Welcome to the spring 2022 issue of *Journal of Response to Writing*, which starts the journal’s 8th year of continuous publication. In this new issue, we introduce two feature articles that add to the breadth of response-related topics covered by the journal, as well as three pieces in a brand-new section we are calling “Teaching Tips.”

Both feature articles provide insight into ways that writing instruction can better incorporate aspects of peer- and self-response, with the goal of developing student writers’ metacognitive abilities throughout their writing processes. The authors’ research studies analyzed classroom interventions that improved students’ abilities to read their own and their peers’ texts and to think critically about how to improve those texts.

The first article, Leanne Havis’s “Improving First- and Second-Year Student Writing Using a Metacognitive and Integrated-Assessment Approach,” focuses on university-level writing across the curriculum. Using a quasi-experimental approach, Havis compares student achievement on essay exams and research papers. Students engaged in exam...
autopsy, a multistep process meant to help students reflect on their written performance and make plans for improving in the future. Havis’s analysis shows that the exam autopsy process significantly helped lower division students (first- and second-year students) improve their grades on the next exam or draft of their papers. The process was not as helpful for upper division learners, a finding that Havis attributes in part to these students’ previously developed metacognitive skills for approaching college writing.

Developing metacognitive abilities for self-response is also the focus of the second feature article, Katherine E. Batchelor’s “Using the ‘CARD’ Technique to Assist Middle School Students in the Revision Process.” In collaboration with a middle school teacher, Batchelor taught a class of seventh-grade students how to use the heuristic “CARD” (a mnemonic for “change, add, rearrange, or delete”) while revising the flash fiction stories they were writing. Batchelor observed how the students employed the heuristic both in talking about their own writing processes and in giving feedback to their peers. Young writers used this simple mnemonic to remind themselves of areas in which they could improve their writing.

In addition to these feature articles, we are excited to debut a new “Teaching Tips” section of the journal intended to provide practical advice to writing teachers, teacher educators, writing program administrators, writing center coordinators, writing tutors, and graduate students. These teaching tips are designed for quick reference and modification for a variety of writing and response contexts. Following a brief rationale for the approach, the bulk of the text provides step-by-step guidelines for putting the tip into practice. These brief overviews of activities and lesson plans can be used in writing instruction or for the professional development of writing instructors and tutors.

In this issue, the editors of JRW offer teaching tips they have implemented in their own work. The first, co-editor Katherine Daily O’Meara’s “Building Response Into Labor-Based Grading Contracts,” outlines a beginning-of-term process to give students more equitable
opportunities to meet course expectations. While labor-based grading contracts have been popular for a while in writing courses, they do not always consider how response fits in the process. O’Meara’s contribution provides helpful suggestions for writing teachers wishing to implement labor-based contracts in their syllabi. The second teaching tip, associate editor Grant Eckstein’s “Preparing Students to Engage With Teacher Feedback,” offers suggestions for helping writing students make sense of instructor commentary. Eckstein’s recommendations align with the process described in Havis’s feature article in this issue. Finally, in “Online Teacher-Student Group Conferences,” co-editor Betsy Gilliland, writing with Michelle Kunkel and Mitsuko Suzuki, describes a process for conducting small-group conferences in an online format. These conferences blend the benefits of one-to-one teacher-student conferences with those of peer response, socializing novice writers into the practices of feedback provision.

We hope the new “Teaching Tips” section will allow readers to share quick and easy-to-adapt response-related activities and lessons that they have used in their teaching. Because they will not go through the peer-review process, teaching tips are intended for a quicker turnaround time and more rapid publication. As always, we also encourage readers to share their research and response practices through peer-reviewed feature articles and teaching articles as well. Please continue to think about the myriad ways that response appears in discussions of writing, both in first- and second-language writing in any language, and in contexts ranging from primary school to professional work.

Register on the journal platform (https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/journalrw/) to be notified when a new issue is released. You can also follow JRW on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. Thank you for reading our new issue!
Improving First- and Second-Year Student Writing Using a Metacognitive and Integrated-Assessment Approach

Leanne Havis
Neumann University

Abstract: Metacognition emphasizes an awareness and understanding of one’s thoughts and cognitive processes, along with management of cognition through multiple strategies, including organizing, monitoring, and adapting. Before students can truly become effective writers, they must develop an appreciation for the amount of planning, organization, and revision that a writing assignment requires. In order to improve student writing, the exam autopsy approach—an integrated postexam assessment model that draws upon self-assessment, peer review, and instructor feedback—was modified to include metacognitive components for use with essay exams and writing assignments. The current study employed a mixed-methods design with a quasi-experimental, nonequivalent group component across four institutions over 2 semesters, with the fall semester classes (T1) functioning as the control group and the spring semester classes (T2) functioning as the experimental group. During the spring semester of each class, the modified version of the exam autopsy process (EA 2.0) was used between two submissions of student writing (either essay exams or drafts of papers). Students who used the process in lower division classes had significantly higher scores than the control group, but not in upper division classes. Qualitative data analysis reveals some of the reasons behind the observable improvements (or lack thereof) in student writing. These reasons, as well as possible future implications for both teaching and research, are discussed in this article.

Keywords: self-assessment, peer review, metacognition, writing, writing improvement, first-year students

Author Note

The author wishes to thank the faculty members who participated in this research study.

Motivated by a desire to support undergraduate students as they work to plan, monitor, and control their own learning, Owen (2019) developed an integrated postexam self-assessment methodology known as the exam autopsy approach. This approach utilizes metacognitive reflective practices and incorporates feedback from peers and faculty members, as well as from the student learners themselves, to facilitate students’ self-regulated learning. The underlying aim of the original exam autopsy model was to have students reflect critically on their performance and study skills and, with some direction and prompting from their peers and instructor, modify their learning strategies as needed. After Owen shared the approach with colleagues, several dozen faculty members began implementing it in various classes, and the response has been overwhelmingly positive. Student grades on tests seem to improve when this approach is incorporated into a class. Yet faculty members have consistently expressed an interest in adapting this approach to writing assignments or writing-based exams (e.g., essay tests) in a bid to improve the quality of their students’ writing. This interest provided the impetus for the next iteration of the exam autopsy process (EA 2.0) to be tried and tested.

EA 2.0 is comprised of four steps aimed at providing multiple sources of insight and feedback about a sample of student writing, as well as the habits and strategies that went into producing it. The first step involves an initial self-reflection on the part of the student writer, the second seeks input from a peer, the third incorporates faculty comments and suggestions, and the concluding step provides an opportunity for the student writer to integrate all of the aforementioned observations and consider how to approach writing tasks differently in the future. Given that the literature consistently

demonstrates a clear connection between metacognitive practices and writing, two research questions guided this project. The first addressed quantitatively whether the use of EA 2.0 would result in improved student writing. The second research question involved a qualitative analysis of student comments to explore possible reasons as to why student writing did (or did not) improve as a result of EA 2.0.

**Literature Review**

**Metacognition and Writing**

Encouraging students to use metacognitive practices to monitor, control, and reflect on their own learning can be an invaluable step in promoting both academic achievement and the acquisition of transferable skills (Zimmerman, 2001). Initially coined by Flavell (1979), metacognition emphasizes an awareness and understanding of one’s thought and cognitive processes, along with management of cognition through multiple strategies, including organizing, monitoring, and adapting. Given that writing as a process also involves those selfsame strategies, it is hardly surprising that metacognition and writing are often discussed within the same research frameworks. Writing is occasionally defined as a problem-solving task that requires metacognitive control of planning, text generation, and reviewing (Hayes, 2012). Before students can truly become effective writers, they must develop an appreciation for the amount of planning, organization, and revision that needs to go into a writing assignment. Planning alone extends to making decisions about the content and purpose of the work, the way in which the work should be organized in order to maximize flow and clarity, and necessary details to attend to in editing and revising (Hayes, 2012). Consequently, writing processes involve both cognitive and metacognitive mechanisms.

According to Schraw and Dennison (1994), knowledge of metacognition includes three types of awareness: declarative knowledge, which has to do with people’s awareness of their own capabilities and the variables that
may influence their learning performance; procedural knowledge, which focuses on the awareness of how to execute and perform a task; and conditional knowledge, which involves an awareness of those situations in which declarative or procedural knowledge should be applied. Strengthening a sense of self-awareness, including an awareness of one’s own strengths and weaknesses as well as an awareness of various appropriate strategies that may be employed if a particular approach is not achieving its desired objective, is a necessary metacognitive step that can ultimately improve student writing.

Numerous studies have investigated whether the use of metacognitive strategies results in better student writing. Wischgoll (2016) found that learners who received an additional self-monitoring-strategy intervention benefited significantly more in terms of acquiring academic writing skills and producing better quality texts than their counterparts who did not receive this intervention. These results seem to underscore the value of introducing students to self-monitoring strategies that they can apply to academic writing. Pacello (2014) suggested this value may lie in students’ ability to view their learning as meaningful and relevant, arguing that pedagogical methods stressing a metacognitive-strategy approach to college reading, writing, and learning may help students to understand that learning is a process and, consequently, to consider the course as being connected to their academic, personal, and professional pursuits. Riddell (2015) added that a necessary dimension of the reflective process involves frequent opportunities for practice and feedback, inasmuch as a metacognitive approach to essay writing can provide tremendous benefits for students’ writing skills if the approach includes carefully scaffolded assignments that afford opportunities to practice writing and receive feedback.

**Student Self-Awareness and Self-Assessment**

Promoting self-reflection and self-evaluation among students is a critical first step in the metacognitive process, and encouraging students to reflect on their own written work, as well as on the effectiveness of the steps

they took to produce that work, is a vital piece of the assessment puzzle. Feedback from outside sources (such as peers or faculty members) will carry less weight if the students themselves have not had the opportunity to self-assess. Yet most students (including upper division undergraduates) struggle with monitoring their own efforts (Warkentin & Bol, 1997). This may be attributable to the fact that many students find it challenging to judge their own knowledge and skills accurately (Ambrose et al., 2010), a phenomenon that is especially prevalent among students with weaker knowledge and skills (Dunning, 2007). Falchikov and Boud (1989) conducted a meta-analysis of 48 quantitative self-assessment studies and analyzed differences in student and faculty scores for the same assignment. They found that self-assessment was more accurate (i.e., corresponded more closely to faculty assessment of student performance) among students in upper division courses (as opposed to those in introductory or lower division courses), among students in the sciences (as opposed to those in other disciplinary areas), and in studies with a well-thought-out research design. The implications in the literature are clear: even though it is insufficient as the sole source of data upon which to draw in formulating judgments and evaluations of effective study strategies, self-assessment has definite potential for producing deeper learning (Bercher, 2012) and improvements in student writing (Fung & Mei, 2015; Mazloomi & Khabiri, 2018).

Instructor Feedback

A second source of feedback for students to consider in developing an overall sense of declarative, procedural, and conditional metacognitive knowledge is the faculty member scoring their assignments. Ross (2006) researched concurrence rates between students’ self-assessments and teacher (and peer) assessments and determined that students typically rate themselves higher than their instructors rate them (with some exceptions). He contended that this is due to the differential interpretation of evaluation or assessment criteria by students and teachers (Ross,
2006). In other words, students presume they do better than they actually do because they fail to grasp fully the requirements of an assignment or the expectations of a faculty member.

Nonetheless, feedback from faculty members is tremendously valuable. In order for students’ writing to improve (and, indeed, for other areas of their study strategies to improve as well), the students need to grasp fully not only what grade they earned on an assignment but also why they earned it, and along with that, what decisions they made that resulted in that grade. Research suggests that students highly value feedback from faculty members insofar as it clarifies why the final grade was awarded (Tehrani, 2018). Instructor feedback is certainly valuable, given that instructors are the ones that create the expectations and grading criteria for an assignment. However, feedback is often frustrating for both the instructor and the student. The former may feel as though the task is laborious (Bean, 2011) and end up spending hours engaging in a form of copyediting, correcting every spelling or grammatical mistake on a student’s paper (consequently depriving the student of an opportunity to learn to identify and correct mistakes independently), while the latter may feel either dejected at the sheer volume of corrections that need to be made (Jonsson, 2013) or baffled because the comments noted on the paper (e.g., “avoid overgeneralizing,” “don’t editorialize”) may seem too abstract and vague. Indeed, Bowden (2018) pointed out that students rarely make the changes suggested by faculty members on earlier drafts and noted that much of the literature aimed at uncovering why that is focuses on faculty, rather than student, perspectives on the matter. Poulos and Mahony (2008) sought to provide insight into students’ perceptions of effective feedback and noted that effective feedback, from the students’ point of view, was the kind that “provides emotional support and facilitates integration into the university” (p. 152). Faculty comments viewed as confusing rather than concrete, then, while offered with the best of intentions, are likely to be dismissed. Moreover, Sommers’ (2012) interviews with community college students about the perceived value of instructor comments found

that students appreciated feedback that began with something positive and that had a conversational, rather than normative, tone. Interestingly, students appreciate the same characteristics in peer feedback as well, as discussed in the following section.

It may be that students fail to respond to instructor feedback because it is typically provided in writing, a format that requires students to read and process the comments. Students may not fully comprehend what instructor comments mean. Future course correcting, then, becomes somewhat impossible in this context. Students cannot be expected to change their approach to writing if they fail to understand meaningfully what it is about their approach that needs to be changed. Stannard (2008) suggests that too much written feedback can be biased toward a single learning style, essentially disadvantaging certain students. Further research suggests that providing instructor feedback using multiple modalities, such as audiotaped recordings (Rawle et al., 2018) or face-to-face conferences (Mahmoudi & Bugra, 2020), along with written comments (Bitchener et al., 2005), better meets student needs and produces greater improvements in student writing.

**Peer Evaluation and Feedback**

Peers constitute a third source of evaluative insight, and peer assessment or evaluation has been found to have significant cognitive and metacognitive benefits (Topping, 1998). In fact, if its chief objective is improving student writing, peer evaluation constitutes an even more integral part of the writing process because feedback and student gains in writing quality have long been strongly and positively correlated with one another (Kuyyogsuy, 2019; T. T. L. Nguyen, 2018). Furthermore, there is extensive evidence in the literature that suggests student writing improves most significantly when feedback is provided early, often, and with a subsequent opportunity for revision, redrafting, or some other form of a “next attempt” (Bean, 2011; Kolb et al., 2013; H. T. Nguyen & Filipi, 2018).
Moreover, the peer evaluation process is often as beneficial for the student providing the feedback as it is for the student receiving it (Li et al., 2010; Liu & Carless, 2006; Topping, 1998), regardless of the quality of the feedback itself. The very act of articulating and identifying a problem, and proposing an appropriate solution to it, forces students to think critically and to engage with the assignment in unprecedented ways (Boud, 1990). They learn to view their own work from the perspective of others (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). Students frequently comment that when they read another student’s paper, they develop a better sense of what they need to work on in their own writing (Liu & Carless, 2006; Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). Consequently, engaging in peer review promotes the development of students’ self-assessment skills (Boud, 1990; DeGrez et al., 2012; Liu & Carless, 2006; Ruggiero & harbor, 2013).

