Instructor's Study Guide
for
The Online Writing Conference:
A Guide for Teachers and Tutors

by

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Contents

Introduction

This study guide presents the basics of responding to student writing in a digital environment—what to do, what to watch out for, and what to avoid. It helps you use *The Online Writing Conference: A Guide for Teachers and Tutors* as a practical guide (the *how*) and is grounded solidly in research and theory (the *why*).

WHAT IS A DIGITAL RESPONSE TO WRITING?

- Any text-based, computer-distributed feedback to student writing—whether in a traditional course or in a fully or partially online course
- Any text-based or audio/visual interaction in the same settings

In a writing-to-learn educational culture, students write essays, reports, and case studies in many of their classes. As the instructor, we read and respond to their writing because feedback is a primary way to teach writing to individual students. Our goal is to promote student learning through our responses. *Are we actually promoting that learning or stifling it? Do students understand our responses as corrections, editing, or teaching? Do they know what to do with our responses?*

This study guide particularly focuses on how to help students read and understand the instructional text that usually accompanies the writing returned to them. To do that, it refocuses us on our own written response.

The brief chapters here will help you begin using helpful response strategies immediately. They will help you spotlight common writing problems and recognize traditional response strategies developed for face-to-face meetings that may have migrated inappropriately to online settings. For example, brief comments and rhetorical questions used in traditional writing response can be translated to perplexed students in a follow-up classroom interaction or an individual conference or tutorial. In online settings—particularly asynchronous (not in real time), text-based ones—students often are left to puzzle out cryptic comments and indirect questions on their own. This is one of the leading reasons a student may be unsure of how to improve her or his writing and may re-post an inadequately revised paper for assessment.

The Online Writing Conference can help you improve your responses in traditional settings, too!

Real-time conferences [see *The Online Writing Conference*, pp. 25–30]
A real-time conference is synchronous. It happens when two (or more) people talk together at the same time.

- Traditional writing conference: a teacher or tutor sits with a student in the same room, at the same table, talking about the same essay or assignment or writing concern.
- Computer or other technological mediation.

- Telephone conference: participants use the same tool (the phone) for a discussion that happens "in the moment."
- Video conference: the individuals can see each other as they're speaking.
- Computer conference: either voice, voice and video, or text-based chat or all three. Some programs allow individuals to see the text at the same time, while a rare few programs enable simultaneous ability to work on and change the text.

Non-real-time conferences [see *The Online Writing Conference*, pp. 17–25]
A non-real-time conference is just as "real" as a synchronous conference. It merely occurs asynchronously; the time lag between interactions can be minutes, days, or weeks.

- Text-based teaching and tutoring:
  - Email messages.
  - Online discussion forums.
  - Web- or email-delivered essay drafts. Most often, the responses are written above/below the students' text as a global sort of commentary (Example 2 in Chapter 1 of this study guide) or embedded within the writing (Example 1) or both.
- Audio/visual conferences. As more students become comfortable participating in and creating videos, we may begin to see more asynchronous conferences via Skype, Camtasia, YouTube, or other video platforms. These depend on the participants' facility with the software, as well as its availability and affordability.

The Reading Problem of Online Students

We like to think that if we provide a thorough written response to the student, he or she will be able to read it, understand it, and then enact the advice, guidance, or required changes without any problem. For a lot of students, that's simply not true. For example, the typical first-year, developmental, nontraditional, or EL2 user can be a good reader of various genres—fiction, biographies, lab reports, even textbooks—but not necessarily a good reader of instructional text about his or her own writing.

What we write about student writing can seem overwhelming to many students.

- We may use underlined language about essays, arguments, expositions, thesis sentences, assertions, topic sentences, content development, organization, and various concerns at the sentence level. *Students have to understand the meaning of these words as they apply to their own writing* without the benefit of the teacher's oral intervention.
- Students also have to read for the hidden meaning behind time-worn and clichéd abbreviations, edits, and corrections to sentence-level concerns. We might say that correctness is far less important than the higher-order content-based concerns; yet the strikeouts and marginal comments belie our words.
- We also have a habit—formed from a concern for politeness and a desire not to "appropriate" students' texts—of writing in rhetorical questions, indirect suggestions, and conditional language. Language like this can confuse students, give them hints without certain answers, and suggest that they have certain writing choices they really don't have if they're trying to revise a particular piece in certain ways.

Our Writing Problem

Although students need help with their writing, the writing problem is ours, in that much of the instruction we convey online is alternately overly lengthy and discursive or curt and filled with abbreviations and unclear notations. We use conditional and rhetorical language, as well as technical terms. Responding appropriately requires a cognitive leap many online writing students find impossible to make. While we insist that we have made ourselves clear and don't understand why the student isn't following through, the student thinks that she or he has done so. *The Online Writing Conference* discusses how to develop online text-based conferences—or written responses—in ways that help students decode the instruction.

> This study guide—and *The Online Writing Conference*—will help you avoid or mitigate some almost certain communicative problems, particularly in asynchronous settings, but also in synchronous (real-time) ones.

Using Conferences for Feedback and Response

[see *The Online Writing Conference*, pp. 30–35]

There are significant differences between real-time and non-real-time conference strategies, primarily because the strategies require different kinds of turn-taking, time lags, and talk interaction between participants.

    The Online Writing Conference discusses the pros and cons of these different strategies in various institutional settings—because your setting (e.g., administrative preferences, budget, ability to engage trained educators) tends to lock in what you can and cannot do with your writing students. Often, the setting cannot accommodate your personal preferences, so it is important to understand all the various strategies for online conferencing as legitimate ways to interact with students about their writing.

> Knowing how to interact and teach in online settings is becoming critical for professional stability and advancement.

Characteristics of Student Writers

Before looking at communicating with students about their writing through digital means, let's consider some characteristics of many student writers:

- **Students are not particularly skilled readers of instructional text.** Although they may be familiar with strategies for reading textbooks, they tend not to have received any special instruction in how to read and understand teachers' and tutors' comments regarding their writing. Students need clear directions about <u>what is expected</u> of them in revision or for writing a future paper. They also need straightforward teaching about <u>how to do these things</u> in the writing response.

- **Many writers—of all experience levels—tend to write themselves into a clear thesis.** This thesis is often found in the middle or toward the end of an early draft. This means that many writers (me included) may think they know what they want to say but learn more about their own ideas through the actual writing. Students have to learn to look for their main points

later in the drafting process, which implies *having a drafting process* rather than a one-shot essay-writing strategy.

- **Student writers tend to submit their rough and early drafts.** These drafts are too often written at the last minute with the hope of being "finished." Usually, students are wrong in this thinking (see the tendency to write ourselves into a clearer thesis, above). The problem of writing at the last minute can be mitigated by building revision into the assignment and curriculum, as well as by *requiring* students to submit drafts for review or as part of the essay package.

