Abstract: The relationship between tutoring and teaching has been a recurrent topic of interest among writing center directors and writing program administrators. While scholarship agrees tutoring experience aids composition teachers with implementing process pedagogy and fostering a collaborative classroom, the relationship between tutoring and assessment of student writing is less clear. This qualitative study uses interviews with eight graduate teaching assistants with tutoring experience to examine how they transfer and juxtapose knowledge, practices, and values for response between the writing center and the classroom. Like previous scholarship, this research finds writing center tutoring contributes to teachers’ enactment of constructivist, student-centered pedagogy and enhances their understanding of students’ relationship to writing and feedback, standard language ideology, and systemic inequities in education. However, evaluation led these instructors to experience tension between their values and preferred respondent roles, with many reporting anxious grading processes and some experimenting with alternatives to traditional grading. The article concludes with suggestions to build bridges between tutoring and teaching contexts, particularly through explicit attention to antiracist pedagogy and alternative assessment practices.
The relationship between tutoring and teaching has been a recurrent topic of interest among writing center directors (WCDs) and writing program administrators (WPAs). Both anecdotally and empirically, scholars and administrators have generally viewed the relationship positively, with the writing center providing a valuable site of professional development for writing instructors (Broder, 1990; Child, 1991; Cogie, 1997; Harris, 2002; Ianetta et al., 2007; Weaver, 2018; Worden-Chambers & Dayton, 2021). The emerging consensus indicates that tutoring experience can aid composition teachers with implementing process pedagogy, especially student-teacher conferences, and fostering a collaborative classroom. However, the relationship between tutoring experience and grading and responding to student writing is less clear. Therefore, this study focuses on one central facet of tutoring and teaching writing: responding to student writing. This qualitative study analyzes interviews with eight teachers of first-year or advanced composition with prior writing center experience. Like previous scholarship, my research finds writing center tutoring contributes to teachers’ enactment of constructivist, student-centered pedagogy and enhances their understanding of students’ relationship to writing and feedback, standard language ideology, and systemic inequities in education. However, evaluation led these instructors to experience tension between their values and preferred respondent roles, with many identifying grading as a source of keen anxiety due to the potential for emotional harm to students. I offer suggestions for WCDs and WPAs to build bridges between tutoring and teaching contexts, particularly through explicit attention to antiracist pedagogy and alternative assessment practices.

Tutor-Teachers and Development of Constructivist, Student-Centered Pedagogy

Writing center tutoring has been a longstanding component of graduate teaching assistant (TA) preparation for first-year composition (FYC), becoming widespread in the 1980s (Wilhoit, 2002) and continuing today. To better understand the relationship between writing center tutoring and classroom teaching for pre- and in-service teachers, it is necessary

to examine this common practice from the perspective of tutor-teachers (Babcock & Thonus, 2012, p. 74). The limited empirical research examining the role of writing center tutoring in TA development indicates tutoring experience allows TAs to gain insight into student writing processes, enact student-centered pedagogy, and reflexively connect composition theory to practice (Broder, 1990; Child, 1991; Clark, 1988; Cogie, 1997; Harris, 2002; Ianetta et al., 2007; Weaver, 2018). However, those benefits are tempered when the writing center serves as required “training wheels” for TAs preparing to teach FYC (Nichols, 2005). In such cases, writing centers lose control over staffing and writing center services, and pedagogy may be devalued by these TAs (Ianetta et al., 2007; Nichols, 2005). Furthermore, TAs required to tutor rather than self-selecting into the center may struggle to transfer one-to-one writing pedagogy to an entire class (Grouling & Buck, 2017).

Graduate TAs who spend time in the writing center gain practice with constructivist and collaborative pedagogy. As Harris (2002) observes, tutors learn skills that can be applied to teacher conferences, such as “question-asking strategies and techniques for establishing rapport so that collaboration can take place, for assessing who that writer is and what she needs (rather than what the paper needs), and how to motivate the student to write or revise that paper” (p. 201). Tutoring experience provides novice FYC TAs with insight into students as learners: knowledge of students’ understandings and misunderstandings, individualized writing processes, approaches to writing tasks, and experiences with writing across the disciplines (Clark, 1988; Cogie, 1997; Worden-Chambers & Dayton, 2021). Writing center tutoring also improves TAs’ understanding of assignment design and motivation to experiment with instructional strategies (Cogie, 1997; Harris, 2002; Ianetta et al., 2007; Worden-Chambers & Dayton, 2021). In addition to gaining instructional strategies, teachers may develop an understanding of students’ linguistic identities and experiences of standard language ideology and gain “a stronger sense of empathy, compassion, and patience” from their time in the writing center.
Still, the transfer of learning between sites of teaching and teacher preparation remains complex, influenced by factors including teacher education, deepening knowledge, attunement to student learning, prior writing experiences, and circulation of concepts and ideologies across contexts (McQuitty, 2012; Newell et al., 2009; Qualley, 2017).

**Role Negotiation and Tutor-Teacher Response to Writing**

The relationship between tutoring and TAs’ ability to respond to and assess student writing remains uncertain. Some research has found that TAs feel less confident about responding to and evaluating student work after tutoring experience. Child (1991) found teachers entering the FYC classroom for the first time after tutoring felt challenged and frustrated by the responsibilities of assessment. In comparing an FYC program that required TAs to work in the writing center with a program that did not, Reid et al. (2012) found, “TAs who had had a year of experience tutoring in a writing center were unexpectedly less likely than [other] TAs to mention confidence about conferencing and providing feedback” (p. 57, emphasis added). On the other hand, Cogie’s (1997) participants reported no adverse effects of tutoring experience on classroom performance, and Worden-Chambers and Dayton’s (2021) participants felt they had gained insight into response strategies such as being encouraging and constructive from their experiences “working with clients who were discouraged by negative or vague commentary from instructors” (p. 117).

One explanation for these inconsistent results may be a misalignment of respondent roles between the writing center and the classroom. Child (1991) found that experienced teachers returning to the classroom after tutoring felt freed from authoritarian roles, while inexperienced teachers entering the classroom for the first time after tutoring felt anxious and frustrated by classroom dynamics and assessment. Traditionally, writing centers espouse student agency, and, as Harris (2002) suggests, instructors who embrace “nonhierarchical” relationships with students may

enhance their student-centered, collaborative skills as tutors, and these instructors may prefer their time in the writing center compared to the classroom (pp. 205–206). Furthermore, tutorial interactions can yield recognition of conflict between students’ identities, voices, academic writing conventions, and assessments. One participant in Worden-Chambers and Dayton’s (2021) study voiced this conflict, wondering, “The Writing Center showed me the struggle of letting students feel valued and speak in their own voice. But then, how do we help them not get a really bad grade?” (p. 118). Tutor-teachers may feel this tension between supporting students’ voices and assessing writing within their classrooms.

WCDs and WPAs may experience similar tensions as they prepare TAs to respond to writing despite increasing attunement to intersections of language, race, identity, and privilege in writing assessment. Writing centers have a history of adopting a regulatory stance toward standard language ideologies that continues to circulate (Camarillo, 2019; García, 2017; Grimm, 1996). Recent scholarship has argued that writing center pedagogy’s focus on the individual has obfuscated systemic inequities and privileged White, middle-class, monolingual writers while failing to attend to the needs of racialized, working-class, and linguistically minoritized students (e.g., Camarillo, 2019; Denny et al., 2018; Faison & Condon, 2022; García, 2017; Greenfield & Rowan, 2011b). Likewise, WPAs have explored strategies for shifting assessment cultures, such as introducing teachers to critical language awareness (Behm & Miller, 2012; Davila, 2017; Shapiro, 2022) or alternatives to traditional grading, like labor-based grading contracts (Inoue, 2021), engagement-based grading contracts (Carillo, 2021), or ungrading (Blum, 2020). While scholarship has occasionally featured narratives of writing center encounters that problematize and challenge tutors’—typically, White tutors’—understanding of linguistically minoritized students’ writing experiences (e.g., Geller et al., 2011), much remains to be learned about how tutor-teachers transfer that understanding to the classroom assessment context.
WCDs and WPAs should attend to affective tensions in tutor-teacher roles. Tutors and teachers explore different approaches and personas in response, whether adopting the role of “a sistahgurl” (Kynard, 2006), an activist ally (Baldwin & Smith, 2022), or an accomplice (Green, 2016). Those roles may also include being

- a teacher, reader, a guide, a friendly advisor, a diagnostician, a coach, a motivator, a collaborator, a fellow explorer, an inquirer, a confidant, a questioning reader, a representative reader, a common reader (or average reader or real reader), a sounding board, a subjective reader, an idiosyncratic reader, a sympathetic reader, a trusted adult, and a friend. (Straub, 1996, p. 225)

Caswell (2018) describes affective tensions in response, reminding us of the “tug and pull” teachers “experience between what they feel they should do (mostly driven from a pedagogical perspective) and what they are expected to do (mostly driven by an institutional perspective) when responding” (p. 71). Caswell’s case study participant, Kim, illustrates the paralyzing emotions that even veteran teachers experience when faced with conflicting values: In this case, a teacher with 10 years of experience spent 45 minutes on a single (short) paper, uncertain of how to proceed when torn between tensions of responding to content over grammar and preserving the student relationship over providing critical feedback. Such experiences remind us that “responding to student writing is an identity-shaping activity for teachers” (Caswell, 2014, p. 11) and deserves our rich attention.

Therefore, this study asks,
- How do tutor-teachers transfer knowledge, practices, and values for response from the writing center to the classroom?
- What differences do TAs perceive in their respondent roles for the writing center and the classroom? How do they experience the role of evaluator?
Methods

Study Site and Context

This analysis examined participants’ perceptions of similarities and differences in response practices and roles between the writing center and the writing classroom. This study occurred from 2017 to 2019 at a large, public, Midwestern, doctoral-granting university. This predominantly White institution has a sizable population of international and multilingual students and a growing number of first-generation students. I conducted this research from my vantage as director of the university-wide writing center, which employs undergraduate and graduate tutors from across the disciplines. The writing center selects graduate tutors through competitive application; there is no requirement for composition instructors to tutor before teaching. To recruit participants for this study, I extended invitations to graduate tutors and teachers of first-year and advanced composition courses. I did not offer any incentives beyond the opportunity for reflection.

At this institution, several departments offer courses that satisfy the first-year writing requirement, but the English department employed all participants teaching FYC. In this composition program, new English graduate students teach one section of 19 students each semester during their first year and two sections in the following years. A one-semester pedagogy education seminar introduces new graduate students to composition theory and assessment.

The university requires advanced composition for all undergraduates. Many courses satisfy this requirement, and course expectations and instructor training vary by department. In this study, participants taught advanced composition in literature, education, and writing studies/informatics.

All participants believed they were required to use traditional, letter-grade forms of classroom assessment; however, I did not collect data from the participants’ departments to substantiate those beliefs.
Participants

Eight instructors volunteered to participate, all with at least one year of tutoring and one year of teaching experience. Half of the participants taught FYC during this study, while the other half taught advanced composition. Four participants were graduate students in writing studies, three in literature, and one in education. Seven participants were doctoral students, and one was a master’s student (see Table 1). Five participants were White, one Asian American, one Black, and one Hispanic.

While I had envisioned these participants would have received training at my institution’s writing center, the reality was that some had previously worked in a writing center during undergraduate or master’s programs, some were working concurrently in the writing center, and some referred to additional tutoring experiences, such as with GED programs.

Table 1

Participant Tutoring and Teaching Experience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Standing</th>
<th>Tutoring Experience</th>
<th>Current Tutor</th>
<th>Years of Teaching Experience</th>
<th>Current Course</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Annie</td>
<td>Literature</td>
<td>1st-year PhD</td>
<td>1.5 (MA, PhD)</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>FYC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anton</td>
<td>Writing Studies</td>
<td>2nd-year PhD</td>
<td>7 (undergraduate, MA, PhD)</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>FYC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bea</td>
<td>Writing Studies</td>
<td>1st-year PhD</td>
<td>5 (community college, MA)</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>FYC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kurt</td>
<td>Writing Studies</td>
<td>2nd-year MA</td>
<td>3 (undergraduate peer tutor) 4 (undergraduate GED tutor)</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>FYC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisa</td>
<td>Literature</td>
<td>2nd-year PhD</td>
<td>1 (PhD)</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Adv. Comp (100-level literature)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ron</td>
<td>Writing Studies</td>
<td>4th-year PhD</td>
<td>3 (undergraduate, PhD)</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Adv. Comp (300-level digital composition)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spectemur Agendo</td>
<td>Literature</td>
<td>3rd-year PhD</td>
<td>1.5 (undergraduate)</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>5–6</td>
<td>Adv. Comp (200-level literature)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tony</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>4th-year PhD</td>
<td>6 (undergraduate, PhD)</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Adv. Comp (200-level education)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Data Collection

I collected data from multiple sources—interviews, classroom observations, and written feedback on in-progress and final drafts—to allow for a multifaceted representation of these TAs’ pedagogies for responding to writing. Each participant completed two 60- to 75-minute semi-structured interviews. The first interview was held near the beginning of the semester and focused on participants’ prior teaching, tutoring, and training experiences; expectations for student writing; goals for response; and current understanding of effective response strategies. The second interview was held near the end of the semester and gathered information about TAs’ written feedback, using stimulated elicitation (Prior, 2004) questions based on student papers provided by the TAs (with student consent), as well as about the principles that guided response in teaching and tutoring contexts. I also asked questions to prompt explicit reflection on participants’ experiences as tutors and teachers: How would you say your work in the writing center has influenced your teaching of writing, if at all? How do you think about your teacher role and tutor role differently in this process of providing feedback? How do you support student writing development as a teacher? What about as a tutor?

