Chapter 8

EVALUATING & RESPONDING TO STUDENT WRITING

[Part One: Response 192](#_Toc488432624)

[Tips for Effective Responding 193](#_Toc488432625)

[Further Reading 198](#_Toc488432646)

[Part Two: Dealing with Troubling Papers 199](#_Toc488432649)

[Tips for Effective Responding 200](#_Toc488432650)

[Part Three: Dealing with Plagiarism 203](#_Toc488432657)

[Prevention 203](#_Toc488432658)

[Detection 204](#_Toc488432660)

[Confrontation 205](#_Toc488432663)

[UW Resources on Plagiarism 206](#_Toc488432664)

During the quarter, you’ll be giving your students individual written feedback on each of their short and major assignments, and this feedback will be instrumental in helping students improve their writing and revise their chosen assignments for the portfolio (see the pathways in Chapter 6 to help you think about connecting feedback with assignment sequencing). While individual assignments are not graded, your feedback will be one of the primary ways that you set up expectations for how students will be graded when they turn in their final portfolios. This chapter will present some guidelines by which you can evaluate and respond to your students’ writing, and information on grading portfolios can be found in Chapter 9: Portfolios in English 131.

The chapter is divided into two main parts. “Part One: Response” takes up the sometimes tense issue of how to most helpfully respond to student writing, being careful to differentiate between critique and response. “Part Two: Dealing with Troubling Papers” offers some strategies for working with challenging student papers that can feel very violent to read. “Part Three: Dealing with Plagiarism” explains how to prevent plagiarism in your class and what to do if a student does engage in academic dishonesty

# Part One: Response

Though you will grade your students in the end, most of your feedback will be in the form of writing on drafts (and having conferences, as discussed in Chapter 7). Because the EWP uses the portfolio for determining final grades in 131 and does not assign letter grades to every writing assignment, the responses the students receive from you—and from their peers—will be all the more important. One of the ideas behind removing formal grades from every assignment is that your comments on the paper will fill the discursive space that was once filled by justifying the formal grade. Of course, the grades do not totally disappear, and we’ll discuss grading in Chapter 9.

As instructors in the EWP, you will be spending a lot of time responding to student writing. There are as many ways to go about this as there are English instructors; the time spent on each paper and the number of drafts that can be graded in one sitting (while preserving your own intelligence, energy, and coherence) will vary from person to person. Everyone will respond to student writing in their own way, and while there are few if any hard-and-fast rules, what follows are some things to keep in mind in developing your own commenting style.

## Tips for Effective Responding

### Goals in Responding

The primary goal of commenting on a student’s draft is to give your student the benefit of a clear and articulate “reader’s eye” view of his/her writing; referring to specifics in the writing lets the student know which elements really stand out to a reader, either as well-crafted or in need of work. In addition, this kind of commenting will keep you from falling into a “rubber stamp” kind of response (“more support, more evidence” written at the end every argument paper), which despite coming pretty easily after the eleventh or twelfth paper of the night, is not all that helpful to the student. These comments are also generally forward-reaching, meaning that the comments deal with skills and strategies so that the feedback can be used in subsequent writing assignments, even when they aren’t explicitly revising the one you’ve just commented on.

### First Things First: Time Spent Responding to Assignments

You could spend the rest of your life editing freshman English papers and no one would benefit from it. It seems to be a fact of life that when you first start grading, you grade obsessively. You spend time writing long comments, filling all the margins, and “fixing” punctuation errors, misspelled words, and strange new syntactic constructions—the latter of which may very well keep you from considering the content that speaks to the primary focus of the assignment. With this in mind, here are four reasons to avoid the overachiever grading attitude:

1. You will go insane. There are not enough hours in the day, and your other work will suffer.
2. The students at the bottom of the pile will bear the brunt of you having spent an hour on each of the first 15 students’ assignments. Save some steam!
3. This kind of commenting will often lead the student to think of the draft less as a project-in-progress, and more as a fixed object which, if only s/he goes through the list of “repairs” that you’ve prescribed, will be finished. Your comments will be for naught.
4. Your students are human, and as such, they can only absorb so much information. Remember that competence in all of the outcomes describes a final aim of a quarter-long course, not the aim of each every draft. Be reasonable and pick your battles.

Time management may be one of the biggest challenges you face teaching 131: how to balance commenting on assignments with the rest of your teaching, your own scholarship, and your life outside UW (which you shouldn’t feel guilty about having!). Here are some ways to manage:

* Skim each student’s draft before you begin commenting on it. You’ll notice major things that require attention and won’t be tempted to waste your time on smaller issues. An alternative method: Skim through all of the drafts once before settling down to read them. You can sort them into high, middle, and low range. This will help you comment consistently and highlight common mistakes that will make your commenting more efficient.
* Decide how much time you’ll spend with each draft before you begin, and stick to this time limit! Use a timer if you need to. (This will also ensure that you distribute your time fairly among students.) A good time limit may be 10-15 minutes on shorter assignments and 20-30 minutes on longer assignments. It may be hard at first, but you will get faster as you become more experienced.
* “Rule of 3”: Limit yourself to three written comments per page, plus an end comment if you’d like. Keep your end comments to three sentences.
* For shorter assignments, design a chart or checklist rubric that you complete and return to students along with their drafts. Your rubric can list the things you’re looking for in the assignment (perhaps directly citing the outcomes or the evaluation criteria outlined in your assignment prompt), and provide check boxes for evaluation using the language of the final portfolio rubric (outstanding, strong, etc.) You can also leave (a small) space for more specific written comments.
* Don’t read all 23 assignments in one sitting. You’ll go crazy by the end and will not be able to approach those last papers with the same fair eye you had for the first few.
* If you see students making similar choices that you find particularly in/effective, don’t offer the same advice over and over for each student; bring these issues up to the whole class. When doing so, you may want to bring in anonymous samples (get students’ permission first) or make up your own samples.
* Consider leaving a draft or two you know will be good for the end, rather than deferring those you know will be hardest to read; you’ll be glad you did!

