Praise, Question, Wish: Making Writing Feedback Matter

1. Encourage students to write early and often in a low-stakes environment. In order for this to be useful, you need not personally respond to—or even read—everything they produce.

2. Give students writing models—student writing, professional writing, your writing—and discuss those models in class or conferences. When you're talking about an article for content, spend a minute asking students to actually notice how the piece is constructed. Where's the argument? Can we point to it? What parts does this article have, and how does the writer emphasize the relationship between them? What works well? What could work better? Why?

3. One benefit of group discussion of writing models is that students, when confronted with poor writing, are more likely to say "wow, this is lousy" than you are. Let them.

4. Make your grading standards explicit at the time you give an assignment and consider using the prompt itself to model the kind of writing you hope to receive.

5. If there are specific writing problems that make you, personally, want to open your office window and jump, tell your students what they are. Students can't read your mind and if they knew as much as you did about style, clarity, and the writing conventions of your discipline, they wouldn't be in your program.

6. Whenever possible, spend your commenting energy on drafts rather than finished work. Use **Praise, Question, Wish** as a framework to acknowledge what the writer has already accomplished, focus on what is ambiguous or underdeveloped in this draft, and communicate specific expectations for the next draft.

7. Alternately, when you comment on drafts, particularly early ones, aim to follow the **Rule of Three**. Once you have identified three things for a writer to accomplish, stop. When the writer has made a good-faith effort to make progress on those three things, ask her come back for three more things. Prioritize efficient but frequent communication.

8. Consider replacing hours spent marking drafts or final products with conferences where writers mark their own work. You can accomplish more in a 20-minute discussion than you think you can. In a class, consider supplementing these sessions with guided collaboration between students and require them to evaluate the help they receive.

9. Help writers separate editing from revision. Do not copy-edit student work that isn't otherwise ready to be assessed or submitted for publication. Being copy-edited makes writers very attached to the 'fixed' sentences. If they have fixed garbage, you will see it again. (If the very idea of this is making you die inside, consider limiting early copy-edits to one exemplary page.)

10. If you feel you need to comment extensively to justify grades, figure out how to make your grading standards more transparent and explicit up front (see #3).

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