A Template for End Comments

1. **Say back:** Articulate the student’s argument/thesis/question/claim as you understand it.

2. **Identify at least one specific thing the student has done well:** If students know what they are doing well, then they are more likely to continue to do that thing well. If students are revising the piece at hand, the student has no real motivation to go back and revise unless he/she has something to build on. Avoid the “spoon full of sugar” approach; instead, specifically name what the student is doing well.

3. **Name two or three things (tops!) that the student needs to work on.** It’s tempting to identify all of the problems that need fixing, but it is unreasonable to expect students to learn everything they need to learn as writers, readers, and thinkers all at once. Learning new skills and concepts slow process. Be aware that students will sometimes backslide.

4. **Provide the student with manageable tasks that will help him/her work on these things.** Often you’ll hear students say: “I know what I need to do, but I don’t know how to do it.” Help them with the **how.** For example, if students are not defining their terms, suggest that they do the following: “Before you complete the next assignment, be sure to identify at least three key terms and define them.” Or, if a student has not understood the central argument of an assigned reading, direct the student to: “Return to the article and reread the title, the beginning, and the end (first three paragraphs and the last four). Mark key concepts and terms (words that are repeated in the title, beginning and end). Using at least three of these concepts (the ones you think are central to the author’s point), write the author’s argument in 1-2 complete sentences.” Rather than focus on the negative, this type of feedback provides students with a concrete approach and a goal for the next assignment.
Usage Errors: Strategies for Providing Feedback

We have the best of intentions when we mark or correct all of the errors in a student’s paper, but this is not the best use of our time. When we correct students’ errors, they are not likely to learn how to find and fix these problems themselves. When we cover our students’ papers with marks, they are likely to lose hope or interest. How can we mark students’ papers so that they are responsible for fixing problems?

**Minimal Marking:** Mark the lines with errors and ask the students to figure out what the problem is and fix it. One study suggests that students can find and fix 60% of their errors on their own. See Haswell.

**Look for patterns:** Mark, name, and fix one or two instances of pattern problems on one or two pages of a student’s paper. Ask the student to find and fix them in the remainder of the paper.

**Prioritize:** If a student has a number of pattern problems, don’t expect that student to learn to fix them all at once. Focus first on errors that prevent the student from conveying his/her ideas. Identify the error for the student and provide him/her with a handout or a link that explain the rules.

**Purdue’s OWL:** Others have taken the time to explain these problems and their solutions so that you don’t have to. Once you’ve identified a problem, email the student the relevant link: http://owl.english.purdue.edu/

**Ask students to keep journals:** Students need to take an active role in learning to eradicate pattern errors. Students can keep a journal of their pattern problems and refer to this journal as they proofread papers.

**Keep a list:** When you have a stack of papers to grade, instead of marking each error on the page, keep a list of errors. This way you can identify patterns for a particular student and across the class. For example, my comp students are having trouble with homonyms and they are capitalizing words that don’t need to be capitalized. Rather than respond to these issues in each individual paper, I will work with the entire class on homonyms and capitalization.

**Give students time to proofread one another’s papers:** Give students Lunsford’s top twenty errors or explain one or two common errors you’ve noticed in their papers. Students can proofread one another’s papers in light of this discussion. Try giving students ten minutes at the beginning of class on a day that a paper is due to proofread that paper.

**Build in extra time for students to proofread their own papers:** You might ask students to proofread papers the day after they were due. David Bartholomae found that when students read their drafts aloud they were able to correct many of the mistakes on their own.

**Share your strategies:** It helps to talk to our students about our writing processes. Students benefit from knowing that we write multiple drafts, we read passages aloud, and we ask peers for feedback.

**Send a student to the Reading and Writing Center with a specific goal:** RWC appointments are short. It helps the consultant make the most of his/her time if the student can say exactly what kind of help he/she needs.