Data Analysis

To investigate the research questions indicated above, this analysis centered on the interview data and participants’ reflections about their experiences responding to student writing. Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and uploaded to the qualitative data analysis software QDA Miner. Analysis was iterative, inductive, and comparative (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) and included passes of exploratory, descriptive, and values coding (Saldaña, 2013). I coded the data for instances when participants reflected directly on transfer or juxtaposition of knowledge, practices, values, and response roles between tutoring and teaching contexts. The findings summarize themes related to participants’ transfer and juxtaposition of tutoring and teaching activities.
Findings

This study examined how writing center tutoring influenced TAs’ response to student writing and how knowledge, practices, and values for responding were similar or different across contexts. Participants gained insight into students’ relationship to writing and feedback, and they transferred constructivist strategies, respondent roles, and understanding of students. However, participants juxtaposed respondent roles within the two settings, particularly between the classroom role of evaluator and their preferred roles of generous audience and activist. Some experimented with assessment practices to alleviate tension between these roles.

Enhancing Understanding of Students’ Relationship to Writing and Feedback

Participants credited the writing center with improving their awareness of students’ prior writing education, students’ journeys through the larger university context, linguistic identities, and emotional effects of feedback. At times, their reflections about students’ use of and reactions to feedback shifted fluidly between settings, such as when something learned or observed in the writing center was reinforced in the classroom or vice versa.

Participants expressed a heightened understanding of how students’ prior education shapes their writing knowledge and skills. Some reflected on how misconceptions developed through simplistic or incorrect writing advice (e.g. “Never use ‘I’ in formal writing”) and a lack of instruction affected the quality of students’ writing. Tony recounted his experiences with “students that have come from under-resourced high schools”:

The rules that they haven’t been told are not there, and you know, if you focus more, like we stress here [at the writing center], . . . focus more on the actual components, the ideas, the flow, the power of the paper itself and then teach them the schematics, it just works so much better. And in some cases, they don’t feel attacked, and that’s something I learned from [the writing center]. Not from teaching.

Tony leveraged his experiences in the writing center to meet students where they were at, without judgment, and to support students through direct instruction and recognition of their ideas and goals.

Participants saw how prior writing instruction influenced students’ strategies for drafting and revising, recognizing some students had been “taught to prioritize grammar” (Annie); some “don’t always know they need a main point” (Tony); some may lack experience with research; and some may need instruction on integrating evidence. These participants also formed impressions of how writing standards were taught and enforced. Anton reflected on how students learn to become “good” writers:

A lot of [students] found out that, like, slang wasn’t appropriate, or certain dialects of English, accented English, other languages were not appropriate when they tried it at school, and they were told that that was not appropriate. And so I think that, unfortunately, I think people learn to be good writers when they’re singled out or . . . when that is commented on in some way. And so they learn what not to do as opposed to what to do.

Anton and others felt students lacked instruction and experience and had been taught more about Standard American English (SAE) rules than rhetorically effective writing.

These tutor-teachers also credited their work in the writing center to an improved understanding of students’ writing experiences within the larger university context. Some expressed frustration with the teaching of writing in other courses. Tony elaborated on his understanding of students’ need for direct, nonjudgmental instruction, saying,

This is not a critique of anybody, but just I think maybe something those of us who are here at the writing center have felt like, you can’t always assume, and I feel like this is across all departments . . ., all courses, you can’t assume that students know what a thesis statement is; you can’t assume that students know how to support a point; you can’t assume that students know how to contextualize a quote. . . . Personally, I don’t think there’s anything wrong with just telling them what a thesis statement is if they don’t know.
From his writing center interactions, Tony believed that faculty across the disciplines did not teach writing explicitly but instead made assumptions about students’ knowledge and experience. These interactions led him to perceive students sought out the writing center for that direct instruction.

Others indicated their work with students made them wonder what other teachers were looking for in writing, and some observed instructor feedback did not always match the assignment or provide helpful instruction. Several participants reflected on students’ emotional reactions to feedback, finding students may perceive comments as “ambiguous or hurtful or confusing” (Anton). They recognized students may not ask questions about feedback because of power dynamics and suggested tutors can provide strategies for approaching instructors to explain the grade and feedback. Ron explained,

One of the things that I picked up really quickly was that students get a lot of feedback that’s not helpful, that’s not passable to them, and they don’t feel comfortable asking for it or expecting that as a student.

In his teaching and tutoring, Ron aimed to empower students to feel “like they can insist that their . . . biology TA or professor explained why they got that grade on the short answer that they got. Expecting feedback that’s at least trying to detail how they performed and why they are getting that grade in that sense.” In their writing assessment, these instructors sought to provide a counterpoint, offering clear, specific, and helpful feedback connected to assignment goals.

Participants expressed awareness of systemic inequities in writing education, with several observing through their writing center work that not all linguistic identities were equally welcomed in academia or by academic practices. Bea credited her initial writing center experiences at a community college with insight into institutional inequities and an orientation toward social justice pedagogy, explaining,
So, so much of what I was asked to do was helping a lot of adult students find the verb to underline in the sentence. But what I was getting more from them was obviously realizing how effed up that entire thing was. From them, the people themselves, I was getting more stories.

Bea went on to tell the story of Michelle, an adult student who had tested into the lowest level of English and was required to take skill-and-drill remedial courses. Bea recalled,

So when she finally got into the class where she’s allowed to write beyond a sentence level, . . . she would get stuck because she’s like, “I don’t have anything to say about this, I have to do a description and I don’t know, I don’t know what to do.” She did though, it was just because she’d been locked into this institutional mindset of what writing is and what’s valid. So, I feel like a lot of my interest in social justice, and a social justice pedagogy, really come from that time. Because I was seeing how people were being treated just as numbers.

For Bea, sustained interactions with Michelle and other diverse writers in a community college writing center fostered an understanding of systemic inequities in higher education and writing curricula. Through listening to these writers’ narratives of lived experiences, she developed a social justice orientation to writing pedagogy that she carried forward into tutoring and teaching.

Many participants offered similar descriptions of coming to understand how linguistically diverse students were devalued through written feedback. For example, Kurt reflected on “the figure of the teacher with the red pen who told them they were terrible and not worthy of putting words on a page” and tried in his classroom “to create a pedagogical space that doesn’t evoke those sort[s] of things that were so incredibly negative to them.” Anton also reflected on students’ negative assessment experiences, saying,

Every student has examples of, you know, “The feedback I got made me feel bad.”
... And they can’t maybe stop it from happening, but they can understand that that’s not okay and that there are institutional reasons for that.

Anton connected these observations to his preferred respondent roles of informant and activist, explaining how the writing center offers a space where students can develop:

a critical awareness of how their writing is, might be, has been interacted with. And so, that’s a delicate dance because they don’t want to, you know, slam an instructor. Right. But if I can point to, if there’s a rubric that says, you know, “Your paper will not be read if there are, you know, articles missing.” We can talk about how, you know, what are the kinds of institutional forces behind that.

In response to the prescriptive, judgmental, and harmful feedback Anton saw students receive, he sought to create pedagogical spaces where students could question that feedback and develop a critical awareness of intersections of language, race, privilege, and writing assessment.

Others observed students’ emotional reactions to writing assignments, like Annie recalling her “last-ever tutorial session” at a previous writing center with “a girl literally bursting into tears.” From experiences like this one, Annie found “getting a glimpse at student anxiety is really useful, because it makes you see the ways like maybe you’re feeding into that as an instructor. ... I don’t want to be that teacher that stresses them out.” In general, participants felt that most students believe they are not good writers, many students have been damaged by previous writing teachers, and some students have been made to feel they should be ashamed of writing.

Through writing center interactions, these participants developed awareness of students’ experiences of writing instruction and feedback. Participants credited these interactions with enhancing their understanding of systemic inequities and the intersections of language, race, privilege, and writing assessment. As a counterpoint, they developed facilitative orientations to writing pedagogy, with the goals of privileging students’ ideas,
scaffolding their learning, and, for some participants, creating spaces for students to unpack and critically question instructor feedback.

**Transferring Respondent Roles from the Center to the Classroom**

Participants reflected on response practices and values developed in the writing center and transferred to the classroom. These tutor-teachers reported gaining collaborative, student-centered, and social justice pedagogies in the writing center and developing respondent roles of generous audience, informant, and activist.

Many participants described learning the utility of specific response strategies, such as questions, reader response, and praise. Ron adapted his tutoring approach to the classroom, saying he used “writing center best practices.” For Ron, those best practices include asking “some pointed questions” and using reader-response strategies “like, ‘I don’t know what this means exactly, could you say more?’” Ultimately, Ron said, he knows “not to just put like ‘awk’ or mark grammatical errors, which I just don’t do.”

Similarly, Spectemur repurposed reader-response strategies learned as an undergraduate tutor, saying the writing center taught her “how to respond to student writing as a reader, like, ‘I’m confused here, what do you mean?’ ‘I’ve lost you.’ ‘I’m very clear on what you mean right here, good job,’ things like that.” As a new teacher, she explained,

> I had to find my way back there because when I . . . first started teaching I think it took that, like, very objective, this is right or wrong. But I’ve now returned to some of those earlier tutoring experiences and responding with, like, ‘I wanna be able to follow you, but I cannot.’

Both Ron and Spectemur recognized differences in the classroom context of response but reached back to knowledge gained in the writing center to enact dialogic written feedback.

Several participants reflected on the role of praise in feedback. Tony believed students need positive feedback to hear and accept the negative, while Annie believed praise to be “a double-edged sword” that may
detract from revision. To promote engagement in drafting and revision, Spectemur found students needed praise for the process, not the product. Kurt reflected on his experiences as a GED tutor:

Praise was something that [the students] had never gotten before. You could see sort of like the ways in which that served to be a motivator. And so for me, I tried to incorporate that. Even with papers that I thought kind of missed the mark completely almost, I was like there’s still good stuff that’s going on here.

Although some worried about when and how to best provide praise, these participants recognized its motivating potential and carried praise into their classroom response practices. In addition to response strategies, participants reported transferring respondent roles from the writing center to the classroom. A majority reported adopting the role of a generous audience. This role was characterized as being an interested reader, giving credit for what the student is doing and for what they’re trying to do, showing appreciation for students’ effort, inviting students to participate in the academic conversation, and being kind. Kurt explained, “I think the most important thing is just to be a receptive audience to their work. And just to be a good listener and a good reader.” Ron said he is guided by “generosity, which is vague, but [he] think[s] that idea of trying to give a student credit for what they are doing just as much as what they are not, is really important.” Bea echoed this point of giving students credit for beyond what appears on the page:

I feel like I’m able to honor what they’re trying to do. So, like, I am the audience for the paper. I am obligated then to read it—well, read it, but read it generously. Think about [it], it’s not just about the paper in front of me, it’s also what I know about the student and what the student has been trying to achieve.

This stance of generosity encompassed students’ goals and intentions beyond the written product, and being a generous audience supported participants’ values of building confidence, motivation, and agency.
In addition to being a generous audience, some participants adopted the role of rhetorical audience to encourage students to develop skills for communicating with audiences beyond a particular course. For instance, Anton reflected on giving students advice about development by taking on the audience’s perspective, saying,

Okay, here’s a place where I think that you need to expand this, because your reader is going to be reading this and, you know, by the time that they’re two pages in and they don’t have a sense of what’s going on, they might stop reading, right? In a real world, quote-unquote, context.

These participants indicated the writing center helped them learn to take the “long view,” in Lisa’s words, recognizing each assignment or course was just one small point in the student’s writing trajectory.

Several participants reported taking an informant role in the writing center and classroom. They tried to avoid making assumptions about what students might know or not know and instead worked to dismantle myths and barriers about academic writing. As Bea explained, her overarching response philosophy “is of informed consent. In terms of, yes, students can make choices, but they need to in some way know what the potential effects of those choices are.” She explained how this philosophy was tied to an early writing center experience:

So, I once was told . . . how a student came in talking about the “meadow of nursing” in her paper. And [the tutor] realized, “Oh she used the thesaurus, and just replaced ‘field’ with ‘meadow.’ But wasn’t that a beautiful metaphor? And didn’t it open up all this stuff?” And I was like, “Yeah, but it’s wrong. And you may have had this beautiful moment of introspection, but you didn’t tell her, and that’s effed up.” . . . Students need to know that they’re making the choice. Sometimes they don’t know that they are making the choice, it’s just an error. And maybe it’s a beautiful error, maybe an error they want to cultivate, but they need to know that some people are going to read “meadow of nursing”? And no scholarship. You know?
Bea’s adoption of an informant role arose from reflections on linguistic diversity she encountered as a tutor and her desire to support students’ agency over their communicative choices. She felt a responsibility to provide “informed consent” so that students could consider audiences’ potential reactions to nonidiomatic phrasing, assess alternatives, and weigh options in their use of language.