### Use the Course Outcomes

If you design each assignment with the outcomes in mind, are explicit about which outcomes or traits are targeted in each assignment by including evaluation criteria in your assignment prompts, and discuss the outcomes and your expectations with your students, you can use these expectations to guide your comments. For example, if one of your assignments asks students to support their claim with evidence that comes from a text they have read, you can focus your comments on the strength of their evidence and their use of quotation and summary. It would not be as helpful to your students to focus on the complexity of their claim if the exercise was meant for them to apply evidence in a particular way.

Sometimes it’s hard to identify just *why* a draft—or a whole group of drafts—isn’t working. The course outcomes and traits should help you remember things about conducting research, for example, which have probably become second nature to you as a writer. As mentioned earlier, some instructors even use these outcomes to organize their end comments categorically, writing separate comments in response to the student’s performance in each area that has been targeted in the assignment. Whatever approach you take, be sure to cite the language of these outcomes (especially ones you have targeted in your assignments) when responding and evaluating. This way, you reinforce and circulate the outcomes, keeping them active in students’ minds. Just as importantly, the course outcomes and traits give you a vocabulary you can use for responding to student writing.

The Course Outcomes can be found on page 39 of this manual, at the beginning of  *Writer/Thinker/Maker,* and on the EWP website*.*

### Use the Evaluation Rubric

The evaluation rubric below is meant to work in conjunction with the course outcomes. Having identified the trait(s) you are targeting in an assignment, you can then use the value terms below to communicate to students how well they have demonstrated these traits in their work. Be sure to supplement these value terms with explanation related to the outcomes.

**Outstanding**: Offers a very highly proficient, even memorable demonstration of the trait(s) associated with the assignment outcome(s), including some appropriate risk-taking and/or creativity.

**Strong**: Offers a proficient demonstration of the trait(s) associated with the assignment outcome(s), which could be further enhanced with revision.

**Good**: Effectively demonstrates the trait(s) associated with the assignment outcome(s), but less proficiently; could use revision to demonstrate more skillful and nuanced command of trait(s).

**Acceptable**: Minimally meets the basic assignment outcome(s) requirement, but the demonstrated trait(s) are not fully realized or well-controlled and would benefit from significant revision.

**\*Inadequate**: Does not meet the assignment outcome(s) requirement; the trait(s) are not adequately demonstrated and require substantial revision on multiple levels.

*\* Some instructors opt for “Needs Improvement” instead of “Inadequate”*

### Respond Specifically in the Context of the Assignment

“Nice job with *Aladdin* and *The Fox and the Hound* in para. 3—this really shows an engagement with Lippi-Green’s idea of bias toward a Southern dialect” is better than “Nice job with Lippi-Green.” It is not as simple as “more is better,” but it is worth keeping in mind both the amount of **specificity** you offer your students and the example that you set for your students’ own work as peer responders.

### Different Drafts = Different Kinds of Responses (for different students)

Your responses to drafts will vary with the specific assignment, targeted outcomes, and the different stages in a sequence of assignments. In early assignments, for instance, you might focus more attention on the inventiveness of the thinking, on violations of the known-new contract, or on problems in focusing or framing an argument. Nearer to the end of a sequence, you may find that you’re spending more time on support and development issues; and, in the final stages, you may concentrate more on stylistics. Remember that each draft is different, and also remember that your students will be at different places in their writing processes. There is no rule that says your commenting has to be homogenous from assignment to assignment, or from student to student. For more information about how to tailor your feedback to the specific expectations of your course calendar and/or to align it with your pedagogical values as an instructor, please refer to the pathways outlined in the EWP Statement on Assessment of and Feedback on Grammar Correctness in Chapter 6. You will also find helpful suggestions for dealing with grammar issues in your students’ work more broadly.

### Recognizing Strengths

Let your students know when you recognize they’ve done something well, without evaluating or making suggestions. If something strikes you as elegantly presented or as a nice example of some element of writing you’ve been discussing in class, don’t hesitate to make a note saying so, or even better, use it as an example in class (be sure to get permission; students hate surprises). It is generally worth the effort to pass through a draft again in order to find something positive (as recommended by Donald Daiker). Also, be honest with students about how you tend to respond; if your “constructive” comments tend to outweigh your positive ones no matter what you do, be honest with them about this in class (or, if appropriate, try to adjust your style).

### Give Equal Time and Energy to Every Student’s Assignment

It is difficult not to spend more time on the drafts of students whose work has been consistently well written, or on drafts by students who we like or who contribute productively to class discussions. But it’s important to give equal time and effort to every student—even if that means taking extra time to find specific positive things to say on an outstanding draft or deciding not to comment on the clichéd conclusion because you’ve spent time commenting on the unsuccessful organizational choices in a poorly written paper. That said, if a student has clearly not fulfilled the assignment, there is no reason to respond as though he or she has; you should feel free to return the assignment with minimal comments and explain that in order for you to give feedback, the student must rewrite the assignment according to the guidelines and outcomes described in the prompt. You might also consider that if the student really does require extra feedback, you can ask that they come see you during office hours to talk about their paper (more on this below).