- **People often lose fluency when grappling with new ideas.** Loss of fluency occurs both in speaking and writing about new ideas. Students are in various classes each term and typically grapple with new ideas in all classes, potentially causing an amazing loss of verbal and written fluency at any one time. Dysfluency shows up in unclear ideas, poorly developed content, organizational confusion, and surface- or sentence-level problems. To increase fluency, we need to give students time and impetus to work out their thoughts in a series of drafts, with an eye toward revision and with clear instruction.

Keep these traits of novice writers in mind when integrating the suggestions found in this study guide with the strategies and theories discussed in *The Online Writing Conference*. At all times, I assume that students can be taught to write better and that they can do so when learning in online settings. The pedagogy of online response and instructional text in this study guide and book also can help you provide stronger responses in a traditional classroom setting.

Both this study guide and *The Online Writing Conference* focus on the most commonly used technology for non-face-to-face conferences: writing to the student. It is your writing that will engage or disengage the students, lead them to comprehension or confusion, and enable reasonable steps for revision. If it is ineffective, it will provide them with too many tasks to separate and enact. Responding to writing comprehensibly is your job in any setting.

Chapter 1

"Talk" in an Online Environment

The essay responses we have used for many years were developed for face-to-face teaching and tutoring, where we might orally explain to the entire class or in a one-to-one conference whatever we meant (but failed) to convey in the written response.

I used to give a short lecture at the beginning of a class about what kinds of strengths and problems I had found in the class's writing as a whole. I would explain any shorthand remarks or markings I had made on the essays. Then, I would return papers and entertain students' questions. Students tended to have many questions about how I wanted them to improve their writing.

In an online setting, we can meet that group need by writing a shared lesson for all students about the essays. We can even use a digital voice recorder or a voice-over video. But typically we still rely on our individual written responses to be intelligible to the students. Unfortunately, when it comes to *how to change their own writing*, students can be remarkably confused about what we mean in our written response [see *The Online Writing Conference*, Chapters 5 and 6].

For one thing, despite much good scholarship and professional development to the contrary, too many teachers and tutors copyedit their students' writing or at least point out sentence-level errors using embedded comments only. Not enough written response teaches how to strengthen the writing in revision—if revision is even allowed or encouraged. Too often, cryptic language like "awkward" ("awk") or "s-v agr" or "needs thesis" is used. Example 1 illustrates some of this language.

Example 1: Digital Written Response Migrated from Traditional Response

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Elder Care without the "Care"

In today's society, **[cliché]** elderly people are living longer than ever because of advancement in medical knowledge, better nutrition, and healthier lifestyle choices (Brackett 955). The increase in the elderly population means that there will also need to be an increase in the number of caregivers and other elderly care options. **[well said]** The growth of the number of caregivers is unlikely to become a reality **[huh? awkward]** because in recent years family size has decreased, which means that there are fewer persons to share the burden of taking care of their aged relatives (Brackett 956). Also, the high rate of employment for women implies that there will be less **[fewer]** traditional caregivers available compared to the past (Brackett 956). These occurrences are hindering the quality care toward aged members of society and the national samples and state data indicate that, "1 and 2 million Americans age 65 or older have been injured, exploited, or otherwise mistreated by someone on whom they depended for care or protection" (Bonnie 1) and "about 5 percent of persons over age 65 will be abused in some way" (Rudolph 943). **[Run-on sentence. Can you put a comma in? Also, did you quote accurately?]** Traditional view **[a traditional view of what?]** calls for families to take care of their own relatives, but that may not be the best solution for every family and have **[who?]** a hard time deciding what's best because of the lack of options and information for elder care, families are having difficulties in choosing the best option for their elderly family members and so changes are needed for this issue. **[Thesis is a run-on sentence. What are you arguing?]**

The feedback in Example 1, an asynchronous response that might be provided either traditionally or online, doesn't help the writer revise. Various sentence-level errors are pointed out, but why they are problematic and how to address (and even avoid) them is still unclear. Little is said about the student's content, and research tells us that that kind of response is most important for writing growth.

Example 2: Digital Written Response that Teaches a Lesson

Kim, you have written a strong introduction paragraph in terms of providing background for your essay. Good start!

As you revise this draft, one of the most important things you can do is to rewrite your thesis sentence. You underlined the part of the sentence that you are trying to support in this argument:

Traditional view calls for families to take care of their own relatives, but that may not be the best solution for every family and have a hard time deciding what's best <u>because of the lack of options and information for elder care, families are having difficulties in choosing the best option for their elderly family members and so changes are needed for this issue.</u>

You have more than one sentence here, causing it to be what is called a "run on." One way to correct that problem is to start a new sentence beginning with "because" and be sure the new sentences make sense.

<u>**More important**</u>**, though, you have** <u>**more than one idea**</u> **that you're saying you will support regarding a lack of options and information for elder care:**

1. **Families are having difficulty choosing the best options for their elderly family members.**
2. **Changes are needed for this issue.**

The first is a statement of fact: it is challenging to make the right choices for care of an elderly relative. The second is a statement of argument: changes need to occur. But what changes are you proposing? To revise your thesis for clarity and focus, let's look at what you have written about in the essay:

- **You provide the history of nursing homes**
- **There are certain negative attitudes about caring for the elderly**
- **Families with elderly relatives have problems**
- **There are too few caregivers available**
- **There is a lack of quality in nursing homes**
- **There are possible solutions to all these problems**

There are too many main topics in the argument, **Kim. What thesis would you write to support an argument for:**

- **Putting (or not putting) elderly relatives in a nursing home OR**
- **Providing better nursing homes OR**
- **Helping people to be able to keep their elderly relatives at home OR**
- **Any other idea that you really want to argue?**

Choose one of these topics and write a sample thesis for it that you could support in your essay.

Try these steps:

1. **Reread your essay and mark each of your arguments using a number (1, 2, 3, etc.) or color to see where they are placed together and where they are separated by other ideas and paragraphs.**
2. **Figure out which argument you like best and for which you have the most support. That way, you can use a lot of the material that you already have although some of it will need to be revised.**
3. **Write a tentative (temporary) thesis for that argument.**
4. **Revise the essay with that thesis.**
5. **Review the new essay draft and revise the thesis, if necessary.**
6. **Edit and proofread the entire draft.**

Example 2 points out the student's main problem—the thesis sentence (indicated by her underline). It is a problem not because it is a run-on sentence, which it is, but because there are several embedded ideas that might be argued—as indicated by the run-on sentence. In other words, the faulty sentence is a clear indicator of a confused idea or content. Teaching the student how to revise this thesis has a lot to do with teaching how to focus on one primary content-based goal, and it needs a more thorough lesson to accomplish that instruction. That focus, in turn, can help the student revise the problematic run-on sentence. More important, though, it can help her refocus the entire essay on a supportable topic, which is the assignment's expectation.