In some cases, the informant role was extended to being an activist, aiming to build critical language awareness and create a problem-posing space for students to question the histories and politics of language supremacy and SAE. Anton described using FYC as a space to interrogate assumptions about writing that students bring from high school. He explained,

I don’t necessarily mean that college is open to other dialects and registers, but I think students come in with a lot of rules and ideas, right? Like, “Well, I shouldn’t do this. I shouldn’t do this. I’ve been told this.” And I think it’s a nice moment in their trajectories to stop and say, “Well, why is that?”

Like Anton, Bea also intended to create an environment for students to “question assumptions of what a discourse or language is. And what is standard, or standardized written English, and how it is marked in its own way. It’s not neutral.” These participants’ preferred respondent roles were guided by their understanding of multilingualism and critical language awareness, which emerged from a constellation of coursework, commitments to social justice pedagogy, and knowledge of students’ writing experiences developed through writing center encounters.

The enhanced understanding of students developed in the writing center led these participants to transfer to the classroom response strategies like question-asking, reader response, and praise. These tutor-teachers also described a spectrum of preferred roles developed in the writing center that they transferred to the classroom, such as generous audience, informant, and activist.

Juxtaposing Respondent Roles: Collaborator or Evaluator

These participants found grading to be a fraught activity. Participants juxtaposed the generous and activist roles they could adopt in the writing center to the classroom roles of evaluator and authority. Some reported frustration with the extrinsic motivation provided by grades; several reported arduous grading processes shaped by anxiety about harming students; and some experimented with alternate modes to improve transparency or resist evaluation.

Several participants juxtaposed the collaborative possibilities of the writing center with the authority of grading. All perceived an institutional expectation to provide letter grades, and some experienced the grader role as contradictory to their goals for student learning and motivation. In the writing center, Bea explained, “We’re gonna co-create outcomes for this session, for this paper, for your trajectory in this class, for you as a writer.” In the classroom, however, Bea “had a lot of discomfort with the rule of authority, but obviously, duh, that’s what it is. [She’s] grading everything. So [she’s] gotten slightly more comfortable with that.” Lisa and Annie similarly felt the classroom context imposed competing agendas, where instructors want to support agency, choice, and exploration, while students expect direction. Lisa worried about her students reading her comments as “a to-do list,” prompting a focus on task completion rather than reflection (i.e., “I’m going to go through and fix this because my instructor has said I need to [do] X, Y, and Z in order to get this particular grade”). Participants felt the evaluative context distorted the feedback-and-revision dynamic, where students used feedback to achieve a particular grade rather than develop as writers.

Not only did these teachers worry about diminishing students’ agency and involvement in revision, but they also worried about the effects of feedback on students’ confidence and motivation. Kurt struggled with the role of grader. He felt “grading undermine[d] [his] whole approach”—his effort to show genuine, generous engagement. Kurt elaborated by distinguishing between feedback and grading, saying,

When I went to grade, I was like, this doesn't feel like it's helping anyone. And that people, you know, they get frustrated, like, “I got a C+ on this; this sucks.” And then that can end up killing the motivation, where it’s like, . . . “I’m a terrible writer, this is no fun, why am I in this class, I want to be a biologist, this is an English course,” or whatever. It’s like all these different things that come up in response to grades that is not really helpful in terms of actually helping students write better.

Kurt was not alone in worrying about the dampening and damaging effect of grades; several respondents reported dread and anxiety around the obligation of grading and its potential for emotional harm. Anton recalled struggling to grade during his first semester as a teacher, saying,

I would look at a student text and I’d be like, “I don’t even know what to do.” Because I’m like, “I don’t want to mess this person up,” and like, “What if this is bad advice?” So just major indecision.

Spectemur also described feeling anxiety when receiving student papers:

I’m interpolated into their world of experiencing grades like condemnations of their soul and their morals. And so I feel the burden of carrying their sense of self-worth [laughs] in the grade I give them. And I have to do exercises myself, like reflective journaling and breathing techniques to remind myself, like, this is the banking system. And I’m being interpolated into it right now, and I have a duty to them to be a problem-posing teacher, so let it go, let it go, and just be honest. So, yeah, their feelings are what I experience as the biggest burden when I get a batch. And fear.

To avoid the negative emotional toll of grading, some participants reported procrastinating, which resulted in long nights of binge-grading. Kurt explained, “I do them all the night before because I just don’t want to grade.” Anton also mentioned that grading tends to be an “occluded” activity, something rarely discussed among peers and mentors. That sense of grading behind closed doors perhaps contributed to the anxiety many of these instructors experienced.

Given their anxiety about negatively impacting students through assessment, these participants experimented with methods to improve
transparency or aid reception. Lisa developed a rubric for her advanced composition course, reasoning, “I feel like I have to, not defend myself, but make sure that I provide some kind of transparency for the student in terms of why I gave the grade that I ultimately gave.” Many reported prioritizing feedback to avoid overwhelming students. Ron stated that one of his response goals was “not overwhelming a student with millions and millions of comments.” Several also reported minimizing attention to grammar. Kurt stated,

I don’t grade for grammar. Cause that has been a concern that second language writers have brought to me . . . , asking about ‘Okay, how do you grade? Are my grammatical mistakes going to be counted against me?’ And that’s where I clarify like that’s not what I’m looking for when I’m evaluating.

These instructors struggled to reconcile what they felt was an institutional imperative to evaluate assignments with a desire to support student learning. To resolve this dilemma, they experimented with strategies like rubrics, prioritized feedback, and explicitly not evaluating grammar.

A few participants experimented with modes of evaluation that they perceived as forms of resistance to traditional assessment, even if in small ways. For example, Anton incorporated portfolios and audio-recorded feedback to align his evaluation methods more with his student-centered values. However, he felt the FYC program did not condone these modes of assessment. As another form of resistance to the institutional obligation of grading, participants like Kurt, Annie, Lisa, and Ron often gave high grades. Most of his grades, Ron explained,

are like B+, A−. I know that’s not ideal. I also, when confronted about those things, tell people my main concern is whether or not that student came out of the course a much better writer than they entered it. On some level, it’s not my job to produce measuring criteria for corporations, which is what grades really are. . . . The word “grade” came from how they differentiated the quality of grain. The grade of grain.

In general, these teachers felt grading impeded student learning. They felt their efforts were not helpful and, in Bea’s words, were “never good
enough.” They had observed students’ feedback experiences in the writing center and worried about the emotional harm of grading. As a result, they experienced their own emotional toll when tasked with grading. These participants wanted to support and affirm student writers and felt that grading directly countered these goals, which they felt better able to accomplish in the writing center.

Discussion

Knowledge, Practice, and Values for Written Response

This study has examined how eight tutor-teachers transferred knowledge, practices, and values for response from the writing center to the classroom and how they experienced differences in respondent roles across these settings. First, they credited writing center interactions with enhancing their understanding of students’ writing education and relationships between linguistic identities, systemic inequities, and negative writing feedback. Second, they reported transferring specific practices—like questioning, reader-response, and praise—and preferred respondent roles—like generous audience, rhetorical audience, informant, and activist. These participants juxtaposed their preferred roles with institutionally obligated classroom roles of authority and evaluator, with several reporting anxious grading processes and some experimenting with what they described as alternatives to traditional grading. Tutor-teachers experienced tension between institutional sites of writing education and struggled to enact in classroom writing assessment the social justice commitments they developed or enhanced in the writing center. These findings contribute to ongoing discussion about the writing center’s role in teacher learning and development.

This study highlights one labor-intensive facet of teaching: responding to writing. These results add to scholarship that indicates writing center tutoring allows TAs to develop strategies for responding constructively (Child, 1991; Clark, 1988; Harris, 2002; Worden-Chambers & Dayton,
While much of that research has focused on response in contexts like student-teacher conferences, the tutor-teachers in this study attributed written feedback practices like question-asking, reader response, and praise to their writing center experiences. In some cases, connections between the writing center and classroom settings and practices were not instinctively apparent, and some participants, like Spectemur, described a trajectory of beginning with a more objectivist orientation to classroom response before reaching back to earlier experiences as a peer tutor for constructivist practices.

Beyond specific strategies, these tutor-teachers felt they gained knowledge of the interrelationships between language, identity, and education. Some scholars, like Cogie (1997), have found tutors acquire insight into the “baggage” students accrue from prior education and bring into the writing classroom. These participants similarly reported learning about the emotional effects of negative feedback and, like Worden-Chambers and Dayton’s (2021) participants, understood students’ feedback experiences within the context of systemic inequities in education and standard language ideology. Participants like Bea, Anton, and Kurt listened to students’ stories of assessment—the “figure of the teacher with the red pen who told them they were terrible” and the “effed up” institutional gatekeeping practices around “what writing is and what’s valid.” These participants recognized the effects of those assessments on students’ confidence and motivation and connected such stories to their own deepening commitments to social justice pedagogy. Wood (2020) discusses aligning teachers’ antiracist assessment values and response practices. While these graduate student TAs sought to enact their values through response, they did not feel empowered to resist letter-based grading with assessments like labor contracts (Inoue, 2021) or ungrading (Blum, 2020).

Given their orientation to students’ emotions, these tutor-teachers experienced their own affective tensions in response. Like Caswell’s (2018) case study participant, these instructors experienced anxiety about assessment, sometimes leading to fraught grading processes. Seeking to enact
respondent roles of generous audience, informant, and activist, the participants struggled when faced with perceived institutional roles of authority and evaluator. In other words, the participants experienced dissonance between what they felt they should do and what they believed to be condoned by institutional expectations for classroom assessment. On the other hand, they perceived the writing center as an institutional site where they could better enact their valued roles in a setting that embraces collaboration, activism, and “nonhierarchical” (Harris, 2002) relationships. Caswell (2018) suggests teachers can engage in emotional reflection to become aware of affective tensions (p. 91). However, these participants’ experiences suggest reflection alone will not resolve affective tensions. Such tensions must be considered within the context of tutor-teacher education and support for assessment.

WCDs and WPAs should collaborate to support the knowledge, practices, and values that tutor-teachers will transfer from one institutional role to another. WCDs can prompt reflection on response strategies and insights into students-as-learners that tutors will bring to the classroom. WPAs can further support teachers during grading and assessment. This study suggests teachers desire information about alternative assessments and explicit permission to experiment with such approaches. While the language participants used to describe their teaching philosophies varied (social justice pedagogy, critical pedagogy, liberatory pedagogy), many took an antiracist stance whether or not they credited their writing center and FYC professional development with explicitly introducing such pedagogy.

Much recent scholarship has addressed antiracist writing assessment (e.g., Condon & Young, 2017; Faison & Condon, 2022; Inoue, 2015; Wood, 2020), and this study only further corroborates the need—and, on the part of tutor-teachers, hunger—to avoid the “week twelve approach,” where a topic is raised once in pedagogy education, discussed fleetingly, and not returned to (Greenfield & Rowan, 2011a) and instead provide

specific, sustained attention to social justice, standard language ideology, and antiracist assessment in tutor-teacher professional development.

**Conclusion**

While WCDs and WPAs have a longstanding interest in what transfers from tutoring to teaching, the nature of learning to respond is messy: It is not necessarily unidirectional from the writing center to the classroom but reciprocal and additive as tutor-teachers move between contexts. In this study, some participants started as tutors, others as teachers; some experienced these settings concurrently; and several experienced tutor-teacher training at multiple institutions. Tutor-teachers may perceive direct applications from one setting to the other. Still, the transfer of knowledge, practices, and values will be impacted by affective tensions between respondent roles and beliefs about what is possible within institutional contexts.

