

Steps I Take When Evaluating A Paper

Writing Center Tutor Training

Fall 2005

A. If there is a paper:

1. What kind of feedback does the person want?

- Have the writer do a self-evaluation either formally or informally through asking questions.
- Writers at all levels often only want a certain kind of feedback: when (if ever?) are you obliged to tell them more than they want to hear?
- Resources: Editing Section of the Hum 110 Writing Folder

2. What are the most serious problems in the paper?

• Responding to Problems in Focus and Organization

1. Scan the Paper for its thesis and focus
2. Clues:
 - a) paragraph length (are there a lot of short paragraphs? perhaps the student has tried to cover too much territory and has not developed any of the ideas in sufficient length)
 - b) first and last paragraphs (do they have a common theme and emphasis?)
 - c) the self evaluation is helpful for this since it asks students to identify the focus of their paper: often you can get them to use this as their thesis.
 - d) predictable structure, openings, and closure
3. Tactics: have students diagram their paper and paragraphs. Have them write analytical topic sentences. Have them brainstorm on underdeveloped sections. Use handout on more interesting intros and conclusions (in folder).

• Responding to Questions of Development

1. Scan the paragraphs for support and analysis. Does the essay merely paraphrase other sources? Has the writer understood the material?
2. Clues: no quotes, no analysis between quotes
3. Tactics: take student through brainstorming process. Model how to analyze evidence.

• Responding to Questions of Style

1. Possible problems: pseudoacademic style that makes the writing incomprehensible. Poor choice of emphasis. Problems of relation. Words and Phrases. Grammatical Construction. Lack of Economy. Lack of precision, vividness, concreteness (see the Walvoord article in the "Style" section).
2. Tactics: ask student to read a passage aloud. Discuss audience and writers they admire. Ask them what their rhetorical goals are for their style. Use works by one of the following authors to help them through their lack of clarity and grace: Barbara Wolford, Joseph Williams, Richard Lanham (the first two are in the reader, the latter is a book in the library called *Revising Prose*.)

• Responding to Questions in Grammar, Punctuation, & Spelling

1. Unless the paper is unintelligible, I would suggest that this be the last thing you emphasize. This would be a perfect topic for a weekly student for the last 10 minutes of a session.
2. Tactics: identify one or two key problems. Point out the error and how to locate it. Model how to fix one of the sentences and ask the student to find and fix other ones.

B. If there is not yet a paper:

1. Have the student talk or freewrite for 5-10 minutes.
2. Model different modes of brainstorming: clustering, outlining, diagramming.
3. At the end of the session ask the student to propose a thesis sentence, list what evidence would be needed to support such an assertion, and construct a possible outline.