



# RESPONDING TO STUDENT WRITING

Roger Graves  
Director, Writing Across the Curriculum  
University of Alberta

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Director, Writing Across the Curriculum  
Professor, EFS

**Just published**

Five strategies to improve student writing in your courses

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Recent presentations to classes  
This page contains links to slides displayed at presentations given to classes.  
2013-2014 Presentations  
2009-2013 Presentations

**Research and faculty presentations**  
Genre by Numbers  
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Group writing Tutorials: Nursing  
Group writing tutorials: Do they improve student writing?  
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Studying Assignments as a Catalyst for Change  
UAlberta's Approach to Writing Instruction  
Building a better scientific writer: Strategies for Biology Instructors  
1 Big Thing keynote address: "Making it Real: Re-thinking Student Writing in your Course"

**About Me**  
As Director of Writing Across the Curriculum, I work with faculty and students across the university to improve student writing. I consult with instructors and departments, and I teach writing in a wide variety of courses when students in those courses are starting a writing assignment. The link to Recent Presentations to Classes will take you to slides from these presentations.  
I am the author, co-author, or editor of ten books and 26 articles, including *Writing Instruction in Canadian Universities*. My current research interests include writing assignments across disciplinary fields, assessment of group writing tutorials, and rhetorical approaches to text encoding. The SSHRC-funded research project on writing assignments across the curriculum extends our work at the University of Alberta across Canada.  
Currently I serve on the Steering Committee of the the International Society for the Advancement of Writing Research (2014-2017), as Past President of the Canadian Association for the Study of Discourse and Writing (CASDW), as a member of the editorial boards for *College English* and the *IEEE Proceedings on Technical Communication*, and as publisher of *Inkshed Publications*, the publications initiative of the Canadian Association for the Study of Language and Learning (CASLL).

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**Five strategies to improve writing in your courses**  
January 15, 2014  
Found in: [Managing your career](#) | [Surviving grad school](#) | [Articles](#)  
**Five strategies to improve writing in your courses**  
How to get your students to submit better assignments.  
by Roger Graves

**Entrance testing is not the answer**  
December 18, 2013  
**Entrance testing is not the answer**  
University students need to learn to write for different disciplines and assignments, and testing the skills they learned in high school isn't relevant to what they will need to learn.  
by Roger Graves and David Slomp

**Why Students Struggle with Writing**  
September 11, 2013  
**Why students struggle with writing**  
What to do about it.  
by Roger Graves

<http://www.ualberta.ca/~graves1/>

# Writing Across the Curriculum



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### Course-Based Writing Tutorials For Your 2014-2015 Classes

Would your students benefit from a lecture and small group tutoring specifically designed around your writing assignment? If so, consider enrolling your class in Writing Across the Curriculum's group writing tutorials program!

Would you like to improve the writing of your students? Improve their learning of your lecture material? Are you looking for new ways to engage your students in your course materials? If this interests you, contact Roger Graves [roger.graves@ualberta.ca](mailto:roger.graves@ualberta.ca) or call 780.492.2169



#### What we do for individual instructors:

- meet to talk about ways to incorporate informal (short, impromptu) writing assignments into any class, small or large
- review via email any assignment you give students that has a writing component to help make it clearer for students and to help develop grading rubrics to improve the speed and accuracy of grading
- visit your class to help students get started on your writing assignments

<http://wacctl.ualberta.ca/>

### **Response can come at any stage of the writing process:**

- Thesis statements (idea generation)
- Outlines (organization)
- Drafts (coherence, development)
- Final/finished products (editing, proofreading)
- At each stage, the focus of the response should change.

# The Writing Process: A Model



## Summative/Formative

Summative evaluation/response  
sums up, totals, gives a final  
comment on a performance

=

Formative evaluation helps shape  
or form the performance in  
advance of a final judgment of it

+

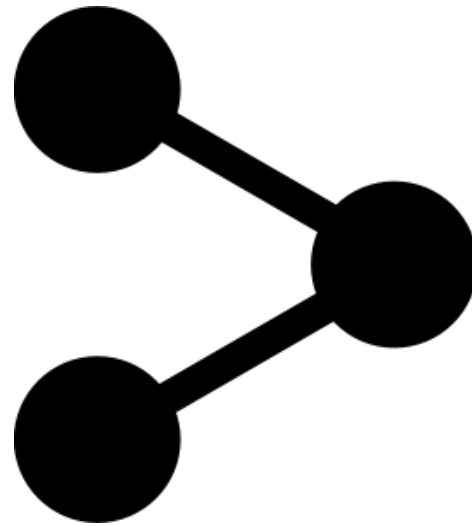
## Sample peer response questions

### Peer Feedback: Proposal Writing

1. Identify the main claims made in the proposal.
2. Using the schema on pages 114-115, identify the claim, link (because statement), reason, and evidence that are explicit or implicit in at least one of these claims.
3. Identify a rebuttal (challenge) that someone might make to one of these arguments, and then suggest how the writer could counter that rebuttal.
4. Using the proposal evaluation sheet as a guide, identify 3 areas you think the writer could improve if they revised their proposal.