Future research should include observation of tutorials to better understand the knowledge, practices, and values that tutor-teachers carry or transform across settings. This analysis centered on interview data and participants’ self-assessments of knowledge, practices, and values used for response. Relying on self-reported data provides insight into tutor-teachers’ values and intentions but may not accurately capture enacted practices. Furthermore, research should closely examine concepts presented in tutor-teacher education related to linguistic diversity, standard language ideology, and antiracist writing assessment. Including attention to training materials and topics will help WCDs and WPAs better understand the complementary nature of tutor-teacher education and the circulation of antiracist pedagogical practice between settings. To paraphrase Caswell (2018), our goal as tutor-teacher educators should be to reconcile the tension between what teachers’ values drive them to feel they should do and what they believe higher education institutions expect them to do when assessing writing.
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Abstract: Research in feedback literacy (Carless & Boud, 2018; Molloy et al., 2020; Yu & Liu, 2021; Zhang & Mao, 2023) explores student use of written feedback and barriers to feedback uptake; the role of faculty in designing contextually appropriate feedback has been termed teacher feedback literacy (Carless & Winstone, 2020). When feedback does not achieve desired results, faculty must evaluate their feedback practices; they may be unaware of underlying features that hinder feedback effectiveness. In this paper, a long-time instructor of first-year college composition (FYC) interrogates her own feedback practices using tools from the specialization dimension of Legitimation Code Theory (LCT, Maton, 2014; Maton, 2016a; Maton, 2016b). A translation device (Maton & Chen, 2016) connecting feedback data to LCT concepts was constructed to code responses to 105 student drafts. Subsequent analysis reveals that knowledge codes, which legitimate student achievement through the demonstration of specialized knowledge and skills, predominate in the feedback. Comments foregrounding the student writers’ dispositions, intentions, and agency occur much less frequently. From these results, the instructor identifies potential barriers to student feedback uptake, including code mismatches and code confusion, which may be mitigated through adjustments to written responses and classroom instruction.
The nature and efficacy of written feedback in first-year composition (FYC) has prompted research in the fields of composition and rhetoric (e.g., Anson, 1989; Batt, 2005; Brannon & Knoblauch, 1982; Fife & O’Neill, 2001; Sommers, 1982; Sommers, 2006; Straub, 1996a; Straub, 1996b), applied linguistics (e.g., Hyland & Hyland, 2001, 2019; Li, 2010; Crosthwaite et al., 2022), and developmental education (e.g., Calhoon-Dillahunt & Forrest, 2013; Treglia, 2008). Researchers outside of composition and linguistics have also explored written feedback; Sutton (2012), for example, introduced the term feedback literacy, prompting cross-disciplinary exploration of student dispositions that enable feedback uptake (Carless & Boud, 2018; Molloy et al., 2020; Yu & Liu, 2021; Zhang & Mao, 2023). Carless and Winstone (2020) proposed a related teacher feedback literacy framework, foregrounding the role of the teacher in aligning curricula, assessments, and feedback to support student feedback literacy. Across disciplines, research in both student and teacher feedback literacy centers on an active and dialogic view of feedback: It is a “process through which learners make sense of information from various sources” and apply that information to their learning (Carless & Boud, 2018, p. 1315).

Unfortunately, this research also confirms what many of us FYC instructors have observed: Students do not always make sense of feedback and thus do not apply it consistently (Calhoon-Dillahunt & Forrest, 2013; Devrim, 2014; Treglia, 2008). Winstone et al. (2017) identified four possible barriers to feedback uptake: awareness (problems decoding the feedback), cognizance (lack of strategies to respond to feedback), agency (feelings of disempowerment or ability to act), and volition (lack of motivation to accept or act on feedback). Like many of my colleagues, I have tried to address such barriers through pedagogy: I create opportunities for dialogue and offer incentives to counter roadblocks of agency and volition, and I make the purpose of my feedback explicit to address problems in awareness and cognizance. Still, I have found that my feedback, which seems clear and intuitive to me, is often neither for my students. This finding is echoed by others (Baker & Bricker, 2010; Calhoon-Dillahunt & Forrest, 2013; Rountree & Parker, 2017; Treglia, 2008; Winstone et al.,
Because my feedback practices are habitual, I struggle to assess them objectively; I may overlook features that work against course goals or inhibit student uptake of feedback. To understand how my feedback may impact student feedback literacy, I have spent nearly three years looking at my written responses through various analytical lenses. During this exploration, I discovered Legitimation Code Theory (Maton, 2014; Maton, 2016b), a conceptual framework that has allowed me to interrogate underlying structures in my feedback concerning my course goals and my efforts to foster feedback literacy.

In this paper, I investigate my written feedback in FYC using tools from the specialization dimension of Legitimation Code Theory (Maton & Chen, 2020) to find answers to these questions:

1. What are the organizational structures underlying my feedback practice?
2. Do those structures align with the design principles of the FYC course?
3. What potential barriers to feedback uptake does my practice raise?

I will describe my FYC course, introduce Legitimation Code Theory (LCT), and define terms from the specialization dimension of LCT. Following this overview, I demonstrate how I correlated specialization concepts to my feedback data through what LCT calls a translation device. I then discuss the results and applications of the analysis for pedagogy and research. Ultimately, I demonstrate that my feedback privileges rhetorical and linguistic knowledge over my students’ agency and writerly dispositions, a finding from which I can adjust my teaching to foster feedback literacy.

The FYC Course: Writing About Writing

The feedback I analyze in this study comes from two FYC sections I taught in the spring of 2019. I designed the course based on Writing about Writing pedagogy (Downs & Wardle, 2007) and threshold concepts
(Adler-Kassner & Wardle, 2015). It focuses on eight key ideas, emphasizing transferable writing processes like decision-making, revision, and reflection (see Moore, 2021, for a full description of the course). Figure 1 shows the foundational concepts underlying the course.

**Figure 1**

*Foundational Principles of the FYC Course*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text and process-oriented concept</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. All writing involves choices that affect meaning: words, structures, details, punctuation, and organization.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text-oriented concepts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. Good writing pays attention to the needs and the knowledge of a reader.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. People’s words and ideas are valuable; We must handle them with accuracy and care when we write about them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Specific writing tasks require us to follow the conventions of a discourse community.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Process-oriented concepts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5. Good writers seek feedback and use it to revise (not just edit) their work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. We can “never outwrite our reading ability” (Smith, 2010, p. 670). Good writers are good readers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Uncertainty, difficulty, and confusion are normal parts of a writer’s growth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Reading and writing demand disciplined thought; Reflection is an indispensable tool for developing and honing such thought.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These eight concepts anchored the syllabus and framed the assignments, which included a literacy narrative, summaries with source integration paragraphs (the “progressive annotated bibliography,” or PAB
assignments), and a researched essay. In addition, students were invited to create their own list of key writing concepts for their final exam. Given the primacy of the concepts in the syllabus, I wanted to see how closely my written feedback aligned with those concepts and how my comments might support or inhibit feedback uptake. For the study, I collected feedback on ungraded drafts of the literacy narrative, five PAB assignments, and the researched essay. While the course also included peer feedback and oral feedback in conferences, I only collected my written comments from drafts in Google Docs for analysis.

Data Organization

I divided feedback into two groups based on the nature of the assignments: literacy narrative drafts and research drafts (including PABs and the researched essay). Table 1 indicates the number of student texts submitted, the total number of comments, and the average number of comments per text. Note that submission of drafts was encouraged but not required; thus, there are fewer drafts per assignment than students. Also, note that the higher average number of comments in the literacy narrative reflects assignment length—1,000 to 1,200 words for the literacy narrative compared to 500 to 700 words for the PAB drafts.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Assignment</th>
<th>Number of Student Texts</th>
<th>Number of Comments</th>
<th>Average Number of Comments/Text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Literacy Narrative</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>473</td>
<td>16.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Drafts</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>496</td>
<td>6.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>969</td>
<td>9.22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I defined the unit of analysis as a comment type or group of clauses related thematically. Content comments focus on propositional
content, related inferences, supporting details, and source interpretation. Text comments address organization, cohesion, and paragraph structure. Language comments cover word choice, grammar, style, and mechanics. Finally, summative comments treat the text holistically, addressing assignment requirements, student progress, strategies, and resources. A single Google comment could include multiple comment types, as in Figure 2, which contains both text and content comments. Table 2 provides an overview of the number of comment types in the data.

**Figure 2**

*Sample Google Comment*

![Sample Google Comment](image-url)
Table 2

Comment Types According to Assignment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comment Type</th>
<th>Literacy Narrative</th>
<th>Research Drafts</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Content</td>
<td>409</td>
<td>324</td>
<td>733</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language</td>
<td>208</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>409</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summative</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>197</td>
<td>295</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>792</strong></td>
<td><strong>740</strong></td>
<td><strong>1530</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Legitimation Code Theory

Legitimation Code Theory provides a “conceptual toolkit and analytic methodology” to describe how principles underlying a disciplinary or social practice organize what is—and what is not—acceptable or “legitimate” performance in that context (Maton, 2016a, p. 7). These organizing principles are called legitimation codes (Maton, 2016b, p. 240). The legitimation codes of a discipline are not always obvious or explicit; LCT analysis brings these organizing principles to the surface, allowing researchers to see familiar educational practices with new eyes and avoid what Maton (2014) has termed knowledge blindness:

> The organizing principles of knowledge shape the spatial and temporal reach, modes of engagement, and forms of development of social fields. They are key to social inclusion and social justice in both education and civic life. Though made by us, knowledge possesses properties and tendencies of which we may be unaware and which may lead to consequences that are unintended, even contrary to our aims and beliefs. (p. 13)

Although the LCT framework was relatively new to me, I chose to apply it to my data; I hoped the less familiar concepts of LCT would reveal...
structures shaping my feedback and offer new insights into barriers for students trying to make sense of my feedback on drafts.

The LCT toolkit comprises a set of constructs or dimensions along which educational practices can be analyzed. I chose the specialization dimension for my feedback study, which explores “knowledge/knower” structures in social practices (Maton, 2016a; Maton & Chen, 2016). Morton and Nashaat-Sobhy (2023) have argued that specialization concepts from LCT provide “a powerful set of tools for revealing the organizing principles underlying the bases of achievement when teachers assess examples of students’ work” (p. 6). Eight key concepts shaped the design of my course: three emphasizing texts or products (knowledge), four addressing processes or writers (knowers), and one highlighting both. Did the organizing principles underlying my feedback—and thus legitimating student writing—align with those eight concepts? The specialization dimension of LCT offered me a way to assess this alignment or lack thereof.

According to Maton and Chen (2020), a social practice is about something and enacted by someone. Epistemic relations characterize the something part of the practice; they indicate to what extent the practice foregrounds “specialized knowledge, principles or procedures” to validate achievement (p. 38). In specialization analysis, epistemic relations are annotated by the abbreviation ER and a range of values (++, +, –, ––) indicating how strong the orientation is. Social relations (abbreviated SR), in contrast, describe the someone component of the practice; they indicate how strongly a practice foregrounds the attributes of actors to legitimate achievement. In other words, epistemic relations highlight what counts as legitimate knowledge in the context of the practice, while social relations emphasize “who can claim to be a legitimate knower” (p. 38).

Organizational structures underlying a social practice are called legitimation codes. Combining values for both epistemic and social relations yields four possible specialization codes, each of which can be mapped onto a topography known as the specialization plane, as in Figure 3. Codes represent organizational principles structuring a given practice;
when applied to feedback, codes reveal how that feedback defines or legitimates achievement.

Descriptions of the four codes in Maton and Chen (2020) are adapted here for the context of composition feedback. Knowledge codes describe the practice in which achievement is legitimated by possession of specialized knowledge; to succeed in FYC, students must demonstrate knowledge about writing, language, and research. In knower codes, achievement is legitimated by being the right kind of knower; in this case, students must demonstrate the attributes and dispositions of writers. In elite codes, achievement is legitimated both by having the right knowledge and being the right kind of knower (writer). Finally, with relativist codes, neither knowledge nor writer attributes legitimate achievement (or “anything goes,” [Maton & Chen, 2020, p. 39]).

Figure 3
The Specialization Plane

Like all LCT tools, specialization codes were developed for use across disciplines. Therefore, the analysis of my feedback data required a

translation device to clarify how epistemic and social relations would be realized in the context of first-year composition. Maton and Chen (2016) detail the process of developing a translation device, which typically takes the form of a chart or grid with a summary statement of how epistemic and social relations manifest for each category of analysis (here, each comment type), as well as indicators for coding both types of relations at various strengths. Finally, there are examples from the data, as shown in Figure 4.

The full translation device for my feedback emerged over time as I reviewed examples of each comment type separately, moving back and forth between theory and data, as suggested by Maton and Chen (2016). For content comments, strong epistemic relations are realized as an emphasis on propositions supported by reasoning, evidence, or details. Implicit in all comments with strong ER is that readers expect a certain level of evidence for any proposition, and legitimate college writing should meet that threshold, as comment 1.1 (ER+) below explicitly states. Similarly, the questions in 1.2 and 1.3 request specific evidence to support student assertions; they are coded ER+.

1.1 I think keeping the focus on yourself—and your specific experiences—will work better than trying to make generalizations for which you might not have the evidence to convince a reader. (ER+/SR+)

1.2 By whom? (ER+/SR–)

1.3 How did you know? (ER+/SR+) Strong epistemic relations in content comments also emphasize accurate interpretation and use of source texts, as in 2.1 and 2.2.