### Ask Questions (instead of giving directions)

If you find yourself asking questions as you read (and you will), let the student know what they are. Questions—particularly those asking for clarification—identify problem areas (both general and specific), and as students respond to them, they can be led where they need to go in their argument, without your having prescribed or dictated that they go there. In addition, questions that suggest implications and extensions of the student’s argument can indicate the extent to which the student’s work has produced engagement on the part of you, the reader.

### Approach Each Draft as a Draft

The assignments your students submit throughout the quarter are, after all, *drafts*; your students will have a chance to revise their work for their portfolio, so when you comment, keep this in mind. You might write something like, “If you choose to revise this assignment for the final portfolio, think about…”

### Tie Your Comments to Class Discussions

You may want to re-present some elements of the student’s writing using some of the terms you’ve established in class: “I like the way you present your controlling idea about education and indoctrination in the opening paragraph, and then move on to your supporting statements about your experience here at the UW. You wait until you’ve fully presented your position before considering counterarguments.” Or you may refer specifically to something that went on in class: “Remember what Joanne said about Ron’s paper—a little humor goes a long way.” (This kind of commenting also comes in very handy as a reminder that it is a good and necessary thing to attend class.)

### Remember, Focus on What You’ve Done So Far

Having spent time pouring over the criteria and going over it with the class, it may be tempting to respond to everything in every assignment. Though this is a bad idea for time reasons (as discussed before), you also want to remember that there is no point to writing “weak transition” if you haven’t discussed transitions; the comment will not mean much to the student. Of course, when it comes time for the portfolio, the student will need to take all the criteria into account, but it will be their job to return to that first paper, where you hadn’t yet done transitions, and figure out what needs work.

### End Comments v. Marginal Comments

Generally, try to spend more time on end comments than on marginal comments, as end commentary is written as a response to the entire essay and is likely to contain your more important thoughts and reactions, especially overall suggestions for revision. Marginal comments are likely to be more fragmented and seen by students as “fix-it” items. However, for some instructors, end comments tend to be blasé, so decide for yourself. Also, avoid marking repeated mistakes: it’s usually better to identify the problem in an end-comment and leave it to the student to identify and “fix” the problem.

### Know When to Say “See Me”

Sometimes, a student will submit a draft that is so far “off” or confusing that you don’t know where to start; often, in these cases, you’ll uncharacteristically stare at the page for several minutes thinking “where do I begin?” Sometimes, the appropriate move can be to write a small note asking the student to come see you. In writing, you may leave the student with a predominantly negative response (and one that cannot take into consideration valid but unanticipated reasons students might have for “missing the point” of an assignment). But in person, you are more likely to understand the student’s point-of-view and successfully articulate your own. It’s best to get the student’s take on how he/she did/did not meet the assignment *first*, in order to gauge your response appropriately. Lastly, “see me” has the same stigma as red pen: watch your phrasing, and consider writing something such as “please come see me in office hours soon so we can talk about your paper and brainstorm ways to refocus and strengthen it.”

### Coordinating Your Responses with Scheduled Conferences

At a few points in the quarter, you’ll likely be coordinating your responses on assignments with conferences; be sure to take advantage of this! As discussed elsewhere, the conferences are a great opportunity to talk to the student, and you’ll need to gauge how it changes your response strategy. You may find that you can write less and instead have the student write down ideas as you present them in conference (this also keeps them from spacing out in conference). You may also decide to use a response strategy or symbol that allows you to easily locate areas you want to discuss in conference (which you often think you’ll remember but won’t by your ninth conference in a row). Some students with different learning styles and preferences will appreciate the kind of feedback they receive in conferences. By the same token, keep in mind that certain students with learning and other disabilities may require you to write your comments, even if you plan to conference.

### Again, Use the Language of the Outcomes

Let the student know how s/he is doing: where you’re convinced by their argument, where you’re not, and why; what’s detracting from or adding to the overall quality of her/his piece, and why. Even (and in many cases especially) in portfolio courses, students will often be (quite justifiably) anxious about their eventual grades; you don’t need to assign a letter grade to communicate your evaluation of their performance on an assignment draft. Students are very savvy about translating the implications of adjectives, so, for example, if you mean “outstanding” don’t just write “good.”

### Explain Your Style

After a quarter or two (and after seeing your colleagues’ approaches), you’ll recognize your feedback “approach.” When you can identify what you tend to do, be honest with your students. They will respect you for this “meta-discussion” on feedback, and it will also give you a chance to admit your strengths and weaknesses, such as tending toward the negative, writing messily, ignoring conclusions in first drafts, etc.

### Make Sure Your Students Read Your Comments

Some students have a tendency to stuff returned work into their backpacks as soon as you hand it back, only to dig them out when it’s time for them to revise for their portfolios. It is important to explain to your students that because 131 assignments are constructed as a series of scaffolded sequences, students should expect to work toward incorporating your suggestions on each successive assignment to avoid making the same mistakes or unsuccessful choices. It will be frustrating to both you and your students if you make suggestions on how to make their claim more focused, but they don’t read this comment and repeat the same type of vague claim statement in their next assignment. So build in time for students to read your comments; you might leave a couple of minutes at the end or the beginning of class for them to gloss your comments and write a “Revision Plan,” have them email you a question or two about the comments you’ve given them on a draft, or have them keep a journal or log of comments/ suggestions/things they should be working on in their writing throughout the quarter. These strategies will also help students with their critical reflection at the end of the quarter, where they will need to explain how they revised their work, and will help them become more critical readers of their own and their peers’ work.