As with instructor feedback, the peer evaluation or assessment process works best when feedback is not provided exclusively in writing but rather is constructed as an ongoing dialogue between teachers, learners, and peers that is individualized and aimed at providing concrete suggestions for improvement (Espasa et al., 2018; Nicol, 2010). To have students participate in this dialogue, peer reviewers must be trained, not only so that feedback can be shared with peers in a constructive, beneficial manner (Van Merrienboer, 1997) but also so that the instructor can ensure all of the students have a clear, uniform understanding of the criteria and expectations associated with scoring the assignment (Leydon et al., 2014). Hadzhikoleva et al. (2019) cautioned that students may be reluctant to comment on their classmates’ work for personal reasons and that they may be unable to function effectively as peer reviewers if they fail to understand how to apply the criteria (i.e., a scoring rubric) or what the benchmark is (which reflects the instructor’s expectations).

Taken as a whole, the literature establishes that student self-reflection may produce improvements in writing quality but cautions that student self-assessment as a sole means of judging performance may be inadequate.

or insufficient. Peer and instructor feedback provide additional useful sources for input and evaluation, but these need to be dialogic in nature and presented using multiple modalities (i.e., not just in writing) in order to be truly meaningful. However, no study to date has triangulated these sources of insight, namely, from self, peer, and faculty, and examined the extent to which doing so might produce improvements in student writing.

**Methods**

The current study employed a mixed-methods design. The quantitative portion utilized a quasi-experimental, nonequivalent group component across four institutions over 2 semesters, with the fall semester classes (T1) functioning as the control group and the spring semester classes (T2) functioning as the experimental group. Since the assignment of participants to groups (i.e., either to T1 or to T2) was neither controlled by the investigator nor random, it must be acknowledged that there is a possibility the fall and spring sections of each class were not equivalent. However, the investigator sought to account for any confounding variables by choosing groups that were as similar as possible. The student populations in the control group and experimental group for each of the courses chosen are comparable, as evidenced by the lack of statistically significant differences between the means of the first scores students earned on essay exams or writing assignments in those courses. Specifically, there was no significant difference in the grade students in T1 ($M = 77.09, SD = 11.49$) and T2 ($M = 73.50, SD = 15.12$) earned on the first assignment in the sociology course; $t(46) = 0.94, p = 0.35$. Nor was there a significant difference in the grade students in T1 ($M = 76.95, SD = 9.10$) and T2 ($M = 77.39, SD = 9.91$) earned on their first exam in the criminal justice course; $t(35) = -0.14, p = 0.89$. Likewise, there was no appreciable difference in the grade students in T1 ($M = 87.0, SD = 6.0$) and T2 ($M = 85.11, SD = 7.18$) earned on their first exam in the English course; $t(15) = 0.65, p = 0.53$. Finally, there was no significant difference in the grade students in T1 ($M = 87.27, SD = 5.27$)
and T2 ($M = 85.50, SD = 6.43$) earned on the first writing assignment of the psychology course; $t(21) = 0.73, p = 0.48$. These preliminary analyses suggest that writing levels in each pair of courses were similar at the outset of the semesters under study, and therefore, the student populations in the control group and the experimental group were comparable.

During the spring semester of each class (T2), EA 2.0 was used between two submissions of student work (either two essay exams or successive drafts of the same research paper) in order to determine whether the process resulted in improved student writing. The hypothesis guiding the study predicted that students who completed EA 2.0 would have statistically significant improvements in their writing from one submission to the next. The qualitative portion of the study involved an analysis of written student comments submitted as part of EA 2.0 in order to explore why significant improvement in writing was (or was not) observed.

Participants

Faculty at four institutions were approached and asked to participate in the current study. Given the research focus on improving student writing and developing students’ self-regulated learning skills, interested faculty members were asked to select classes that met two criteria for inclusion in the study. First, the class under consideration had to utilize writing-based assignments; that is, either essay exams (at least two, for the purposes of the study) or a research paper (involving the submission of at least two separate successive drafts for feedback). Second, the class under consideration had to be taught by the same faculty member using the same delivery method (i.e., hybrid, face-to-face, or online) two semesters in a row (fall and spring). The fall sections (T1) functioned as the control group; no interventions were introduced, and the classes were taught using the pedagogical approach typically adopted by the particular faculty member. Students in these sections received instructor feedback on their writing when the papers or exams were returned to them but did not spend any time practicing

self-assessment or peer review. Instead, the faculty member continued delivering course content in preparation for the next writing task. The spring sections (T2) functioned as the experimental or treatment group; faculty members teaching the classes used EA 2.0, either between essay exams or between two consecutive drafts of a writing assignment. Ultimately, four courses were selected to participate in the study, representing various disciplines and assorted class levels: a 100-level sociology course, predominantly taken by first-year students to fulfill a general-education core requirement; a 200-level criminal justice course, mainly taken by second-year students in the major; a 300-level English course, comprised of students in their third or fourth year who were taking the course either as an elective or as majors; and a 400-level psychology capstone course, exclusively taken by seniors in the major (see Table 1). In the interests of universality, 100- and 200-level courses will be referred to as “lower division” classes or courses, and 300- and 400-level courses will be referred to as “upper division” classes or courses.

Table 1

<table>
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<th>Course characteristics</th>
<th>SOC T1</th>
<th>SOC T2</th>
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<th>CJ T2</th>
<th>ENG T1</th>
<th>ENG T2</th>
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**Course type for participants**

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</tr>
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</table>

**Delivery format**

| F2F | F2F | F2F | F2F | H  | H  | F2F | F2F |

*Note.* “SOC” refers to sociology. “CJ” refers to criminal justice. “ENG” refers to English. “PSYCH” refers to psychology. “F2F” refers to face-to-face courses. “H” refers to hybrid courses.

**Materials**

In order to test both of the research questions, the four-step EA 2.0 process was used as an intervention. The prompts and questions themselves are presented in Appendix A, and the procedure by which the steps were introduced is described in the following section.

**Procedure**

IRB approval was secured at each of the participating faculty members’ home institutions and a 2-hour training session was held to orient faculty to EA 2.0. Details were provided about the rationale for the approach and about possible challenges faculty could expect to encounter. Particular attention was paid to Step 3 of the process (i.e., providing faculty feedback to the students) and to the peer reviewer training presentation described later. The investigator scheduled time for faculty to participate in active role-playing from a student perspective, engaging with the worksheets and student artifacts from previous semesters.

At the start of each semester under study (both T1 and T2), faculty members distributed informed consent forms to the students in their courses. During T1, students were asked to indicate whether they would consent to share their grades on two essay exams, or two subsequent drafts of the writing assignment selected (with their names redacted to...
ensure anonymity). All students in all classes consented to participate in the study. For the protection of their privacy and anonymity, students were assigned random numbers for data entry purposes.

During T2, students were likewise asked to indicate whether they would consent to share their grades on two essay exams or two subsequent drafts of the writing assignment selected (with names redacted to ensure anonymity); however, they were also told that they would be expected to participate in EA 2.0 and that any of the contents of the related worksheets could also be shared with the investigator, albeit anonymously. Once again, all students in all classes consented to participate in the study, and students were assigned random numbers for data entry purposes.

The fundamental difference between T1 and T2 was that, between the first and second essay exams (in the lower division criminal justice class and the upper division English class) or between the first and second drafts of the writing assignment (in the lower division sociology class and the upper division psychology class), the students in T2 participated in EA 2.0. At the start of the class periods in which the first two steps of EA 2.0 took place, faculty members reminded students that they could withdraw from the study at any time. No student across all four of the T2 classes declined to participate at this point. The classes then commenced EA 2.0 using the steps represented in Figure 1 and described in detail in Appendix A.

During the class period when the selected first paper or exam was returned to students, faculty members explained that a postexam or postassignment metacognitive self-assessment would be taking place and that the objective of the self-assessment (Step 1) was for students to think critically about what they had done well and areas in which they could improve; this step was intended to raise awareness around what Schraw and Dennison (1994) described as declarative knowledge. Students were instructed to focus on process over content: They were to concern

themselves not with whether they got any of the material wrong but rather with how they made sense of, planned out, and executed the assignment (or the exam).

Once students completed Step 1, faculty members spent approximately 30 minutes providing peer reviewer training in accordance with the suggestions made by Van Merrienboer (1997). Faculty members clarified expectations and benchmarks (further capitalizing on an opportunity to provide students insight into how the scoring and grading process takes place), students engaged with the scoring rubric in a norming exercise, and faculty members explicitly and repeatedly reminded students to ensure that

their comments as reviewers were respectful and, above all, constructive; the process of providing feedback was framed as an opportunity not to denigrate or humiliate one another but rather to provide support in a very concrete way. The faculty member also clarified that the peer review/feedback process was not intended to position students (when providing feedback) in the role of an editor; that is, they were not responsible for pointing out sentence-level errors or correcting faulty citations. Instead, they were supposed to consider their classmates’ writing holistically and prioritize suggestions for improving their classmates’ writing.

Once faculty members’ expectations were clarified, Step 2 began in earnest. Students were paired up randomly to exchange exams or drafts (something that was not in the original version of exam autopsy), as well as their Step 1 worksheets, before being asked to address (in written format first and then oral format, in case expansion or elaboration were needed) the Step 2 worksheet prompts. Students shared their feedback with one another in peer conferences that took approximately 20 minutes of class time. This collaboration with peers offered student writers access to what Schraw and Dennison (1994) called procedural and conditional metacognitive knowledge. Before leaving for the day, students turned in both their Step 1 and Step 2 worksheets, attached to one another.

Step 3 afforded faculty members the opportunity to share their unique perspective on students’ procedural and conditional knowledge while simultaneously providing insight into their thoughts about the best way to approach the assignment in a low-stakes, nonthreatening way. Additionally, the final question on the worksheet for Step 3 allowed faculty members to model their own conditional knowledge by reflecting on specific steps that they would take if they were in their students’ shoes (see Appendix A). Faculty members shared these thoughts with individual students in a 5- to 10-minute face-to-face conference, at which time students were given back all three worksheets (including the written version of their instructor’s feedback). Students were then asked to complete Step 4 (see Appendix A).

Two things are noteworthy about Step 4 of EA 2.0. First, unlike the metacognitive self-assessment in Step 1, in which students were asked to engage exclusively in an exploration of their declarative knowledge, this final step required the students to synthesize procedural and declarative knowledge in a way that would allow them to integrate what they had learned into future decision-making processes. Second, in requiring them to identify three concrete strategies to consider implementing in the future (faculty members had only provided them with two), students had to flex their metacognitive skills further as they worked to identify appropriate solutions for some of their own personal challenges. That required a great deal of self-awareness, as well as an appreciation of the assignment’s requirements.

EA 2.0 took as little as 1 week for the upper division English class and as long as 2 weeks for the lower division sociology class (partly because of the time commitments involved in meeting individually with each student in the larger class). In the upper division psychology class, the second draft of the paper was due approximately 2 weeks after the first draft had been submitted. In the sociology class, the second draft of the paper was due approximately 3 weeks after the first draft. In the lower division criminal justice class, the second exam was administered approximately 5 weeks after the date of the first exam. In the English class, the second exam was administered approximately 6 weeks after the date of the first exam. Details about the exams and writing assignments are provided in Appendix B.

The same criteria pertaining to writing quality (i.e., context of and purpose for writing, content development, genre and disciplinary conventions, sources of evidence, and control of syntax and mechanics) were applied to all assignments, regardless of whether they were essay exams or drafts of papers. Faculty members participating in the current study scored student papers using the Association of American Colleges and Universities’ (AAC&U) written communication VALUE rubric in the
interest of consistency (AAC&U, 2009). Students’ scores on these criteria for the first and second exams/drafts, along with the mean scores and the standard deviation, are presented in the following section. This study only evaluated scores associated with the quality of students’ writing, so students who wrote well may still have scored poorly overall on an exam if they misunderstood an essay question or failed to answer it altogether.

Percent agreement was used to calculate interrater reliability. Faculty members randomly drew one quarter of the artifacts of student writing from each course (12 for sociology, 10 for criminal justice, 6 for English, and 6 for psychology) and forwarded these to the investigator, who used the AAC&U written communication VALUE rubric to score the assignments and exams as a second independent grader before collecting the faculty members’ scores. The investigator and the faculty member teaching the sociology course agreed in 10 out of 12 cases, or 83% of the time. The investigator and the faculty member teaching the criminal justice course agreed in nine out of 10 cases, or 90% of the time. The investigator and the faculty member teaching the English course agreed in four out of six cases, or 67% of the time. Finally, the investigator and the faculty member teaching the psychology course agreed in five out of six cases, or 83% of the time. The mean percent agreement across all four courses was 80.75%.

Results

In order to test the hypothesis related to the first research question guiding this study, namely that students who completed EA 2.0 would have statistically significant improvements in their writing from one submission to the next, two sample (unpaired) t tests assuming unequal variances were conducted separately for each of the four classes to determine whether the mean differences in the T1 and T2 changes in student grades from the first to the second assessment (i.e., exams or drafts of written work) were statistically significant. The alpha level was set at 0.05.

For the lower division sociology class, there was a significant difference in the grade changes between T1 (M = 7.0, SD = 3.87) and T2 (M

= 10.8, SD = 3.87); $t(47) = -3.28, p < 0.01$ (see Table 2). In the lower division criminal justice class, there was also a significant difference in the grade changes between T1 ($M = 5.7, SD = 3.20$) and T2 ($M = 8.4, SD = 3.62$); $t(34) = -2.47, p = 0.02$ (see Table 3). In these two classes, the $p$ value was less than the alpha value of 0.05, so the null hypothesis could be rejected, and EA 2.0 could be assumed to be effective in improving student writing.