2.1 I don’t think this is his point at all. I think he is much more interested in how popular culture represents literacy. (ER++/SR–)

2.2 Unfortunately, the word “connect” here is not about connecting with peers. It’s about connecting with prior experiences. This quote does not address collaboration or cooperative learning. (ER++/SR–)
**Figure 4**

**Translation Device: Epistemic Relations in Content Comments**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept manifested as an emphasis on:</th>
<th>Code:</th>
<th>Indicators:</th>
<th>Examples/Stems from the data:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Logical and accurate propositions supported by reasoning, evidence, or details</td>
<td>ER--</td>
<td>make side comments; give opinions that do not directly address student texts or sources; or offer indirect instructional commentary.</td>
<td>Nice. I am a big fan of Murray's. This was the first book I read in French in high school. I loved it! Ask me about this.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ER-</td>
<td>ask open-ended questions about content (opinion); seek to clarify student meaning (A or B) without judgment; assert confusion/lack of clarity regarding content (without passing judgment); or query student comprehension.</td>
<td>What do you think about . . . Are you saying that . . . ? I don't quite follow here. Does that make sense?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ER+</td>
<td>request specific additional information or a specific TYPE of information (an example, a quote, etc.); ask comprehension questions about source texts; focus on logical conclusions; or point out missing information: logic, details, or required source info.</td>
<td>Such as? We need examples and details to see this clearly. What is she trying to tell teachers? This seems a little odd—obviously literacy is easier when you read better. Literacy means being able to read. Where does it say that?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ER++</td>
<td>emphasize the correct interpretation of source material; address misreadings of texts; or correct application of course concepts.</td>
<td>?? This really isn't his main idea at all. He does mention a stereotype of the college professor in one sentence, but then he spends most of the essay talking about the difficult working conditions and low pay. This is somewhat confusing. An act cannot be a Discourse—a Discourse is a defined group identity. The school culture could be a secondary Discourse, but an individual act or even stance towards reading can only be a feature of the Discourse, not the Discourse itself.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In contrast to epistemic relations, strong social relations (SR) in content are realized as an emphasis on the strategic processes, agency, and intentions of student writers. Comment 3.1, for example, affirms the student’s effort and then uses a modalized directive (“see if you can”) to suggest an open-ended expansion. The question in 3.2, which is coded SR+, positions the student’s story as prominent, framing the needs of the reader in light of that story. The question in 3.3, coded SR++, solicits a personal reflection from the student.

3.1 You’ve got the right idea here—quotes from both authors and then a connection. See if you can expand that connection a little—is there something that Stromberg adds, something that is not in Warnock’s piece? (ER+/SR+)

3.2 In terms of your story, why do you think that information is important for your readers? (ER+/SR+)

3.3 Do you think you were changing the culture a little? (ER-/SR++)

In weaker social relations (SR- or SR--), the student’s authority to make decisions about content is downplayed or removed. In 4.1, the writer is expected to provide the information the reader has asked for and nothing else. The student’s agency or intentions regarding the text are minimized, so it is coded SR-. Similarly, in 4.2, an assertion is described as inaccurate without reference to the student writer. It is coded SR--.

4.1 By whom? (ER+/SR–)

4.2 This is not quite accurate. (ER++/SR––)

Note that comments are coded separately for both ER and SR following the translation device. Figure 5 presents the social relations portion of the device for content comments.
### Figure 5

**Translation Device: Social Relations in Content Comments**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept manifested as an emphasis on:</th>
<th>Code:</th>
<th>Indicators: Queries and Comments that...</th>
<th>Examples/Stems from the data:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The writer's choices, experiences, expertise, and control over the developing text</td>
<td>SR−−</td>
<td>• require/request specific wording; • explain source texts to the student; • ignore the student; or • interpret student text in absolute terms (right or wrong).</td>
<td>• There are no other writers. This is just the text of her speech. So, you can set it up that way and make Rowling the speaker. • Peer discussion is just one thing she talks about; there are 4 other factors, along with social constructivist theory from Vygotsky, that are just skipped here. • Refute would mean to show the contention is false. Brooke concedes that the passive can be used to obstruct clarity; therefore, he does not refute this.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SR−</td>
<td>• ask comprehension questions about a source text, or • tell students specifically what to include/demand specific information.</td>
<td>• Is this [source] about why writers write or what influences their writing in the process of writing? [One answer is right.] • By whom?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SR+</td>
<td>• give a goal without specifying how to accomplish it; • ask students yes/no questions regarding their meaning or intent; • ask students to affirm comprehension of instructor feedback; or • give students responsibility for the content.</td>
<td>• I just think you need to connect this [to] the sort of theories he talks about. • Are you saying that _______? • Does that make sense? • See if you can expand that connection a little; is there something that Stromberg adds, something that is not in Warnock's piece?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SR++</td>
<td>• seek clarification of student meaning or intent with WH questions; • ask open-ended opinion questions; or • affirm and applaud student perceptions or conclusions.</td>
<td>• How do you think that would come about? What would it take to get them to believe that it's all important? • Why are their findings important, do you think? • Good. I appreciate the personal connection here.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The translation device in Figures 4 and 5 concerns only content comments; different indicators are required for other comment types, such as the following summative comments.
5.1 Jess, this does not do what is required in a PQ paragraph. Remember that PQ paragraphs have a quote or paraphrase from two sources, and they show a connection between those sources as well as your opinion. (ER+/SR–)

5.2 This is NOT a PQ paragraph. (ER++/SR––)

5.3 Bottom line: What do you want to tell readers about yourself as a reader/writer? If you can figure that out, I think the paper will come together. (ER+/SR++)

Stronger epistemic relations in summative comments emphasize knowledge of and adherence to assignment requirements (as seen in comments 5.1 and 5.2) as well as rhetorical basics such as a controlling idea (implied in 5.3). Stronger social relations, in contrast, foreground the intentions and writing processes of the writer (5.3). Weaker social relations may ignore the student completely (5.2) or downplay the writer’s intentions, resources, or processes (5.1). Figure 6 summarizes both epistemic and social relations for summative comments.

While the indicators differ across comment types, stronger epistemic relations in both content and summative comments suggest that the student’s work will be legitimated by their demonstration of specific knowledge or principles, whether that is knowledge of assignment design or principles of evidence. In contrast, stronger social relations indicate that achievement will be legitimated by student attributes—their intentions, decision-making, or strategic processes. Similar realizations occur with language and text comments as well, as shown in Figures 7 and 8.
**Figure 6**

*Translation Device: Epistemic and Social Relations in Summative Comments*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept manifested as an emphasis on:</th>
<th>Code:</th>
<th>Indicators: Queries and comments that</th>
<th>Stems from the data:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ER</td>
<td>ER--</td>
<td>highlight general strategies (not related to the assignment) or resources; emphasize the process over the product; or refer to previous instructor feedback.</td>
<td>I'd recommend that you visit the writing center.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ER-</td>
<td>query student comprehension of feedback; contain invitations to collaborate; or focus on the next step in the process or reminders to revise/edit.</td>
<td>If that doesn't make sense, ask me about it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ER+</td>
<td>repeat assignment requirements; direct students to improve the quality of assignment requirements; or ask questions about readings or source material.</td>
<td>Make sure you include two sources.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ER++</td>
<td>evaluate the draft based on assignment criteria or requirements; state what the text is (or is not); or give positive/negative descriptions of the text.</td>
<td>This does not do what the assignment requires.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SR</td>
<td>SR--</td>
<td>describe student work objectively, without reference to student's effort or intent; focus on instructor response (without addressing revision or the process); or evaluate without reference to the student or the process.</td>
<td>The paper shifts focus several times.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SR-</td>
<td>remind students of specific steps required to meet assignment criteria; ask about source texts (right/wrong); or recognize but minimize the value of the student attempt.</td>
<td>Make sure you include the author's name and the title in the first sentence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SR+</td>
<td>direct the student toward resources and specific strategies for completing the process; invite a revision/offer a revision strategy; or check student comprehension of feedback.</td>
<td>I think you should visit the writing center...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SR++</td>
<td>evaluate the work or progress with emphasis on the student's process or effort; or query student goals for the draft.</td>
<td>This is a solid draft. Keep it up—you can do this!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 7

Translation Device: Epistemic and Social Relations in Language Comments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept manifested as an emphasis on:</th>
<th>Code:</th>
<th>Indicators: Queries and comments that...</th>
<th>Stems or examples from the data:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Correctness and adherence to the conventions of academic English | ER—–  | • downplay clarity, formal conventions, and disciplinary expectations | • Why did you ____________?  
• What does “this” refer to? |
| | ER–  | • ask “why” questions about language, or  
• try to clarify a student’s intent. | • There’s another tense shift here.  
• Can you word this without using “helpful” and “help” together?  
• We would not capitalize this. |
| | ER+  | • point out problems with sentence structure/word choice (right/wrong),  
• ask students to solve language problems,  
• describe what “we do” as academic writers, or  
• discuss “readability” or style as opposed to correctness. | • This is a comma splice.  
• Remember that when you have quotation marks inside a quote, these shift to single quotes: ‘identity kit’. |
| ER++ Comments highlight formal conventions, accuracy, and correctness. | • correct and/or identify major sentence mistakes by name: comma splices, run-ons, fragments, subject-verb agreement;  
• explain correct usage; or  
• supply wording or conventions. | • Comma splice.  
• Don’t shift to “you” here.  
• Format!  
• This is a fragment. |
| Agency to make stylistic choices that support a writer’s meaning | SR—–  | • ignore students;  
• contain directives with no explanations; or  
• issue corrections without explanations. | • Don’t forget that you need a comma before a conjunction: I.G. or I.C. |
| | SR–  | • explain rules or expected practices; or  
• remind students to edit for specific issues. | |
| | SR+  | • give students responsibility for editing decisions/mention resources;  
• query student’s understanding of language explanations; or  
• ask why a student made a language choice. | • Check your book for how to do a document on a professor’s website.  
• See how that works?  
• Why is this verb past?  
• Can this be combined or condensed? |
| | SR++ Comments highlight writer’s intent, choices, goals, identity, and style | • invite exploration and choices;  
• connect choices to author goals; or  
• invite students to clarify | • Think about the structure here and what you want to emphasize.  
• If this last part is the thesis, then you might consider a sentence structure that emphasizes it more. Right now, you have it in a subordinate clause, which sort of de-emphasizes this part of the sentence. |

Empty cells indicate that no realizations could be identified in the data
## Translation Device: Epistemic and Social Relations in Text Comments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept manifested as an emphasis on:</th>
<th>Code:</th>
<th>Indicators: Queries and comments that...</th>
<th>Stems or examples from the data:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cohesive writing that meets a reader's expectations for the genre</td>
<td>ER</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ER–</td>
<td>• downplay reader expectations and genre components, focusing instead on meaning and writer choices.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ER–</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ER+</td>
<td>• identify problems; • ask questions so that students can find solutions to problems; or • offer choices.</td>
<td>• The shift in focus here is very abrupt. • Should there be some kind of transition here? • You might want to consider a new paragraph here, especially if you add details earlier.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comments emphasize meeting a reader's expectations for genre components, cohesion, and coherence</td>
<td>ER++</td>
<td>• identify a problem and provide a detailed explanation or rationale; or • give a specific directive to address a problem or request a specific change.</td>
<td>• The organization here is an issue for me. You introduce technology in the final sentence of the previous paragraph, so I am expecting you to develop that idea. But instead, this shifts to the Gee connection and takes us back to reading/writing (with no mention of tech). The next paragraph then jumps back to technology. • Set up his focus here—Friend is mostly focused on who is reading and responding to writing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choices that reflect a writer's meaning, responsibility for shaping the developing text</td>
<td>SR</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SR–</td>
<td>• ignore student intent or agency in describing problems.</td>
<td>• Right now, there's a sentence about reading, a quote from Gee, and then another sentence about reading—it's a bit jumpy. • Here's another shift... This is quite confusing for your reader.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SR–</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SR+</td>
<td>• use directives to tell students what to do (offer no choices), or • describe specific changes needed without directly engaging the student or the student's responsibility.</td>
<td>• Set up his focus here—Friend is mostly focused on who is reading and responding to writing. • I think some of this information needs to come earlier in the paper... I think it would help the reader clarify some of the confusing points if this background comes earlier.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SR++</td>
<td>• give students responsibility for solving a problem, or • direct students in general terms.</td>
<td>• Make sure that the timeline stays clear for the reader—don't leave the reader to wonder if we are going backward or forward in time. • I think you can take the thesis and word it so that the point is perhaps clearer to your reader.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comments foreground a writer's authority to make meaning-based choices in the text</td>
<td>SR++</td>
<td>• invite students to make decisions about essay components, cohesion, and thesis; • connect choices to student meaning; • query or affirm student intent or purpose; or • give students control/full choices.</td>
<td>• Overall, I am a little concerned about the number of different ideas packed into this paragraph—do you think it is sufficiently focused? • The first paragraph seems to jump around—you mention your dad, and then quickly jump to the focus on French. Do you need to include that sentence about your dad in this paragraph? Could it wait?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Coding Methods

Having developed a full translation device, I coded all comments for both epistemic and social relations, yielding four possible specialization codes across comment types. Knowledge codes (positive ER/negative SR) locate achievement in the demonstration of knowledge or principles, downplaying the agency (or even the presence) of the student:

7.1 This is not accurate. (ER++/SR––)
7.2 Comma splice here. (ER++/SR––)
7.3 This is getting long, and there is a shift in focus. (ER+/SR–)

Knower codes (negative ER/positive SR) foreground student attributes and agency while downplaying the demonstration of particular knowledge, as in 8.1 and 8.2.