### Understand Your Role

Considering what many of us find important in our studies, it is unsurprising that we often enter the classroom hoping to temper the power relationship between teacher and student; we understand we have authority but perhaps don’t want to flaunt it. In terms of responding, this can sometimes result in “wishy-washy” responses or a failure to recognize the authority you really do hold as an instructor, which can be understandably frustrating for the student. Be honest and clear, and recognize that you are not simply “another reader,” but are not the supreme dictator either. Of course, it is also possible to be too authoritative, especially since your students will expect you to be, and this is something to be careful of as well and can be tempered by a stronger emphasis on peer review and positive response from you.

### Options for Responding

Though there are many different ways that you can respond to assignment drafts, outlined below are a few styles to consider:

* **Reader response mode**: I’m confused here when you say \_\_\_\_\_; I thought you meant \_\_\_\_\_\_, but this next paragraph makes me think \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. Can you clarify for me? I like your image here; it reminds me of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.
* **Argument response**: Your claim says \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, but your examples argue for \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. Can you help me understand how you think the examples support your claim? I think you skipped a step here—what I would expect here is \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, but maybe you’re saying something else. Which is it?
* **Peer responses**: I noticed that your peer said \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ when you mentioned \_\_\_\_. I agree. Can you clarify for us? Your peer said that you needed additional sources and I see that you didn’t change any in your revision. I think your peers had the right idea.
* **Other resources**: In class, we read \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, but I notice that you didn’t mention that article. Doesn’t it fit with your argument?
* **Reference language of assignment**: You seem to be arguing \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, but the assignment asks that you consider these options, in addition to the basic claim. What else can you say about these options?
* **Returning to heuristics**: Your peers and I found that we needed more detail for this example. How about a brainstorming list from the article you use listing all the occasions where your point is mentioned?
* **Recommending further reading**: Another source on our recommended reading list was\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. I think it might be useful for you to consider for your final version.

## Further Reading

### Response

Daiker, Donald A. “Learning to Praise.” *Writing and Response: Theory, Practice, and Research*. Ed. Chris M. Anson. Urbana: NCTE, 1989.

Elbow, Peter. “Writing Assessment: Do It Better, Do It Less.” *Assessment of Writing: Politics, Policies, Practices*. Eds. Edward M. White, William D. Lutz, and Sandra Kamusikiri. New York: Modern Language Association of America, 1996.

Farr, Marcia. “Response: Awareness of Diversity.” *Assessment of Writing: Politics, Policies, Practices*. Eds. Edward M. White, William D. Lutz, and Sandra Kamusikiri. New York: Modern Language Association of America, 1996.

Ferris, Dana R. *Response to Student Writing: Implications for Second Language Students*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2003.

*Responding to Student Writing*, Center for Interdisciplinary Studies of Writing, University of Minnesota: <http://cisw.cla.umn.edu/faculty/responding/index.htm>

Sommers, Nancy. “Responding to Student Writing.” *College Composition and Communication* 33.2 (1982): 148-156.

Straub, Richard. *The Practice of Response: Strategies for Commenting on Student Writing*. Creskill, NJ: Hampton Press, 2000.

### Evaluative Criteria

Berlin, James. “Poststructuralism, Cultural Studies, and the Composition Classroom: Postmodern Theory in Practice.” *Professing the New Rhetorics: A Sourcebook*. Eds. Theresa Enos and Stuart Brown. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1994.

Toulmin, Stephen. “The Layout of Arguments.” *Professing the New Rhetorics: A Sourcebook*. Eds. Theresa Enos and Stuart Brown. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1994.

# Part Two: Dealing with Troubling Papers

This section is designed to help you develop flexible strategies for dealing with ideologically troubling papers, which can feel very uncomfortable, and even violent, to encounter and engage with. Such student papers might contain perspectives that deeply conflict with your own or might contain what you understand as sexist, racist, or otherwise discriminatory or problematic discourse.

First and foremost, it is important to recognize that it is not always clear how (or whether) to respond to such perspectives that appear in student papers (or comments in class for that matter). Your response to any given paper will be a negotiation affected by many factors, including your own teaching philosophy and commitments, your identity and comfort level with the student, your sense of the intentionality or seriousness of the ideas you encounter, the dynamics and context specific to your class in any given quarter, and so on. While our responses will differ, one of our goals is to help all of our students make effective arguments and to become more responsive to and responsible for the consequence arguments have (their own and others’) within diverse communities and contexts.

Secondly, we urge you to remember that students may be encountering new ideas that might deeply challenge perspectives they hold. In many cases, students using troubling discourse may not be fully aware of the impact and effect of their argument.In such cases, helping students better understand the consequences of various arguments and ideas (which is one of the aims of Outcome 3) and being open to listening to their reasoning can open up productive space for dialogue, learning, and trust. While not always possible, such a space can become an opportunity for students to challenge their own thinking and gain a deeper understanding of and responsibility for the serious consequences of language in the world.