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statistics</th>
<th>T1 grade change</th>
<th>T2 grade change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$M$</td>
<td>7.043</td>
<td>10.808</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variance</td>
<td>14.953</td>
<td>17.362</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypothesized mean difference</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$df$</td>
<td>47</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$t$</td>
<td>$-3.2880$</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$p$ one-tail</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$t$ critical one-tail</td>
<td>1.679</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$p$ two-tail</td>
<td>0.002</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$t$ critical two-tail</td>
<td>2.012</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Table 3

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Statistics</th>
<th>T1 grade change</th>
<th>T2 grade change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$M$</td>
<td>5.667</td>
<td>8.389</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variance</td>
<td>10.233</td>
<td>13.075</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

However, in the upper division English class, there was no significant difference in the grade changes between T1 ($M = 3.0, SD = 1.63$) and T2 ($M = 3.67, SD = 0.71$); $t(17) = –1.31, p = 0.21$ (see Table 4). Nor was there a significant difference in the grade changes between T1 ($M = 2.3, SD = 1.42$) and T2 ($M = 3.0, SD = 1.54$) in the upper division psychology class; $t(21) = –1.18, p = 0.25$ (see Table 5). In these two classes, since the $p$ value was not less than the alpha value of 0.05, the null hypothesis could not be rejected.

### Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statistics</th>
<th>T1 grade change</th>
<th>T2 grade change</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$M$</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.667</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variance</td>
<td>2.667</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hypothesized mean difference</td>
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<tr>
<td>$df$</td>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$t$</td>
<td>–1.306</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$p$ one-tail</td>
<td>0.105</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$t$ critical one-tail</td>
<td>1.740</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Given that EA 2.0 appeared to have a differential impact on lower division and upper division classes (i.e., mean differences in grade changes for the lower division courses were significant, but those for the upper division courses were not), it became necessary to test whether a correlation existed between grade changes and class level (i.e., first-year, second-year, etc.).

For the purposes of calculating Spearman’s rho, \( x \) was an individual’s grade change and \( y \) was the individual’s class level (i.e., a first-year student was scored as 1, second-year scored as 2, third-year as 3, and fourth-year as 4). In the sociology T1 and T2 classes, the association between the two variables was statistically significant, \( r_s = 0.638, p \) (two-tailed) = 0.001 and \( r_s = 0.731, p \) (two-tailed) < 0.001, respectively. In the criminal justice T1

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and T2 classes, the association between the two variables was statistically significant, $r_s = -0.770$, $p$ (two-tailed) < 0.001 and $r_s = -0.904$, $p$ (two-tailed) = 0, respectively. In the English T1 and T2 classes, the association between the two variables also was statistically significant, $r_s = -0.807$, $p$ (two-tailed) < 0.001 and $r_s = -0.750$, $p$ (two-tailed) = 0.020, respectively. Given that all of the students in the psychology T1 and T2 classes were fourth-year students, the Spearman correlation coefficient could not be calculated because there would have been a division by zero; thus, the correlation coefficient $r$ for these data is undefined.

In order to investigate the second research question guiding this study, namely, why EA 2.0 did (or did not) result in improved student writing, written comments from among the four steps were analyzed to provide some valuable insight into students’ thinking. For example, all nine students in the T2 English class (100.0%) and 11 out of 12 students in the T2 psychology class (91.7%) reported in Step 1 that the grade they earned on the exam/assignment was what they were expecting to earn. Five out of nine students in the T2 English class (55.6%) and 10 out of 12 students in the T2 psychology class (83.3%) commented in Step 4 that they “knew what [they] needed to do but just didn't do it this time” (with minor alterations in the exact wording). These trends seem to reinforce the notion that upper division students may already possess the necessary metacognitive and cognitive skills for effective writing but simply lack the motivation (or time) to implement appropriate strategies. In contrast, only seven out of 26 students in the T2 sociology class (26.9%) and four out of 18 students in the T2 criminal justice class (22.2%) reported in Step 1 that the grade they earned was what they were expecting to earn. None of the student comments in Step 4 in either the T2 sociology or the T2 criminal justice class mentioned already knowing what needed to be done and simply choosing not to act on it. While it is impossible to intuit accurately why students may or may not have made certain comments on their worksheets, the patterns are interesting and seemingly suggest

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that first- or second-year students are more in need of exposure to (and opportunities to practice) metacognitive strategies.

This need is perhaps illustrated most concretely in the area of student study habits. When asked how they spent their time preparing for the essay exam or working on the assignment, the students in the lower division classes typically did not mention active learning strategies, such as practicing writing out essay responses or organizing their thoughts with an outline before beginning to write. Step 1 comments around this topic from the T2 sociology group included such statements as “I made sure I read all of the assigned readings before I started,” “I reviewed the PowerPoints the teacher gave us,” and “I looked at the textbook again to make sure I had all the information I needed to know.” Interestingly, many of the same students who referred to these types of study strategies noted that they spent “a lot” of time studying or preparing; time estimates ranged from 2 to 6 hours, and several other students used descriptors such as “lots of time” or “more time than I did for other classes” rather than providing specific amounts. This pattern was also true for the T2 criminal justice group, whose Step 1 comments included such insights as “I studied for a really long time” and “I spent ages preparing for this” while describing such strategies as “I looked at the review questions at the end of the chapter” and “I printed out my PowerPoint slides so I had them to go over.”

The fact that lower division students’ strategies focused on expending time rather than energy and utilizing passive, not active, techniques was something that both peers and faculty picked up on. In Step 2, several students in both the T2 sociology group and the T2 criminal justice group wrote to their partners some variation of the following: “I think you studied for a really long time but I don’t know that what you did was enough” (example student comments are quoted exactly as written). Unfortunately, since their peers lacked the same prior exposure to reflective practice as the student authors themselves, they were often unlikely to suggest an appropriate way to pivot. That is, they could identify that it appeared their

classmates were not doing “enough,” but they did not know what “enough” preparation might look like or what form it might take. In Step 3, when faculty were asked to express an opinion of the methods students used to prepare or study, suggestions were more concrete, as in: “It sounds like you spent a lot of time reading, which is great, but how did you test your knowledge to make sure you understood the material? Did you prepare an outline? Did you have a thesis statement in mind? How did you plan to support your argument?”

In contrast, students from the upper division courses were less likely to mention in Step 1 that they studied for a long time and more likely to mention that they used active, rather than passive, learning strategies. For example, in the T2 English group, comments included, “I knew the topics we would have to pick from and I made sure I had at least a thesis statement worked out for the questions I planned to answer” and “I found it helpful to outline some thoughts ahead of time, not so I would have to memorize anything but so I could remember where I wanted the essay to go.” Likewise, in the T2 psychology group, one student wrote, “[I prepared by] thinking through ahead of time what I wanted to write in response to the prompts and then getting organized so I could back up my answers with evidence from the case.”

Analysis of the comments provided in Step 2 suggests that students in lower division classes differ from their peers in upper division classes not only in study strategies but also in the nature of the constructive criticism they provided. Peer comments in the lower division classes focused more on sentence-level, local editing issues (e.g., two students in the T2 sociology group said, “You have a lot of typos” and “You should spell check more carefully”) while comments in the upper division classes bypassed those types of issues and centered more around providing constructive criticism relating to flow, clarity, and global editing (e.g., two students in the T2 English group commented, “This could move down here, it would flow better” and “Help the reader see where you’re coming from with more examples or explanations.” Students from the T2 psychology

group provided similar feedback: “Provide more support through examples” and “You seem to contradict yourself”). Based on the peer review comments, students in lower division classes seem to believe that good writing is writing that is mechanically correct and free of sentence-level errors (despite having received peer reviewer training to the contrary), while students in upper division classes recognize that good writing benefits from coherence, cohesion, and the construction of a sound argument.

Discussion

The fact that the EA 2.0 intervention resulted in statistically significant improvement in student writing in the lower division courses and not in the upper division courses merits further exploration. The distribution of the mean grade changes is far more spread out in the lower division courses and more closely clustered around the mean in the upper division courses (as shown in Tables 2–5). This may have to do with the level of the courses but may also be attributable to the nature of the courses, the types of writing tasks assigned, and the faculty members’ pedagogical approaches. However, given the greater likelihood that students taking upper division courses (a) take them as a major requirement (as opposed to an elective) and (b) are more likely to be upper division students (who would have had previous exposure to some of the disciplinary content or, at the very least, to expectations surrounding writing in the discipline), the level and nature of a course are presumed to be key factors associated with the effectiveness of EA 2.0. One upper division class was an English seminar with many English majors who, according to the faculty member teaching the course, were accustomed to reading and critiquing one another’s work, revising, and redrafting. Likewise, the upper division psychology class was a capstone seminar, which presupposes that students have already taken most (if not all) of their required courses and are well positioned to write a final integrative paper. Students in upper division classes did not have as much meaningful improvement in their writing because the incoming students were (in both semesters)

already fairly familiar with the writing tasks expected of them and with the faculty member’s scoring criteria. There was little EA 2.0 could add to what they had already learned about the writing process. These results regarding the skill levels of upper level students confirm findings by Falchikov and Boud (1989), who determined that upper division students were better able to self-assess than their lower division peers.

The finding about the differential skill levels of upper and lower level students is further borne out by the fact that the students in the upper division courses started off (with their first draft or first essay exam) at a higher grade than their counterparts in the lower division courses, so there was less room for them to improve on their performance. In contrast, there was a great deal more variability among the grades earned on first drafts (or first exams) by students in the lower division classes, which may account for the fact that the actual grade change from one draft (or exam) to the next was, in some cases, far more dramatic. What is encouraging is that students in those lower division classes that had more room for improvement appeared to benefit significantly more from the intervention, a finding that has critical implications for faculty members teaching lower division classes that are predominantly populated by first- and second-year students.

Embedding a metacognitive approach to self- and peer-assessment early in the university experience could be highly effective in promoting better writing and better study habits in younger students, as indicated by Wischgoll (2016). There are two fundamental reasons for this. First, as previously stated, many students are poor judges of their own knowledge and skills (Ambrose et al., 2010), especially if those knowledge and skills are somewhat lacking (Dunning, 2007). Qualitative analysis of the data in this study supports these findings when it comes to students’ perceptions of their own study habits. Generally speaking, students in the lower division classes believed studying for longer was a key to success, while students in the upper division classes believed it was less about the amount of time spent and more about the organization and thoughtfulness that went
into the process of studying. This difference clearly indicates a need for students in introductory or lower division classes to understand that not all study strategies are equally effective and that what may have worked for them in high school may not be helpful in higher education. Forcing them to reflect and self-monitor is a critical component of prompting them to self-evaluate and recognize what changes they may need to make moving forward.

Second, providing an opportunity to engage in reflective practice could also help students in lower division classes gain greater insight into faculty expectations pertaining to the writing process, a factor identified by Ross (2006). To improve student understanding of writing tasks and reinforce the organizational and evaluative aspects of metacognitive practices, instructors could not only ask students to self-reflect individually but also work through the trends in the peer comments from Step 2 as a group to unpack the importance of certain elements in a writing sample. As noted by Poulos and Mahony (2008) and Pacello (2014), students appreciate and benefit from feedback that is practical, meaningful, and concrete rather than vague, ambiguous, or subject to interpretation. EA 2.0 provides a useful opportunity for discussing collaboratively what constitutes good writing so that students in lower division classes might recognize, as their peers in upper division classes do, that good writing is less about local, sentence-level mechanics and syntax and more about coherence, cohesion, and the construction of a sound argument, which all stem from a holistic, global approach to planning and editing.

Conclusion

The findings of this study have meaningful implications both for teaching and for future research. Utilizing an approach like EA 2.0 in class between two essay exams or two drafts of a writing assignment could serve to clarify a number of issues, including the role of college students, an instructor’s expectations relating to scoring and grading, and the comparative effectiveness of certain study strategies over others. Moreover, by

collaborating with students to promote self-monitoring, self-evaluation, and self-reinforcement in a safe, low-stakes environment, faculty have a unique opportunity to model for students what the practice of providing feedback looks like. In doing so, they can highlight that a critical component of lifelong learning is not that mistakes never happen but rather that it is possible to identify them, learn from them, and pivot accordingly.

This study has two key limitations. First, although courses were deliberately chosen in four separate disciplines and across four different institutions, with every effort taken to ensure equivalence and comparability among lower division students and likewise among upper division students, it is possible that the student populations were not as alike as initially believed. Perhaps certain incoming student populations were underprepared, while others had received more extensive writing instruction in high school. Another researcher in the future might wish to compare apples to apples, as it were, by employing the same methodological design across courses within the same institution (or even within the same program). Second, faculty members self-identified and volunteered to participate in this study, a fact which could potentially have compromised the study’s internal validity. The willingness to employ a new pedagogical approach in the classroom may have stemmed from some underlying factor (i.e., either a commitment to innovation that suggests enthusiasm for focusing on certain skills or, conversely, a desire to revamp an entire course because the status quo was deemed to be ineffective), and it may be that this unknown factor, rather than EA 2.0 itself, ultimately contributed to the observed results.

Several opportunities exist for further inquiry into the effectiveness of EA 2.0. It would be interesting to note whether there are differences along gender lines when it comes to the effectiveness of EA 2.0. Alternatively, it might be useful to design a more long-term study that could track students who participated in EA 2.0 during a lower division class, ideally during the first semester of their college experience, and those who did not, in order to determine whether there are significant differences in
terms of either their overall academic performance (relating to study habits that may or may not have improved) or their subsequent writing assignments in other courses (relating to writing skills that may or may not have improved). Another longitudinal project could attempt to introduce EA 2.0 to students before they enter higher education, possibly during middle school or high school (with some modifications to make the process developmentally appropriate), in order to track whether students with greater exposure to metacognitive reflective practice of this type are more likely to succeed in college. Embedding opportunities for students to engage in metacognitive reflective practice can have significant positive implications for both their writing specifically and for their academic performance overall. Such a practice promotes the development of critical skills for students to master while in college so they can use them in the professional world when they graduate.
References


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Appendix A

Exam Autopsy 2.0 Description

Step 1

Students were given a self-reflection worksheet with the following questions:

- How did your actual grade on this exam/assignment compare with the grade you expected? How do you explain the difference, if there is any?
- How do you feel about your exam/assignment grade? Are you surprised, pleased, relieved, disappointed, or what?
- How many hours did you spend preparing for this exam/working on this assignment? Was this enough time to get the grade you wanted, or should you have spent more time preparing/working?
- How did you spend your time preparing for the essay exam/working on the assignment? (For instance, did you practice writing out essay responses? Did you organize your thoughts with an outline before beginning to write? Did you ensure that you had a clear thesis statement and that you were prepared to make all supporting points persuasively?)
- Examine the items on which you lost points and look for patterns. Did you include an introduction and conclusion? Did you follow a clear and logical structure? Did you take the time to edit your work and proofread carefully for grammatical and spelling errors? Were all the necessary citations included and properly formatted according to the style guidelines indicated by your professor?
- Set a goal to get a certain percentage or score in the next exam/draft. What study strategies and schedule will enable you to earn that score?