Although Example 1's response is a poor one in any setting, teachers and tutors across the country write similar responses. We can get away with it better in a face-to-face setting under the guise of future opportunities to explain the response in class or individual oral conferences. Such already weak response strategies migrate freely into online settings, where they simply don't work. They don't teach students enough about what to revise to create a focused, supported, or even interesting piece of writing. Example 2, on the other hand, is a stronger response because it teaches the student what is not working, why it is ineffective, how to address it, and provides the next action for the student. Both *The Online Writing Conference* and this study guide can help you avoid poor online response to student writing and support students in rewriting their pieces.

How do your own written responses compare with Examples 1 and 2? One way to improve them is to write an essay of your own. Then, ask a peer to respond to it while you provide feedback to a similar essay of his or hers. Learn what you actually do in your instructional response and teach each other how to improve. Another way is to review your responses to students from a previous semester.

Chapter 2

Think *Formative* Rather Than *Summative*

While tutors typically provide *formative* assessment toward revision, teachers have the option of providing both formative and *summative* assessment. Teachers eventually have to think of grading or otherwise evaluating student writing. Doing so is called summative assessment.

Although summative assessment is inevitable, there are a number of ways to build formative assessment into a project and semester. It is especially important in online classes to build in opportunities to help the student *form* the writing.

> Thinking formatively means not judging the value of the writing or its overall success in the same way we do when we assign a grade. It means offering—and teaching—strategies for continued improvement of the writing [see *The Online Writing Conference*, pp. 145–148 for a formative rubric].

Introduce the Idea of a Draft

Students need opportunities to conceive and re-conceive ideas. They especially need to learn that writing takes time and that a first go at an assignment is rarely sufficient. Many teachers require students to produce an early draft that may receive the teacher's comments, a tutorial review, or peer response. In online settings, where students typically are isolated as they write and think, the need for feedback to their early drafts is especially important.

To give formative instruction to online students:

- Begin by writing clear, doable assignments.
  - ➢ Write the assignment in simple, clear language that defines any unusual or specialized terms.
  - ➢ Clearly state the required research and/or drafting steps to give students a sense of how they might go about tackling the task.
  - ➢ Offer students a sense of how long it might take to complete a draft that includes background research and writing.
  - ➢ Take the time to complete the assignment yourself so you will know whether it is both clear and doable within a certain time period. Teach students from your experience.
  - ➢ Ask for drafts and respond to them using the principles outlined in *The Online Writing Conference*.
- Provide revision opportunities.
  - ➢ At least once, however briefly, look at a student's draft, comment on it, and return it for revision.
  - ➢ Have students revise at least one completed piece at the end of the semester.

Teach Revision

Students have to learn how to revise. While a face-to-face interaction may allow you to spontaneously show revision on a whiteboard or using a projector, in online classes and most tutorials, the

opportunities usually are asynchronous and thus more static. It takes more planning to build instruction and models for revision for online instruction.

- Begin by demonstrating what revision looks like in an early assignment. Use your own writing to produce a series of drafts, take your students' comments on the drafts into account, use the track-changes feature of the word processing program, and revise at both deep and surface levels [see *The Online Writing Conference*, pp. 64–70].

- Explain that revising means adding, deleting, rearranging, distributing, and substituting content at both global and local levels.

- Enforce strong writing expectations by providing rich, ample opportunities to practice good writing wherever the course outline allows.

- Use your writing as a model of thoughtful, proofed text.

Use Writing Tutoring

If your school offers the service, consider requiring your students to have at least one interaction with a writing tutor. Many institutions are developing online writing tutoring opportunities or using outside tutoring services.

- Find out whether you can require students to use an online tutor at least once in the term.

- Teach students how an online tutor can help them by demonstrating a tutorial and talking (or writing) about it. [For an asynchronous example, see pp. 17–25 in *The Online Writing Conference*. For a synchronous example, see pp. 25–30.]

- Teach students how to use the tutorial to their best advantage. They will need to know, for example, whether they are allowed to use the tutor's suggested changes and whether they have the freedom to reject a tutor's suggestions [see especially pp. 50–55 in *The Online Writing Conference*].

- For accountability, ask students to hand in their tutor's notes with their essays.

Match Rubrics to Assignments in Drafts and Final Pieces
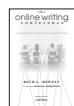
Many schools have premade rubrics that help teachers measure writing development and help students understand their grades. *The Online Writing Conference* has a set of sample rubrics and explanations for them on pp. 145–57. Watch out, though, because rubrics also can be problematic!

- Evaluate writing according to the goals of the assignment.

- Give the most weight to the most crucial parts of the assignment—presumably the content and other higher-order concerns.

- Give students the rubric at the same time they receive the assignment.

- Use rubrics as both a formative and summative tool to measure genuine growth from the beginning of the assignment to the end.

Finally, even after an assignment has been graded, you may be able to allow future revision (in an end-of-term portfolio, for example), so also offer strong instructional feedback if you have time.

How do you write formative responses to your students? How do these responses differ from summative ones? Use the strategies discussed above and in *The Online Writing Conference* to connect them.

Chapter 3

Be Straightforward

Chapter 6 of *The Online Writing Conference* discusses the problems students have reading written responses to their writing. While the book itself deals with a variety of ways to help students with such reading issues, I place the onus on us—instructors—as the ones with the problem. Especially in an online setting—although also in traditional, face-to-face educational settings—if the student cannot understand our written response, we first must examine our writing for language choices and coherence. I call this maintaining "semantic integrity."

> Semantic integrity creates fidelity between what we intended and what our students interpret. Without that fidelity, students will fail to understand what they are to do and how to do it. We, on the other hand, will fail truly to teach.

Avoid Indirection, Secrets, and Hints

Language can be quite "ornery," as Chapter 6 of *The Online Writing Conference* demonstrates. Semantic integrity requires that we use language in clear, straightforward, and guiding ways that students can read and interpret sufficiently to take the next steps in their writing. When text is our instructional voice, it has to ring clearly to be heard and understood.

Look at your own instructional language. Do you tend to be straightforward (direct) or suggestive (indirect)? Much of English composition pedagogy encourages indirection for reasons explained in Chapters 4 and 6 of *The Online Writing Conference*. However, a direct, straightforward approach is more appropriate, especially in the online setting.

The first three examples below use direct language; the fourth uses indirect language.