Finally, and just as important, it’s crucially important for us to acknowledge and recognize the emotional and intellectual labor that goes into reading and responding to such papers—it can be a deeply taxing, stressful, and isolating experience. After all, while it’s true that your students are demonstrating vulnerability in submitting their works and opening themselves up for critique, teaching, too, can be a deeply vulnerable act—especially if you’re a first-time teacher. Please reach out to us and to your peers if you encounter anything in student papers (or class interactions) that is worrisome. We are here to listen and to help you troubleshoot, offer strategies, and address any safety concerns.

Below, we offer a list of methods and strategies that Belle Kim has used in the past to respond to two challenging papers. The first (Student A) condemns #BlackLivesMatter and the tactics the movement has used to further their cause to argue that they have brought police brutality and racial policing upon themselves by being disruptive and making themselves ready targets; the second (Student B) claims that racial discrimination results from cultural difference and immigrants’ inability to assimilate successfully into the US; the third (Student C) argues that Syrian refugees should not be admitted into European countries because they are more likely to be terrorists and criminals, cause political strife, and cannot offer anything to their host country to offset the cost of their relocation. The instructor’s goal was to encourage her students to think more deeply about the issue at hand by using a variety of tactics to respond that sought to disrupt their assumptions and push against their line of argumentation.

In offering these examples, we hope that you can feel more supported and prepared to tackle such scenarios as they rise.

## Tips for Effective Responding

### Name and Question the Assumptions that Undergird Their Arguments

Explicitly naming the unstated beliefs and assumptions students hold that motivate their unsubstantiated claims is a crucial strategy that you can use to push against students’ arguments. In doing so, you can tell your student that an argumentative research paper emerging out of such an assumption is fundamentally unsound unless they can cite and analyze credible evidence or reference reliable (scholarly) secondary sources and research that can back up the assumption.

*Example:* Student A argues that #BlackLivesMatter is ineffective because “the justice system only target those who intentionally make an enemy of it—usually in the form of committing crimes” and the tactics of the movement (described as “relentless protests”) “makes an enemy of that system, thus inviting the targeting they wish to end.” In her response, the instructor names and questions his assumption that the justice system evenly targets and punishes only those who commit crimes: “Here, you’re making a lot of assumptions—that there is no racial bias within the police force, for instance (an assumption that scholars such as Angela Davis [discussed in class] and Michelle Alexander have specifically disputed); that all the unarmed black civilians who were killed by police were engaging in criminal acts at the time of their deaths, which hasn’t actually been the case; that there hasn’t been a history of racial violence against black Americans in the States, etc.—that you’d need to prove in order to be able to convince your readers of the interpretation you’re offering here.” Here, she pushes against his central argument by showing that it is built around a series of assumptions that cannot be proven with material evidence or analysis.

### Recommend Other Credible (Scholarly) Secondary Sources that Disrupt Their Assumptions

Another tactic that you can use is to suggest relevant and credible scholarly secondary sources whose core arguments disrupt the assumptions your students make in their paper. In doing so, you will be able to show that the arguments they are interested in making are actually part of a much larger ongoing (academic) conversation that includes multiple stakeholders and scholars with more expertise and knowledge. Your response to their work, then, cannot be read as just the proclivities of one individual; rather, it is situated in a larger context and conversation. Moreover, your recommendations can serve as additional guidance and direction that can help students think through the questions you pose throughout your reading of their paper.

### Refer Back to Course Texts and Discussions that Actively Work Against Their Claims

Referencing specific class discussions, lectures, and course texts can help remind students that they’re expected to engage with the shared knowledge you build with them in your classroom throughout the quarter in their individual writing. After all, building upon and expanding on the ideas of others is a critical part of thinking of writing as a conversation rather than as something that occurs in isolation. It also pushes students to grapple with compelling evidence and analysis that work against the very claims they’re making.

*Example:* In his paper, Student B argues that racial discrimination and the harassment of immigrants and people of color result not from white supremacy (which he argues has been “constantly altered and diminished”) but from cultural difference and the newcomers’ inability to assimilate effectively into the US: “The inequality that can be observed in the society, may [be found to be] the faults of the immigrants, since they share different culture, origin and ideas.” The instructor responds to the unsubstantiated assumptions he makes here by citing course texts and referencing relevant class discussions that work against his claims. Addressing his first point, she asks, “How might Lipsitz respond to such a claim given his argument that institutional and structural racism continue to very much organize US society and culture? Is white supremacy really diminished given the xenophobic/racist/nativist attitude of the Trump administration and the ongoing prevalence of social activism such as #BlackLivesMatter and #Not1MoreDeportation?” To the second, she writes, “Is what you’re trying to argue, then, that racial discrimination has existed solely because of cultural difference? How might such an argument run the risk of being reductive? Think back to Hing’s claim, for instance, that the cycles of acceptance and rejection that characterize US immigration policies were motivated by the desire for cheap, rootless, easily exploitable labor and capital on the one hand and racial prejudice and fear of economic competition on the other. How might his argument complicate your own?” With these comments, she reminds the student that she expects him to be drawing from and adding to conversations they have been having in class even if he had the freedom to choose which topic to write on for this paper.

**Use the Language of Stakes to Urge Students to Think Through the Ethical and Political Implications of Their Arguments**

Ask your students about the urgencies and stakes motivating their argument—what are they writing about and why? Who is most affected by this issue? What are they trying to achieve by forwarding a specific argument? What is their argument and writing being mobilized toward—that is, for what end? What might be the material impact of their writing for those most affected by the argument they’re wanting to make and how have they taken this into account? In demanding that they think through such questions, you are reminding students that, at least within the parameters of your classroom, being a good writer means thinking carefully about the ethical and political implications of your arguments and being accountable critical writers.

