Suggestions for Responding to Writing Using Oral Screencast Technology

Before you begin, become thoroughly familiar with the technology you're using.

- Decide how you want to respond, based on your goals and context. Oral response gives you an opportunity to demonstrate your reading process by commenting as you read, explaining your predictions about what's to follow, confusions along the way, and so on. This is less common than after-reading response, but if you use it, be aware that it's very spontaneous and takes unpredictable amounts of time (try turning the equipment on and off as you read). In after-reading response, first read the entire paper once through, making shorthand marks to yourself in the margins to remind you of specific issues later.
- When you begin the screencast session, have the paper onscreen, greet the student, and explain the context: "Hey, Susan. I like the direction you've taken here in this second paper. Let me offer some comments about what works well and what else you can think about."
- Work through the paper, explaining your reactions, noting both strengths and weaknesses. With your cursor, highlight parts of the text you're discussing, so they're visible. When you're done, provide a summary statement: "So overall, this paper responds effectively to the assignment, especially the use of outside sources. You should continue to work on paragraph development as I've discussed, and also be sure to . . . ." If you're grading a (final) paper, scroll to your rubric and/or grade (usually at the end of the paper) and discuss it only toward the end of the video but not at the very end. This compels students to watch the entire video.
- Keep your eye on the time bar so you don't run over the screencast program's limit.
- Use an informal, friendly tone. Although oral response encourages a more casual demeanor, it can also accentuate sarcasm, negative attitudes, and the like. Talk as if you're having a pleasant chat, and the student will pay more attention. Enjoy responding.
- Try not to rush your comments. Students may not be able to process fast talk, especially if they're trying to see what you're referring to in a paper. It's better to focus on fewer issues more slowly than to race through a hundred concerns, even a screencast can be replayed many times or paused.
- If you need to think or review, pause the screen capture, then continue. Often the starting and stopping isn't even noticeable.
- Work from larger issues down to smaller, and save surface details for the end. Use the oral response as an opportunity to read confusing sentences aloud to show the student what happens to you: "Listen to this sentence, Tim: 'CBS was founded by William S. Paley, his uncle and his father sold him a struggling radio network.' See what happens when I hit that comma? I'm thinking at first that CBS was founded by Paley, his uncle, and his father. Then I get to 'sold' and I'm thrown off. You've run two sentences together here so I can't figure out which is which." This is one of the most powerful advantages of oral feedback.