

Timesaving Tips for Grading: Essays

In our newsletter titled, "Time Saving Tips for Grading: Daily Work," we described two key assumptions that help generate specific time saving strategies when grading. And we provided three examples of how to save time when grading daily homework and classwork. Below are some additional ideas that may help save time when grading student writing and essays.

The Problem:

It bothers many teachers that when they correct student essays, they put in the most time for kids who put in the least effort. They'll spend thirty minutes working on Mark's poor paper, putting red ink all over it, only to watch him crumple it up when he receives it in class. There are two parts to this scenario. First is the repetition of written comments that teachers tend to make for each paper. Second are all the grammatical corrections teachers make that barely get a glance from the student.

Four Solutions:

Comments.

Create a "teacher comment sheet" that includes the written comments that you typically make on student papers. You can tailor the comment sheet for each assignment. Each comment on the sheet has a number. When you grade a student's paper, instead of writing a comment that's an entire sentence long, simply write the number that corresponds to the comment on the teacher comment sheet.

In addition, for final summative comments that appear at the end of the essay (such as "excellent use of examples"), have a second section to your teacher comment sheet that is devoted to final overall comments. Simply circle the appropriate comments on that section of your teacher comment sheet, and attach the sheet to the back of the essay.

Corrections.

Indicate only three corrections for the student's paper, even if the paper actually has twenty-five mistakes. Go over some of the more oft-repeated mistakes with the whole class. If a parent complains that you haven't put enough red ink on Mark's essay, simply say "Thank you so much for your interest in Mark's work. Please have Mark correct the three mistakes that I indicated and have him return the essay to me. I'll be happy then to put three more corrections on it."

By going over the mistakes and corrections in class, students will receive the feedback they need to improve. In addition, students who make the effort to go

beyond the first three corrections will receive the additional help that they are asking for. Students who put a minimum of effort into writing their essays won't be holding you hostage for thirty minutes as you diligently reconstruct their entire paper for them.

Grading Rubrics.

Use a rubric to grade student papers. This is used for scoring written essays on standardized tests. The graders simply assign a number- one through six, for example- to each paper. The numbers correspond to a document that describes in detail the characteristics for each of the six papers. A six would be an excellent paper, with most or all of the important elements included. A five would be a very good paper, with many of the key elements included, and on down the line. If you are going to do this, it's helpful to use student samples for each of the numbers in the rubric, as well as more generic descriptors for each number.

Feedback Rubrics.

Create a rubric that separates out the different elements of an excellent essay, i.e. grammar, spelling, descriptive language, use of evidence, structure, etc (see sample below). Each element can be described from 1-4 separately, with a 1 being the least effective use and a 4 being the most effective use. This works best when you actually highlight on the rubric where the student's paper falls for each element. Staple the highlighted rubric to their essay before you hand it back for revisions. Then design class wide lessons on the elements that the majority of students struggled with, before having them re-write or revise for their final essay grade.

	4. Distinguished	3. Proficient	2. Apprentice	1. Novice
Research-Quality: Information from reputable sources	Included facts, quotes, and paraphrasing from reliable sources. Included research from subject-matter experts.	Included facts, conclusions, and opinions from reliable sources.	Included a mixture of facts from reputable sources and opinions from unreliable sources.	Included more opinion than fact. Information was taken from unreliable sources.
Writing-Ideas: Interesting, informative details	All details were unique, interesting, and related to and supported the profile idea. -Writing included information based on fact.	Writing had many interesting details which supported the profile idea. Writing included interesting information .	Writing had three or more details that supported the main idea.	Writing had few details.
Content-Creativity: Unique delivery	Project demonstrated student's own interpretation and expression of research material. Used pictures, images, or other visual aids to display information in multiple ways.	Used student-created materials as well as existing material from other sources. Student devised a creative way to design or deliver the project.	Information was factual but showed little student interpretation. Project based primarily on sample work. Student added one or more original ideas.	Project was built from a template, designed only as prescribed, or was based entirely on sample work.
Organization-Time Management: Uses time wisely	Used time well. Work was turned in early or on time.	Most work was done on time.	Some work was not done on time. Monitored progress occasionally. Did not change work habits or schedule accordingly. Worked frantically to finish project on time.	Did not use time well. Little or no work was done on time. Did not monitor progress adequately. Project was not completed on time.
Design-Layout and Organization: Organized and easy to read	Content was well organized with headings and subheadings. Text and graphics were neatly organized and made the project easy to read.	Project was organized with headings and subheadings. Text and graphics were placed to make the project easy to read.	Most of the project was organized. The placement of text and graphics sometimes made the project hard to read.	Project was hard to read. There is no clear structure. Text and graphics were randomly placed.