*Example 1:* In response to Student A’s continuing critique of #BlackLivesMatter and assertion that “I look down upon those who take tactics such as those of BLM, and invite all who share a desire for a healthy future of discussion in America to join me,” the instructor asks, “What are the stakes of engaging in a project like this? That is, for what purpose are you launching and mobilizing this critique of the BLM movement? Compare this to the stakes and urgencies motivating the BLM movement—how do they compare? How might you take the latter into account more fully in your argument?” Here, she stresses that the student needs to think about both the stakes that inform his project *and* those of the movement he criticizes so it is clear he isn’t critiquing the BLM just for the sake of doing so.

*Example 2:* Student C argues in his paper that “only by facing the negative effects refugees bring to Germany can German media and politicians realize how much damage refugees [have] done and new policies should be publish[ed] to properly control refugees.” Throughout his paper, he remains focused on narrating the “negative effects,” “damages,” and “harm” that Syrian refugees have brought to their host countries but neglects to examine the issue from the vantage point of those most affected by his argument—the refugees themselves. In response, the instructor writes, “Is it only the damages? What benefits have they brought? What are the conditions that have led these refugees to seek asylum in other countries? Note that these people are escaping a war-torn country (the political instability of which has been actively facilitated by European/US powers) and while it's important to think about the costs/drawbacks, it's equally important to think about what they've contributed, the specific traumas they've had to negotiate, and the ways in which various countries have been implicated in the making of the refugee crisis. To clearly establish the stakes of your project, then, you need to think more about who your argument affects and in what ways.” The instructor thus pushes the student to consider more carefully the perspective of those most directly and materially impacted by his assumptions about the cost of refugee relocation.

### Use the Language of “Resisting Binary Thinking” and “Counterarguments/ Concessions” to Push Them to Consider Questions and Perspectives They Haven’t Yet Considered

Remind students that an effective piece of writing does not shy away from complexities or contradictions; the most compelling and powerful arguments emerge not from cherry picking for only those pieces of evidence that backs up one’s claims but from pushing deeper, asking difficult questions, and engaging those perspectives they have discounted or neglected to take into account.

*Example:* Student A writes that #BlackLivesMatter, “instead of convincing the populace and political groups to ignore the members of the movement and the Black people…paints an even bigger target on it—one labeled this time ‘impulsive and violent’ rather than ‘inferior and irrelevant.’ In acting and speaking out so thoroughly and extravagantly…they also ensure they are treated differently as well, defeating the point of trying to end the differential treatment members of the Black people receive.” Here, the instructor offers in her margin comments a strong rebuttal to his argument that he’d need to address in order to be convincing to his readers: “How might you respond to a counterargument that says it was necessary for the BLM to explore different tactics because so many other approaches have been unsuccessful (as signaled by the ongoing devaluation of black lives)? Why might they have been calling for large-scale action to begin with? Doesn’t it also point to the difficulty of disrupting the status quo?” To push against the student’s assumptions that the only thing #BlackLivesMatter mobilizations have achieved is to make African Americans even more of a target, she asks, “Has this been the only outcome? What might have been gained? I think your argument would be strengthened by making some concessions and acknowledging that which the BLM has done well—doing so would lessen the risk of alienating your readers and engaging in binary thinking.” She thus tries to push the student to add more complexity and nuance to his argument by asking different questions than those currently motivating his writing.

### Ask Open-Ended Questions and Require Students to Respond to Them During Revisions

Ultimately, in dealing with papers like the ones discussed in this section, one of the best strategies you can use is to leave margin comments throughout that pose specific questions for the students to answer. The questions can ask for clarification, more evidence and in-depth analysis, a metacognitive reflection on the student’s purpose and agenda as writer, a discussion of the stakes and urgencies motivating the student’s paper, etc. You can then require your student to respond directly to these questions in writing, which will also necessitate that they engage in more research and reflection. Asking carefully thought-out (and phrased) questions thus allows you to offer guidance without simply leaving unaddressed the troubling content. While some of the tactics offered in this section may seem inadequate at best, keep in mind that they’re also a way for you to protect yourself against potential accusations that you’re a “biased,” “unprofessional,” “social justice warrior” who practices “reverse racism” and tries to “indoctrinate” her students.

*Example:* Student A argues that the Black Lives Matter activists’ interruption of Bernie Sanders’ speech is indicative of the “reckless aggressiveness” of the movement: “Sanders has publicly stated views that align with those of BLM…however, the protesters refused to acknowledge this; they denied offers of negotiation while insulting the audience, leading to jeers and profanities from the audience…It directly showed how a group of liberal activists—closely aligned with the movement itself and not opposed—were quickly made into enemies due to the methods of the protestors and the reckless aggressiveness they tend to employ.” For this student, the disruption is a compelling piece of supporting evidence that backs up his critique of the #BlackLivesMatter. The set of questions the instructor asks in response shows, however, that such an example can be interpreted and read in a very different way: “This is a useful example that helps advance your argument, but I think you could do an even more in-depth analysis of what took place: what do you think the BLM activists were trying to accomplish and point out by interrupting Bernie Sanders? What do the pejorative responses of the audience suggest about the BLM’s perception of the gap between white liberals’ presentation of themselves as “good allies” and their actual political practices?” Such questions demand that the student engage in a more thoughtful analysis that goes beyond his own personal opinion.

