

# Grading Written Work

Boba Samuels  
Manager, Writing Centre  
September 4, 2013

# Agenda: Grading Workshop

- a) Introduce **evaluation criteria and marking strategies** for academic writing
- b) Mark excerpts from two first-year HI papers—giving **summative** feedback
- c) Comment on student papers—giving **formative** feedback
- d) Share helpful resources

# What I can do for you

- ▶ Content and discipline-specific evaluation is your domain
- ▶ Focus on evaluation criteria for academic writing
  - You may not have an opportunity to learn these from your supervisor
- ▶ Make common conventions of academic writing explicit
  - Your supervisor will know these implicitly but may not make them explicit

# What I can do for you

- ▶ Focus on the most important aspects of academic writing
  - to show you how writing and independent critical thinking connect
- ▶ Suggest ways of giving formative feedback

# Four stages of the evaluation process

1. **Develop** evaluation criteria appropriate for the assignment (and share it!) – FEED UP
2. **Identify** strengths and weaknesses of papers
3. **Mark and grade:** summative feedback  
– FEED BACK
3. **Write comments:** formative feedback  
– FEED FORWARD

excerpts from Hattie & Timperley, 2007

# 3 stage strategy for marking

## 1. Quick grouping

In your first “rapid” read through, group papers (from A to F) according to evidence of intellectual grasp and sound argument

## 2. Careful reconsideration

In your second careful reading, adjust for consistency between groups and fine-tune the marks, add formative comments

## 3. Feed forward

Summarize your main judgments and provide 1 or 2 suggestions for improvement.

# Today we will

- ▶ Do a rapid assessment of
  - the **introduction** in two papers
  - **two body paragraphs** in each paper to see how the argument is developed
- ▶ Assign each paper a **tentative grade**

# Starting: What to focus on

- ▶ Is there an argument: thesis + support?
  - Most assignment types call for some form of argument (explicitly or implicitly)
  - BUT many students are more familiar with informative writing and have difficulties with this academic genre
- ▶ We start with
  - The assignment—the writing task
  - The grading criteria for the course

# The assignment

1. In **what ways** did Absolutism contribute to the development of Europe?
2. To **what extent** did the Enlightenment and Scientific Revolution contribute to the development of Europe as the dominant power?
3. **What factors** encouraged the continued imperial expansion of European states in the nineteenth century?

# The essay instructions

- ▶ Your essay should include in the first paragraph a general “**thesis statement**”, setting out the principal argument that you intend to make in your essay. The essay should then go on to **provide evidence** in support of the thesis statement through the use of selected material arranged logically and coherently.

- ▶ My emphasis

# FEED UP

- ▶ Evaluation criteria and rubrics

# O'Shea's grade description for HI106

- ▶ A papers establish a brief historical context for a **strong thesis** that is developed and supported **by good use of evidence** from the text and primary sources. The paper quotes **key primary evidence**.
- ▶ B papers may have a **strong thesis** and introduction but tend to be **more general** in their development and make **less effective use of sources** than A papers.
- ▶ C papers may be B-papers marred by **unclear** and awkward writing. The **argument is there**, but the **support is dropped in** rather than introduced and interpreted to develop the argument. Alternatively C-papers may read like a **summary or review**.
- ▶ D papers may be **summary-style** C-papers that are undermined by **poor writing**, but these problems should be substantial to push a paper over the 60 threshold, or the D-paper may simply demonstrate a lack of effort.

# Evaluating the characteristic features of writing and argument

1. LOGIC: The logic of the argument: Development, organization, focus and clarity.
  - Is the claim supported by strong developed reasons and arguments that consider alternatives and objections?
2. VOICE: The credibility of the writer.
  - Does the writer's language effectively engage the reader through careful consideration of issues, opposing viewpoints, and a direct tone?
3. CONVENTIONS: The use of standard writing conventions.
  - Does the writer use correct spelling, grammar, lexicon, and mechanics?

| *  | <b>Development, Organization, Focus and Clarity</b>  | <b>Voice</b>                                    | <b>Conventions</b>   |
|----|--|---|--|
| D  | No primary claim.  | No voice.                                       | Continual errors in usage, grammar, punctuation and spelling.                                      |
| C- | Definite, but unsupported claim.   | Extremely immature voice/language for audience. | Many errors confuse reader (4 types).  |
| C  | Definite claim supported by weak premises and warrants, overlooks stronger arguments, important objections or alternatives.  | Moderately immature voice/language.             | Many errors (3 types).   |
| B- | Definite claim. Strong but underdeveloped reasons: reader must infer sub-arguments for premises and warrants (they show relevance of evidence), and against objections or alternatives | Somewhat immature voice/language.               | Occasional errors (2 types).<br><b>Stuart Yeh,<br/>Stanford</b><br><b>Grade allotment<br/>mine</b> |

| *  | <b>Development, Organization, Focus and Clarity</b>   | <b>Voice</b>  | <b>Conventions</b>   |
|----|---|---|--|
| B+ | Definite claim supported by strong, developed arguments. Clarity could be enhanced through definition, elaboration, illustration, explicit connections, and conciseness.  | Mature but bland voice/language.  | Infrequent errors.   |
| A  | Definite, well-qualified claim or proposal. Strong, developed, well-organized supporting arguments. Responds to major objections and alternatives. Key terms, ideas and connections are defined, elaborated and illustrated to avoid misinterpretations. Sentences build on each other through connecting ideas. Wording is clear, concise, and consistent. | Mature voice—defined as: appropriate, sophisticated, audience-centered vivid language full of conviction. | <p>Virtually error-free.</p> <p><b>Stuart Yeh,<br/>Stanford</b></p> <p><b>* Grade allotment mine</b></p> |