8.1 Let me know what questions you have. (ER+/SR+)
8.2 So, are you saying that BEGINNING a book was exciting to you, but you did not stay excited long enough to finish the book? Is that it? Why do you think this was the case? (ER–/SR+)

Elite codes (positive ER/positive SR) foreground both the demonstration of knowledge or principles and the student’s control over the text or writing processes.

9.1 Is there any way to help us share this? Smells are terribly hard to describe, but perhaps you could make a comparison that would help the reader? (ER+/SR+)
9.2 I am wondering if you can separate this sentence into smaller sentences with different punctuation. Right now, you’ve got 5 different conjunctions in this one sentence—I think you could make it more effective by dividing it up. (ER+/SR+)

Relative codes (negative ER/negative SR) are rare in the data and offer side comments unrelated to the developing text. They do not indicate how achievement for the text will be defined.

1 Because I worked with my own feedback in this exploratory study, coding was not cross-checked by others for reliability. As the translation device developed over a 15-month period, I revisited coding and checked for consistency over time.
1. Sometimes, I sit in airports or other public places, and when people find out I am a teacher, they start complaining about the “younger generation” and all the things they don’t know. (ER––/SR––)

Results

Table 3 shows the distribution of codes by comment type in both the literacy narrative and the research drafts.

Table 3

Specialization Codes by Assignment and Comment Type

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Knowledge</th>
<th>Elite</th>
<th>Knower</th>
<th>Relative</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Literacy</td>
<td>Content</td>
<td>219</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>408</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narrative</td>
<td>Language</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Text</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Summative</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>372</td>
<td>353</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>790</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research</td>
<td>Content</td>
<td>252</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>325</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Language</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>202</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Text</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Summative</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>197</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>449</td>
<td>251</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>740</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>821</td>
<td>604</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>1530</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These results reveal two clear trends in the feedback:

1. The path to legitimation depends heavily on having the right knowledge: 93% of my comments across assignment types were coded knowledge or elite (either ER+ or ER++).

2. Legitimation also depends somewhat on the attributes and processes of the student writers, though not as much as demonstration of knowledge: Knower and elite codes (either SR+ or SR++) comprised 46% of my comments.

However, the distribution of codes across comment types suggests a more nuanced analysis. Strong epistemic relations, for example, predominate in content comments; only 7% of all content comments were coded as ER- or ER--. Thus, while students as writers/knowers are not completely ignored in content comments (after all, 255 of 733 content comments, or 35%, were also coded SR+ or SR++), my feedback clearly privileges the demonstration of knowledge and principles regarding content development and sources.

Moreover, the ratio of knowledge to elite codes differs for each comment type. Knowledge codes account for more content comments (471 of 733, or 64.3%) than elite codes do (214 of 733, or 29.2%). However, in language comments, elite codes account for more of the total (53.8%) than knowledge codes do (42.8%). While strong ER dominates in language comments (with 396 of 409 comments coded ER+ or ER++), 57% of language comments are coded SR+ or SR++ (57%). Results thus suggest I am more likely to emphasize student responsibility and choice in language comments than in other types of comments.

Discussion

Research Questions 1 and 2

I analyzed my feedback to explore its underlying structures, assess alignment with the principles of my pedagogy, and discover potential barriers to student uptake. My feedback clearly rests on strong epistemic relations (ER+ and ER++), as indicated by the prevalence of knowledge
and elite codes in the data. This result aligns with the first four foundational concepts of my course (see Figure 1). The agency and attributes of student writers factor into achievement and align with the foundational concepts. However, they do so primarily in conjunction with knowledge, as evidenced in the distribution of codes: Elite codes (strong ER and SR) comprised 39% of the comments, whereas knower codes (weak ER and strong SR) comprised only 6%. I was somewhat surprised by the dominance of knowledge codes in the results; after all, I aimed to present the foundational concepts equally in my pedagogy, emphasizing choices, strategic processes, growth, and ownership just as much as I stressed accuracy, genre features, language, reader expectations, and documentation. I was particularly surprised by the distribution of knowledge and elite codes in content and language comments.

In reviewing that distribution, I recalled the “novice-as-expert” paradox described by Sommers and Saltz (2004). My feedback positions students as novices who must acquire knowledge about genres, content, and language to satisfy their readers, hence the prevalence of knowledge codes. At the same time, I ask students to begin positioning themselves as authorities within the context of their papers, as knowers who take responsibility for and exercise control over the writing process; this is reflected in comments with stronger SR (elite and knower codes). As my course concepts state, early agency in writing can lead to uncertainty, difficulty, and confusion; however, emphasizing specific knowledge may address some of that uncertainty. Sommers and Saltz suggest the authority of first-year writers comes not from “writing from expertise” but “writing into expertise.” First-year writers “learn to write by first repeating the ideas they encounter in the sources they read and the teachers they admire, using the materials and methods of a course before making them their own” (p. 134). When I comment on content, I assume that students are not yet writing “from expertise,” particularly in the researched essay. They do not yet know what I know—the expectations academic readers will have for accuracy, logic, and development (see Bartholomae, 1986,
p. 9). Thus, stronger ER predominates in content comments. However, Bartholomae (1986) argues that novice college writers “must imagine for themselves the privilege of being ‘insiders’—that is, of being both inside an established and powerful discourse and of being granted a special right to speak” (p. 10). Whereas my content comments prioritize the need to master knowledge, my language comments more often prioritize both knowledge and the student writer, as indicated in the higher percentage of elite codes. Such elite codes invite students to accept the privilege Bartholomae describes and exercise the “right to speak.” Thus, language comments align with the first foundational concept of the course, which ties knowers and knowledge together: All writing involves choices that affect meaning: words, structures, details, punctuation, and organization. Students need to know how words, structures, and punctuation impact meaning; they also need to exercise agency and choose how to deploy that knowledge. Elite codes, predominant in language comments, center student agency, allowing students to make choices in relation to their goals and purposes, as shown in the following examples:

11.1 If this last part is the thesis, then you might consider a sentence structure that emphasizes it more. Right now, you have it in a subordinate clause, which sort of de-emphasizes this part of the sentence. (ER+/SR++)

11.2 This is a comma splice. Check for these. If you can replace any comma with a period, then that comma is actually a comma splice, and it needs to be corrected. (ER++/SR+)

11.3 Think about the structure here and what you want to emphasize. (ER+/SR++)

Research Question 3

How do the structures underlying my comments facilitate or impede students’ feedback literacy—their ability to accept, understand, and apply feedback effectively? As Carless and Winstone (2020) have argued, students develop feedback literacy in an interplay with teachers, who create conditions that support student comprehension and feedback application.
Creating such conditions requires awareness of potential barriers—or mismatches between instructor and student perspectives—that may hinder feedback uptake. A proactive stance to managing such potential barriers is, as Carless and Winstone (2020) suggest, an integral part of teacher feedback literacy.

Based on previous instruction, for example, some students may have acquired writing knowledge that does not match the knowledge required for FYC assignments. Recent high school graduates may expect that college writing will emphasize five-paragraph essays, formulaic introductions or thesis statements, and certain stylistic features. These expectations set up a knowledge mismatch, leading to potential frustration with teacher feedback. Consider the example in 12.1: The student had been told that college writers never use first-person pronouns; my comment was perceived as a challenge to his writing knowledge.

12.1 The efforts to do this in the third person are problematic. If you were describing someone else, this would be fine. But since this [is] you, I see no reason for the verbal gymnastics (including pronoun agreement issues) required to keep it third person. (ER+/SR–)

Could this knowledge mismatch serve as a gateway to more closely align with the first of my course principles (all writing involves choices that affect meaning)? Consider this revision, which shifts the underlying structure of the comment to positive SR:

12.1, Revised: The efforts to do this in the third person are problematic for your reader, especially since you are talking about yourself. You’ve got some interesting verbal gymnastics here (including pronoun agreement issues). Could you experiment with using the first person to see how it works? Or perhaps shift this to a character (i.e., “this writer”), blending an active third person with a perspective that is clearly your own? (ER+/SR+)

Another barrier, code mismatch, may arise from previous educational experiences, particularly for international students who have not experienced feedback with stronger social relations (i.e., elite or knower codes). For me, elite codes are invitations for writers to take responsibility, as in
13.1. For students accustomed to knowledge codes, however, such comments may be interpreted as failure to provide clear guidance (for a fuller discussion of this type of code mismatch, see Maton & Chen, 2020).

13.1 Look back through those first sentences and think about WHY you are introducing this idea next. You might want to consider rearranging some ideas or at least giving your reader a bit more structure . . . . Reverse outlining your paper and thinking about the topic sentences can help you get the organization under control. (ER+/SR+)

Code mismatch may also occur when summative comments coded SR+/SR++ point students to out-of-class resources such as the writing center, open labs, or office hours, as in 14.1. If prior educational experience has framed such resources as punishments or indicators of failure instead of opportunities, students may reject the advice.

14.1 I am going to recommend that you work with the writing center, and you can come to the open lab after class on Friday, too. (ER––/SR+)

Code mismatches can be addressed explicitly through instruction and adjustments to grading criteria. Recently, for example, I have adopted a two-part grading system based on participation (highlighting strong SR) and a final portfolio of student-selected works (emphasizing strong ER), assessed via specifications (see Nilson, 2014). Students earn participation points by using campus resources strategically and submitting reflective annotations to indicate how they have attempted to apply feedback to the final portfolio—even if the attempts are not especially effective. My revised grading aligns feedback and foundational concepts while fostering feedback literacy by foregrounding a connection between feedback and learning (see Chen & Liu, 2022).

A third potential barrier is code confusion; students may not recognize how to interpret what comments are asking of them. There is no one-to-one correlation between ER or SR coding and grammatical mood; for example, questions, directives, and statements—along with modalized forms of each—occur across all codes. A question may serve to clarify the student’s intent as a writer (8.2), challenge an interpretation (15.1),

demand information (4.1), or encourage additional thought (3.1, 3.3). Making sense of these questions—and responding appropriately—poses a challenge to student writers.

15.1 Where does it say that? (ER+/SR−)

Similarly, declarative comments coded as ER+/ER++ (such as the blunt statements in 5.1 and 7.2) are meant to provide critical knowledge for revision. However, these may be interpreted as absolute assessments. In such cases, students may see no point in revising; after all, the paper is “no good.” As with example 12.1, the addition of SR positive language (emphasizing strategic processes, resources, or clear avenues for revision) may help counter code confusion, turn barriers into gateways, and create conditions that facilitate student feedback literacy.

Conclusion

LCT analysis does not label feedback practices as “right” or “wrong.” Feedback is one component of an overall pedagogy, and feedback-literate teachers will make theory-conscious and data-informed adjustments within that pedagogy (Carless & Winstone, 2020). Assuming a proactive stance toward potential mismatch or confusion is critical to creating conditions for feedback uptake and the growth of feedback literacy. Proactive strategies include preparing students for my feedback in class (see Eckstein, 2022), tweaking comments to ensure a balance of ER and SR language, and engaging students as partners in feedback loops, which foregrounds shared responsibility for learning. In fact, Chen and Liu (2022) suggest that high student feedback literacy is marked by awareness of this partnership, along with recognition of the connection between feedback and learning. LCT analysis affirms that my comments emphasize knowledge (strong ER) to address existing problems and the writerly dispositions (strong SR) that should help students carry that knowledge beyond the paper at hand. As I adjust my comments, I can make my strategies transparent, helping students not only interpret those comments but also recognize their value for learning—not just a grade.
My LCT analysis represents an exploratory study: As the classroom instructor, the theorist, and the analyst, I cannot extend my results beyond myself and the contexts in which I teach. Despite major limitations to generalizations based on my results, I believe the study indicates the potential value of individual and small-group exploration of teacher feedback literacy based on LCT analysis. This study, which evolved over three years, led to months of immersion in my own feedback; during that time, I began to see what I had written differently. As I developed and applied the translation device, I found myself questioning the clarity and purpose of my responses. As indicated in the discussion, I also adjusted my practices. Such adjustments present avenues for future research, including collaboration with students to assess how specific changes are understood and applied.