### Talk to your Student in Person

This is not always possible, but if you have more serious concerns, you might ask to talk with the student in your office or during a conversation. The experience of reading written comments is very different than a conversation where you can ask students why they made certain choices and you can listen and respond to the student. See Chapter 7 for more information on and strategies for conferencing with students.

# Part Three: Dealing with Plagiarism

Unfortunately, another element of the classroom that must be taken into consideration when designing your course and assignments is plagiarism. It is important for you to know how to prevent it, how to detect it, and then how to deal with it if you determine that your student is using work that is not his/her own. Some students who resort to these tactics feel overwhelmed by the demands of college; others do not completely understand how they are supposed to use source materials properly. Please remember that you are encouraged to talk to the Director or to an AD if you are in doubt about a possible plagiarism case and if you want advice about how to deal with a student whom you suspect. There are a variety of ways to handle plagiarism cases when they occur that you will need to negotiate and that will depend on the severity and circumstances of the case, your philosophy, and your student’s situation.

## Prevention

You can start preventing plagiarism before your class even begins, when you are designing your syllabus, assignment sequences, and lesson plans. Be sure to include the UW policy on plagiarism (or a more personally tailored paraphrase) directly in your syllabus. The UW policy blurb is included on the EWP website and can be cut and pasted into your syllabus, or you may construct your own plagiarism statement by referencing the resources mentioned in the next paragraph. Follow up on the written policy by verbally reviewing your guidelines on the first day of class and then again later in the academic quarter (perhaps when you discuss MLA citations).

As stated, your syllabus should include a section describing your class policy on plagiarism, such as the example below. You may wish to consult the university’s statements for students, <http://www.washington.edu/uaa/gateway/advising/help/academichonesty.php>, or for instructors, <http://depts.washington.edu/grading/conduct/index.html> to find helpful language. If your student chooses to remain in your course, then s/he has agreed to abide by the rules described in your syllabus:

###### Plagiarism, or academic dishonesty, is presenting someone else's ideas or writing as your own. In your writing for this class, you are encouraged to refer to other people's thoughts and writing—as long as you cite them. As a matter of policy, any student found to have plagiarized any piece of writing in this class will be immediately reported to the College of Arts and Sciences for review.

However, beyond merely adding your policy on plagiarism into your syllabus, you must also emphasize the importance of this rule. On the first day of class, you should go over your entire syllabus carefully, but spend extra time reviewing your plagiarism policy. Remember, many students are not sure what plagiarism means, and many have done it (unconsciously or not) when they were in high school. You must warn them that plagiarism in college is a very serious matter with very serious consequences, which can include their possible removal from the university.

Inform your students that you will grow to be very familiar with their individual writing styles, so any aberrations will be readily apparent. Remind them that the portfolio system dictates that you will witness the incremental progress of each of their drafts, so you will certainly notice any highly unusual shifts from one submission to another. In addition, caution them that you are just as computer savvy as they are, and you are therefore very aware of relevant search engines, websites, and articles associated with your assignment topics. After you have told them about your policy on the first day, revisit the topic later in the quarter. You might have some late arrivals to your class, and everyone can use some reminding about the serious nature of this offense.

Remember that not all students understand fully how to use source materials. In order to help these students to avoid plagiarizing, it is important that you explain that academic dishonesty includes things like referencing a quote they have never seen, using ideas from another source without citing that source, and using academic work written for a different class. You should take the time to discuss methods for taking accurate notes and citing sources properly, and the reasons behind proper citation expectations in the academy and public spheres.

Many students plagiarize because they feel their own work will not be successful, or because they have run out of time to complete an assignment. If you create room for students to ask questions about your assignments, discuss time management issues, and let students know that you understand that writing is a difficult process, you may be able to cut down on plagiarism. It can be risky because students may take advantage of the offer, but some TAs find it helpful to explain to students that it’s much better for them to ask for an extension at the last minute than resort to plagiarism.

Another effective way you can prevent plagiarism is by individually crafting your writing assignments. Although it will be very tempting to borrow your colleagues’ successful assignments verbatim, we strongly urge you to vary your class’ version of writing assignments. In other words, we recognize and honor the collaborative process of curriculum design and lesson planning, but we strongly encourage you to tailor assignments into your own words to fit your unique goals and expectations. The more unique your assignments are the more difficult (and less rewarding) it is to get away with plagiarism. If you alter or add to an assignment, your student will not be able simply to recycle a paper written by another student for a different writing class. (And if your student does, you will notice that s/he hasn’t answered your question properly.) You could also require specific elements in your assignment (articles from a particular journal, interviews that the students conduct themselves, copies of whatever cultural artifacts they may be analyzing or using as evidence), and limit students’ secondary research materials to recent publications.

## Detection

Since you will be reading many samples of writing from your students, you will become familiar with their individual styles, voices, and even limitations. Therefore, if you suddenly receive writing that sounds drastically different from other assignments, you should examine that draft much more closely. Also, since you will follow each assignment’s progress through an assignment sequence, you should also become suspicious if you notice that your student has suddenly changed his/her topic for short assignment 3 in the assignment sequence.

### Things to look for:

1. Has the voice of your student suddenly changed? (Review past writings.)
2. Has your student’s knowledge of advanced grammatical devices suddenly leapt? (Has your student suddenly gone from composing very simple, ungrammatical sentences to authoring a publishable article?)
3. Are there some phrases included in the paper, which appear **much** more complex than your student has demonstrated elsewhere? (Rather than a steady progression, your student’s writing has been transformed overnight.)
4. Examine your student’s prewriting assignments (usually short assignments 1 and 2) next to this composition. Is this an incongruous entry?
5. Has your student answered the assigned question? (For example, is your student turning in a well-written paper about Marjane Satrapi but ignoring your specific and individual questions about her graphic novel?)
6. Does the font or quotation ("rather than “) style randomly fluctuate?