Step 2

Students were given a worksheet during peer review with the following questions:

• Do you agree with your partner’s assessment of how and why s/he earned a different grade than expected? Why or why not?
• Any and all feelings your partner may express about his/her exam grade are valid. What words of wisdom or comfort could you share in light of how s/he feels?
• What can you highlight that s/he did well?*
• What is your opinion of the time your partner spent studying for this test/preparing for this assignment?
• What is your opinion of the methods your partner used in studying for this test/preparing for this assignment?
• What is your opinion of your partner’s assessment of the items s/he got wrong, or where s/he lost points? Do you have another interpretation of or explanation for what might have happened?
• What do you think of the goals that your partner has set out for him/herself? Are they realistic? What are two additional ideas you could suggest to help him/her achieve those goals?

Step 3

Faculty members were given a worksheet with the following questions:
• Do I agree with your assessment of why you got a different grade than expected? Why or why not?
• Any and all feelings you may express about your exam grade are valid. What words of wisdom or comfort could I share in light of how you feel?
• What is my opinion of the time you spent studying for this test/preparing for this assignment?
• What is my opinion of the methods you used in studying for this test/preparing for this assignment?
• What is my opinion of your assessment of the items you got wrong, or where you lost points? Do I have another interpretation of or explanation for what might have happened?
• What do I think of the goals that you have set for yourself? Are they realistic? What are two additional ideas I could suggest to help you achieve those goals?

Step 4

Students were given the following instructions and prompts:

Think about your original answers to the self-assessment questions, as well as the feedback that you received from your partner and from me [the faculty member]. In a brief paragraph, write down what, if anything, has changed in terms of how you prepared for the first test or assignment and how you plan to prepare for the next one. Be concrete and specific in describing at least three strategies that you plan to use to study for (or take) the next test (or to organize and plan for your next paper draft). Why do you think those strategies are the most promising for you? What can I do to help support your learning and your preparation for the next exam/assignment?

Note. An asterisk [*] denotes a question that was modified substantively from the original exam autopsy approach.
Appendix B

Description of Writing Tasks

For the lower division sociology course, students were assigned a paper. The paper prompt was as follows:

In a 3- to 5-page paper, analyze either a movie poster or a movie trailer through the lens of race, gender, and/or social class introduced in this course. You are encouraged to be creative and have some fun with this, but I want to see you apply (and not just mention) specific readings we have covered in class this semester. Make sure you cite your sources appropriately using APA format. You are encouraged to discuss your topic with me sooner rather than later to ensure that you have chosen something appropriate.

For the lower division criminal justice course, students were instructed to choose two essay questions to answer on a timed, 90-minute exam. Students chose from the following three questions:

- Discuss psychological theories of crime. You should make sure you address the focus of this group of theories and describe, in detail, each of the theories covered in class (including psychoanalytic theory, maternal attachment theory, and moral development theory) and their provenance. Your descriptions should explicitly state how each of these theories explain criminal behavior.
- Describe the changes brought on by industrialization, urbanization, and immigration in the United States during the late 19th and early 20th centuries and explain how these related to the development of the Chicago School and its approach to criminology. Your answer should begin with a historical overview and end with a discussion of social disorganization, concentric zone theory, and the differences between Durkheim’s concept of anomie and Merton’s concept of anomie-strain.
• Explain how social process perspectives view criminal behavior as the product of interpersonal dynamics. Your answer should include a comparison between social process and social structural perspectives, as well as a detailed discussion of such theories as differential association, differential identification, differential reinforcement, and labeling.

For the upper division English course, students were instructed to answer five short essays on a timed, 3-hour exam.

The faculty member selected questions randomly from a pool in order to minimize the likelihood that two students would receive the same test with the same questions. The course introduced students to contemporary nature writing and environmental literature through three genres: poetry, fiction, and creative nonfiction. All assigned texts focused on the natural world and humans’ relationships with it. Exam questions asked students to grapple with such topics and questions as the following:

• The role of literature in how we perceive and conceptualize nature;
• Earth as a literary setting and stage but also as a habitat;
• Utopias versus dystopias;
• Sense of place;
• Pollution, climate change, the fossil and postfossil fuel economies, and other environmental problems and potential catastrophes;
• Notions of private versus communal property;
• Mammals, birds, and concepts of the more-than-human world;
• Extirpation and extinction of animal and plant species;
• Notions of wilderness and wilder places;
• Settlers and nomads;
• Observation and contemplation of nature;
• Nature and silence;
• The relationship between landscape and story; and
• Ethics, environmental activism, and questions of responsibility to the earth

For the upper division psychology course, students were assigned a case study.

After reading the case study carefully, students were given the following instructions:

Using your knowledge of risk assessment, mental disorders and offending behavior, and interview and treatment strategies, answer the following questions:

- Describe the type(s) of mental disorder Mr. D may be suffering from.
- Consider whether those disorders are likely to contribute to the risk he poses of future violence.
- Identify those risks that Mr. D poses to himself and others.
- Consider whether you would discharge Mr. D from the hospital at this time and give your reasons why.
- Highlight what challenges Mr. D may pose in treatment and how you might overcome them.
Using the “CARD” Technique to Assist Middle School Students in the Revision Process

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Abstract: Although revision is essential to the writing process, it is often neglected in schools. Research has shown that teaching revision through reflection, conferencing, positive teacher feedback, specific instruction linked to reading strategies, and built-in time between drafts for students to think about their writing can cause students not only to revise more but to revise at a deeper level by focusing on content rather than grammatical errors. This study investigates how middle school students’ writing drafts as well as attitudes and beliefs toward revision changed based on introducing a specific self-response and peer-response revision strategy called the “CARD” (change, add, rearrange, and delete) technique, named for the ways in which revision might occur in writing via holistic categories. Research questions included the following: How does middle school students’ writing change when they are taught the CARD revision technique? and, In what ways, if any, does the CARD technique enhance middle school students’ thinking about revision, specifically regarding their attitudes and perceptions of revision? This research helps educators understand students’ perceptions and beliefs toward revision, in general, and a way to encourage revision via student-led decisions in their writing.

Keywords: revision, self-response, peer-response, middle school students, writing, strategies, attitudes and perceptions, student-led, student-centered
Author Note

I would like to thank the students who allowed me into their writing lives and spent meticulous time pondering the revision process.

Revision is the dreaded “r” word lurking in the corners of every English classroom. Wayne, a 7th grader, defined revision as “the teacher telling you what you did wrong in writing” and “writing your paper all over again.” Maddie, another 7th grader, described her experiences with revision: “When I’m in class and if I finish early in a writing assignment, my teachers usually ask me to go back and revise my paper.” Unfortunately, Wayne’s and Maddie’s vague comments regarding revision may not surprise many educators who empathize with the teaching of writing. What is disheartening and suggests the need for further examination, though, is that these students’ comments do not include specific actions regarding how they revised. Revision to these two students is a broad-sweeping, “one-and-done” attitude of fixing and correcting errors. Additional student comments such as “I take out the paper to be revised and revise it” or “I usually go back through all my writing and make sure it makes sense” do not get to the heart of the revision process and what it really encompasses. Perhaps students are not being specifically taught how to revise.

Research has shown that teaching revision through reflection, conferencing, positive teacher feedback, specific instruction linked to reading strategies, and built-in time between drafts for students to think about their writing can cause students not only to revise more but to revise at a deeper level by focusing on content rather than grammatical errors (Baer, 2008; Bardine & Fulton, 2008; Keen, 2010; Muldoon, 2009; Peterson, 2003).

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine how middle school students’ writing drafts and attitudes and beliefs toward revision might change based on introducing a specific revision strategy called the “CARD”
Using the “CARD” Technique in the Revision Process

Revision Practices in Writing Instruction

Researchers have examined revision over the last 4 decades through a variety of models and methods. For example, teacher–researchers (K–16), developing their craft of teaching writing to students, have published numerous how-to books on the subject. Even though their specific strategies might vary, all share the belief that revision is an integral part to writing and teaching writing. Atwell (1998) mentioned cutting and taping, adding carets and icons, highlighting, and circling items in drafts as techniques that instructors could use as mini lessons to assist students in developing their writing. Hillocks (2007) suggested teaching students how to add, cut, and rearrange their work through questioning strategies and whole-class revision modeling. Gallagher (2011) expanded Hillocks’ techniques by developing RADAR (i.e., replace, add, delete, and reorder), noting that teaching this set of skills should be done through teacher modeling on both handwritten pieces and electronic documents with track changes. Kittle (2008) recommended peer feedback as an effective way to teach revision to students, modeling how to search for the heart in a piece of writing and labeling time in class, time away from the draft, and time to revise throughout an entire semester as crucial for developing writers to recognize the importance of revision. Noden (2011) used checklists with his students to help them identify form, content, style, and conventions, all of which he noted overlap in writing. Messner (2011) suggested using color-coded pencils to identify the five senses in students’ narrative writing.
so they could note which sense was overpowering the piece or missing completely.

Other research has found significant importance in what deters and motivates students to revise. For example, Graves’s (1979) longitudinal study on the revision processes of young children paved the way for recognizing writing’s developmental stages and revision’s role in the writing process. Revision began to be viewed as a highly complex operation requiring knowledge and a process that includes the writer’s engaged role in actions and mental events, as well as in peer feedback (Flower et al., 1986).

Because of the growth in cognitive research in the 1980s, various models of revision were created. For example, Faigley and Witte (1981, 1984) created a taxonomy of revision that included microstructure and macrostructure features; six types of operations (e.g., adding, deleting); and six linguistic levels (e.g., graphic, lexical). Flower and Hayes (1981) identified three stages of revision: planning, translating, and reviewing. Bereiter and Scardamalia (1983) invented a CDO (compare, diagnose, and operate) model. Additionally, numerous studies created taxonomies for coding and categorizing revisions (Bridwell, 1980; Faigley & Witte, 1984; Sommers, 1980). These taxonomies centered on how inexperienced and experienced writers thought about revision, specifically their differences in approaches to how students revise writing, especially regarding surface-level changes (Beach, 1979; Bridwell, 1980; Faigley & Witte, 1981; Flower et al., 1986; Sommers, 1980; Yagelski, 1995). Sommers (1980) identified the frequency in which inexperienced writers made changes at the operational level (deletion, substitution, addition, and reordering) and examined the changes in terms of word, phrase, sentence, and theme level.

Faigley and Witte (1981), influenced by Sommers’ (1980) research, expanded revision research to include whether students changed the meanings found in their texts when they revised; they differentiated between microstructure revision (e.g., revising a sentence) and macrostructure revision (e.g., changing the entire meaning of the work). Chanquoy (2001) continued to study revision via microstructural and macrostructural
changes by categorizing the revisions her participants made in their writing as either additions or deletions of words or parts of the text.

The notion of writers restructuring their thoughts influenced how researchers examined revision (i.e., they systematically recorded measured word units over the course of multiple drafts). However, as scholars in the last two decades have focused on revision's external forces, their research has emphasized the teacher's view of writing rather than the student's view (Haar, 2006). For example, many studies conducted on revision during the 1990s and early 2000s centered on the teacher's feedback and perceptions of writing, which gave revision a push forward, but much emphasis stayed on the teacher rather than on the child (Mlynarczyk, 1996; Patthey-Chavez et al., 2004; Sze, 2002; Yagelski, 1995). Teacher beliefs about what constitutes good writing impact how students interact with their peers' writing as well as their own writing (Yagelski, 1995) because many of the revision strategies students learn are based on what the teacher deems “good” writing. Having a limited audience (i.e., their work's audience is often limited to the teacher) could affect how writers revise.

Additionally, students revise if there is an environment conducive to authentic writing purposes. A classroom environment “in which the writers' peers provide most of the input, including formative assessment, can support strategic revision” (Keen, 2010, p. 278). Moreover, students may not have enough investment in their own work to want to revise, whereas critical reflection, such as response strategies, could encourage this connection to their writing (Baer, 2008; Muldoon, 2009). Muldoon (2009) explained:

Critical revision forces students to stand up and justify their choices and explain which revision suggestions and feedback made them think more carefully about their work or why such feedback made them even more certain that their initial choices were correct. (p. 70)

More specifically, providing opportunities for students to respond to questions regarding decisions they made while writing can assist them in writing
future drafts and provide a way for students to evaluate their own writing (Bardine & Fulton, 2008).

Feedback from peers can also play an important role in revising (Keen, 2010; Peterson, 2003). One way for students to receive feedback from peers is through peer conferencing. For example, Fitzgerald and Stamm (1990) looked at student comments made in group conferences and then revisions on student papers (per 100 words) and found that conferences influenced students to revise more both at the macrolevel and microlevel, which also improved their drafts. Peterson (2003) found that peer talk in the classroom assists the revision process and that students considered peer talk “oral rehearsal” before writing (p. 267).

This study aims to showcase a particular revision-response strategy, the CARD technique, that is not based on what the teacher suggests good writing processes to be; rather, the technique stems from what students say they do while they revise and from peer feedback. This response technique will be elaborated in the coming sections.

Methodology

Participants

Participants in this qualitative study included 27 students enrolled in a 7th-grade advanced English course (Ms. Gardener’s 7th period class; all names are pseudonyms) at a public middle school in the Midwest over the course of one semester (September–November). All 27 students agreed to participate with IRB approval from my university. I selected this class period due to its fit with my teaching schedule at the university. Students in this class identified as White, except for one student who identified as multiracial. Students were all first-language English speakers. The class composite reflects the district’s demographics as well.

Ms. Gardener wanted assistance in teaching a writer’s workshop for her students, and her principal put us in contact since I had recently conducted professional development in their school district. Since I would

teach her last period of the day, we decided that she would take the role of “observer” during the periods I taught her class so that she could implement the same lessons and activities the following day with her other class sections.

