

Managing the Paper Load!!!

Go in with a plan—teachers who find themselves teaching writing for the first time often jump into response without having a plan. Part of this is because they have no idea what to expect. As you gain more experience responding, your methods and management will likely change significantly, but do not go into responding without an idea about *how* you want to accomplish getting through a stack of student essays.

1. Don't think you have to respond to everything your students write. For some writing assignments, the value for students is simply completing the writing (journals, in-class freewriting, etc.). For others, you may just want to write one or two comments. Students can also be an asset here. If you find yourself short on time, save your fully developed and engaged comments for high-stakes essays and allow students to review low-stakes assignments.
2. Similarly, don't feel you have to spend equal time responding to every student essay. Some students will be quicker to pick up your suggestions than others. Others will simply not require as much response as some of their peers.
3. Try to set your priorities before you begin responding. This includes priorities for the class in general, for specific assignments, for the point students are in the writing process, and for the stage you are in the course.
4. Limit the scope of your responses. Address a limited amount of concerns on each essay. This will allow you to concentrate on the comments you do make.
5. Try to figure out what kind of responder you are: conversational, play-back, reader response, etc. This will give your commenting consistency.
6. Experiment with your methods of response when you get new revisions. For instance, you might divide your stack in half and read half of the papers before you comment and the other half on the first read. You may find that one way is much faster for you. You can also do things like set a timer or plan personal breaks after reading a certain amount of essays.
7. Use minimal marking (intelligently and appropriately). For example, comment on a limited amount of grammar/punctuation errors per draft (comma splices and antecedents let's say). Identify students' mistakes on page one then instruct them to correct the rest when they revise.
8. Let the students take up some of the slack. While students may not be as fluent at responding to each other's essays as you, with direction and clear instruction students can learn to become effective responders in a relatively short time. One of the additional benefits of peer-review is that students learn a great deal about writing through responding to their peers' essays.