

## **"THINGS THAT WORK"**

### Patterns of Error

While teaching 102, I found that I was detecting the same errors repeatedly in student drafts. I gathered the most common errors into a proof sheet specific to the class. I gave it to the class and we went over each of the errors, using examples from student papers and correcting them as a class while answering student questions and concerns. Creating a class-specific proof sheet to supplement the departmental sheet and the Hacker book allowed us as a class to focus in on specific errors. It also helped me in reading drafts, as I could refer students to specific numbers they might want to review in revising drafts. Providing the sheet in a "checklist" form provided students with a specific tool for proofreading their drafts--rather than listing errors, I worded specific questions they could ask themselves to check for those specific errors.

This idea could easily be adapted to any of the composition classes. I have often found that errors tend to run throughout a class as whole. Each semester, it's almost as though the entire class subconsciously fixes upon the same error, which I suddenly see in different papers, different assignments. Creating a class specific error sheet is a great way to supplement and focus the department error sheet.

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### Comments that Work

Rebecca Brittenham was my small group leader during TA orientation. She gave the best advice on grading and commenting, and I have found it extremely effective. She said you should only focus on one (at most two) things that the student should work on for the next paper--anything more and the student will be overwhelmed. I have since modified that fantastic advice. I always make sure to first point out what a student is doing well, whether that be clean writing, organization, or analysis. Then I focus on the one thing the student really needs to work on to improve for the next paper. If there's a point in the paper where they seem to start addressing this problem, I point them to that moment, perhaps even contrasting it to other moments in the paper. This strategy is especially effective when there is only one moment of connection in a student paper. I direct them to that moment and contrast it to other points in the paper. I think students always need to know what they're doing right, and they need to see that as much as seeing what they still need to work on.

I also try to emphasize revision in comments. After reading the final draft, I always skim through their rough drafts with peer comments. In my comments, I reinforce peer revision by either congratulating students on effective revision, or, even more effective, pointing out those moments when the comments I make on the final are the same as the comments a peer reviewer made on the draft. Comments are so closely connected to the grade (even in physical proximity),

so students quickly learn that peer revision is serious and can help or hurt their final grade.

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### Extended Quotation Exercise

I have always had tremendous success with this exercise. It helps students learn to work with quotation to make connection, allows students to work together to locate these connections, reinforces proofreading skills, and then provides students an extra opportunity to locate more connection.

I usually try to do this exercise during our discussion of the third essay. Placing it before the third paper can be very useful for students. I start by locating 5-7 quotations from the third essay that definitely connect in some way to our previous essays. I type these quotations up and bring them into class. Students work in groups of 3-4 on these quotations. The goal is to produce a paragraph that connects the quotation they are given to a quotation from one of the previous essays, and to explain that connection. At times, I have directed students to begin by paraphrasing the given quote, relate it briefly to the author's argument as a whole, locate a connection from another author that connects, and then explain that connection. I make it very clear that paragraphs will be collected and typed for the class to see, so they should be formal and as error-free as possible.

The next class I return with the paragraphs typed up. There are ALWAYS a host of errors in the hand-written paragraphs, and I bring them to class as is. The class as a whole reads the first group's paragraph, looking for errors. Then as a class we identify these errors and correct them. This provides an opportunity to discuss various errors as well as to discuss hard error versus sentences that are just awkward and to devise strategies for dealing with both. Then, we have corrected the paragraph, I ask the group that composed it to explain the connection they located. Then I check to see if the class sees the connection and if they have any questions for the group that located that connection. We repeat this process for every group's paragraph.

At the end of class, I tell the students that they are to choose one of the original quotations and write their own individual paragraph, connecting to the author that that particular group did NOT choose. Students see how connections can be made between the third author and either of the previous essays. I then collect these paragraphs the next day to see how individual students are working with quotation and connection.

I try to devote at least half a class to the first day of this exercise where the groups compose the paragraphs. Going over the paragraphs takes a whole class day (between finding error and discussing the connection).