1. *This paragraph needs to be revised.* This sentence provides information about the writing. It is a declarative sentence providing information (form and function match). **Declaratives are helpful sentence forms for teaching online.**

   - *You need to revise this paragraph.*
   - *Your lab report requires six outside sources, and you only have three.*
   - *A case study like this should be developed in chronological (time) order.*

2. *How will you revise this paragraph?* This sentence asks a question about the writing. It is an interrogative sentence eliciting information (form and function match). **Interrogatives— genuine questions that begin with "wh-" and "how"—are helpful sentence forms for teaching online.**

   - *Where can you find three sources that respond to your topic? The first source you use provides a good model.*
   - *What is the title of Jacob's article? Who is the publisher?*
   - *According to APA style, where should the in-text citation be placed for this quotation?*

   Rhetorical and yes/no, closed questions are not helpful (see 4 that follows).

3. *Revise this paragraph.* This sentence requests or commands the writer to do something about the writing. It is an imperative sentence commanding action (form and function match). **Imperatives are helpful sentence forms within certain contexts for online teaching.**

   ▪ *Find three more sources that support the thesis of this lab report.*
   ▪ *To brainstorm this idea, write six or seven ways that people can get into trouble when driving with cell phones. Choose the three or four that you think are strongest to write about.*
   ▪ *Delete the sentences that don't provide more information about your thesis.*

4. *Shouldn't you revise this paragraph?* Or *Does this paragraph need revising?* The first example is an interrogative sentence commanding action: form and function do not match. The second example is an interrogative sentence that both commands action and provides information: form and function do not match. The "suggestion" that results when form and function do not match is a mixed message that students are free to ignore. Rhetorical questions are particularly dangerous: teachers and tutors read them as gently pushing students toward an action; students read them as literal and address them as a choice. **Suggestions are not helpful sentence forms UNLESS they are preceded with the phrase "I suggest that you XYZ" or "I think you should XYZ."**

Examples of Indirection

The following suggestions were written by real teachers and tutors. **Deep purple** statements are the instructional comments. Bold, black, bracketed statements indicate a possible student reaction to the suggestion. Italicized bold, black, bracketed statements are a more straightforward translation of the indirect language.

Can you identify and correct the comma splice errors in this paragraph? **[Nope, I can't.]** **[*Identify and correct the comma splice errors in this paragraph.*]**

When you read this sentence aloud, does it sound "right" to you? **[Yes.]** **[*This sentence doesn't sound right. Read it aloud and fix it.*]**

The meaning of this sentence may not be clear. **[It's clear to me.]** **[*This sentence is unclear. You need to revise it.*]**

Is the "number one stressor" you identify in this sentence the same as the one you identify in the first sentence of the paragraph? **[It must not be or you wouldn't have asked. So what?]** **[*You stated a different "number one stressor" in the first sentence of the paragraph. Which is number one?*]**

Do you need the comma in the previous sentence? **[Crap, I don't know. Do I? You're the teacher; you tell me!]** **[*The comma in the previous sentence is unnecessary.*]**

Do you see a place for an apostrophe in this sentence? **[No, I don't, but I guess you do. Where the @#$@ is it needed?]** **[*A word in this sentence needs an apostrophe; add it.*]**

"Family" is usually thought of as a singular noun, representing one "unit," so your instructor might expect the singular verb "has" here. **[But maybe my teacher might not expect that form of the verb?]** **[*"Family" is a singular noun and usually takes a singular verb.*]**

However, "family" is also a collective noun and may take a plural verb if the family members are acting as individuals, not a unit. Which situation fits your sentence?]

Examples of Straightforward, Direct Language

Here, the bolded text represents direct language, and the non-bolded text explains how and why the instruction works.

You need a comma in the previous sentence to set off the introductory phrase from the main sentence. Where should you place it? The first sentence in this paragraph gives a correct example. The instruction is linked to another sentence in the paragraph that provides a <u>model</u> for the student to follow. A mini-lesson on introductory clauses would strengthen this instruction.

Your assignment indicates that you need six outside sources and you only have three. The Oakley source seems to be your best one because it describes a recent study. Where can you find others like it? This instruction provides straightforward information about the assignment, how the student has met the requirements of the assignment, and where he has made a good choice in sources. It ends with a genuine question that helps the student to think about where to look for more sources.

A lab report typically has an abstract that is written after the report itself is complete. It summarizes the main issues and findings of the report in about 200–500 words. Look at the main parts of your report, find the key issues and results, and write a brief abstract in summary. Then, place it at the beginning of the report as shown in your APA style manual. This instruction both defines what an abstract is and provides direction on how to write one and where to place it. All the language is direct rather than indirect.

Evaluate your own writing responses. Are you direct or indirect? What changes do you need to make to be more direct in your language choices?

Chapter 4

Focus Tightly

Distinguish Between Higher Order Concerns and Lower Order Concerns

Research indicates that students cannot take in everything that could be said about a draft and that they ignore a good many of the provided comments as they revise, which is a reasonable enacting of their authorial ownership. In truth, busy teachers and tutors don't have the time to write such thorough responses anyway [see *The Online Writing Conference*, pp. 47–55 and pp. 133–136].

When commenting about writing, remember that the goal is to help the student take the draft to the next level. It isn't to help the student write the perfect paper. We are *teaching students to write better one draft at a time*. That draft is the current teaching tool. Even for a final version, it is important to focus tightly on the most important concerns. We might call this strategy "choosing our battles" or, better still, "problem-centered instruction."

> Focus instruction tightly on the key ideas or issues determined by thinking "formative."

Higher order concerns (HOCs) are those that will most affect writing in a global or content-based way. These include:

- Brainstorming.
- Audience awareness.
- Thesis statements.
- Content development.
- Introductions and conclusions.
- Organization.
- Paragraph development in terms of content and organization.
- Uses of outside sources in responsible ways.

Lower order concerns (LOCs) are those that will most affect the writing on a sentence level. Some writing instructors call these "later-order concerns" because they need to be addressed, but only after most HOCs. These often are focused on style, clarity, or correctness. These include:

- Transitional words and phrases.
- Sentence-level confusions and/or awkwardness.
- Word-level mistakes.
- Grammar and mechanics errors.
- Citation style issues.

Current composition research strongly recommends addressing the HOCs before worrying about the LOCs. However, it can be tempting to correct or call attention to LOC errors. They're more easily addressed in written responses than the HOCs, as shown in Examples 1 and 2 in Chapter 1 of this study guide. To help students in both areas, address HOCs in one draft. Then, when students repost the writing, provide editing, tutoring, or peer response activities that will help them with copyediting and proofreading.

