

Tools for Giving Efficient, Effective Feedback to Student Writing

Fifth in a Series

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Current technologies offer a wide range of ways to comment productively on student writing. Your using these tools—in combination with the techniques described earlier in this series can help students deepen their learning and develop their proficiency.

1. Rubrics (AKA Criteria Lists)

Whether you give feedback on paper or electronically, using a rubric or list of criteria can save time, increase the consistency of your commentary, and—most important—clarify for students your expectations for their learning and writing.

A rubric can be as simple as a **table** that (1) lists the main criteria and (2) leaves room for your specific comments. For example, here's a rubric for an assignment to write a review of research:

Criterion	Score (0-5)	Comment
Has cited all key, relevant studies		
Has effectively summarized each key study		
Has effectively analyzed research trends		
Provides useful advice to future researchers		
Review is clearly organized		
Sentences are concise and well-edited		
Total	Max. 25	Overall Comment

This tool is particularly useful for students giving **peer feedback**. When used in a peer response workshop or for an online peer review assignment, the rubric is essential to helping peers give good feedback. Moreover, using the rubric for peer response deepens each student's understanding of the assignment and its goals.

Recommendation: Writing studies scholars recommend creating your own rubrics tailored to your assignments; to help you begin this process, the *VALUE Rubrics* (<http://www.aacu.org/value/rubrics>) created by the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) are a great place to get ideas about design. *Written Communication* is one of 16 areas for which AAC&U has designed generic rubrics.

2. Giving Feedback Using Smartsite (or another LMS)

UCD's learning management system (LMS), Smartsite, offers five (5!) tools for promoting student writing—and for making your feedback both easy and promptly available to your students.

- *Assignments* allows upload of paper drafts or direct writing of drafts in the program. You can type your feedback into the box provided or upload your rubric and insert comments into the table. *Assignments* allows you to write comments of any length and address each student confidentially.
- *Blogs* enables individual students or groups to write on topics you design, and gives you and the students opportunities to comment on the blogposts.
- *Chat* allows quick give-and-take on topics that you assign or that arise in class. You and peers can give feedback on views shared—and each person learns from the posts of others as ideas evolve in the written discussion.
- *Forums* (an asynchronous tool I particularly like) can either be used like *Chat* or for longer assignments, such as project proposals. The *Forum* can be set for a whole class or for subgroups, such as project teams. Your feedback and that of peers will be readable by all in the group. (When I use *Forums* to comment on group project or individual proposals, I like to have my feedback readable by the entire class, as this feedback is meant to be helpful across the project teams and class members.)
- *Wiki* (similar to Google Docs or Track Changes in Word) is meant for group brainstorming of projects or for collaborative writing of documents. Individual writers “give feedback” by making changes (additions, deletions, rewording, reorganization) in the group document and then commenting on why changes were suggested.

3. Audio and Video Feedback

These ways of giving feedback to writing are becoming more and more popular as technology makes them easier. In its *Assignments* function, Smartsite allows upload of video files as commentary, but far easier is the insertion of audio and video

feedback in the LMS Canvas, which is now being piloted at UC Davis. Audio and video can be directly recorded into the program from your computer, or files uploaded.

Next in this series: Assigning and Managing Group Writing Projects