As invaluable as this analysis process has been, I know the material conditions of FYC instruction make such solo projects impractical or impossible for others. However, LCT tools—including various published translation devices—can be applied to smaller data sets by groups, and there is an active community willing to collaborate and consult in classroom research. LCT cannot address all barriers to feedback uptake nor provide a blueprint for giving the most effective feedback to FYC students. Instead, it offers teachers an option for researching feedback practices. The more we understand the structure of those practices, the more effectively we can adjust them to support our students.
References


Abstract: Giving feedback to student writing is one of the writing teacher’s most
important tasks in the classroom. Writing teachers can use many forms of feed-
back, such as written feedback, teacher-student conferencing, peer feedback, or
self-assessment. Additionally, the influx of technologies into writing classrooms
allows teachers to use screencast video feedback when responding to student writ-
ing. In this article, two second-language writing teachers questioned their feedback
practices when responding to students’ texts. They implemented feedback innova-
tion by using screencast video feedback in their classrooms to explore how their
attempts to use video feedback affected their individual practices. The implemen-
tation of video feedback opened their eyes as writing teachers because of its multi-
modality. The innovative use of aural, visual, textual, and gestural modes enabled
them to view feedback as a tool for improving and learning writing rather than
solely correcting students’ errors. This article provides ideas and suggestions for
writing teachers interested in improving feedback practices with screencast video
feedback.
Giving feedback to student writing is one of the second-language (L2) writing teacher’s most important tasks in the classroom (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2014). Integrating technology in writing classrooms provides L2 writing teachers with the opportunity to incorporate screencast video feedback as a new tool for responding to student writing. According to Cunningham (2019), screencast video feedback “provides recorded spoken comments on student work with the added provision of a video of the paper on the screen where the instructor can gesture, highlight, and show areas of the work being spoken about” (p. 224). Researchers have analyzed screencast video feedback in various contexts, such as English as a foreign language (Zhang, 2018), English as a second language (Cunningham, 2019; Séror, 2012), and first-year writing programs (Thompson & Lee, 2012). Some researchers, such as Séror (2012) and Thompson & Lee (2012), emphasize the socio-emotional, multimodal, and interchangeable affordances of video feedback. Overall, students reacted positively to screencast feedback due to its personal, conversational, and multimodal nature. Furthermore, the inclusion of comprehensive and elaborated details led to more meaningful revision.

Although research on student perceptions of screencast feedback is crucial and promising, exploring how teachers innovate feedback by adopting new tools (e.g., screencasting) is equally important. Such research can contribute to the literature of teacher education and feedback literature, throwing “light on the theory-practice divide, if any, and the problems that teachers face in undertaking feedback innovation, with direct implications for teacher education and teachers’ continuing professional development with regard to feedback in writing” (Lee et al., 2016, p. 249). Séror’s (2012) study responded to the need for feedback innovation research by adopting screencast feedback in L2 writing classrooms. Although Séror described his use of this new feedback tool in detail, he did not address how that feedback innovation attempt affected
his conception and practice of giving feedback. Intrigued by the potential of screencast feedback, we voluntarily created an informal professional learning community for our own feedback innovation. In this article, we describe our design for and implementation of video feedback innovation in our L2 distance learning writing courses. Additionally, we share our reflections and examine how experimenting with screencast feedback has transformed our individual feedback practices.

**Context**

Heon and Sarah investigated video feedback innovation at a large, land-grant university in southern New England, USA. We teach primarily L2 writing courses within the First-Year Writing (FYW) program. Two courses, ENGL 1003 (English for Non-Native Speakers)\(^1\) and ENGL 1004 (Introduction to Academic Writing),\(^2\) prepare students for the FYW course, ENGL 1007 (Seminar in Academic Writing and Multimodal Composition). ENGL 1003 introduces emerging L2 writers to the rhetorical process, and ENGL 1004 develops students’ writing practices and introduces them to meaningful participation in critical conversations. ENGL 1007 introduces students to different modes and approaches to composition and increases their awareness of various rhetorical situations. ENGL 1007 is a university-required course; all students must complete ENGL 1007 before registering for upper-level and university-required writing-intensive courses. Incoming students must complete an online Guided Placement Survey (GPS) to determine the most appropriate course according to their needs, abilities, and prior experience in English writing.

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\(^1\) Due to the problematic nature of this course title, the course has been renamed as of Fall 2023 to more accurately reflect its content as a writing course, rather than a language course. At the time of this writing, the course catalog description for English for Non-Native Speakers read in part, “[The course] is an introduction to the rhetorical process for emerging second-language writers. It stresses the writing situation and the purpose of writing and pays particular attention to the critical engagement and reflection skills needed to participate successfully in the American university discourse community.”

\(^2\) While ENGL 1003 is entirely populated by L2 students, ENGL 1004 consists of L2 and domestic writers in the same course sections.

Heon is a native speaker of Korean with English as an additional language, and Sarah is a native speaker of English. Heon earned his PhD in 2019 in Foreign, Second, and Multilingual Education from The Ohio State University and has been teaching in the University of Connecticut’s writing program for four years. Sarah earned her PhD in Composition and TESOL in 2016 from Indiana University of Pennsylvania and has been teaching in the University of Connecticut’s writing program for five years. We have 27 years of collective experience teaching second-language writing at the college level, including previous roles teaching university writing courses. In our current writing program, we were hired as full-time teaching faculty specializing in second-language writing. Our additional responsibilities include developing curriculum, designing guided self-placement surveys, and implementing research-oriented pedagogical innovations.

In Spring 2022, at the time of our investigation into video feedback innovation, we were both teaching distance learning sections of our courses. The courses were primarily asynchronous, with synchronous sessions held weekly. Heon taught one section of ENGL 1004; the synchronous sessions met twice each week for 105 minutes. Heon investigated the use of video feedback in his course, which was composed of 15 students, all of whom were L2 writers and native speakers of Chinese. The class met for 15 weeks, and all the students were in their second semester of college writing. Sarah taught two sections of ENG 1003. Those sections were “intensives,” which met for 10 weeks, but students completed the same amount of work as students taking the 15-week version of the course. Synchronous sessions met twice each week for 75 minutes. Attendance at the first synchronous session of the week was required, but the second session was optional. This session allowed students to ask Sarah questions about the coursework or assignments and to clarify the material discussed during the synchronous sessions. Sarah chose one section of her course to investigate her use of video feedback; the section was made up of 15 students, all of whom were L2 writers and native speakers of Chinese who
were in their first semester of college writing. In the section of her course that was not included in this investigation, Sarah provided feedback via written commentary on drafts and online writing conferences.

In our FYW program, all the courses are grounded in a Writing Across Technology curriculum. The program highlights the importance of guiding students to strategize and engage in critical thinking about the technologies they use to compose and the synergistic effect achieved when they compose using multiple modes. Due to the supportive environment for using technologies in the classroom, we became interested in technology-mediated feedback, such as screencast feedback, because we questioned the effectiveness of the written feedback we had traditionally used for our students’ drafts. For instance, we were often frustrated when responding to the global aspects of writing. Despite investing time and energy into written feedback, students often did not understand our feedback. This, in turn, led to unsuccessful revisions. Thus, we two became an informal professional learning community as we read research literature on screencast feedback, discussed our plans to design and implement screencast feedback in our classrooms, and shared our reflections on using screencast feedback through regular online meetings throughout the semester.

**Materials and Procedures**

We chose Screencast-O-Matic® (now called ScreenPal®, https://screenpal.com) desktop screen recording software for our video feedback because we wanted a software tool that would be easy for us to use and equally easy for the students to access their individual videos. We also wanted a tool with a free, basic version and one with a global presence to ensure that distance-learning students experiencing varying levels of reliable internet access could easily download and watch their video feedback screencasts. In addition to Screencast-O-Matic®, we wrote individual journals to reflect on our video feedback efforts.
We also met weekly via Zoom throughout the semester to discuss our approaches to video feedback and to share our journal reflections.

In both Introduction to Academic Writing and English for Non-Native Speakers, the semester’s coursework was divided into four modules. Heon utilized video feedback for the cumulative projects in Modules 3 and 4 of Introduction to Academic Writing. In the Module 3 project, students wrote an essay responding to an article by Garnette Cadogan (2016), reflecting on the effects of navigating spaces through the lens of their personal experiences and observations. Then, in the Module 4 project, students created their own multimedia blog posts explaining what affects their movements in different spaces and how they contribute to or change those spaces. Sarah used video feedback for the final project of Module 4 in English for Non-Native Speakers. In that project, students wrote an essay exploring how patterns of language they had previously observed and recorded shaped their lives.

In addition to the stress associated with adopting an unfamiliar technology for writing feedback, there was also the necessity to scaffold the introduction of video feedback. This involved familiarizing students with the new technology and preparing them to receive video feedback (i.e., explaining what it was, how we would use it as teachers, and how the students could potentially respond to it). Our efforts were bolstered by the students’ familiarity with peer review feedback: The concept of having their writing reviewed was not new to them, only the method of feedback delivery.

Next, we read through our respective students’ drafts, making detailed notes to help us focus our feedback during the screencasts. While making the screencasts in Screencast-O-Matic®, we focused on global- and local-level comments. From the global perspective, comments for Heon’s class were guided by the grading rubric for Module 3 and checklists for Module 4 (see Appendix A).
In contrast, comments for Sarah’s class used evaluative criteria (see Appendix B). Global-level comments were focused on content, structure, organization, and meeting the requirements of the assignment. Local-level comments focused on word choice, expression, grammar, punctuation, style, and documentation. All the feedback was given in English.

Once the recording began, we adopted a pleasant tone and mirrored the relaxed speech patterns that we used during synchronous sessions. This ensured that hearing our voices did not seem unusual to the students. We began each video with a friendly greeting, addressed the student by name, and gave overall encouraging comments. Then, we guided the student from the beginning of the draft to the end, highlighting and commenting on specific parts of the text. We ended the screencasts with more encouragement and a final comment, such as “I hope this helps you as you approach your revisions. Please let me know if you have any questions.”

Most of our videos were between four and five minutes long, although two of Sarah’s videos were seven minutes long, and four of Heon’s videos were eight minutes long. After completing each video, we uploaded it to the Learning Management System (LMS) for auto-captioning. The captioning process sometimes took as long as two hours, which we found frustrating and inefficient because it caused a delay in providing the feedback video to the students. After the auto-captioning was completed, we edited the captions for accuracy. Then, we uploaded the captioned video to the student’s draft submission in the LMS.

Reflection

Initially, we were anxious and resisted using screencast feedback. Heon, who is not a native English speaker, felt stressed and anxious about providing his audiovisual feedback in English within the timeframe recommended by video feedback research literature (i.e., five to six minutes; [Vincelette & Bostic, 2013]). That stress and anxiety resulted in awkward pauses and silences in his videos. Teacher participants in Vincelette and Bostic (2013) also shared similar anxiety toward video feedback; one
teacher participant was so preoccupied with speaking precisely within the time limit (i.e., five minutes) that he stopped utilizing screen tools, such as highlighting and scrolling. Sarah noticed an empathetic connection between her initial resistance to video feedback and students’ anxiety about writing in general. However, our initial anxiety about and resistance toward video feedback innovation proved ultimately transformative, leading us to enhance the application of our feedback with practice and effort.

Video feedback opened our eyes as writing teachers because of its multimodality. The combination of aural, visual, textual, and gestural modes while giving screencast feedback was innovative because we primarily give text-based comments in the margins or at the ends of students’ drafts. While giving screencast video feedback, we especially enjoyed the nature of switching back and forth between students’ texts and outside resources such as instructional materials or assignment rubrics and prompts. The ability to expand our feedback with screencasting is illustrated in Table 1, which contains a transcribed excerpt from the video for a student in Heon’s class.

Table 1

Transcripts of Video Feedback

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Voice commentary</th>
<th>On-screen events</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One of my comments is related to your misinterpretation of Module 3 assignment project.</td>
<td>Highlighting the introduction paragraph.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Especially in your introduction, I cannot see which direction you are going to develop. In this essay, having a clear direction is very important.</td>
<td>Switching back to the assignment prompt.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Let me show you the Module 3 assignment prompt one more time.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3 For more scholarship on writing anxiety, specifically its effect on L2 writers, see Huerta et al. (2017), Tsao et al. (2017), and Zhang (2019).
Voice commentary (continued) | On-screen events (continued)
---|---
When you go to the “task” section, you can see three bullet points, and these are the three options of directions that you need to decide. Also, it is important that this is not a summary writing but your draft too much focuses on summarizing the Cadogan’s article. This essay needs to include your own experiences and observations about moving spaces. | Highlighting the task section of the prompt using the color highlighter tool

My suggestion is read your draft and then check what you have. And then, think about which direction maybe can fit well with what you have. And then, explicitly state your direction in your first paragraph so that readers expect what you will develop in your main part of the essay. | Switching back to the student text

As shown in Table 1, the student’s draft revealed his struggle to comprehend and interpret the expectations of the Module 3 composition project, in which students composed a short response to an article. Therefore, Heon displayed Module 3’s assignment prompt on the screen and clarified the material, enabling the student to recognize his misinterpretation of the assignment. If Heon had used written feedback in the margin, he would have simply commented, “You need to review the assignment prompt in detail.” However, because of the affordances of video feedback, Heon could switch his screen from the student draft to the assignment prompt, explain what went wrong with the student’s draft, and suggest how the student could improve his draft to meet the requirements of the Module 3 prompt. The transcript example indicates that video feedback’s multimodal and shuttling nature helps us envision feedback in a new way. 

As Lee (2021) pointed out, feedback-literate teachers consider the goal of feedback to be improving student writing and learning instead of “fixing students’ immediate problems in writing (e.g., by correcting errors)”

The use of video feedback helped us experience how that tool can improve the learning of writing.