Identify HOCs

Writing assignments tend to focus on particular knowledge areas (content), rhetorical properties, and skills that the student is expected to practice and master. Although many courses still focus on writing about literature and the particular approaches to writing that it entails, writing-across-the-curriculum assignments tend to emphasize similar issues regardless of the particular discipline. Example HOCs for all disciplines include:

- Meeting the specific content requirements for the assignment—topic, genre, rhetorical context, and audience.
- Other content-based issues.
  - Having a main idea (thesis, assertion, or claim).
  - Developing sufficient detail, reasoning, and examples.
  - Organizing according to the genre or assignment.
  - Using outside sources when needed to support reasoning and meaning.
  - Using appropriate quotation and paraphrase strategies.

Identify LOCs

As with HOCs, regardless of the discipline, when writing is an important part of a course, similar LOCs tend to be important for communication and mastery of an assignment or genre. Example LOCs for all disciplines include:

- Meeting the specific length and style requirements of the assignment.
- Addressing other sentence-level or correctness concerns:
  - Readable (well-written) sentences.
  - Correctness in grammar and mechanics.
  - Well-proofed text.
  - Correct in-text citations and reference lists per required style manual.

Balance the Writing Goals

Writing goals are balanced by tightly focusing on key concerns. When giving text-based response in online settings, focus tightly to provide clear feedback that leads to doable actions:

- Select only two or three HOCs that, if addressed, will influence the meaning of the writing or take it to the next level of competence.
- Teach primarily to those concerns.
- Avoid the urge to sneak in lessons about the small, correctness-level LOCs when the student's content, thesis, or organization needs a lot of work to meet the assignment's or the essay's goals.

Key Instructional Strategies:

- As a teacher, compose thoughtful assignments that enable students to succeed. As a tutor, identify the learning objectives in the assignment.
- Encourage students to revise, and provide them with opportunities to do so.
- Teach students how to revise by demonstrating and modeling.
- Focus formative comments on specific HOC issues with less attention to LOCs.
- Teach the biggest problems for greatest effect.

Chapter 5

Problem-Centered Instruction

Teach Rather Than Talk

[see *The Online Writing Conference*, pp. 97–101]

Teaching and tutoring in text-based and online settings require more intervention than is normally provided in face-to-face settings.

> Especially in online settings, teaching is showing, not just telling. It is doing together—sometimes doing a small piece of writing for the student as a demonstration. It is intervening in the student's writing so that the student can connect the words of the response with the required revisions.

To teach is to explain, yes. But it also is *to do*:
- Ask genuine ["wh-" and "how"] questions.
- Demonstrate how to do something.
- Illustrate by examples, anecdotes, and numbers.
- Model the writing the student is being asked to do.
- Provide doable tasks with instructions to carry them out.
- Explain terms and actions that might be unclear.

Teaching can involve drawing, striking out words and substituting others, highlighting, and a variety of other strategies that instructors often don't use.

Finally, personalizing the response is critical. One way to do so is to **use the student's name more than once**. Everyone likes to be addressed by name.

Four-Part Intervention

In any written conference, explanations are insufficient for students who don't know what to do next. The primary way that we teach, not talk, is to provide short written lessons any time a revision is needed. These lessons are most helpful when they follow these four steps:

1. Identify the problem;
2. Explain why it is a problem;
3. Demonstrate how to address (revise) and avoid the problem; and
4. Give the student something to do in revision—a way to change the writing and an instruction to try a revision action.

The "do" part of the process is like a mini action plan tucked into each and every lesson.

Think *What, Why, How, Do***:**

1. *What* is the problem?
2. *Why* is it a problem?
3. *How* can this problem be revised and avoided?
4. *Do* these steps to address the problem.

To write quicker, better, and more efficient responses, train yourself to think *what, why, how,* and *do*. You don't have to write a long lesson, but it does need to be complete to be the most helpful [see Example 2 in Chapter 1 of this study guide and pp. 95–101 in *The Online Writing Conference*].

Problem-Centered Revision Demonstrations

Another way to teach, not talk, is to let the words in the lesson become your voice. Don't be afraid to get your hands dirty playing in the words.

Personalize and illustrate what you're saying with examples from the students' own writing.

In online settings, you could write template lessons dealing with common problems and post them as part of the course. These lessons on revision are most useful when they include the student's writing [see *The Online Writing Conference*, Chapter 4, for theoretical reasons]. Perhaps the most important reason is that the student's writing connects what is being taught with how to apply it. Example 3 is a personalized, problem-centered revision demonstration that uses the student's own writing.

Example 3

Thesis Development:

The sentence in your first paragraph that most seems to be your thesis is:

"Immigrants are what help make America be America; by being a multicultural society standing united."

However, your essay really seems to address the need to accept immigrants in the country. In your last paragraph, you say:

"I'm very proud of my background in Italy and America. And no one should be denied the opportunity my parents and I have to be a part of America."

Roberto, you seem to be saying that: "**America should be open to immigrants because of** _____." But I can only guess because there is not a clear statement of your main idea. You may use my example in your essay if this is what you're trying to say.

Fill in the blank with your own ideas and words. Revise your thesis by writing your message as clearly as you can.

The template response in Example 4 avoids this kind of personalization. The student must take the explained strategic information and figure out how to apply it to his own writing. It's rather like reading in a textbook about writing and being expected to revise from that point. For many students, template responses are insufficient.

Example 4

> **Thesis Development:**
>
> The sentence in your first paragraph that most seems to be your thesis is: "Immigrants are what help make America be America; by being a multicultural society standing united." However, a thesis needs to make some kind of claim about something that you're going to argue. Here, you're saying that immigrants are important to America but then it isn't clear why.
>
> A good thesis does the following:
> - Uses one sentence.
> - Makes a claim about something that needs to be supported.
> - Can be defined, supported, explained, or justified.
> - Sometimes lists the main points of the essay in the sentence.
> - Is usually placed at the end of the introduction paragraph.
>
> That's what your new thesis should do.

My research shows that students want responses to *them* about *their writing*, not something that could have been copied from a textbook.

> Revision demonstrations that include some of the student's own text (length appropriate to the lesson), combined with the four-step intervention process, can teach students how to:
> - Revise a thesis for greater clarity;
> - Influence meaning with particular word choices;
> - Write quote introductions and analyses (as well as model citation styles);
> - Use transition words; and
> - Address serious grammatical or sentence structure issues, among others.

Teach Through Modeling

Another of many ways to teach a problem-centered lesson in online settings is to model writing. In Chapter 2 of this study guide, I recommend teaching revision by completing the assignment yourself and demonstrating various revision steps using the word-processing features "track changes" and "comments" [see also pp. 64–69 of *The Online Writing Conference*].

> To make your own responses to students more problem centered, keep in mind that HOCs are almost always more important to good writing than LOCs, unless the student truly is in the editing and proofreading phase.

