

# RESPONDING TO STUDENT WRITING

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- wac
- c4w
- writing initiatives
- webmail
- efs

I'm new to the University of Alberta, having come from the University of Western Ontario where I was Director of the Program in Writing, Rhetoric, and Professional Communication in the Faculty of Arts and Humanities. In my new position here I'll be working with faculty and students across the university as part of the Writing Across the Curriculum initiative. I will also be working with students and faculty in the Department of English and Film Studies.

I am the author, co-author, or editor of five books and 29 articles, including *Writing Instruction in Canadian Universities*. My current research interests include the development of doctoral student writing, writing assignments across disciplinary fields, and rhetorical approaches to text encoding. Currently I serve as co-Vice-President of the Canadian Association for the Study of Discourse and Writing (CASDW) and a member of the Executive Board of the Canadian

### Recent presentations

This page contains links to pdfs of slides displayed at presentations I've given.

### Books

This page displays the covers and descriptions of books I've authored, co-authored, or co-edited.



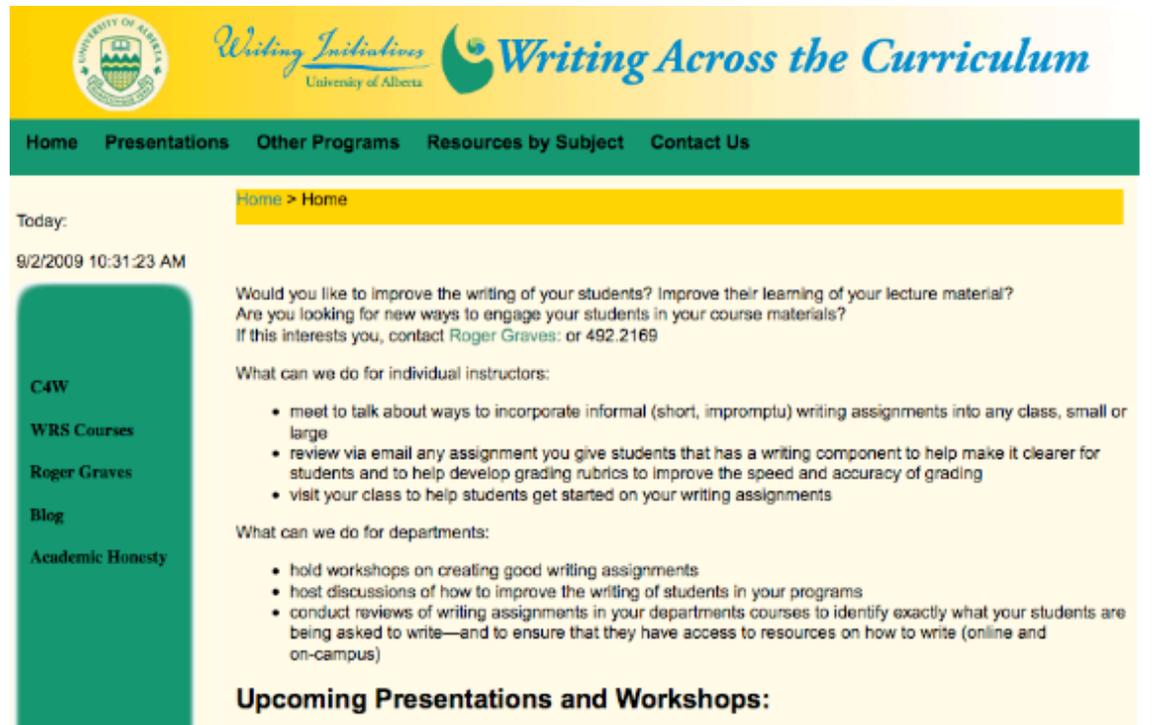
### Blog: Thinking About Writing

A new blog on writing-related issues



<http://www.ualberta.ca/~graves1/index.html>

# WRITING ACROSS THE CURRICULUM



The screenshot shows the homepage of the Writing Across the Curriculum website at the University of Alberta. The header features the University of Alberta logo and the text "Writing Initiatives University of Alberta" and "Writing Across the Curriculum". A navigation menu includes "Home", "Presentations", "Other Programs", "Resources by Subject", and "Contact Us". The main content area has a yellow background and a breadcrumb trail "Home > Home". The text asks if the user wants to improve student writing and learning, and provides contact information for Roger Graves. It lists services for individual instructors and departments, such as meetings, email reviews, and workshops. A sidebar on the left contains links for "C4W", "WRS Courses", "Roger Graves", "Blog", and "Academic Honesty".

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Home Presentations Other Programs Resources by Subject Contact Us

Today:  
9/2/2009 10:31:23 AM

Home > Home

Would you like to improve the writing of your students? Improve their learning of your lecture material?  
Are you looking for new ways to engage your students in your course materials?  
If this interests you, contact [Roger Graves](#): or 492.2169

What can we do for individual instructors:

- meet to talk about ways to incorporate informal (short, impromptu) writing assignments into any class, small or large
- review via email any assignment you give students that has a writing component to help make it clearer for students and to help develop grading rubrics to improve the speed and accuracy of grading
- visit your class to help students get started on your writing assignments

What can we do for departments:

- hold workshops on creating good writing assignments
- host discussions of how to improve the writing of students in your programs
- conduct reviews of writing assignments in your departments courses to identify exactly what your students are being asked to write—and to ensure that they have access to resources on how to write (online and on-campus)

**Upcoming Presentations and Workshops:**

C4W  
WRS Courses  
Roger Graves  
Blog  
Academic Honesty

<http://www.humanities.ualberta.ca/WAC/>

# Response



Response can come at any stage of the writing process:

- Thesis statements (idea generation)
- Outlines (organization)
- Drafts (coherence, development)
- Final/finished products (editing, proofreading)

At each stage, the focus of the response should change.