As a former middle school teacher for 10 years and now as a teacher educator, I have struggled with how to teach revision and admit I may have done it poorly during my early teaching career. Over the years, I wanted to make amends by researching revision, practicing revision, and attending various workshops like the National Writing Project Summer Institute. Since I now teach writing to preservice teachers, I explore ways to rethink how revision is studied and taught by building off the writer’s workshop model, honoring experts like Donald Graves, Don Murray, Lucy Calkins, and Tom Romano.

Data Collection

Data collection took place as I was teaching one class 5 days per week from September through November and consisted of the following: field notes, open-ended questionnaires (prestudy and poststudy), students’ writing notebooks, submitted drafts, and recorded audio- and video-interview transcripts of students engaged in the writing process and writing workshops with peers.

I purposefully selected writing notebooks for students to compose their drafts since I am a firm believer in the notebook as a place to build writing, to reflect on and reread prior entries, and to play with various parts of writing passages. Students could also reference prior drafts and then revise, visually noticing what was in the original writing. Notebooks also helped me as a researcher since I could easily spot revisions. Working with a Word document could not provide the visual translation effect I wanted for the students and for myself. I also feared students would accidentally “accept” tracked changes, and then the revision process would be lost to data collection. Furthermore, teachers at the school shared one laptop cart, which was often requested months in advance; therefore, with

no guarantee that we would have laptops, I believed we could more easily rely on notebooks when writing and revising.

Data Analysis

Because of its naturalistic inquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) design, this qualitative study had ongoing data analysis, which constantly informed the progression of the study. According to Lincoln and Guba, “Data analysis must begin with the very first data collection, in order to facilitate the emergent design, grounding of theory, and emergent structure of later data collection phases” (p. 242). Particular attention was given to identifiable revision in students’ drafts in their writing notebooks by comparing their original drafts to revised drafts and then to their final drafts for each round of writing. Holistic categories centered on the CARD technique were used to note revisions that could be labeled as change, add, rearrange, and delete. I then reviewed students’ coded audio- and video-interview transcripts, noting open-themed codes regarding the participants’ attitudes and beliefs toward revision during the study. Table 1 summarizes how each of the data sources supported the findings showcased in the next section.

Process of the Study

I introduced students to a unit of study approach to writing, in which they freewrote in writing notebooks, engaged in writer’s workshop, and learned how to read like writers through reading mentor texts in flash fiction, a genre they had never encountered. As noted previously, this genre was broken into three rounds during the study, each lasting approximately 4 weeks and corresponding to the months of September, October, and November.

Flash fiction pieces are between 250 and 750 words (Masih, 2009) and support in-depth connections to the human condition. Writers in this genre rely on shocking their readers, thus allowing them to think about issues outside of the text. Even though short stories require craft and skill
### Table 1

**Sources of Data**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data source</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Representative excerpt</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Writer's notebooks</td>
<td>Deeper revisions at the macro-structural level</td>
<td>Laura began her flash story with “I should not be telling you this.” Originally, this line appeared at the beginning of the fourth paragraph in her original draft. In her revisions, Laura circled this line and starred it. In her final draft, she placed it as her lead because she wanted the reader to engage with her story quickly and identified that this one line could accomplish that during her revisions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open-ended questionnaire (prestudy)</td>
<td>Biggest challenge in revising and realizing why</td>
<td>Tamara said, “The most challenging [part] is probably deleting because I always like what I write[,] but I know some things aren't needed, and that I also need things to take their place because it just gets kind of confusing.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open-ended questionnaire (poststudy)</td>
<td>Revision helps writing</td>
<td>Dylan shared, “I now believe that revision is more necessary in my writing. It helps me improve my stories and I feel more confident and happier.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audio transcript of interviews</td>
<td>Change is good</td>
<td>Darin concluded, “It has made me a better writer in seeing what you put down as a draft won’t always stay.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Video transcript of interviews</td>
<td>Misconceptions of revision</td>
<td>Kari admitted, “Well, I knew what revision was kind of [groans and laughter from her group]. No, really, I did, but I didn’t know you could like change everything, so then I was like, ‘Whoa, you can change everything?’, so I like changed stuff, and it made my story like so much better and cooler.” (Kari)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field notes</td>
<td>“Messiness” equals better revising</td>
<td>I wrote, “Students compared their drafts during revision to see who had the messiest draft.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

to work within the word-limit parameters, this genre may not seem as overwhelming as others for students, especially middle school writers, because flash pieces are much shorter than the typical short story.

I chose flash fiction due to its maximum word count of 750. Revision is an essential component in producing highly effective pieces in this genre due to the space allowed. Word count is an ever-present component in the flash fiction writer’s mind and forces the writer to involve subtle writing techniques that are unique to this genre. In this study, these techniques were modeled and learned via reading exemplary mentor texts. Every day in class, students began multiple flash fiction pieces in their writing notebooks and chose to continue or abandon each story. They were also encouraged to continue writing in their notebooks at home each evening, but most chose to only write during class time.

During each round of writing, I did not provide written feedback or grades on students’ initial drafts or revisions. Instead, each student attended a writer’s workshop in which they used the CARD technique to guide their self-response and peer review. This lack of written teacher feedback was purposeful; I did not want my feedback to influence or steer students’ writing in a particular way. I wanted their writing to be based on personal decisions. For example, when they conferred with me, it was simply to talk about their writing and process of revising rather than to receive suggestions from me in the “teacher” role. I explained that each story was their writing, not mine. Students were free to run ideas by me, but I listened instead of telling them what to do. As Murray (2004) noted in reference to revising options, “The primary responsibility for seeing the choices is the student’s” (p. 5). I did scan each draft on preselected deadline dates so that Ms. Gardener could keep a running tally of student work completed and provide a weekly completion grade in an online gradebook.

Having students systematically turn in work gave me opportunities to routinely scan their initial and revised drafts, which allowed me to compare them throughout students’ revising processes. I scored their finished

drafts in rubric form with the following criteria: (a) title; (b) lead; (c) word count; (d) topic choice; (e) show, not tell; and (f) polished (editing-specific) “final” draft conventions. These criteria were created based on my extensive research in flash fiction (Batchelor, 2012, 2015; Batchelor & King, 2014) and the things editors look for when considering flash pieces for publication (e.g., Masih, 2009).

Initial Perspectives on Revision Thinking

Prior to working with the students, I asked them to complete an open-ended survey about revision. They completed this survey again at the completion of the study. Overwhelmingly, students initially equated revision with editing-specific decisions. Of 26 students, 22 mentioned spelling, punctuation, and capitalization when defining revision. These students noted that revision included finding “errors” in their writing or “fixing” and “correcting” grammatically incorrect aspects while “double or triple checking” the paper. Students also included the term “editing” as part of their definitions. Furthermore, Amy commented that revision was done to papers “in school” while Ben included the “teacher” as part of his definition.

Students’ perceptions of the purpose of revision were not far from their definitions of revision. They included terms like “check,” “fix,” “correct,” and “find,” and they also included “edit[ing]” negative things that they could easily identify, like grammatical fixes. Students included statements about “wrong”ness as well. For example, Randy stated, “The purpose of revision in writing is, um . . . to like correct everything that is wrong in your writing.” Jason agreed, “The purpose of revision is to find mistakes such as misspelling, capitalization, and punctuation.” Moreover, students’ comments describing the easiest or most challenging aspects of revising centered on grammatical concerns, which are microstructural changes that do not affect the meaning or content of the writing. Deeper thinking about making writing better appeared in glimpses on the presurvey, especially centering on adding details. Students expressed
their apprehension, worrying whether decisions would make their writing “correct.” They did not focus on ideas and general meaning for themselves or to the reader.

The CARD Technique

Because of students’ dislike and misperceptions of revision, I introduced a response technique to better assist them in identifying possible revisions. This technique, which I call the CARD technique, stemmed from the various ways in which students have routinely (in my past experiences as a middle school teacher) talked about revising drafts. Past students had used phrases such as “change,” “switch,” “take out,” and “add”; therefore, I based the CARD acronym on these terms.

Figure 1 shows the breakdown of the acronym. I printed and laminated small note cards of the figure for students to keep clipped in their writing notebooks. They referred to it daily when drafting and revising as well as during conversations in the writer’s workshop with their peers because it could also be used to provide peer-response suggestions.

Figure 1

The CARD Technique

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Your Revision CARD:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Change (e.g., switch point of view; plot events)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Add (e.g., extra parts to include new info, details)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rearrange (e.g., move around chunks of your story)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delete (e.g., take out parts that don’t help your story or are confusing)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Students received a laminated card with this text.

I also modeled how I might use this technique in my own writing. When working as a writing teacher, I found that when students are able to see me write, think aloud, seek advice, and feel frustration, it makes

the writing process more real, raw, and honest to them. Students can see that writing is not a prepackaged finished draft but rather many drafts and needed revisions to get the writing finished. I modeled my writing to the class days after students had begun revising their own stories; I tried to time the modeling exercise so the revision process would be familiar to students so that they could offer their own comments and thoughts about the activity.

Hooking my laptop to the projector, I shared a first draft of a flash fiction story that I had started and highlighted areas in which I might possibly employ the CARD technique in my own revision process (see Figure 2).

I wanted students to see the process of how I revise in “live time,” so we discussed as a group what the four actions of the CARD technique sound like when metacognitively talking through the process of revising, and specifically what the actions look like if implemented in writing. They shared ideas for me to try, which I noted below the story, and I modeled “aha” moments that came to me during these sharing moments, revising in live time as they watched and assisted me. This sample of my own writing also demonstrates how revising includes questioning and “playing” with writing. The students saw that revising did not require a set answer. They also noticed through my thinking and modeling that I could experiment with revising but did not have to keep a particular change.

For example, the idea of altering the draft from a third-person point of view to first-person point of view seemed intriguing to the students, so we changed the perspective in the first few paragraphs. However, students then commented that they did not like having the child narrator use “I.” They preferred third-person point of view. One student stated that she felt a better “distance” from the child in the story, which allowed her to “see the whole picture of the story.” This distance between the reader and the child seemed to be lost when I switched the point of view to first person. We quickly returned to the original version and began working on other suggestions, such as adding details, and discussed how to revise with

The child shuddered as thunder clapped against the sky. She knew something was out there in the night. Something that shouldn’t be. **ADD DIALOGUE?**

She wrapped her pink Care Bear bathrobe tightly against her body, peering through the front porch screen. Nose pressed against the dusty checkered wire, the door jolted forward from her weight. She sprawled onto the top wooden step of her home’s landing. Brushing off fallen leaves from the Autumn wind, she took hold of the side rail, delicately placing her toes onto the first step. The floorboard creaked under her weight. First a step, and then a pause. Step, pause. Almost there, she whispered. One more step. One more pause.

There! She reached the sidewalk safely and turned to face home. Her home. The home of wishes and secrets. She glanced up toward the room. The light was on. Still on. Always on. She twirled around on the balls of her feet and inched closer to the lawn. Her toes entered the soggy grass, sinking into the cold, damp Earth. **Add sensory details here?**

Lightning streaked across the darkened canvas of the forest wall beyond the boundary of her yard. Looking over her shoulder, she glimpsed an image of him.

Darting across the lawn, swirly pig tails brushing against her cheeks, her breath carried her through the mist, trees passing in her peripheral vision as fast as cars. She stopped, hands on her knees, and panted. **ADD MORE**

She found the spot. The spot where she left him. **ADD MORE about digging**

Brambles poked out of his contorted sides like a voodoo doll, damp from the evening’s downpour. But he was safe, and that was all that mattered. **ADD MORE**

Her Teddy Bear.

**IDEAS to revise my story:**

**Change:** Change point of view from **3rd** person to **1st** person? / Change time of day? / Change title? / Paragraph 3 ending sentence change to “she saw him.”?

**Add:** Add more details at the beginning to set time of day? / Maybe enhance sensory details of the smell of rain and grass? / Include digging details about dirt underneath fingernails, earth worms, and so forth, in paragraphs 4/5? / Add something at the end of paragraph 6? / Add dialogue at the beginning maybe?

**Rearrange:** Move around sentences in paragraphs 2/3?

**Delete:** Delete Care Bear bathrobe detail? / Delete sentence about the room with the light part? / Eliminate last paragraph “her teddy bear” ?????
each in mind. Students were eager to offer ideas to expand my paragraphs, modeling themselves that part of revising can be expanding the original material through thinking and creative play.

Students looked to the CARD technique to share and to discuss how to implement new ideas for revising. As discussed in the next section, the discourse surrounding revising became more about a writer’s intentions and less about the teacher’s intentions. In this way, students began to see that they held ownership of their own work.

Findings

This section describes three key findings based on conversations with students during the revision process and a review of students’ drafts for all three flash units. These findings were that students (a) mostly revised at the macrostructural level, (b) created personal techniques to assist their revision process that differed from others, and (c) enjoyed “messy” revising.

Revisions That Included Macrostructural Changes

I focused on identifiable revision by comparing students’ original drafts to their revised drafts and then to their final drafts. Revisions were separated into holistic categories centering on the four actions of the CARD technique: change, add, rearrange, and delete. In this next section, I share students’ thoughts about how and why they revised their writing according to these categories.

Change

When the students and I initially talked about change, we narrowed the idea to changing overall core aspects of our writing. This was in part because any revision could be considered change. When a writer deletes a sentence and then inserts a new thought, for example, it could be considered making a change in the writing. Therefore, we had to be specific

when discussing how to change aspects of our writing during revision. We decided that “change” meant changes that would alter the entire premise of a story (and thus the entire piece), such as changes in point of view, setting, characters, or plot events. For example, Maddie wrote about a person winning a contest for travel in a time machine and decided that she would rather have her character go on a mission in which her character had to secretly enter the villains’ “headquarters” and save the day. The notion of time travel appears in a subtle way at the end of her new piece, but she dramatically changed the entire premise of her character’s situation and her character’s actions within that situation, as well as the setting from semifuturistic times on Earth to an entirely different planet that humans settle in the future. Another student, Lexi, noted that she changed the plot of her first flash piece. She said:

I decided to change the plot a bit, that instead of her just running away, her having to kill him. Another decision I made was to decide if I wanted to describe Christopher or leave him being a complete mystery. I also changed the conversation between Catherine and Christopher to explain what happened more so it was clearer to the reader.

