How to Respond Constructively to English Language Learners' (ELLs) Writing

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Some general strategies

◆ Acknowledge the complexities involved in learning to write academic prose in English.
◆ Establish a scale of concerns when providing feedback.
◆ Decide on type of feedback, e.g., summative vs. formative, direct vs. indirect.
◆ Equip students to work with genre exemplars, e.g., MICUSP
Acknowledging the complexities

◆ Academic discourse and its peculiar features

- Frequent citation
  Summer is warmer than winter (Blink 1971; Bizzy 1978 [1976]; Bingo 1980; Buffy and Blooper 1982; Binkey et al. 1986; Beastie 1992 [1989]).

- High lexical density
  In bridging river valleys, the early engineers built many masonry viaducts of numerous arches.
Acknowledging the complexities

◆ Academic discourse and its peculiar features

- Nominalized style
  • I handed in my essay late because my kids got sick.
  • The reason for the late submission of my essay was the illness of my children.

- Grammatical metaphor
  • Recognition often attempts to highlight ...
  • Gay-identity politics claims that ...
  • Modern “dominant political discourse” often uses the term ...
Acknowledging the complexities

◆ Specific disciplinary discourses
  o Rhetorical common-places
  o Valued attitudes and stances

◆ Culturally-based rhetorical styles
  o L1 “interference”
  o Over-compensation for perceived L1-L2 differences
Acknowledging the complexities

- Not all “grammar” problems are grammar problems
- Causes for grammar errors are complex
  - negative transfer from L1
  - errors idiosyncratic to the learner
    - interlanguage development
      - fossilization
      - mis-learning of rules
      - over-application of rules
Identify patterns and priorities of errors

- Avoid the temptation to “correct” right away.
- Do not mark everything: choose in a principled manner.
- Identify patterns of errors
- Identify priorities of errors, global vs. local
- Let’s Practice: See sample of student writing
Pre-Drafting Interventions

- Collect Biodata from all students
- Collect a Writing Sample from all students
- Conduct Pre-paper Conferencing
- Help Students to Read Models
Early Drafting Interventions

• Emphasize Writing as a Process
• Establish the Difference between Global and Local Errors
• Recognize the Relative Permanence of Local Errors
Post-draft Interventions

- Establish a “Scale of Concerns”
- Decide between Formative and Summative Assessment