## Who responds?

- Peers in class
- Centre for Writers tutors
- Friends, family
- Instructor





## Principles of response

- Respond to encourage revision rather than justify a grade
- Organize your comments into a hierarchy—most important to least important
- Comment on ideas and organization first
- Wherever possible, make positive comments
- Avoid over-commenting: students learn faster if they must find and correct their own errors

Bean, John C. *Engaging Ideas: The Professor's Guide to Integrating Writing, Critical Thinking, and Active Learning in the Classroom*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001.

## How to respond, 1

- Do not waste time on careless student work.
- Do not extensively mark grammar and punctuation.
- Address fundamental concerns first.
- Consider comments without grades.
- Use comments only for teachable moments.
- Spend more time guiding.
- Use only as many grade levels as you need (2= p/f to 13).
- Limit the basis for grading.

Walvoord, Barbara E. and Virginia Johnson Anderson. *Effective Grading: A tool for Learning and Assessment in College*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010.

### Higher-order concerns

- Does the draft follow the assignment?
- Does the writer have a thesis that addresses an appropriate problem or question?
- If the draft has a thesis, what is the quality of the argument itself?
- Is the draft organized effectively at the micro level?
- Lower-order concerns
- Are there stylistic problems that you find particularly annoying?
- Is the draft free of errors in grammar, punctuation, and spelling?

Bean, John C. *Engaging Ideas: The Professor's Guide to Integrating Writing, Critical Thinking, and Active Learning in the Classroom*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001.

### Coach

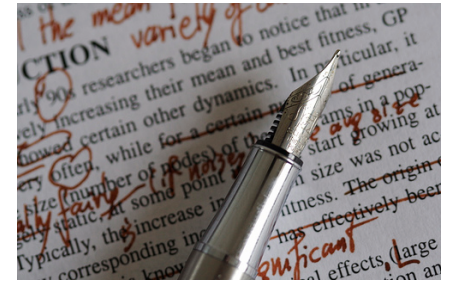
- Uses writing workshops to draft and revise student work in class
- Believes praise works better than censure
- Depends upon students to take responsibility for their learning



Source: Stephen W. Wilhoit, *The Longman Teaching Assistant's Handbook: A Guide for Graduate Instructors of Writing and Literature*. New York: Pearson Longman, 2008.

## Editor

- Focus on sentence-level errors
- Conversant with rules and conventions of standard edited English
- Every word and punctuation mark counts
- Devote much time marking essays



Source: Stephen W. Wilhoit, *The Longman Teaching Assistant's Handbook: A Guide for Graduate Instructors of Writing and Literature*. New York:

Pearson Longman, 2008.

### Academic reader

- Focus on how well the paper meets the standards of academic discourse for style, evidence, citations, sources
- If not, what must be changed?



Source: Stephen W. Wilhoit, *The Longman Teaching Assistant's Handbook: A Guide for Graduate Instructors of Writing and Literature*. New York: Pearson Longman, 2008.

# Metaphors for response

## Average reader

Read as if you were reading a magazine or newspaper—to see what the writer has to say

Speak back to the writer about what interests you, confuses you, annoys you

Source: Stephen W. Wilhoit, *The Longman Teaching Assistant's Handbook: A Guide for Graduate Instructors of Writing and Literature*. New York: Pearson Longman, 2008.

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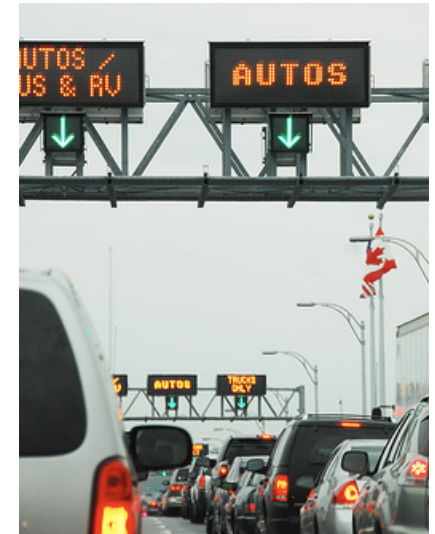
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Grant MacEwan University begins \$20M expansion



### Customs officer

- Guards the academic border to ensure only approved students pass on
- Works from a clear set of rules
- Applies the rules consistently





Which of these metaphors describes how you see yourself as a responder to student writing?

Is there another metaphor that captures what you are trying to accomplish when you respond to student writing?



# Sources

Coach photo: <http://picasaweb.google.com/lh/photo/T4NhrhxVWMh8qfkL2NbmUw>

Border shot: [http://farm1.static.flickr.com/52/131161403\\_afb1b40c45.jpg](http://farm1.static.flickr.com/52/131161403_afb1b40c45.jpg)

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