Chapter 6

Use Digital Space Wisely

The Online Writing Conference [see especially pp. 125–33] discusses and demonstrates how to use digital space wisely. Formatting—delivery, as some might label it—helps with readability and student comprehension.

How easy is it to read your message?

Use White Space Well

Writing teachers and tutors have been trained to be discursive. We write mini-essays to students as opposed to mini-lessons that clearly convey our instructional goals. However, contemporary students do much of their reading on the web.

Use web pages as models for your instruction. Web pages include ample white space; use short, chunky paragraphs that convey smaller bits of information; and are punctuated by line breaks and bullets and numbers, among other formatting tools. Sometimes chunks of text are fully indented (or "blocked") to set them apart. Textboxes often highlight information.

Use Colors, Fonts, and Highlights

Here are some other formatting strategies that can help you create a highly readable and focused written lesson:

- Fonts:
  - ➢ Distinguish your lesson from the student's writing by using a different font.
  - ➢ Use a readable font size, such as 11 or 12 point, in serif style.
  - ➢ Use the same font size and type throughout your teaching to indicate your voice.
  - ➢ Use different font styles (**bold**, <u>underline</u>, or *italics*) to indicate emphasis, but do so selectively so students can understand what you're emphasizing and why.
- Use highlighting to demonstrate or point to particular concerns to underscore. Remember, though, that a little—one color, two or three instances—goes a long way.
- Use bullets and numbers freely, but in regular ways. Unless the numbers are meaningful, as in a series of action steps, bullets may be more helpful.
- Indentation and tabs:
  - ➢ Use tabs to indent paragraphs.
  - ➢ Use full indentations to block an entire passage.
  - ➢ Use indentation and tab keys rather than the spacebar for evenness.

- Line spacing can be double, one and a half, or single. Use whichever is easiest to read for your instructional purposes.
- Hard page breaks between your overarching comments or rubrics and the student's essay can be helpful. Place your writing before the student's text to draw more attention to it.

Another way to make the message more helpful visually is through color. Use blue, green, or purple for your words and black for students' words, for example. Avoid red, as it carries a negative overtone for many writers. Use only two colors; additional colors become confusing and jarring. The color should be rich and dark so it will be visible on a wide variety of screens as well as when printed. The following are sample colors and tones that may be unreadable to the colorblind and the otherwise visually challenged. Using rich, dark, distinguishable colors (not mixing blue and purple, for example) help readability and therefore understanding.

Avoid these tones:
- Use excerpts from your research to illustrate reasons why you believe in your thesis.
- Use excerpts from your research to illustrate reasons why you believe in your thesis.
- Use excerpts from your research to illustrate reasons why you believe in your thesis.

Adopt richer tones:
- **Use excerpts from your research to illustrate reasons why you believe in your thesis.**

Use Icons and Formatting Tools

A critical element in this day of word-processing programs is learning to use shortcut icons and auto-functions. Learn to use these automatic functions to avoid problems like this:

If I don't use the indentation icon, I have to fake the indentation

by (1) hitting "enter" to change lines and then (2) hitting the space

bar multiple times to achieve an indentation. You see what can

happen in terms of misalignment. ___If I change the font type or size,___

___things really mess up!___

The example lessons below demonstrate how necessary it is to use digital space wisely. In Example 5, there are long paragraphs with lots of words. That is how some students will see it, anyway. Notice also how a combination of poorly selected color and overused formatting tools makes the response both less comprehensible and downright unfriendly. In Example 6 note how *only the formatting is changed* to help the student better read and attend to its message.

Example 5

Content Development:

Your essay does not completely satisfy the assignment. It is important that you follow the instructions in order to learn the goals of your class. You were to provide responses to two separate scenarios. You say in the essay: *"I will be giving you two scenarios and giving you examples on how the scenarios can affect a person. I will also provide you with two references and two citations to support this paper."*

In what you have submitted here, you have only addressed one scenario and used one source (your assignment sheet cannot be included in the count of sources for your paper in this case). Your citation should be changed to match APA style and a References page should be included at the end of your document to list your sources. For more help with APA style, check your handbook or another source of information, such as a website. Further, the point you make before introducing the one scenario is that "Communication can go wrong as well, if you are sending off the wrong signs." But after introducing the scenario, John, you seem to make a different and completely unrelated point about communication: "If you have a problem with an employee that works alongside you, the best way to go about communicating to them how you feel is to go to them personally."

All of your discussion about this scenario should be CLEARLY CONNECTED, including the "six elements of communication." For example, instead of just saying that "From this example we see that there are elements to communication" and then listing and defining them, explain what exactly the barrier/s to communication were in this example, whether the channel was an appropriate one and why or why not, and what kind of feedback the sender was likely to receive from the receiver in this case. DO AN ANALYSIS OF THEIR INTERACTION because it can help in explaining what the problems were in their communication. That makes it easier for you to explain why you would handle the situation a particular way.

Example 6

Content Development:

Your essay does not completely satisfy the assignment. It is important that you follow the instructions in order to learn the goals of your class. You were to provide responses to two separate scenarios. You say in the essay:

> I will be giving you ==two scenarios== and giving you examples on how the scenarios can affect a person. I will also provide you with ==two references and two citations== to support this paper.

In what you have submitted here, you have only addressed one scenario and used one source (your assignment sheet cannot be included in the count of sources for your paper in this case). Your citation should be changed to match APA style and a References page should be included at the end of your document to list your sources. For more help with APA style, check your handbook or another source of information, such as a website.

Further, the point you make before introducing the one scenario is that "==Communication can go wrong== as well, if you are ==sending off the wrong signs==." **But after introducing the scenario, John, you seem to make a different and completely unrelated point about communication:**

> If you have a problem with an employee that works alongside you, the best way to go about communicating to them how you feel is to go to them personally.

All of your discussion about this scenario should be clearly connected, including the "six elements of communication." **For example, instead of just saying that** "From this example we see that there are elements to communication" **and then listing and defining them,** <u>explain</u>**:**

- **what exactly the barrier/s to communication were in this example**
- **whether the channel was an appropriate one and why or why not, and**
- **what kind of feedback the sender was likely to receive from the receiver in this case.**

Do an analysis of their interaction because it can help in explaining what the problems were in their communication. That makes it easier for you to explain why you would handle the situation a particular way.

Use these examples and those in *The Online Writing Conference* to try new ways to make your lessons more readable. Formatting enhances meaning.

