



LANGUAGE AND CULTURE BULLETIN

Information and Tips from the Office of Multilingual and Multicultural Programs

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RESPONDING TO ELL WRITING

This *Bulletin* addresses a variety of issues that English Language Learners (ELLs) bring to the writing process. Mainstream teachers need to consider these issues when responding to ELLs and helping them increase their competence as writers.

CONTEXT

ELLs differ notably from native English speakers in their response to teacher guidance and direction. Many, if not most, ELLs come from cultural traditions in which authority is valued and respected; therefore, teachers should provide clear and direct feedback on *content*, i.e., instructions on how to correct and improve texts.

PREPARING STUDENTS FOR FEEDBACK: BEING EXPLICIT

1. Explain, at the beginning, the format of the procedure to be used in responding to papers.
2. Explain the way in which feedback on form and content will be given.
3. Review a sample annotated paper on overhead transparency with the class.
4. Continue to foster questioning from students to encourage clarity of understanding feedback.
5. Encourage students to analyze and

reflect on teacher feedback by writing journal entries to summarize and respond.

RESPONDING PROCEDURE

1. Read the entire paper at least once before writing comments.
2. Read the paper again, paying attention to issues of content and organization.
3. Write a response at the end of the paper but make it selective, prioritizing the major points.
4. Go back and add marginal notations related to language features (grammar, word choice, mechanics, etc.).
5. Consider audiotaped oral feedback to help ELLs reflect on and revise their texts.
6. Be sure to balance positive and negative comments, i.e., giving constructive criticism to foster revision.
7. Minimize praise, which might actually discourage revising.

RUBRICS

The overall relationship between teacher and student is important in providing feedback. A coding sheet or checklist is a consistent framework containing terminology for providing feedback but can inhibit teachers from personalized responses

appropriate to the student and the assignment.

ERROR CORRECTION

ELLs are generally not adversely affected by feedback on language features; in fact, *not* providing feedback on language can have a negative impact on students, as most prefer a response in this area. A response to language should be elicited at the intermediate stages of the writing process, i.e., after at least one or two drafts, when organization and content become more clearly established. Written comments about language features at the end of the text are more appropriate at initial drafts, with sentence-specific comments appropriate at later drafts.

THE WRITING CONFERENCE

Suggestions. Allowing students to take the lead by eliciting responses before offering feedback may be forcing ELLs into roles they are not culturally prepared for. They may also be ill prepared to deal with the demands of language accuracy or for the reading and writing skills necessary to foster academic growth in providing feedback. ELLs may also be inhibited by teacher questioning and fostering of discussion, especially in a one-to-one conference. Another caution is that teacher comments might be incorporated verbatim because of the teacher's superior knowledge, thus leading to the teacher's 'appropriation' of the text.

Logistics. Computers can be ideal for one-to-one teacher-student interactions, allowing the teacher to move around the room as needed.

Topic. The "Garrison Method", quickly reading something the student has just finished writing (e.g., thesis statement, sample paragraph, conclusion, etc.) provides immediate feedback. A holistic reaction to the general paper or a specific focus on a feature is possible.

Conference dynamic. The most successful

conference is one in which there is ample participation by the writer, but caution is warranted because many ELLs may have differing cultural expectations or limited language ability. Explaining *why* questions are being asked can be helpful, as well as reframing questions so they can be simple and clear to be understood.

Accountability. Ask the student to write a brief journal entry to accompany the next revision. This entry should incorporate what was learned in the conference.

SUMMARY

It is helpful to keep the following in mind when responding to ELL student writing:

- *although helpful and necessary all the way through, feedback is most helpful after initial drafts;

- *response should be provided on *all* aspects of the text: content, organization, grammar, and mechanics;

- *response should be clear and concrete to assist students with revising;

- *be careful not to 'appropriate' the text;

- *ELLs generally attend to teacher response and utilize it due to culturally based values of respect;

- *teacher-student writing conferences are more complex because of language and culture issues.

Revising is "re - vising", seeing again, seeing differently; teachers responding to students' written work is important and helpful if accomplished in a graduated and calculated manner, taking into consideration the variety of factors impacting the potential for helping the student. The writing conference can similarly help the student "resee" and improve upon written work.

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