# Suggestions for Handling Errors in Student Writing

If you're concerned about error, your concern should be connected to your learning goals or outcomes. It needs to be in your goals, in your assignment design, and in your supporting work. You can't "teach" to something else and then grade heavily for error.

- You can choose to emphasize error a lot, a little, or not at all, depending on your learning goals and comfort level, and depending on the level of formality or "stakes" of the project.
- First drafts will have more errors than revised drafts. Support revision and editing.
- Limit students' focus to a few manageable problems in each paper. Begin with errors that impede understanding; those that don't are often "etiquette" errors.
- Error has its place and limits; it's not up front in the writing process. Explain the difference between revising (major changes), editing (style, e.g.), and proofreading (tiny errors). • Balance your concerns about error with your major learning goals—don't let error dominate your criteria (e.g., "three grammatical errors and you fail"), but in larger projects, do make error count in your assessment.
- There are different kinds of errors with different causes: simple slips, oral interference, dialect sources, ESL sources, conceptual sources. Learn these, and respond accordingly.
- Start with meaning/effect: it makes more sense than teaching isolated rules.
- Try "editing" one paragraph instead of the entire paper, and have the student do the rest.
- Recommend a handbook and use support services such as your writing center. Put responsibility back on students whenever possible, but offer guidance.
- Create mini-videos (with Jing, e.g.) that each focus on a single kind of error.
- Make simple errors simple. Go sparingly. It's easy to reach overload.
- Balance response to the whole group with response tailored to individual students.
- Encourage students to create a personal log of errors, written in their own terms with examples from their writing.

Don't hold students to a higher standard than we achieve professionally. No academic ever submits a "perfect" draft for publication; in-house editors cover those drafts with marks, changes, and queries. Also, even when we write very quickly (as in email), we make errors. Students make errors in proportion to how much time and support you have provided for their writing. "Overnight" first drafts are bound to contain errors. Sequence students' work