Providing Feedback on Student Writing

Georgetown Law
Goals of Workshop

- Address strategies for effective and efficient feedback on student writing
  - Assess where students struggle most
  - Assess where faculty struggle most
  - Discuss strategies for dealing with student and faculty struggles in the process
Key Take-Aways for Effective Use of Writing in a Course

- Know why you have assigned the document
- Make sure students know why they are writing the document
- Tailor feedback to the purpose of the assignment
Goals of Your Writing Assignment

- Why have you assigned a writing assignment?
  - What is the purpose of the document?
    - To show mastery of material?
    - To show analytical/critical thinking skills?
    - To help students learn?
    - To master aspects of crafting a particular type of document?
    - To help the professor know where students are confused?
    - To have students connect practical experiences to theory/doctrine?
  - Who is the student writing for?
  - How does this assignment relate to subsequent assignments for the course?
Goals of the Assignment

- What are you looking for?
  - What characteristics do “A” papers share?

- Do you have samples?
  - (>1; past student papers, examples in assigned reading, etc.)
  - Make expectations clear to students
Helpful Professor Actions

(1) setting deadlines that require students to start work early and to work on the papers at a steady pace, while at the same time allowing enough time for each stage in the writing process
(2) building rewriting into the syllabus
(3) discussing the writing process and your expectations in class
(4) intervening in the students’ writing process as often as possible to provide feedback and guidance about the students’ progress
(5) giving students checklists or rubrics for each assignment
Discuss Writing Process & Expectations; Give Feedback

- Research
  - Discuss research sources in seminar
  - Look for Research Guides on Library Web Page
  - Enlist the help of GULC’s librarians
  - Require research reports before drafts are due – as a separate assignment, or as part of an outline
    - Comment on them or discuss in class
  - Recommend research consultations
Discuss Writing Process & Expectations; Give Feedback

- Help Students to Appreciate the Purpose and Audience for the Document
  - Make your goals for the paper and each assigned part of it clear – in class, in syllabus, in separate handout
  - Have students identify their own goals for the document in advance
  - Have an express discussion about audience for the document and how that audience influences writing choices like tone, stance, scope, and format
Effective and Efficient Intervention in the Writing Process

- Do not edit the student’s work or appropriate her text
  - Exceptions: clinics, live-client situations – but build in opportunity to discuss why you made certain edits
- Make comments text-specific, not generic
- Set priorities and stick to them
Effective and Efficient Intervention in the Writing Process

- Focus on the big picture – 3 most important things student needs to focus on in revising or in the next assignment
  - Comments should highlight and be consistent with these individual student priorities
  - Common examples: depth of research; LSO/SSO; stance/tone/thesis; foundation for normative assertions; recognition of counterarguments; precision in language; more express discussion of relevant sources
  - Include positive feedback – what is working (relatively) well?
Effective and Efficient Intervention in the Writing Process

Comments vs. Conference vs. Classroom

- Not all feedback needs to be written comments from the professor
- Use peer reviews in class – ideally with a form/checklist that focuses the review on your goals for the assignment
- Go over a model/strong sample in class with a checklist or rubric and then have students rewrite in light of discussion
- Live commenting and Workshopping

Address Both Product and Process
Commenting Tips: Provide both general and specific feedback on drafts and help students prioritize

- General feedback in a cover/end note that identifies rewriting priorities
  - Look for patterns and describe them here
  - Address priorities for the assignment – e.g., overall organization, depth of research and analysis, meeting formal requirements, precision in drafting, tone/stance

- Specific feedback in margins
  - Describe, Question, Remind, Assign
  - Frame comments in terms of the reader’s point of view
General Tips

- Assign and discuss an article that addresses writing process and structural options for the particular type of document
  - Refer back to the article in your comments/conferences rather than reinventing the wheel
- Send students to the Writing Center
  - Students can make appointments by signing up online.
Resources

- Sample checklists and peer review forms in your packet
- Email me to brainstorm ideas: rossj@law.georgetown.edu
- Books, Articles, and Other Resources:
  - http://legalwritingpedagogy.lawbooks.cali.org/
  - http://www.law.georgetown.edu/faculty-staff/
  - Subject-specific books/articles for teaching upper level writing: http://guides.ll.georgetown.edu/teaching/subject#s-lg-box-12278137