# Criteria should be

- ▶ **Explicit** not hidden evaluation criteria
- ▶ **Applied fairly** not idiosyncratically
- ▶ **Understood** by students, not seen as the marker's personal reactions
- ▶ **Internalized as a set of consistent criteria** for students "to become better thinkers and writers"
- ▶ **Used** so that you, the marker, function as a "coach not a judge with your own agenda"

Edward M. White

# Assessment

- ▶ **Global features** show the writer's control of argument and organization
  - Assess these in your **first quick reading**
- ▶ **Sentence-level features** show the writer's control of language
  - Assess these in a **second more careful reading**

# Features for writing assessment

## Global features

- ▶ Thesis/argument
- ▶ On task
- ▶ Organization: structural coherence
- ▶ Development/support
- ▶ Use of sources
- ▶ **Assess these in your first quick reading**

## Sentence-level features

- ▶ Paragraph cohesion
- ▶ Clear expression
- ▶ Sentence construction
- ▶ Integration and use of sources
- ▶ Spelling, mechanics, and grammar
- ▶ **Assess these in your second careful reading**

# For rapid assessment

- ▶ LOOK AT:
- ▶ the student's **intellectual grasp** of the material as it reveals itself in **rhetorical moves**:
  - They announce that the writer "**enters a conversation about ideas**" (Graff and Birkenstein)
  - The **structure** of
    - Introduction
    - Overall organization of the paper—macro structure
    - Paragraphs—micro structure
  - Striking word choice – jargon, slang, rich vocabulary

▶ See handout: Rapid Assessment

# Rapid Assessment: Feedback

Of the introduction  
in the three papers

# Rhetorical moves in introductions

## Articulate

- ▶ An issue—a subject that attracts academic debate (detailed - complex)

## Establish

- ▶ A context for the issue—material that establishes the topic in a relevant academic context (historical, theoretical etc.)

## Offer

- ▶ A strong thesis—what the writer has to say on the topic

# Criteria for a strong thesis

- ▶ Does the thesis show
  - **analysis and depth** of thought, or is it mainly descriptive?
- ▶ Does it present
  - an **argument**—is it worded as an argument?
- ▶ Is it **contestable**?
- ▶ Is it **defensible**—i.e., is it qualified?
- ▶ Does it answer the “**so what**” question?

# Assess the introduction

- ▶ Take 10 minutes to do a rapid assessment of
  - ▶ The introduction
  - ▶ The thesis
  - ▶ Use the criteria
  - ▶ Give a tentative grade

# Rapid Assessment

Of the rest of the essay

# Organizational structure, coherence

- ▶ Does the essay/paper have clear sections that advance the argument?
- ▶ Are the sections in the expected locations and identified according to your disciplinary convention (e.g., subheadings)?
- ▶ Is the flow of information logical or is it hard to follow?
- ▶ Are all the necessary sections present (e.g., introduction, conclusion, references, appendices, etc.)?

# Paragraph Structure or micro structure

- ▶ **Topic Sentence:** forecasts the writer's main point which should support an aspect of the thesis (may contain transition)
- ▶ **Elaboration:** makes the main point more specific
- ▶ **Development:** gives support or evidence for the main point: facts, examples, illustrations, citations in the form of summary, paraphrase or quotation, logical inferences
- ▶ **Interpretation:** shows the writer's view on the support used (facts don't speak for themselves)
- ▶ **Conclusion:** states the writer's insight (what the development proves or explains)
- ▶ **Transition:** carries the conclusion forward to the next paragraph

# How does the writer use sources?

- ▶ Are they included to
  - make the argument for the writer?
  - summarize or analyze ideas?
- ▶ Or are they
  - introduced to create a context?
  - used as evidence?
- ▶ Are the types of sources used appropriate, and are they cited properly?

# Assess development and support

- ▶ Take 10 minutes to read and do a rapid assessment of the remainder of each paper for **structure, support, paragraph organization, and coherence**
- ▶ Give each paper a tentative grade

# Considerations to keep in mind

Readers expect:

- ▶ to recognize the assignment as belonging to a particular **genre**: here, the research paper
- ▶ that students can create a text that includes the **appropriate generic features**:
  - An argumentative edge and a critical understanding of the literature read
  - An appropriate selection, arrangement, organization, and citation of source material
  - An appropriate use of form and style

# When marking

- ▶ Use a set of criteria you can explain in terms of the course requirements and in terms of writing.
- ▶ Do not use your own taste in writing and style as the basis for a response.
- ▶ Remember, we can teach students the components of style – not which style they should adopt.

