

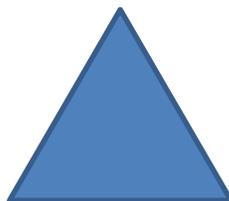
A Heuristic for Responding

1. What is the **context** for the response?
 - a. Formal or informal writing?
 - b. Is the draft at an early stage (still thinking through the assignment, sources), a middle stage (beginning to respond to the assignment but still changing form or focus), or a late stage (revised and edited extensively based on feedback)?
 - c. Which problems or issues do you want students to address using your feedback? What would you like to address in class?
 - d. When will you respond to this draft—early, mid, late semester? How much time will students have to work with your feedback?
 - e. What kinds of revision do you expect based on your feedback?

2. What **type of feedback** does the student need to work from this draft?
 - a. Corrections, criticisms, commands: “this sentence should read...”; “reorder these paragraphs...”; “explain why this is true...”
 - b. Qualified evaluations and advice: “I find your claim unconvincing because...”; “you might want to try...”
 - c. Praise and explanation: “your analysis effectively demonstrates...”
 - d. Closed questions: “do you really believe what you have said...”
 - e. Open questions: “What is your next step...”
 - f. Interpretations, reader responses, lessons, explanations: “When I read this paragraph, I get the sense that...”; “I can tell you believe that...”; “I wasn’t sure where you were going with the first paragraph, but...”

3. What will be your **mode of delivery** for feedback?
 - a. Instructor written comments: marginal and end comments
 - b. Instructor form comments: draft questionnaire or rubric checklist
 - c. Full class instruction: instructor models revision using a representative student draft; instructor writes a letter to the class addressing general concerns or observations
 - d. Peer feedback: students respond to drafts using criteria supplied by instructor; or, students identify the types of peer feedback they want
 - e. Conferences: instructor discusses draft with individual students or groups with related concerns

1. CONTEXT



2. TYPE OF FEEDBACK

3. MODE OF DELIVERY

The research shows...

- Evaluation instruments can never be freed from **some degree of subjectivity**, and the degree of subjectivity is often proportional to the subtlety of the feature being evaluated; sentence fragments are marked and graded consistently, while the effective use of irony is not (Diederich, 1974).
- Nearly two-thirds of teachers' responses are "**corrective and didactic**" (Searle & Dillon, 1980).
- **Direct grammatical instruction is ineffective** in terms of long-term learning; contextualized comments on grammar are only marginally better (Hillocks et al., 1982).
- **More than half of the errors in student writing are due to carelessness** and can simply be marked, rather than explained in detail (Haswell, 1983).
- Teachers "**do not communicate their rhetorical evaluations effectively**, they overemphasize isolated problems on individual papers without regard for patterns, and are too preoccupied with giving students standards by which to judge finished writing—in other words, explaining grades rather than promoting revision" (Connors & Lunsford, 1993).
- **Teachers' claimed priorities in grading (usually communicated via rubrics) differ consistently** from the priorities exhibited in their actual grades (Broad, 2002).
- "**Evaluation-free zones**" in early drafts stages of a writing course often encourage students to be more adventurous with their writing (Elbow, 2006).
- A student will react positively to commentary that challenges her arguments and claims as long as it includes a prompt that enables the **student to develop her own revised ideas** (as opposed to a simple poor evaluation or "correction" of the argument or claim) (Gee, 1972; Straub, 1997; Ziv, 2006).
- "**The results are inconclusive**" in the efforts of two generations of composition specialists "to make the case that response to student writing is a meaningful pedagogical activity" (Knoblauch & Brannon, 2006).