Chapter 7

Teaching Basic and Nontraditional Writers

Basic writers—also called "developmental," "novice," and "beginning" writers—are in an early stage of developing the skills needed to complete high school or college or to find work. *Nontraditional writers*, who may be in their late twenties and beyond, are returning to high school or college after having been active in the work force. Both populations tend to be uncomfortable or unskillful writers, particularly in academic genres. Some may have very basic literacy skills that will need more than one academic term to address.

We have a rare opportunity to help these students understand that the writing process is recursive and generative. Many basic and nontraditional students think their words—once written—are carved in stone, and they fear writing anything because it won't be perfect. They may have writer's block because of this rigid mindset about perfection and finality. These students need to see their own writing in revision. A great deal of anxiety underlies such thinking and may emerge as touchiness and defensiveness about criticism as well. Our responses should reflect a positive attitude.

> Many novice writers have difficulty reading and working with instructional text. To help, use the four-step instructional process (*what*, *why*, *how*, and *do*) outlined in Chapter 5 of this study guide and throughout *The Online Writing Conference*. For less skilled and unconfident students particularly, we need to hone and practice writing responses that are simple, brief (where warranted), and demonstrative.

These students have skills that we can help them build. It is important not to misinterpret their earlier or less skilled writing as being completely inadequate. Remember, they have been writing—however successfully or unsuccessfully—throughout their school years. They also tend to write in their daily work, social, and home lives. Lack of skill or confidence in the academic writing setting is not indicative of lack of intelligence or lack of ability in all settings.

Nontraditional students are often self-motivated and want to study subjects directly relevant to their chosen careers. They may need to be shown how a writing course can help them. Some nontraditional students may be very comfortable asking their teachers and tutors questions; they may even demand—as part of their education—your response.

Using technology in academic settings may be disconcerting for many basic or nontraditional students, who are likely to be "digital immigrants." *The Online Writing Conference* discusses this concern on pp. 2–6 and highlights some ways to connect with these students. Keeping communication channels open via online technologies and the telephone can resurrect a failing essay or stop a downward slide [see *The Online Writing Conference*, pp. 56–59].

When students are poor readers of instructional text and the instruction comes solely from written response to their writing, we must write carefully constructed lessons. These students must also be allowed to learn from their own mistakes. Encourage them to resubmit drafts for additional

guidance. Ask them to make choices and explore the different paths writing can take. Although grades and success are important to them, they need opportunities to experiment, too. Revision is one such opportunity.

Especially in online settings, where we can't always interact orally with our students, we have to learn to form accurate impressions from their writing.

Clues that a writer might have more basic literacy skills

- The topic:
  - ➢ Possibly misinterpreted, ignored, or changed.
  - ➢ May be addressed in a minimalist manner.
  - ➢ Digression.

- The length:
  - ➢ Especially short essays.
  - ➢ One paragraph or fewer than expected.
  - ➢ Many short, "thin" paragraphs—some of which may be about the same idea and others of which are about very different thoughts.

- The parts of an essay:
  - ➢ A formal, standard thesis may not be present.
  - ➢ Some kind of main idea statement may be found somewhere in the essay.
  - ➢ Possibly no formal introduction or conclusion.
  - ➢ Insufficient reasons for a statement or examples.

- Sentences may reflect oral speech patterns:
  - ➢ Nonstandard or very informal.
  - ➢ Subject-verb agreement errors.
  - ➢ Pronoun-antecedent agreement errors.
  - ➢ Mixed-up uses of homonyms.
  - ➢ Confused usage of other common words.
  - ➢ Dialect markers.
  - ➢ Nonstandard sentence openings like "Being that . . . "

- Student affect:
  - ➢ Typically have weak communication skills:
    - ▫ Lack confidence in reading, writing, and speaking with authority figures.
    - ▫ Skill levels lower than grade-level or course expectations.
    - ▫ May be returning adult students with low esteem and history of failure in writing.
  - ➢ Know they have a difficult time with writing:
    - ▫ They are sensitive to apparent reminders of that difficulty.
    - ▫ They may exhibit signs of discomfort in posting their writing to teachers, tutors, or peers (e.g., "Please tear my writing apart").
    - ▫ They want help with their writing.

How can we help these students?

- Apply developmental learning principles.
- Teach respectfully by writing simply and clearly.
- Write shorter yet more explicitly developed responses and lessons.
- Be positive with genuine praise for real, repeatable strengths.

- Be formative, not summative (or error driven).
- Build confidence by teaching through doable, repeatable steps.
- Demonstrate writing through modeling.
- Provide ample examples from student writing.
- Ask genuine questions ("wh-" and "how").
- Give feedback in simple yet meaningful terms:
  - ➢ Avoid "teacher language."
  - ➢ Make comments simple and direct.
  - ➢ Avoid overly grammatical terms or reasons.
  - ➢ Rhetorical reasons may make better sense:
    - ▫ Reader's needs.
    - ▫ Writer's projected self.
    - ▫ Essay's meaning.
- Choose your battles: do not address every error or problem [see *The Online Writing Conference*, pp. 91–96].
- Encourage students to ask teachers and tutors questions.
- Use a number of strategies to help students review, revise, and edit their written texts over time, moving from writer-based to reader-based prose.
- Urge students to read their papers aloud to themselves and to others.

What tips from this study guide and *The Online Writing Conference* make the most sense in helping you respond digitally to your basic or nontraditional writers?

Chapter 8

Teaching English Language Learners*

Working with English language two (EL2) users presents many challenges that cannot be covered in this brief chapter. You should investigate the broad range of literature about EL2 users and their writing. Although *The Online Writing Conference* does not have a section specifically about EL2 users, much of its content—with a few caveats addressed below—applies to this writer subgroup.

> EL2 users have numerous language competencies because they communicate in a native language and one or more additional languages. They speak, read, and write in the native and learned language(s). Writing may be the biggest challenge. No matter how sketchy their English, it's helpful to view these students as people with *different*, not *deficient*, knowledge. It's also useful to be aware of cross-linguistic and cross-rhetorical variations.

The same instructional processes that I advocate in *The Online Writing Conference* and this study guide generally apply to EL2 users, but you should be especially careful to use grammatical structures that are simple, direct, and at the EL2 user's level. Use vocabulary appropriate for the student's level, defining terms as necessary. Straightforward language includes avoiding phrasal verbs, metaphoric/figurative language, and idioms unless they are defined or explained in the context of the lesson being taught. Additionally, avoid correcting or editing the student's text. A lesson that includes ample examples and revision demonstrations should help the student figure out how to correct some of the most important language issues in each lesson.

For those of us who are not fully trained in working with EL2 writers, encountering their writing in an online setting can be intimidating. Learning to engage students [*The Online Writing Conference*, pp. 120–25] and becoming comfortable writing directly about sensitive issues [pp. 139–44] can help us be better online communicators. Even unconsciously held American-centric and elitist views can find their way into our responses, and students can take it to heart. In the same way that our written lessons can be reread to provide future lessons, any remarks, however innocent, can sting and erode the necessary trust between online instructor and student. Good online communication is critical.