# The marker's many hats

Work at two levels when marking papers:

1. **For the student**, phrase your **comments** so that they are constructive and formative
2. **For yourself**, make **observations** on strengths and weaknesses to **record** how you arrived at a grade; keep these notes
  - Some students do complain/appeal

# Formative Feedback: Responding to student writing

- ▶ To have an impact on student learning, students' responses to comments must be *transferable* to other tasks or courses.
- ▶ Therefore, ask yourself the following questions:
  - Can I find a **pattern of error/issue/problem**?
  - What **assumptions** are behind the errors/issues/problems, and can I address these assumptions in my comments?
  - Can the student **learn something** from my comments?

# Formative or constructive feedback

- ▶ When the writer fails to anticipate the academic reader's questions and expectations, act as the typical academic reader's voice
  - Use what you know about the genre of academic writing to guide you in your response
  - Your comments and questions should gently guide the student to address your concern
- ▶ **Questions** are the best tool to get the student to write for the reader.

# For problems with argument and support

- ▶ When you come across a thesis that isn't a debatable position (it may be a statement of topic or fact), encourage the student to take a position by saying “**So what?**”
- ▶ For an unsupported generalization try, “**Says who?**” or “**Why should I agree with this?**”
- ▶ For quotations, data, etc. that are treated as though they speak for themselves ask, “**What is the significance of this?**” or “**Why is this significant?**”

# For problems with coherence

When ideas are not logically connected:

- make a V sign where the line of thought breaks down and write “Gap”
- or write “How do you get from this idea to the next?”
- The writer will usually understand that an explicit connection has to be made

# Problems with paragraph structure and development

- ▶ When paragraphs are too long/disorganized:
  - “P too long: more than one topic”,
- ▶ When paragraphs are thin:
  - “Underdeveloped P; expand or delete”,
- ▶ When paragraphs don’t follow a logical sequence, try:
  - “Why is this paragraph here?”
- ▶ When paragraphs are not connected to the thesis:
  - “impose topic sentence, or connect paragraph to thesis”

# Grammar problems

- ▶ Rule of thumb: correct only what you know
- ▶ BUT try to learn to identify the following which cause confusion and/or ambiguity :
  - Comma splice or Run-on sentence
  - Subject–verb agreement error
  - Pronoun agreement or refernece error
  - Error in verb form or inconsistent shift in tense
  - Dangling modifiers and misplaced modifiers

Use this website to learn:

<http://www.utoronto.ca/hswriting/hitparade.htm>

# ELL – Special concerns

- ▶ Do not focus solely on sentence level grammatical errors in ELL's papers – look at the argument, structure, etc. FIRST
- ▶ Keep in mind that ELLs may take several years to demonstrate writing proficiency in English
- ▶ Consider the way ALL writing is “voiced” – how it reflects each person’s own “accent” – and refrain from expecting ELLs’ writing to be “accent-free” (e.g., limit the negative impact of minor article, verb form, and word choice errors)

# Good advice to your students

Tell those who do not get a high mark:

- Your paper is simply handed in too early
  - If you want a better mark, start the research and writing process much earlier
  - Use Laurier's **Assignment Planner**
- 
- ▶ John Bean. Keynote address at the Annual Teaching Day, Wilfrid Laurier University 2008
  - ▶ John C. Bean. *Engaging Ideas: The Professor's Guide to Integrating Writing, Critical Thinking, and Active Learning in the Classroom*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 2001.

# Handouts provided for you

1. Copies of two first-year history papers
2. Dr. Dana Sawchuck's grading rubric for a critical response paper
3. Handout for Rapid Assessment
  
4. Recommended Resources on Writing and Grading

# Works Cited

- ▶ John C. Bean. *Engaging Ideas: The Professor's Guide to Integrating Writing, Critical Thinking, and Active Learning in the Classroom*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 2001.
- ▶ Booth, Wayne C., Gregory G. Colomb, and Joseph M. Williams. *The Craft of Research*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2003.
- ▶ White, Edward M. *Teaching and Assessing Writing*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1994.
- ▶ Yeh, Stuart S. "Empowering Education: Teaching Argumentative Writing to Cultural Minority Middle-School Students". *Research in the teaching of English* 33.1 (1998):49-83.

# Laurier Writing Centre

## ► What we offer:

- Individual consultations with trained tutors
- Writing workshops at the undergraduate and graduate level
- Handouts, online writing resources, and resource library
- Writing support for faculty and TAs

## ► Visit the Writing Centre:

- Location: DAWB 1-102
- Appointments: ext. 2220 or [learningservices@wlu.ca](mailto:learningservices@wlu.ca)
- Regular hours: Mon–Fri 10–4
- Drop-in hours: Mon–Wed 4–8 p.m., Thurs & Sun 1–4
- Website: [www.wlu.ca/writing](http://www.wlu.ca/writing)