### Searching for confirmation:

1. If you suspect that sections, or the entirety, of your student’s assignment are plagiarized, first, go to a comprehensive search engine (such as Google), and insert a particularly suspicious phrase of 5-7 words from the paper (in quotes). Try several different phrases. This is how many TAs have found the source material of their students’ plagiarized papers.
2. However, even when you find segments of a student’s paper on a website, continue looking. Some students have strung together plagiarized material from five different websites. If looking for phrases is not working, you might try searching for a variety of papers on your broader topic (such as “Marjane Satrapi” and “graphic novels”). After all, this was probably your student’s approach when finding the paper. You’ll be shocked at how many free prefab essays you’ll find this way, and you may just stumble upon one that seems eerily familiar.
3. In addition to pulling papers off of their computers, students also copy sections out of academic journals that they find in the library or off of the Expanded Academic Index. For this reason, you should be familiar with some of the published articles on your topic. Another good idea is to gather many of these works together and put them on reserve in the library, so your students know that you are aware of their existence.
4. Computers and libraries are not the only places to pick up pre-written papers. Since most students at UW take 131, everyone knows people who have written 131 papers. This is why it is very important to craft your assignments so that they are very specific to your class. When students appear to ignore large sections of your assignment or have written a paper completely off-topic, then your red flag should be raised. You may want to email the Englist or 131ta listservs with a brief summary of the paper to see if another TA recognizes the paper in question. Many have found the sources for suspicious papers this way.

When you have evidence that a student has turned in work that is not his/her own (and it appears to be more than a learning problem such as not knowing how to cite sources), you should talk to the Director or to one of the ADs about bringing your documentation to the office of the Vice Provost of Academic Affairs as soon as possible. But the next section also outlines why approaching the Director or an AD should be a first resort and approaching the Vice Provost a last resort.

## Confrontation

If you have a suspected plagiarism case, remember that you don’t have to handle it alone. You are encouraged to notify the Director or one of the ADs, who can help you evaluate your suspicions and discuss how you want to proceed.

In most cases, your student’s first incident of plagiarism does not dictate that s/he will get expelled from the university or will even fail your class. In fact, your student has the opportunity to rewrite his/her assignment (with late penalties). However, in order for this rewrite to take place, you must confront your student as soon as possible to inform him/her of your suspicions and of the consequences. **You should also require that your student sign a contract.** Haste is especially important toward the end of the quarter. Many cases of plagiarism occur after students have turned in work that is unacceptable, and they panic when writing a more final version of a paper. If you have any students in this situation, you should review their assignments first, so if you need to meet with them about plagiarism, you can schedule it in time for your students to rewrite their work.

When you meet with your student, you have the option of having an AD in the room with you, if you so choose. Be organized: Photocopy the suspicious assignment, so you will have an example of it after your student leaves your office. You should also have your syllabus’ “Academic Honesty” section open and have several previous examples of your student’s work in front of you. Obviously, if you have hard evidence of plagiarism, then bring these too.

Tell your student that you have become very familiar with his/her writing for your class and of his/her writing on this assignment sequence in particular. Also tell him/her that you have shared the irregular assignment with the Director and/or an AD, and the Expository Writing Program supports your suspicions. For these reasons, you suspect that this work is not his/her own, and s/he must rewrite it (starting from the beginning) in order to receive credit for the assignment. Even if your student does not want to include a final version of this particular assignment in the graded portion of his/her portfolio, no part of the plagiarized work is acceptable in the portfolio. The student should accrue late penalties while rewriting the assignment. Be prepared to tell your student during this meeting what those penalties are—put them in writing. If your student denies guilt or is not willing to accept your penalties (**by UW policy, students have the right to due process unless they waive it by signing a contract**), then inform him/her that you will quickly arrange a meeting with the Director of Expository Writing to further discuss the matter and then you will report the case to Academic Affairs for adjudication.

If you have evidence, and you decide that there is more than a misunderstanding or a learning issue at stake, then you should bring your documentation to one or more of the ADs and/or the Director on this issue to begin the process of filing it with the Vice Provost of Academic Affairs.

**It is University policy that teachers cannot independently fail a student or take disciplinary action for plagiarism or cheating.** If the case is reported, you cannot assess a penalty (or final course grade if the case occurs at the portfolio stage) until the college committee has adjudicated the case. The committee will ask the student to present his/her case against the case you have made, and then render a decision. If the plagiarism is confirmed, then you can assess a penalty, as described above. The typical first ruling marks the violation of the Student Code on the student’s permanent record. A second violation usually means expulsion.

## UW Resources on Plagiarism

For information detailing the rights that both you and your students have when faced with a disciplinary problem such as plagiarism, see the Faculty Resource on Grading (FROG) website: http://depts.washington.edu/grading. This site also has a detailed description of the review process: [http://depts.washington.edu/grading/issue1/inforprt.htm](http://216.33.148.250:80/cgi-bin/linkrd?_lang=EN&lah=30db179cb7e2dde536b785d7b76acf81&lat=1028086109&hm___action=http%3a%2f%2fdepts%2ewashington%2eedu%2fgrading%2fissue1%2finforprt%2ehtm).