Responding to writing assignments efficiently & effectively

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Today I will offer some ideas intended to help you respond to students' writing more efficiently and effectively. I begin with practical suggestions you should be able to use in 106 immediately. Then I offer principles adaptable to upcoming assignments, both this semester and in the future.

Practical techniques relevant for most responses

1. Begin responding soon after assignments are submitted.
2. Quickly read all student work before starting to make comments.
3. Use a timer to limit response time per student.
4. Using a pencil, make your comments neatly—or type and print.
5. Offer praise as well as constructive criticism.

Designing assignments with response in mind

1. Offer clearly stated objectives carefully articulated with course goals.
2. Make assignments as short as possible! Quality beats quantity every time.
3. Describe your approach to providing feedback. Make your expectations for revision clear.
4. Test your assignments with students and other readers *before* distributing them.
5. Include assignment design and usefulness of responses in course evaluations and feedback.

Approaches to response

1. Limit detailed comments: offer one paragraph for the whole assignment, or respond only to certain sections, or focus on just a few objectives.
2. Deliver a brief response, and offer more detail via individual conferences.
3. Commission a prior review—a self-evaluation or peer critique—then build on it.
4. After reading all submitted work, create a form based on assignment objectives, course objectives, and frequent errors observed in student work, then fill it out for each student.
5. Learn to differentiate between common issues in writing: poor understanding of (or attention to) writing assignments; trouble with content; lack of familiarity with disciplinary genres, writing processes, or rhetorics; ineffective (or hasty) revision; careless errors or under-achievement; or genuine problems with organization, usage, or mechanics. (This is *definitely* a long-term project.)

Resources

See http://dtext.org/profdev/response/ for a bibliography and examples of the handouts I shared today.

I am happy to discuss your strategies for response, assignment design, etc. Stop by my office or write to arrange a time we can talk.