Some students switched back to their original perspective, like Joe, who said, “I tried writing my story in first person, but I liked it better in second [how it was originally].” Lexi changed the point of view in her revised version and liked the change. She also believed that it made the story less confusing for the reader. Agreeing with Lexi, Elsa noted that she changed the point of view in her first flash fiction story so “readers could understand it better.” Randy also changed his story’s viewpoint, commenting that the change helped him write his story: “I switched my third-person point of view, which gave me much more ideas, and it was easier.”

It is important to note that over the course of the semester, students began to change the notion of “change”—they began revising to include more minor alterations. For example, in the third round of writing, 12
students discussing the “C” in change noted that they either changed their title or changed their characters’ names. While these are not the holistic changes that the students had been making at the beginning of the semester, the techniques are certainly student decided and student driven; more importantly, they are attributes of how CARD provided self-response strategies. To students, changing a title could possibly be a holistic change. We discussed the power of titles at the beginning of the study in a mini lesson that invited students to consider at least 10 different possible titles for their stories before they finalized one. Most students noted in informal conversations that they waited until revising their drafts to create a title.

**Add**

Students found that adding details, events, characters, and overarching ideas extended their stories in the three rounds of writing flash fiction. They expanded their initial drafts to include additional sentences and paragraphs, which are macrolevel revisions. In fact, adding content became the most significant aspect of revision students worked with as a self-response strategy during revising. For example, Molly wanted the reader to not know that her main character, a high school senior, was in a wheelchair until the last sentence, when it would be revealed at the prom. However, Molly realized that it would be more interesting for the reader if hints of this reveal were included along the way, so she revised her story by including subtle clues throughout her piece, such as the beginning line, “As I go down the hall, I can see that everybody is staring at me.” Originally, she had the word “walk” in this sentence and realized that she needed to make this statement vague if she wanted to reveal that her main character was in a wheelchair. She also included extra lines as hints, such as “This school is supposed to have the best program for me . . .” Figure 3 shows an excerpt from this flash piece.

Many students chose to revise penciled first drafts with colored pens, which were available and remained in the classroom if needed. For example, Randy and I conducted a miniconference regarding his second story.

While discussing the plot, I noticed that he added a note to himself in blue pen. I asked him about the color choice, noting that his revisions really stood out because of the difference in color, and he stated, “Yeah, I think I’m gonna like, if I wanna add something, I might add it in blue or a darker color.” Joe also chose to do the same with his first story, but with multiple colors. I asked him to tell me about his self-response process, and he described, “I just like to use colorful things because it helps me remember. Because if I were to just use like black or whatever, that kind of blends in with my writing. It'd be hard to see, to like, to be able to recognize what I need to be able to take out or what I needed to put in, and so that’s why I like using the colors, 'cause they pop out.”

Eleven students did not use color in revising their first story, but this technique seemed to gain in popularity when other students in writing groups noticed. For example, in the second story round, only six students

Figure 4

Color-Coding Revision

Heather’s first flash

Heather’s second flash

Heather’s third flash

did not use color in revising, and then it dropped to only five students. Heather’s three different flash stories throughout the study show how she found revising in color to be helpful (see Figure 4).

Rearrange

Rearranging was the least used aspect of revision in terms of self-response. In students’ first flash round, only nine students mentioned that they considered rearranging during revisions. When discussing rearranging informally with students, they said they found it the most complicated action to practice. For example, Holly stated, “I’m not really sure how to rearrange. It’s complicated.” Maddie agreed, “It’s hard to move big chunks around in your story.” Susan noted that she rearranged when typing on the computer rather than in her writer’s notebook due to space limitation. Students’ concern with rearranging may stem from a lack of practice with this type of revising in their writing. Students may not be given opportunities to know what rearranging looks like in their class assignments or in real-world writing situations outside of school.

When material is moved to a new place in a story, the sentences and passages need to flow with what comes before and after the rearranged material. Some students recognized the potential self-response benefits of rearranging, noting that they rearranged parts of their writing because they wanted to make their writing “flow” or “make it better in another order.” However, the few students who practiced rearranging in their writing did so in a macrostructural way, similar to when they practiced adding and holistically changing their writing. Rearrangement was as broad as moving around entire paragraphs or sections, or as small as moving dialogue sentences in conversations. For example, Molly noted that in her first story she moved her second paragraph to where her third paragraph used to be. Dylan also switched paragraphs in his first story, saying, “[I] wanted to switch my second and third paragraphs because I realized that you would probably mention the second before the third in a regular story.” Figure 5 shows an example of one student’s second flash story, in

which she moved a passage she had written in the middle of her piece toward the beginning.

Figure 5
Student Example of “Rearrange”

While most students spoke about rearranging in terms of switching paragraph order, some chose to rearrange the beginnings and endings and vice versa or even split a story into moveable portions. For example, Darin spent a great deal of time rearranging his second piece. He described his process of rearranging: “I took out most of the middle and reworked that and then split the beginning and end. It was together at first and then I split that up, so it went from present to flash back to present again.” Even though it was the least used and least mentioned self-response technique, the students who did use it found that it improved the overall quality of their writing.

Delete

Because flash fiction has a maximum word count of 750 words, students routinely engaged in deleting to meet this requirement. Throughout students’ drafts, numbers appeared in columns alongside the writing. These numbers were based on counting the number of words in each line and then totaling them at the end of their drafts. Students who “over-wrote” the story found that they had to delete portions of their drafts, which meant they had to be more concise in their thinking. When I asked Alison if flash fiction was a challenge because of the word limit, she stated, “It was a challenge because I had over 150 words over, more than 150 over. It was pretty hard because you just feel like every little detail matters, so that’s why it was hard for me.” Randy also explained his going over the word limit. Below is an excerpt of our conversation:

Randy: So I think I’m going to delete a bunch of lines that were unneeded, like they were just useless space I think, like I deleted “you remember all the good times you had with your brother.” And I just put, “He is nowhere to be found. You remember when he got tired of playing.” Like, instead of talking about all the good times he had instead.

Researcher: Nice.

Randy: I also deleted, “You remember where he could possibly be.” Because that wasn’t really needed. Because next it says, “You and your friend were looking for your brother. All you guys were doing was playing hide and seek.” I love that line.

Researcher: Yeah, you gotta keep that line. And so the line before or after might be redundant? Is that what you’re saying?

Randy: Yeah, the line after the beginning and then before “All you guys were doing . . . ”

Like Randy, most students decided to delete unnecessary details or parts of their stories because either they did not contribute to the story, they did not make the story “sound very good,” or they “were confusing to friends” who read their stories, all of which are terrific self-response strategies of deletion.

decisions. Holly explained that she deleted a “big chunk” out of her second essay. I asked her if she missed the chunk she deleted, and she responded, “Not really. I think it makes it better because I wasn’t really sure about it. And I didn’t like it, so I just decided to take it out.” Sifting through students’ revisions, I realized that many deletion examples included students “x”ing or crossing out entire paragraphs that they no longer felt were necessary. For example, below is Susan’s first page of her flash piece, in which she drew an “x” over an entire passage without returning to it again in her rewrite (see Figure 6).

Furthermore, students’ processes were different when they chose to delete and to possibly rewrite a section. Figure 7 shows two examples of how students deleted passages but then reworked their writing.

The image on the left shows how Jason struck through sentences but then wrote over the lines he made. The second image shows Maddie’s deletions: She chose to write in the margins after she struck through material.

Nikki noted that when she deleted something, she looked for a balance. Describing her first story, she explained, “I deleted a lot of extra details that might not have been needed. I made sure I took out enough, but not too much so the story wasn’t boring.” Most importantly, deletions stemmed from students’ internal decision-making processes. Students ultimately made the decision on whether to keep something if they “didn’t like it” or “it didn’t make sense” to them after they revised it. Deletions were self-selected and consisted mostly of sentence and paragraph deletions. Few deletions were word substitutions or word deletions. Instead, students centered their revisions on larger alterations that occurred beyond the word level.

**Personal Techniques of Revising**

Regarding how students processed revision, 12 students chose to make personal memos to themselves in the margins of drafts about how they should revise, sometimes even posing questions to themselves or doodling images. For example, annotations included personal directives
to help them remember where to revise in their rough drafts, such as Kari writing the following comments in her margins: “Add!,” “switch,” and “add more to lead.” Molly wrote on her second flash piece, “details, take out!” Heather provided a range of word options in a word bank she created at the top of her rough draft, in which she listed “seeing, reaching, watching,

Figure 7

Two Students’ Differing Techniques for “Delete”

[and] looking.” (She decided to use “reaching” in her final draft.) Susan wrote in large letters at the top of the last page in her second flash piece “REVISION WORK,” indicating she needed to work more on her ending section. Rory wrote in the margin of his second flash piece the words “change, add, rearrange, and delete” to remind himself of these self-response strategies. He also posed a question at the top of the draft, asking, “point of view of victim?”

Other students posed questions throughout their pieces, too. For example, Alison directed herself to consider removing the specific hourly times she had throughout her second flash story, asking “remove times?” She also noted, “add onamoapias?” [sic; onomatopoeias] and “add details?” in the beginning of her draft. Students also questioned their titles by noting “title?” or “keep title?” Other students brainstormed various titles from which to select one for their final draft at the tops of their revisions. Sandra asked herself whether she wanted to keep sections of her stories by noting “keep?” where she thought about removing parts.

Reading through student revisions, I wondered whether some of the questions were posed to me or to their peers during the writer’s workshop times, or whether they were self-pondering questions. For example, Susan wrote in her third story’s margin, “Is there enough sci-fy [sic]?” When I asked Susan if that question was meant for me, she said it was a reminder to ask her peers. This reveals that she valued her opinion as well as her peers’ opinions over my opinion, steering the revision-making decisions away from the teacher and more toward the individual. The CARD technique also provides students with opportunities to engage with the power of both self-response as well as peer review in their writing.

Furthermore, two students drew images during revising moments in class. To represent the key points she wanted to express in her draft, Susan sketched the following symbolic images: a coffin; a drink with steam coming off the top; “CNN” in large, bubbled letters; and the word “sickness” in bubbled letters with the words “red blood” next to it. Her piece centered

on a sci-fi horror flash in which the end of the word was near due to a plague infected by drinking water. Dave sketched two images side by side of the race car he had sculpted. One depicted the car intact while the other showed a heaping mess of the same car after a collision, which was the premise of his flash fiction.

“Messiness” as a Badge of Honor

The writing during revising became messy. At first, students apologized that their writing was messy in drafts. For example, Amy commented as she watched me flip through her notebook to find her current draft, “Yeah, it’s really messy now that I’ve done stuff to it.” However, after rounds of writing, it almost became a sign of pride for students that their stories were indeed messy, and they began to view it as an indication that they had revised and changed their writing. In writer workshops, students compared who had the messiest journals and laughed about it. However, this messiness did not seem to distract them from rewriting, nor did it affect how their peers read their writing when they exchanged notebooks or read stories aloud to one another. Figure 8 depicts a writing group sharing each other’s stories.

Additionally, Figure 9, a page in Allison’s notebook, reveals her style of revising and highlights the messy display of revisions that she stated did not interfere with her thinking or writing.

Students’ Attitudes and Perceptions of Revision Poststudy

At the conclusion of the study in November, students were given the same open-ended questionnaire they had answered in September. Students’ new definitions of revision were dramatically different than their original ones. Most noticeable was the eliminated idea of correcting grammatical concepts, which students had previously included in their earlier definitions. This time, only two students incorporated notions of editing for grammar as part of revision, whereas before 20 students had included grammar as part of their definitions. Additionally, in the poststudy survey
13 students identified the CARD technique as a component of revision. Dylan stated, “Revision is when you change, add, rearrange, or delete elements of a piece of writing.” Molly wrote, “[Revision is] the process of going back over a piece of writing and changing it, adding things to it, rearranging things in it, and taking things away from it.” Elsa also included CARD aspects to her definition, but she further noted that revision is done during the act of writing. She wrote, “Revision is the act of changing, adding, deleting, or moving parts of our story. You revise while you write.” Other results included 15 students identifying revision as bettering or improving writing, and 11 students identifying holistic terms in their definitions. For example, Kassie defined revision as “a way to improve or look over your writing that will benefit the piece.”

Initially, students’ process of revising had consisted of reading a story over for misspelled words, fixing punctuation, reading it backwards, and having adults check their work. Poststudy responses transformed these notions: Students described their process of revising in terms of using the CARD technique as well as having peers read their work, which theme did not appear in prestudy responses. Sandra noted, “I use the CARD method after reading [my story] through. After that, I have a friend read it for feedback.” Amy stated, “First I read it aloud and then I fix the things
### Table 2

*Students’ Processes of Revision in their Writing, Prestudy and Poststudy*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Prestudy</th>
<th>Poststudy</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Lexi</strong></td>
<td>The process that I use when revising my writing is I go through and make sure there are no spelling errors and grammar [errors] and then I try to add in things like figurative language or like details and stuff that I can do.</td>
<td>First change the title, which makes me think about the story, which gets me going, and think about the story and then I will delete things and then add, and change words, and then, I’ll add before all that, I’ll rearrange.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Joe</strong></td>
<td>I revise my writing by correcting any punctuation mistakes and capitalization errors and lastly, I read through it and make sure it makes sense.</td>
<td>I make sure I like it. Then I change it to make it better.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Alison** | When I revise my writing, I usually read through it first and then if I see any apparent mistakes, if I skim through it, that are easily noticeable like spelling, I would change it then and then I’ll actually read it and fix my commas and apostrophes and my periods. And then I will usually ask my mom to check it as well. | I...  
1. look to see good details to add.  
2. delete a bunch of words.  
3. change a couple of things.  
4. and sometimes rearrange. |
| **Erika** | I revise my writing by reading over my work, check for spelling and grammatical errors, and rewrite it. | I read over my story and change the things I want changed. |

I want to fix and change stuff and delete stuff and then I have friends read it so they can help me decide on things that I cannot decide on.” Susan described her revision process as follows:

When I revise my writing, I read through it and underline parts I don’t like and then I like circle them or underline them and then come back to them when I’m done
reading the story. I will then shoot them out or change them and then I reread the story. Then, if I like it, I keep it.

Students’ poststudy comments about the ease and challenges of revising indicate they were thinking about revising in a holistic manner. Table 2 illustrates four students’ changes in their revision process prestudy to poststudy. This comparison shows that students’ original revising focused mainly on grammatical issues, but at the end of the study, the students’ ideas regarding revision centered on what they wanted to change by adding details, deleting portions of the work, and thinking about writing in a deeper, more personal manner than before their experiences with CARD.