Our innovation using screencast video feedback transformed our individual feedback practices. When using written feedback, Heon’s goal was focused on solving immediate problems, such as fixing errors or reformulating sentences, without deeply considering how his feedback could support the learning of writing. While utilizing the video feedback tool, however, Heon realized that transitioning between students’ drafts and on-screen instructional materials with audiovisual explanations significantly aided students in reviewing their classroom learning and integrating these insights into their revision strategies and future writing contexts. Our video feedback included comments inviting students to consider how they could apply their learning to future writing tasks. Given that students will engage with various writing tasks throughout their college education, the feedback aimed to provide generalizable explanations of writing concepts, knowledge, and skills that can be used in future contexts.

The introduction of video feedback innovation empowered Sarah to reimagine feedback and its effectiveness in her writing classes. Sarah firmly believes that constructive feedback guides emerging writers, helping them navigate the rhetorical situation through their writing. Video feedback, however, provides students with a more engaging and immersive understanding of the reasons for their writing. It also illustrates how they may transfer the experience of writing in one class to writing in other classes and situations. While video feedback is a tool for teachers to respond to students’ writing in a more direct, accessible way, it is also a tool for students because it provides them with an artifact they can retain, rewatch, and re-engage with. This enables them to interact with their writing in a more meaningful way and to consider how they can use their writing in future contexts, even beyond their university studies.

In addition, using screencast video feedback quickly transformed us into writing teachers who realized the importance of the relational aspects of student feedback. Carless and Winstone (2020) noted that “feedback
processes often invoke strong emotions or threats to self-esteem” (p. 5). Because of the relational nature underlying feedback, teachers should “build rapport with students and increase the positive motivational impact of feedback” (Lee, 2021, p. 1055). Video feedback was the key for us to facilitate relational support during the feedback process because we were able to engage with each student personally based on their unique needs.

For low-proficiency listeners, Heon slowed down the rate of his speech in his screencasts so that students could process his words, effectively reducing issues of misunderstanding and miscommunication. Furthermore, the follow-up questions from Sarah’s students regarding her screencast feedback were meaningful, serving as a prime example of building rapport by “encouraging students to continue discussion or ask for clarification” (Carless & Winstone, 2020, p. 6). By engaging with the comments, students transform into active agents in the feedback process, eventually developing into feedback-literate students (Lee, 2017). Considering that both of us taught online courses during the COVID-19 pandemic, social presence and incorporating a conversational tone in screencast feedback may also effectively mitigate the sense of isolation students often experience in online learning environments.

We faced an unexpected challenge while implementing video feedback in our classrooms: We thought that screencast feedback would save us time. However, the screencasting workflow of recording, saving, uploading, captioning, editing, and sharing cost a significant amount of time. Specifically, the auto-captioning process was time-consuming, which we both found frustrating. Despite the time commitment to providing screencast video feedback, we concluded it was worth investing our time and effort as we witnessed students’ positive reactions to our video feedback. Just as students from Zhang’s (2018) study considered video feedback “beneficial in motivating and engaging in writing” (p. 21), Sarah noticed that her students were eager to receive her feedback when
she explained screencast video feedback and showed students a sample screencast she had created.

In general, students were enthusiastic about confirming that they understood how soon the screencast feedback would be ready, where they would find it, and how they should use it to revise. Sarah noted that this marked a significant shift from the written comments she had previously provided to the students on their writing assignments during the semester. The students’ engagement with those comments and their application or retention of her written feedback seemed negligible; Sarah was uncertain that her students were reading her feedback, let alone using it as a guide to revise their writing. However, during this screencast feedback innovation, her students seemed more interested in receiving her video feedback than they had been in receiving her written commentary. This increased interest in screencast feedback was seen in their active engagement with the video feedback: Sarah received several follow-up questions from students about her screencast comments. The number of follow-up questions was atypical for Sarah because her written feedback had not received many follow-up questions.4

We did not expect to develop a deeper appreciation of the importance of captioning instructional videos. As instructors who value access and inclusion, we naturally assumed the responsibility of captioning our videos, recognizing the significance of doing so in support of students who speak and write English as an additional language. However, in our Zoom conversations about our process, we came to consider captioning as imperative if we are truly committed to students’ writing development. Zdenek (2020) argued for a more complete integration of captioning into curricula and workplace practices, “challenging the traditional view that reduces captioning to an afterthought—an outsourced form of transcription intended merely to meet legal requirements” (p. 541). Zdenek’s work

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4 In reviewing our journals during our weekly Zoom meetings, we had similar conclusions about our experiences with screencast video feedback. As a result, we focus here on Sarah’s anecdotal experiences because Jeon’s example and transcript of screencast feedback is spotlighted at the beginning of this Reflection section.

is grounded in disability studies, which is relevant to our view of captioning as an ethical requirement. This is not because we consider our second-language writers as “disabled” but because we see the cross-curricular value of the work of Zdenek and those who have advocated for cross-disciplinary research and practice in caption studies (Brooke, 2009; Butler, 2018; Iwertz & Osorio, 2016).

**Final Thoughts**

As we look back on our screencast video feedback innovation, we identify two crucial aspects of the success of video feedback. First, practice and preparation are important. We found that assignment rubrics and checklists were helpful, as they guided us on what to show and discuss in our screencast videos. Given that research literature on video feedback recommends no more than six minutes when creating a screencast video, being prepared with evaluative criteria can make teacher feedback organized and constructive.

Second, creating a professional learning community is important. In our case, Heon initially shared with Sarah his skepticism about using written feedback, and then we consulted video feedback research literature. Based on that conversation, we discussed the research literature, developed a plan for implementing video feedback in the classroom, and explored our reflections on using video feedback through regular online meetings. Although ours was not a formal professional or program-based learning community, it was pivotal in nurturing the seeds that transformed our classroom feedback practices. Such an innovation attempt may be particularly important in FYW programs where “most of the work of teaching writing is done by graduate students and adjuncts with very little formal education in pedagogy [including feedback practices]” (Brewer, 2020, p. 3). Therefore, organizing a feedback innovation community with like-minded colleagues would be a valuable initiative. The community would provide peer support among instructors, encouraging them to critically examine and question their current feedback practices,
bringing about more effective systems tailored to their specific teaching contexts.

The goal of this article is not to critique the pedagogical value of other feedback practices, such as written feedback, writing conferences, peer feedback, and self-assessment. Instead, these types of feedback can be used cooperatively with screencast video feedback; “voice and visual dimensions enrich and supplement more conventional feedback practices” to produce comprehensive and resource-rich feedback (Séror, 2012, p. 114). As Vincelette and Bostic (2013) pointed out, “today’s students live in a world in which they are immersed in multimodal messages” (p. 260). In that regard, we thought that finding a way to respond to student texts in a multimodal way may be more effective than written comments or writing conferences. Therefore, we invite readers interested in improving their feedback practices with multimodal sources (i.e., visual, aural, textual, and gestural) to explore and experience the transformative power of digitally showing and telling when responding to students’ texts.
References


Many students, especially those new to or unfamiliar with academic discourses, may face challenges with writing in specific, complex, and nuanced ways (Sullivan et al., 2017). Students are often expected to express ideas with “subtlety and nuance” yet might struggle with developing ideas in academically valued ways, including specifying meanings, acknowledging complexities, and distinguishing slight shades of significance (Schilb, 2001). Corrigan (2019) articulates a need for students’ writing “to have more complexity, more nuance, more insight, more depth, more critical and creative thought” (p. 3).

Engaging in a peer review process can nurture students to develop complexity and nuance in their writing and to recognize such qualities in others’ work. However, students may face difficulties with commenting meaningfully on others’ writing, raising a need for instructors to scaffold peer review in ways that encourage constructive feedback (Kim, 2015). By offering guidelines and support with the peer review process, instructors can sharpen students’ close, careful attunement to writing while honing students’ capacities to critically read others’ work (Chamberlain, 2009).

In this teaching tip, I share an exercise that immerses students in offering feedback on their peers’ draft thesis statements. Because thesis statements serve as a place for students to articulate and frame their
arguments, focusing on thesis statements can offer students a starting point for developing complex and nuanced arguments in the rest of the paper. Students often struggle with crafting thesis statements that acknowledge the complexities and nuances of a text or topic. Encouraging a closer attention to the thesis statement can support students in crafting more specific, focused essays. By annotating each other's thesis statements, students can pinpoint specific areas for growth or improvement, become more critically aware of their writerly choices, and reflect thoughtfully on the writing process.

**Context**

I teach this activity as part of a peer review workshop in a first-year college writing course at a university in the United States, and the activity is suitable for all students, including multilingual writers. The assignment sequence for this course consists of a literacy narrative, a rhetorical analysis essay, a research-based argument essay, and a multimodal composition. The exercise I present below supports students in crafting thesis statements for the rhetorical analysis essay. However, the exercise can also be adapted for other levels and contexts involving peer review.

**Learning Outcomes or Goals**

- Students will be able to craft more specific, complex, and nuanced thesis statements for a rhetorical analysis essay.
- Students will be able to recognize qualities of specificity, complexity, and nuance in their own and others' writing.

**Course Format**

This exercise, including the discussion and workshop portions, can be adapted for a face-to-face, hybrid, or online environment. Students need access to individual computers and a shared document platform like Google Docs.
Teacher Preparation

Teachers should prepare slides or handouts that explain the guidelines and criteria for writing a thesis statement, along with examples of effective student-written thesis statements from past classes. Teachers should also find examples of original and revised thesis statements from previous students; drawing on examples of student writing can help model for students what revising a thesis statement looks like. To model the process of commenting on others’ thesis statements, teachers can show students the original and revised versions of the thesis statements along with the teacher’s feedback on the statements.

Estimated Time

This activity takes about 60–70 minutes, including a whole-class discussion (10–20 minutes), a peer review workshop (30 minutes), and writing/revision time (15–20 minutes).

Procedure

1. The class period before the peer review workshop: Introduce the guidelines and criteria for thesis statement writing relevant to the assignment or task. For example, while teaching rhetorical analysis essay writing, I instructed students to draft a clear, specific thesis statement that articulates an original, unique, and nuanced insight that their analysis aims to demonstrate about the text students have chosen to analyze for the essay. Alongside the guidelines, I introduced three components of effective thesis statements:
   a. Specificity—clearly defined or identified
   b. Complexity—consisting of different yet connected parts
   c. Nuance—characterized by subtle or slight shades of meaning or expression
2. As a class, discuss examples of effective thesis statements written by students from past classes. Ask students to evaluate each thesis statement based on the criteria of specificity, complexity, and nuance.

Possible discussion questions could include: Where do students identify qualities of specificity, complexity, and nuance in each thesis statement? What changes, if any, would students suggest that each writer make to the thesis statement to make it even more specific, complex, or nuanced?

3. Ask students to come to class prepared with one draft thesis statement; this may be a low-stakes assignment that scaffolds the full essay.

4. The day of the peer review workshop: To model the annotation process and scaffold strategies for commenting on others’ writing, I share the original and revised versions of an example student-written thesis statement alongside my annotations on the thesis statement, using the comment function on Google Slides. To illustrate how the revised version of the thesis statement is more specific, complex, and nuanced, I also color-code words and phrases in the revised version that illustrate specificity, complexity, and nuance (one color each for specificity, complexity, and nuance). Appendices A and B show an example color-coded thesis statement and annotation.

5. Divide the class into groups of 3–4 students each and have students offer feedback on each other’s draft thesis statements.
   a. Have each group collaborate on a shared Google Doc (you can ask students to share the doc with you as well).
   b. Ask each student to copy and paste their draft thesis statement into the doc so that it is visible to the other group members.
   c. Encourage students to annotate their peers’ thesis statements using the comment function, with suggestions for improving the statement’s
      1. specificity (clearly defined or identified).
      2. complexity (consisting of different yet connected parts).
      3. nuance (characterized by subtle or slight shades of meaning or expression).

Guide students to follow the annotation process you demonstrated in the previous step. You could encourage students to identify and comment on specific words and phrases in their peers’ thesis statements that could be further refined based on the criteria of specificity, complexity, and nuance. You could also offer sentence starters for commenting on others’ writing (e.g., “I wonder if you could specify” and “Could you explain this idea further”). If a student does not have anything to add to what the others have already written, you could encourage the student to identify commonalities across the peers’ comments and to work together with their peers to support the writer in refining the thesis statement.

6. Invite students to discuss each group member’s thesis statement and offer comments and suggestions for improvement.

7. Offer time for students to revise their thesis statements based on the feedback they received from their peers. You can encourage students to synthesize the comments they received to develop a plan for revising their thesis statements based on their peers’ suggestions.

Caveats and Alternatives

Although I taught this activity as part of a unit on rhetorical analysis writing, this exercise can be adapted for different assignment genres, including argumentative essays, research papers, and other kinds of analysis writing. This exercise can also be adjusted for other elements of writing, including evidence incorporation and analysis. For instance, students could comment on a body paragraph, noting where the writer could incorporate evidence to support their ideas.

Depending on the goals of the assignment, students could collaboratively develop criteria for evaluating one another’s writing. For example, engaging the class in a rubric creation exercise could nurture students’ agency as writers while supporting them to refine their craft.
References


