teacher and student and opportunities for instant clarification of meaning. For the student, talking to a teacher about his/her work and responding to the teacher's questions is a way to expand and clarify ideas and objectives.

Writing conferences could be held by appointment or on a walk-in basis. Students could be required to attend at least one such conference per term. The student should take notes to ensure that the teacher's advice is understood and remembered.

3. Should written feedback be on the margin or at the end of the paper?

If, due to time and other constraints, only one form of feedback is possible, then a comprehensive and clear endnote is preferred. As there is more space at the end of the paper, the feedback is likely to be clearer, more thorough, and easier to read. However, a judicious combination of both marginal and endnotes is strongly recommended when time permits.

Marginal notes are immediate and proximate—they are given at the exact point in the paper where the issue occurs, whereas endnotes allow the teacher to provide general comments and prioritize the points to be made. The following **procedure** is useful when writing both marginal and endnotes:

1. Read the entire paper through at least once without providing any feedback.
2. Read the paper again, paying attention to the most important issue of content and organization that you might address.
3. Compose your endnote, which should be comprehensive but selective. Address the major points clearly but don't overwhelm the student by attempting to address every single problem in the paper. Focus on the most important issues.
4. Go back and add marginal comments that highlight specific examples of the general points you made in the endnote.

The following is an example of a good **endnote**:

Sarah, An interesting topic and a well organized paper. Good examples and a fine analysis of Hong Kong's economic problems. But your final paragraph came as a surprise because you hadn't mentioned the threat of *Shenzhen*'s new port before. This para belongs earlier in the paper. When you revise, please pay special attention to articles and tenses. I am looking forward to reading your final version.