At the beginning of the study students’ comments on ease of revising centered on grammatical issues, but at the end students focused on the aspects of revision that were easiest to them. The two most stated aspects of revision that were easiest for students to implement were “add” ($n = 12$) and “change” ($n = 9$). Kassie stated that adding details was the easiest part of revision for her because “there’s always endless possibilities about where you can go with your story and what you can add.” Change also became a common factor in students’ perceived ease of revising. Holly said that changing things was the easiest part of revising for her, saying, “There’s a lot of things that I think they’re really good, and then I look back and say, ‘Why did I do this?’ And so I change a lot of stuff, and then I go, ‘Oh, there needs to be something there to explain that.’”

A few students commented that deleting was the easiest part of revising, and Molly added that the beginning of the revision process was the easiest stage of revision. She shared, “The easiest part is the first time you revise because there’s always so much to do. It’s never perfect the first time you do it.” Molly’s comment also suggests that students revised continuously over a long duration of time rather than revising only during a portion of class time, which is ultimately what many teachers ask students to do.

In contrast to the ease of revision, students revealed that their most challenging part of revising included deleting and rearranging. Elsa stated
that she found deleting challenging because she did not “want to get rid of [her] work.” Amy agreed, explaining, “It’s kind of hard to let go of sentences that you thought were good.” Tamara also focused on deletion, noting, “The most challenging [part] is probably deleting because I always like what I write, but I know some things aren’t needed and that I also need things to take their place because it just gets kind of confusing.”

Furthermore, students claimed that rearranging was a difficult concept for them to practice and one that few students routinely used. One reason for this could be that students did not necessarily know how to implement the process of rearranging. Holly noted, “The most challenging part is rearranging because I don’t know what to rearrange because sometimes, I think my writing is in a really good order and so I don’t really know what could be moved, so I’m not really sure how to rearrange yet.” Kassie agreed, saying, “The most challenging part of revision is rearranging because I think it’s kind of hard to pick out parts you want to move and all that.”

**Conclusion and Suggestions for Further Research**

Students’ attitudes and perceptions demonstrated that while they initially believed revision to be more editing specific, at the end of the study, students shared that revision should be more holistic, centering on transforming content and ideas to produce stronger writing. The CARD technique became the primary discourse in how students talked about revision. They could specifically notice and name what they wanted to do to revise. Sharing the common ground of four main actions (e.g., changing, adding, rearranging, and deleting) writers in the class used to revise made it easier for students to describe the decisions they made when they revised. As students were able to make sense of the intricacies and complications of revision, their newfound knowledge increased conversation among peers in writer’s workshops, contributed to students’ personal revisions, and impacted their overall attitudes toward the revision process.

The CARD technique also gave students various ways to work with revision, and while most students focused on changing, adding, rearranging, and deleting, it is worth noting that a few students chose to draw their revisions first. Students made their revisions colorful, noticeable, and visual to capture the purpose of each revision (e.g., the reason they altered the piece or the new part’s role in the revised draft).

Additional research is needed on the long-term effect of teaching revision techniques to students and whether students use these techniques as they move forward in their schooling. Further research might include a longitudinal study gathering students’ attitudes toward revision as they progress in their English classes as well as in other content areas. Revision should be implemented whenever students write, regardless of subject area, and it is essential that educators allow the opportunity for revision during the writing process both in the classroom as well as outside school, allowing and encouraging students to revisit their writing via repeated drafts.

By providing time in class for revising as well as using specific ways to reevaluate student writing (e.g., CARD), educators can help students view their own writing as a work in progress. As students adopt this view, they will notice the power of returning to their drafts as they focus on content rather than the superficial elements needed during the final editing process. This internalization of progress and process in their writing will continue to shape good writing habits overall. Additionally, the revision process can be rewarding to young writers if educators can provide spaces in which they teach students to value student-driven thinking rather than the wants of others (e.g., writing to please the teacher).

When educators encourage students to revise using the CARD technique and to look at and work through their writing without penalty, revision will no longer become the dreaded “r” word. Instead, it will be seen as a much-needed, appreciated process for navigating the way students think and understand what they write.

References


Alternative approaches to assessment in education (many of which are linked to inclusive and antiracist pedagogies) are gaining in popularity across the board, from PK–12 to higher education (Esquivel, 2021; St. Amour, 2020). One such antiracist assessment strategy is using labor-based grading contracts (LBGCs), popularized by Inoue (2019; see also Syracuse University College of Arts & Sciences, n.d.). In these contracts, students and teachers together enter into an agreement in which they acknowledge that student effort and labor (i.e., the amount of time, intensity, or application students put into their writing) are the major factors that count in the outcome of an assignment.

The use of LBGCs is a chance for teachers to address student learning and feedback/response through an assessment that does not “inadvertently perpetuate achievement and opportunity gaps” (Yoshimoto-Towery & Pedro, as cited in Esquivel, 2021). Furthermore, building response into the LBGC process gives students more opportunity to engage with classroom expectations for feedback and response and to interrogate response paradigms through an antiracist lens. Teachers who are looking to build antiracist strategies into their classrooms can consider the use of LBGCs as a tool to dismantle the “whitely ways” of academia (Inoue, 2016, p. xii).
The spaces in which response happens can easily be incorporated into the parameters of the LBGC, as described in the “Procedure” section.

**Context**

This practice could be implemented in any classroom situation in which LBGCs are used.

**Learning Outcomes/Goals**

- Students will engage with teacher responses to their writing (whether oral or written) as a baseline course expectation of the LBGC.
- Students will have the opportunity to participate in further revisions and engagement with teacher response to their writing as an above-and-beyond criteria in the LBGC.

**Format**

This teaching practice is suitable for online, hybrid, and face-to-face instruction.

**Teacher Preparation**

Consider what kind(s) of response will work for you and your students/course. For example,

- Will your responses be oral, written, or a combination of modes?
- Will you complete your responses/feedback ahead of time, or will the comments be shared live with students in one-to-one meetings?
- How much feedback will you give on lower- versus higher-stakes assignments? (How much time and labor are equitable for you?)
- At what point(s) in the writing process will you respond to students?
- What are the expectations for students? What do you want them to do with your feedback? Will you require them to respond to your responses?
Additionally, make your response-related expectations clear for students (e.g., show them what a good response looks like from both a teacher and a student), and be sure to teach students how to effectively engage with teacher feedback (see Eckstein’s teaching tip on this exact topic, this issue).

**Estimated Time**

This activity will last approximately 2 weeks total.

**Procedure**

See the Appendix for the LBGC I use in my undergraduate courses. In my particular LBGC setup, the students agree to 10 baseline expectations if they want to earn a B in the course, and if they would like to pursue a letter grade higher than that, they generate four individualized above-and-beyond criteria for personal achievement over the course of the semester. These above-and-beyond criteria are completely flexible and may change depending on students’ responsibilities and their desired level of engagement in the course.

Response to writing comes into play in both the baseline expectations (i.e., students are expected to consider response in three of the course’s baseline expectations, numbers 5, 6, and 7) and the above-and-beyond criteria sections of the LBGC (students have the option of including additional rounds of response to writing as one or more of these criteria). For example, to go above and beyond the baseline expectations, a student may choose to conduct an additional round of revision on a higher-stakes assignment or attend feedback session(s) in the writing center.

By incorporating response strategies and expectations into both the required baseline expectations and the optional above-and-beyond criteria, students have the opportunity to engage with feedback and response to their writing in multiple ways and with a variety of people (e.g., the teacher, in-class peers, writing center consultants).

A suggested outline for introducing the LBGC is as follows:

1. On the first day of class, introduce the LBGC process when sharing the rest of the course policies on the syllabus.

2. Have students read the full LBGC template for homework. They should come to class the next session with (a) any questions or concerns about the contract and (b) an initial list of brainstormed ideas of what might count as above-and-beyond criteria.

3. Create an individualized, personalized contract for each student (I did this all in a shared Google Docs folder). Also create a Google Doc that will be used in the in-class LBGC discussion/brainstorming session.

4. During the next class session, discuss the LBGC, noting the purposes of this form of assessment and leaving space for any questions/concerns students may have. Focus on the baseline expectations first so that students know what the relatively nonnegotiable elements are in terms of expectations and performance. Many students may be unfamiliar with this nontraditional assessment approach, so questions will likely be common.

5. Break students into pairs or small groups to generate short lists of possible above-and-beyond criteria. Then reconvene and create one large list together as a full class. You may want to have some of your own ideas ready and/or be prepared to interrogate student ideas for quality and focus, if needed.

6. Give the students until the next class period (or until a one-to-one meeting with you) to articulate their four above-and-beyond criteria. In my own classes, we review proposed criteria in one-to-one meetings, typically before the end of the 2nd week of class. (These meetings are when (a) I am able to check if students’ criteria need to be more specifically articulated, if their original ideas seem too ambitious, etc., and (b) students can ask me individualized questions.) At the end of each meeting, the student and I both sign and date the LBGC.
Caveats and Alternatives

- The LBGC presented in this teaching tip can certainly be edited and altered in myriad ways, depending on your particular course or discipline and in light of the distinct baseline expectations you wish to engage in with students. The number and scope of above-and-beyond criteria can also be changed. Context and negotiation are key.

- Recent compelling research has critiqued Inoue’s (2019) version of LBGCs through the lens of disability studies, particularly when considering neurodivergent students (Kryger & Zimmerman, 2020) and students who identify as disabled and/or multiply marginalized (Carillo, 2021). I recommend considering one’s unique roster of students when making decisions about assessment and responding by creating “assessments that recognize students’ intersectional identities” (Carillo, 2021, p. 8). Both cited texts offer more specific suggestions.

- Based on the research cited in the previous bullet point, I have since substantially updated the LBGC discussed in this teaching tip to be an engagement-based grading contract (EBGC) that is being piloted in the spring 2022 semester. As Carillo (2021) states, “replacing labor with engagement . . . would allow for the decoupling of willingness and ability because a student’s chosen form of engagement is not bound to normative conceptions of time.” Based on feedback from students who have utilized the LBGC, my revised EBGC, among other changes, asks students to propose only three above-and-beyond criteria, rather than the original four.
References


Appendix

Grading Contract

[Course Number] [Course Title] [Semester]

This contract is informed by the publications that appear in the reference list at the end of this document. It must be agreed upon and signed by both you and Dr. O by [date].

To quote writing studies scholar Dr. A. B. Inoue, “If learning is what we are here for, then grades just get in the way since they are the wrong goals to strive for” (2019, p. 144).

Inoue continues,

Consider two issues around grades. First, using conventional classroom grading of essays and other work to compute course grades often leads students to think more about acquiring grades than about their writing or learning; to worry more about pleasing a teacher or fooling one than about figuring out what they really want to learn, or how they want to communicate something to someone for some purpose. Lots of research in education, writing studies, and psychology over the last 30 or so years have shown overwhelmingly how the presence of grades in classrooms negatively affect the learning and motivation of students. . . .

Second, conventional grading may cause you to be reluctant to take risks with your writing or ideas. It doesn’t allow you to fail at writing, which many suggest is a primary way in which people learn from their practices. Sometimes grades even lead to the feeling that you are working against your teacher, or that you cannot make a mistake, or that you have to hide part of yourself from your teacher and peers. The bottom line is, failure at writing is vital to learning how to write better. And we have to embrace our failures, because they show us the places we can improve, learn, get better—and these are the reasons we are in college! Grades on our

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1 The author thanks friends and colleagues Dr. Kayla A. Bruce (Olivet Nazarene University), Dr. Virginia Schwarz (San Francisco State University), and Dr. Jennifer Eidum (Elon University) for their generous and sustained conversations about LBGC use in the college writing classroom.

work and writing do not allow us to productively fail. They create conditions that mostly punish failure, not reward it for the learning opportunity it can and should be. (2019, pp. 143–144)

To put it more succinctly: “Because grades are so destructive to student learning in writing classrooms . . . grading contracts are the best antiracist solution I’ve found” (Inoue, 2015, p. 178).

Therefore, instead of traditional grades in this course, we will instead be working through the semester using a labor-based grading contract. By definition, contract grading is an agreement that students enter into with the professor (Elbow, 2008). Labor-based contract grading is based on the idea that student effort (i.e., the amount of labor, time, intensity, and application you put into your writing) is the major factor in the outcome of an assignment. This means that instead of focusing on individual grades/points on assignments, I will focus on your progress throughout the arc of the entire semester.

I hope that this kind of grading style helps you feel less anxiety about “getting it right” and allows you to feel free to take risks, make mistakes, collaborate with classmates, and be more creative with your writing in this [Course Number] course!

[Course Number] [Semester] has a B default grade. If you complete all of the work asked of you in the spirit it is asked, and if you demonstrate sustained effort through the processes that we establish as a class, then you will earn a B in the course. To earn an A, you must go above and beyond the list of baseline course expectations below; we will discuss and brainstorm what this might mean to you and your classmates in the first 2 weeks of class.

Baseline Course Expectations

In order to earn at least a B in the course, students must agree to the following:

1. Not miss more than 2 weeks’ worth of class/assignments (i.e., six total absences).
2. Meet due dates and writing criteria for all assignments, including daily work in-class/online, minor invention work, major rough and final drafts, and peer review/writing workshop days.
3. Complete all class readings before the scheduled discussion date and come prepared to each class meeting.
4. Demonstrate authentic and regular participation in online collaborative activities on Google Classroom and Google Drive, both in class and out of class.
5. Give thoughtful peer feedback and respond to classmates’ writing faithfully on collaborative tasks (e.g., peer review, writing workshops).
6. Sustain effort and investment on each draft of all writing assignments, including engaging with Dr. O’s response to your writing (i.e., her feedback, whether written or oral).
7. Make substantive revisions based on feedback/response to your writing when the expectation is to revise—not just copy-edit or touch up.
8. Polish all final revisions of major assignments to produce edited, college-level academic work that responds to a specific rhetorical situation (e.g., purpose, audience expectations).
9. Attend all scheduled conferences with the professor.
10. Submit a midterm memo and a final reflective memo.

Failure to consistently meet these baseline expectations will result in a grade lower than a B:
- One missed expectation will result in a BC\(^2\) in the course.
- Two missed expectations will result in a C in the course.
- Three missed expectations will result in a CD in the course.
- Four or more missed expectations will result in a D or a failing grade.