# Summative/Formative



- Summative evaluation/response sums up, totals, gives a final comment on a performance
- Formative evaluation helps shape or form the performance in advance of a final judgment of it

# Sample peer response questions

- **Peer Feedback: Proposal Writing**
- 1. Identify the main claims made in the proposal.
- 2. Using the schema on pages 114-115, identify the claim, link (because statement), reason, and evidence that are explicit or implicit in at least one of these claims.
- 3. Identify a rebuttal (challenge) that someone might make to one of these arguments, and then suggest how the writer could counter that rebuttal.
- 4. Using the proposal evaluation sheet as a guide, identify 3 areas you think the writer could improve if they revised their proposal.

# Who responds?



- Peers in class
- Centre for Writers tutors
- Friends, family
- Instructor

# Principles of response



- ❑ Respond to encourage revision rather than justify a grade
- ❑ Organize your comments into a hierarchy—most important to least important
- ❑ Comment on ideas and organization first
- ❑ Wherever possible, make positive comments
- ❑ Avoid over-commenting: students learn faster if they must find and correct their own errors

Bean, John C. *Engaging Ideas: The Professor's Guide to Integrating Writing, Critical Thinking, and Active Learning in the Classroom*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001.

# How to respond, 1

- ❑ Do not waste time on careless student work.
- ❑ Do not extensively mark grammar and punctuation.
- ❑ Address fundamental concerns first.
- ❑ Consider comments without grades.
- ❑ Use comments only for teachable moments.
- ❑ Spend more time guiding.
- ❑ Use only as many grade levels as you need (2= p/f to 1 3).
- ❑ Limit the basis for grading.

Walvoord, Barbara E. and Virginia Johnson Anderson. *Effective Grading: A tool for Learning and Assessment in College*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010.

# How to respond, 2

- ❑ Higher-order concerns
- ❑ Does the draft follow the assignment?
- ❑ Does the writer have a thesis that addresses an appropriate problem or question?
- ❑ If the draft has a thesis, what is the quality of the argument itself?
- ❑ Is the draft organized effectively at the micro level?
- ❑ Lower-order concerns
- ❑ Are there stylistic problems that you find particularly annoying?
- ❑ Is the draft free of errors in grammar, punctuation, and spelling?

Bean, John C. *Engaging Ideas: The Professor's Guide to Integrating Writing, Critical Thinking, and Active Learning in the Classroom*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001.

# Metaphors for response

## Coach

- Uses writing workshops to draft and revise student work in class
- Believes praise works better than censure
- Depends upon students to take responsibility for their own learning



Source: Stephen W. Wilhoit, *The Longman Teaching Assistant's Handbook: A Guide for Graduate Instructors of Writing and Literature*. New York: Pearson Longman, 2008.

# Metaphors for response

## Editor

- Focus on sentence-level errors
- Conversant with rules and conventions of standard edited English
- Every word and punctuation mark counts
- Devote much time marking essays



Source: Stephen W. Wilhoit, *The Longman Teaching Assistant's Handbook: A Guide for Graduate Instructors of Writing and Literature*. New York: Pearson Longman, 2008.

# Metaphors for response

## Academic reader

- Focus on how well the paper meets the standards of academic discourse for style, evidence, citations, sources
- If not, what must be changed?



Source: Stephen W. Wilhoit, *The Longman Teaching Assistant's Handbook: A Guide for Graduate Instructors of Writing and Literature*. New York: Pearson Longman, 2008.

# Metaphors for response

## Average reader

- Read as if you were reading a magazine or newspaper—to see what the writer has to say
- Speak back to the writer about what interests you, confuses you, annoys you

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Grant MacEwan University begins  
\$20M expansion



Source: Stephen W. Wilhoit, *The Longman Teaching Assistant's Handbook: A Guide for Graduate Instructors of Writing and Literature*. New York: Pearson Longman, 2008.

# Metaphors for response

## Customs officer

- Guards the academic border to ensure only approved students pass on
- Works from a clear set of rules
- Applies the rules consistently



# Your turn



- Which of these metaphors describes how you see yourself as a responder to student writing?
- Is there another metaphor that captures what you are trying to accomplish when you respond to student writing?

# Your turn



- Read the shorter of the two texts you have, and write responses to it, both in the margins and at the end
- Try out more than one of the roles/metaphors we have discussed
- Use the principles in the handout to guide your responses

# Sources

- Coach photo: <http://picasaweb.google.com/lh/photo/T4NhrhxVWMh8qfkL2NbmUw>
- Border shot: [http://farm1.static.flickr.com/52/131161403\\_afb1b40c45.jpg](http://farm1.static.flickr.com/52/131161403_afb1b40c45.jpg)
- Edmonton Journal: <http://www.edmontonjournal.com/>
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