The following are Hewett and Lynn's (2007) ten recommendations for working with EL2 users. These guidelines are written with digital interactions in mind so that you can begin to strategize how to work with this student population both in synchronous and asynchronous formats. Pay special attention to how these recommendations may apply in asynchronous essay responses, since these are a primary way that EL2 students learn online.

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*(Most of the information in this section is borrowed from Beth L. Hewett and Robert Lynn's "Training ESOL Instructors for Online Conferencing," *The Writing Instructor*, 2007.

1. **Know how to "give face."** "Giving face" is showing respect for others and avoiding shaming them for their language issues. Praising what is done well can help temper necessary instruction that can be viewed and felt simply as criticism. One effective method is to say something positive about the student's knowledge of the native language and then explain how those things are done in English. Remember that asynchronous conferences involve a time lag and are directed to one participant at a time; you can't see the student's reaction to your words. If you "give face," the student may not have to "save face."

2. **Sell yourself as an instructor.** The best way to sell yourself as an instructor—whether a teacher or a tutor—is to demonstrate that you know what works in one language can be different in the target language of English. Show authority and humane attention to language difference by saying things like "I know doing XYZ is common in other languages; however, it works like ABC in English." The next best way to sell yourself is simply to be correct about written English regarding both essay writing and grammar. Nothing turns a student off faster than knowing more about the subject than the instructor. Avoid rules that may be wrongly stated or can be interpreted incorrectly. Demonstrate the necessary writing change by using some of the student's writing.

3. **Make an art of clock watching.** You may have to curtail the amount of material that you address with EL2 students or work with fewer concerns than you might like. In online settings, as in traditional ones, you have limited time to work with any one student's writing. EL2 students often have more obvious sentence-level issues, which can tempt you away from addressing the most important concept- or content-based higher-order concerns. It's important to give fair time to all, and it may be necessary and useful to schedule another meeting with the EL2 student in a synchronous online chat or by telephone.

4. **Find out what the student wants.** When possible, find out what the EL2 student wants to know in an upcoming writing conference and then tailor your response to address that issue to some degree—even if it's only a small degree. Students sometimes want help in areas they're not ready for, and it's okay to let them know that other issues need to be addressed first. But EL2 students often know their weaker spots in English, and, unlike some native speakers, they may benefit immediately if you pay attention to those spots.

5. **Learn how to talk to a particular student.** Because EL2 students have differing levels of writing ability in English, using a respectful and careful tone is important. Not being able to write well in English is not related to the student's intelligence, which may be remarkably high. Use appropriate language structures and vocabulary for the student based on what you know about the student overall and the student's writing. Since this study guide and *The Online Writing Conference* advocate instructional interventions using the student's own writing, take the student's apparent writing level into consideration when creating revision demonstrations.

6. **Know what you're talking about.** Keep a style manual on hand to make sure you're correct. It's even better if you and the student have a copy of the same manual or a link to an online version. If you find yourself teaching and/or tutoring EL2 students often, learn something about cross-linguistic differences and the rhetorical moves common to different

cultures. Get a source book for this information and keep it by your computer. If you truly are in doubt about an issue and cannot find what you need to know quickly, don't raise that issue with the student until you've informed yourself about it.

7. **Contextualize the conference.** Keep in mind and refer to the parameters of the assigned writing. (Tutors should familiarize themselves with any provided assignment notes and submission information.) Doing so helps EL2 students see the connections between the written response and their writing. Contextualizing the conference also means explaining—and demonstrating, when useful—how L1 and L2 users might differ in their approaches to any particular piece of writing. Demonstrate awareness of cross-linguistic differences, address only a few key issues within the response (thus, not overwhelming the student), and praise or show that you value the EL2 user's command of English.

8. **Use clear language.** This recommendation is important when working with any learner in an online setting. However, the EL2 user is more apt to pull out a dictionary and check an unfamiliar word, which means that our word choices are under (appropriately) higher scrutiny. It's especially important here to be aware of the "orneriness of language," as *The Online Writing Conference* discusses in Chapter 6; if particular words or phrases can confuse native speakers, there's a greater chance of such confusion for EL2 users.

9. **Proofread.** Everything you do online is open to scrutiny. All of it—email, chat, discussion comments, written response to essays—is recorded and archived. You are a model for how English is used in different genres. For example, you may write less formally in a discussion post than in an essay response, and you write differently in an email than in synchronous chat. All of your writing teaches students something about writing well in English in those genres. Above all else, you need to edit, revise, and proofread your work—which means allowing time for those activities. With EL2 students particularly, watch out for linguistic indirection, phrasal verbs, idioms, and figurative/metaphoric language that can confuse them. Find more straightforward ways to address these students.

10. **Teach by doing.** Chapter 5 of this study guide and the majority of *The Online Writing Conference* stresses the need to teach rather than just talk. It is important in online settings to "do" with students by means of revision demonstrations, modeling, illustrating, and other hands-on activities. In problem-centered teaching, it is vital to get your hands messy with students' words; to dig in and show them how to achieve what seems simple and apparent to you. It certainly isn't apparent to them, particularly in online settings. It simply isn't enough to tell students that 1 + 1 = 2. You need to show them using strategies like the four-step intervention process, formatting skills, and other approaches outlined in this study guide and in *The Online Writing Conference*. EL2 users, as well as native-speaking EL1 users, will benefit!

Chapter 9

Action Plan for Providing Readable Online Feedback and Response

1. Provide rich, ample opportunities to practice good writing wherever the course outline allows (e.g., full sentences, thoughtfully written and proofed in all discussion responses and emails to the instructor).

2. Build revision opportunities into your writing assignments whenever possible.

3. Ask students to use the online tutoring opportunities available through their online writing centers or bundled with their textbooks. Teach students how to use online tutoring to their best advantage.

4. Develop your response to student writing by:
   A. Thinking *formative*, not *summative*.
   B. Being straightforward.
   C. Focusing tightly.
   D. Teaching rather than talking, using problem-centered instruction.
   E. Using digital spaces wisely.

5. Know your response style and how you can vary it.

6. Practice and work with your peers to improve the feedback you give one another.

7. Listen to your own online voice and ask students for their feedback [see Chapter 8 of *The Online Writing Conference*].

8. Contact Beth Hewett for questions and concerns.

Find Beth Hewett online at www.bethhewett.com. For more assistance and to schedule an institutional visit or webinar, contact Beth Hewett at **www.defendandpublish.com**, **beth.hewett@gmail.com**, or 410-420-0133.