\(^2\) To clarify, the institution at which I am employed uses an atypical grading scale with no +/- grades. Instead, the grade range is as follows: A, AB, B, BC, C, CD, D, F.

To earn an A in the course, the undersigned agree to achieving the following four elements that go above and beyond the baseline course expectations. (Agreeing to three of these “above-and-beyond criteria” results in a grade of AB.)

*We will discuss extensively in class what above-and-beyond criteria could be. Stay tuned!*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Above-and-beyond criteria 1:</th>
<th>Student description</th>
<th>Dr. O’s notes/clarification</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Above-and-beyond criteria 2:</td>
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<td>Above-and-beyond criteria 3:</td>
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<td>Above-and-beyond criteria 4:</td>
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**Signature Agreement**

I agree to the terms and conditions of the grading contract for [Course Number], [Semester].

[delete this text and type here]
Student Signature & Date

[delete this text and type here]
Professor Signature & Date

References


Preparing Students to Engage With Teacher Feedback

Grant Eckstein
Brigham Young University

For students to benefit from teacher feedback, either in the short term to improve a draft or in the long term to improve as writers, students need to engage with the feedback (Lira-Gonzales et al., 2021; Zhang & K. Hyland, 2018). Thus, simply receiving feedback is not sufficient to improving student writing; students need to be invested enough in the process of improving their writing to read and implement it. Some students do not engage with teacher feedback due to affective factors (Mahfoodh, 2017). If students have strong emotional reactions to teacher feedback, or if the feedback contradicts their attitudes, beliefs, or goals, students may disengage from it (F. Hyland, 2003; Storch & Wigglesworth, 2010). It is important, therefore, for teachers to acknowledge and respect the emotional labor of receiving feedback while helping students develop or refine positive emotional reactions to teacher feedback. In this teaching tip, I provide suggestions for preparing students to receive feedback by debriefing their past positive and negative experiences with feedback and encouraging positive future reactions.

Context

This approach was designed for adult first- and second-language writers in university courses (e.g., first-year composition, graduate writing courses) and intensive English programs.

Learning Outcomes or Goals

- Students will be able to acknowledge and examine their own emotional perceptions of teacher feedback.
- Students will be able to engage with teacher feedback by utilizing emotion-regulating strategies.

Format

This learning activity takes place as an in-class discussion.

Teacher Preparation

Brainstorm past negative and positive experiences of receiving feedback on your own writing. This could be feedback from former teachers, parents, friends, colleagues, reviewers, editors, and so forth. Feedback experience descriptions should include:

- the context in which the feedback was provided;
- one or two illustrations of the feedback as best as can be remembered;
- the initial emotional reaction that accompanied the feedback; and
- the ultimate result of engagement with that feedback (e.g., Did you take up the feedback, ignore it, improve because of it, completely skuttle the writing project?)

Estimated Time

This activity takes 30–45 minutes of class time.

Procedure

1. Introduce the topic of engagement and emotional response to students in your writing class. Do this perhaps by reading from the

introductory paragraph from this teaching tip or pulling ideas from the cited research in the “References” section.

2. Express your own emotional reaction and subsequent (dis)engagement with a writing task by offering two examples of receiving feedback. Start with a negative example—one in which the feedback you received shut down your writing or revising process. Move next to a positive example in which you engaged with feedback and revised successfully because of a healthy emotional reaction to feedback. It is important to stress that emotional reactions can change over time; initial reactions of anger and frustration can evolve (sometimes with the help of meditation, food, or venting) into respect and appreciation for honest feedback. You may offer insights into your own feedback-processing approach.

3. Ask students to write about two of their own feedback-receiving experiences after considering what you just shared. One experience should be negative and the other positive. Students should also begin crafting their own feedback-processing approach or strategies.

4. Ask one or two students to share their negative and positive experiences with the class or break students into pairs or groups to share.

5. After students have expressed their experiences, distribute the handout (in the Appendix) that suggests options for responding to feedback. Ask students to identify two or three strategies that they currently use or that they would consider using to regulate their emotions in preparation for future feedback events.

Caveats and Alternatives

- Be sure to prepare fully for a conversation on emotional/affective reactions to feedback. Students may have horror stories of bad feedback experiences. Anticipate this and even mention it to students so they know the purpose of this activity is not to excoriate specific teachers but to discuss emotions in a healthy way.

• For some students, feedback will continue to be a painful, intractable issue even after discussing positive emotional reactions to it. Be sensitive to the fact that some past experiences cut extremely deep. In fact, this discussion may bring up issues of victimization associated with feedback episodes, so be prepared to offer contact information for professional counseling services, which teachers should have available as a matter of course.

• Some students may discuss feedback experiences that reveal situations in which they have experienced racism, marginalization, and lack of equality. These can be opportunities to discuss larger issues than feedback and to encourage all members of the class to see and respect diversity.

• Alternatively, assign some or all of this activity as homework. Introduce the topic in class or via online instruction, and then ask students to complete their responses and read the handout at home. Ideally, teachers will still debrief the experience with students in person or online via a learning management system or even a video platform, such as Flipgrid (https://info.flipgrid.com/).
References


Appendix

Approaches for Managing the Emotional Work of Receiving Feedback

Receiving feedback on one’s writing can be an emotionally charged experience. If you are not eager for the feedback, or if the feedback contradicts your perception of your writing, or even if there are too many or too few comments, the experience can leave you angry or disappointed. But strong negative emotions do not do much to help you improve in your writing. In fact, they generally do the opposite. They may shut down your desire to revise or improve your work, or they may lead you to make changes that you dislike or disagree with. Either way, your paper may not improve, and you may suffer as a writer.

So, what can you do to mitigate strong emotions when you receive feedback on your writing, particularly if it is negative? Consider using some of these emotion-managing approaches and strategies:

- Read feedback in a quiet, safe place in which you have time to process it carefully. Scanning feedback quickly while talking to friends or transitioning between projects can make the feedback seem worse than it is.
- Ask someone else to read the feedback and provide a quick, positive initial summary.
- Talk with others about the feedback you received; ask them to help you prioritize it and make plans for addressing it.
- Categorize the feedback you receive by placing each suggestion onto its own row in a table. In the next column, type out ideas for addressing the feedback.
- Identify the amount of feedback you really feel capable of addressing. Maybe you can do everything your feedback provider suggests; maybe you can only address 20% of it. Identify how much you can handle, and then leave the rest for another time.
- Color-code or order the feedback by difficulty to see how many comments you have that would be easy to address, how many are medium,
and how many are hard. Make a plan for balancing your revisions: perhaps address the easy ones first to build momentum or maybe work on all the hard ones first to get them out of the way.

- Highlight the positive comments in your feedback; share these with friends who can help you celebrate your successes.
- Remind yourself that feedback is opinion based. Teachers, peers, and tutors are just offering their perceptions about what will make your writing better; yet those perceptions may be inaccurate, shortsighted, or poorly expressed, so do not treat them like absolute truth.
- Talk to the feedback provider. If your teacher wrote comments that are hard to understand, that are confusing, or that are painful, ask your teacher to clarify them. You can also ask your teacher for suggestions when revising, which may make the extra effort to talk with your teacher especially valuable.
- Leave your feedback alone for a few days, particularly if your initial reaction is bad. The extra time allows you to approach the feedback from a different emotional space.
- Reread your writing after receiving feedback. Try to see your writing from the feedback-provider’s perspective or reread your writing as if it were written by someone else and you had provided the feedback.
- Keep the positive comments in mind if your feedback is particularly glowing. Savor the feelings of accomplishment that come from writing something that another person found effective.
- Find someone who can provide more or better feedback if your feedback provider offered insufficient or inadequate comments. This person might be a peer, friend, tutor, or another teacher. Feedback is an intensive labor, so consider ways that you can give back to the person who agrees to offer additional feedback. Offer to review something of theirs or buy them a cup of coffee.
- Practice intentional breathing when you get particularly anxious about feedback. Breathe in deeply, hold the breath for five seconds, and then exhale slowly.

• Turn to positive emotional releases to deal with strong reactions to feedback; this might include food, sleep, time with friends, or sports. Find a way to process your emotions productively so that you do not internalize the lie that because you received feedback on one piece of writing that your writing is bad in general.

• Rewrite the feedback in your own words using phrases that are positive and upbeat and that encourage rather than discourage revision.

Once you feel neutral or even positive about making suggested revisions, take advantage of this opportunity and truly engage with the feedback. You are likely to improve your paper in the short term and become a better writer in the long term.

Online Teacher-Student Group Conferences

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Teacher-student group conferences (TSGCs) blend the benefits of one-to-one teacher-student writing conferences with those of peer response. TSGCs socialize student writers into discussions of academic writing, giving them an expert model (the teacher) and an opportunity to practice providing feedback to several peers (Ching, 2014; Yeh, 2019). Both Ching and Yeh considered how TSGCs function in face-to-face settings, describing sessions conducted either in a classroom or during office hours in which small groups of students met with their instructor and shared drafts of their writing for group discussion and response. In this teaching tip, we describe how the procedure can be done in an online context over video-conferencing platforms like Zoom, which offer affordances such as screen sharing and text chat as well as audio discussion.

Context

This activity was designed for adolescent or adult students (first- or second-language learners) in academic writing courses.

Learning Outcomes or Goals

- Students will learn how to provide oral and written commentary on draft texts.
- Students will observe how other students approach the writing assignment in their texts.

Format

This activity was developed for use in online synchronous or hybrid classes, but it could also be used in face-to-face classes in which students have access to internet and individual computers outside of class.

Teacher Preparation

Form groups at the beginning of the term, set due dates for students to submit drafts, and read student drafts before conferences.

Estimated Time

Allot 10–15 minutes per writer, with total conference length depending on group size. When possible, use class meeting time for easier scheduling.

Procedure

1. Prior to the first conference, do the following during class time:
   a. Introduce students to the concept of the group conference and its benefits. These benefits include receiving feedback from both the instructor and multiple classmates, asking questions about feedback, trying out ideas for revising, and learning how to give better feedback through the process.
   b. Place students in groups of three to four based on schedule, compatibility, or potential contributions to the process. Make

sure students know when to sign on and have the meeting link (and password, if needed). See Victoria Lee's (n.d.) example instructions.

c. Establish a procedure for preparing for the conferences that includes the following:
   i. Due dates by which writers need to share their drafts with the teacher and their group members.
   ii. Method for sharing drafts with each other (e.g., Google Docs, Word files, or Word online).
   iii. Processes for providing each other with comments (e.g., directly on the writer's draft, at the end of the draft, or on a feedback form).
   iv. Expectations for what students should focus their comments on. You may want to provide students with a list of questions or guidelines to set the scope. See example guide questions from Michelle Kunkel (n.d.-a).

d. If you create a video to model the conference procedure, assign students to watch it in preparation. See a model video created by the authors (Gilliland, 2020) for a university-level English for Academic Purposes class.

e. Let students know when in the conference you will give your comments as the teacher (e.g., at the beginning before the students comment, after all students have commented, or in response to student comments).

2. Follow the conference procedure:
   a. When all members of a group have signed on to the conference, check if students want to have the conference video recorded (for postconference review) and enable the live transcription.
   b. Begin with one writer's text. You can either ask for a volunteer or nominate a writer.

i. Ask the writer to state their goals, questions, and concerns about their paper before inviting others to share their comments.

ii. Display the writer’s text on the shared screen. This can be done either by the teacher or by each writer in turn.

c. Remain consistent throughout the conference to ensure all writers get equal access to feedback:
   i. Comments may be given orally or in the text chat. You may choose to call on students in turn, allow them to speak up spontaneously, or ask them to use the hand-raising function.
   ii. Decide whether the writer should remain silent while all comments are delivered or respond to each comment.
   iii. As reviewers are talking, the writer may wish to write down suggestions or ideas for revision.

d. Monitor the time and wrap up the discussion of each paper as appropriate. One option for wrapping up is to ask the writer to explain their next steps/plans for revision.

3. If the conference was recorded, if a live transcript was created, or if chat transcripts were saved, upload the files where students can access them. Decide whether these files should only be accessible to students in the conference group or to everyone in the class.

4. Have students do some kind of follow-up activity, such as one of the following:
   a. Fill out a form on which they summarize the main feedback they received from their peers and teacher, and plan for whether and how they would follow those suggestions. See an example feedback form created by Michelle Kunkel (n.d.-b).
   b. Keep a feedback log after each conference and write a final reflection paper summarizing what they learned from the conference.

feedback they received throughout the semester. See an example feedback log created by Mitsuko Suzuki (n.d.).

Caveats and Alternatives

- Scaffold students’ participation in conference talk through the following activities:
  - Consider recording a video modeling the feedback process, using the same platform that you will use for the actual conferences so that students can see how it will work.
  - Students could work in small groups in breakout rooms to practice the commenting process in Google Docs (e.g., typing comments at the end of the writer’s text in response to guiding questions vs. using the comments button; replying to comments).
  - Some students may not know what they can say about a peer’s text. They might appreciate a “cheat sheet” of sentence starters or recommendations about things to comment on.
  - Let students know that praise is also helpful. Some students may think that they do not have anything to criticize, but they can say good things about peers’ papers.
  - Encourage students to address each other directly during the conference instead of talking to the teacher (e.g., “I thought you should . . . ” vs. “I think she should . . . ”) as a way of increasing interaction/collaboration.

- Establish a comfortable conference environment:
  - Students (especially second-language writers) may be uncomfortable with the expectation that they give constructive feedback to classmates, particularly within earshot of the teacher and their peers (Ruecker, 2014). They may also be uncomfortable contradicting the teacher’s feedback or providing an alternative perspective.
  - Staying with the same group members throughout the term can help students feel more relaxed with time.
Follow up with students after the conferences:

- Hold a reflection meeting to discuss the conferences. In the meeting, ask students to identify what kinds of comments were helpful, which may encourage them to give more constructive feedback in the next round. Encourage students to talk about the kinds of feedback that they found most/least useful and why.

- If there are particular things you want to know (e.g., how much time students spent writing their drafts and giving feedback, how confident they felt while leaving comments and why, or how useful they thought a particular conference was), collect feedback from students after each conference. Change the questions depending on what you want to know in subsequent conferences.

- Use some type of rubric/grading criteria to hold students accountable for submitting drafts and leaving comments on time. See an example participation rubric from Michelle Kunkel (n.d.-c).
References


