

A TEACHER GOES TO SCHOOL: A RETROSPECTIVE ANALYSIS OF PEDAGOGICAL  
INSIGHTS ON SECONDARY WRITING INSTRUCTION

by

KAREN STELTER OTTO

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of  
The University of Texas at Arlington in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements  
for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT ARLINGTON

May 2022

Copyright © by Karen Stelter Otto 2022

All Rights Reserved



## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr. Jim Warren, who is the chair of my committee, and so much more. He has been a mentor and a friend. The first doctoral class I took (English 5359: Argumentation Theory) was taught by him. I know that this journey would have been so different if I had not met him. Without Jim by my side these past five years, I doubt that I would have reached this point. Jim's classes always felt like a close group of like-minded friends sitting around talking about texts. I felt at home in the program. Under his mentorship, I have learned so much about the craft of teaching composition. His influence extends to the 180 high school students I teach every year. Dr. Justin Lerberg and Dr. Kevin Porter, who are on my committee, have been encouraging and kind during this process. They have challenged me and made me a better thinker, teacher, and person.

To my husband, Mark, who has always been my biggest cheerleader. He has listened to me complain, cry, and brag about every class, every paper, and every single part of this process. He has always been just what I need when I need it. I love you so much. To my mom, who is probably more proud of this accomplishment than I am, you are my role model. You believed in me when I did not. You saw my potential when I was just a bratty blonde-haired toddler with a big attitude and too much confidence and determination. So much of this journey has been possible because of who you raised me to be. To my late father, I know you are so proud of me. You always were. I could never do wrong in your eyes. I will be looking for a rainbow on graduation day.

Finally, to my students—present, past, and future—you are the reason I started this journey, and you are the reason I have finished. To my students in the class of 2024, thank you for

cheering me on this year, for asking me how it is going, for bringing me snacks when I am stressed, for helping me with math for my surveys, and for letting me share in your journey with you. I am blessed and honored to be a part of your lives. I hope I have made you proud!

May 3, 2022

## **Abstract**

# A TEACHER GOES TO SCHOOL: A RETROSPECTIVE ANALYSIS OF PEDAGOGICAL INSIGHTS ON SECONDARY WRITING INSTRUCTION

Karen Stelter Otto, PhD

The University of Texas at Arlington, 2022

Supervising Professor: James Warren

High school English teachers are familiar with current masters in the field (Kittle, Burke, Gallagher), but are not familiar with the scholarly literature on the topics of composition. Although helpful, these professional development books offer examples of quality lessons for helping students become stronger and more confident writers, but rarely do these books address the research that supports these findings.

This dissertation is a retrospective study and analysis of the pedagogical insights on secondary writing instruction that I learned through my doctoral journey. I examine five areas of interest: peer review, teacher review, service-learning, grammar, and grading. I analyze the history and research already conducted on these topics, as well as conduct my own informal interviews of students and teachers. In each of my chapters, I explore what history and research say about the teaching of secondary English. I wanted to know why veteran teachers like me continue to use practices that have been proven ineffective hundreds of years ago. I argue that the proven instructional strategies for high-quality writing require an understanding of where

composition studies have been. Such an approach, I argue, can transform high school English classrooms and reignite the passion for the teaching of composition.

## Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	3
Abstract.....	5
Introduction.....	10
Background of the Problem.....	17
The Student as Defective.....	21
Grammar Instruction.....	22
Formulaic Writing.....	24
Purpose and Significance of This Study.....	25
Dissertation Chapters.....	26
Chapter 1: Peer Review.....	29
Peer Review versus Instructor Review.....	33
Giving Peer Feedback.....	38
Peer Editing versus Peer Review.....	39
Instruction in Peer Review.....	43
Effective Peer Review.....	49
Concluding Thoughts.....	53
Chapter 2: Teacher Review.....	55
Background and Research on Feedback.....	58
Purposes of Feedback.....	63
Students' Thoughts Regarding Teacher Feedback.....	69
Effective Practices for Teacher Review of Student Writing.....	79
Concluding Thoughts.....	87

Chapter 3: Service-Learning.....	88
Definition and Characteristics of Service-Learning.....	89
Models and Types of Service-Learning Projects.....	93
History and Background of Service-Learning.....	94
Service-Learning in the English Classroom.....	99
Authentic Writing, Various Genres, Audiences, and Purposes.....	100
The Assignment.....	103
Teacher Reflection.....	107
Concluding Thoughts.....	112
Chapter 4: Grammar Instruction.....	114
The History of Grammar Instruction.....	115
Redefining and Rethinking Errors.....	121
Reimagining the Teaching of Grammar.....	125
Narrow the Focus.....	126
Genre Study and Grammar.....	129
Language and Power.....	131
Rhetorical Grammar.....	136
Concluding Thoughts.....	140
Chapter 5: Grading.....	142
Historical Perspective.....	144
Grading Practices.....	146
Grading Purposes.....	147
Problems of the Traditional Grading System.....	149



The Subjective Nature of the High School English Class.....	162
A Gradeless Classroom in Practice.....	163
Concluding Thoughts.....	170
Conclusion: Reflections and Connections.....	171
Appendix A: Grammar Log.....	175
Appendix B: Grammar Rants.....	177
Appendix C: Field Notebook.....	179
References.....	183
Biographical Information.....	212

## Introduction

Teaching is not as simple as it might appear to those outside the profession. It is a complex act filled with instructional and administrative decisions, as well as decisions about how to best entertain, comfort, support, and encourage the students sitting in the classroom. According to Goldberg and Houser (2017), teachers make more than 1,500 decisions every day. Madeline Hunter correctly writes that while “most people believe that teaching is just telling kids what to do and maintaining discipline.” However, it more closely resembles surgery:

Where you think fast on your feet and do the best you can with the information you have. You must be very skilled, very knowledgeable, and exquisitely well trained, because neither the teacher nor the surgeon can say “Everyone sit still until I figure out what in the heck we’re gonna do next.” (qtd. in Smith, 2017, p. 18)

As respect for teachers continues to wane and responsibilities continue to increase, many dedicated and qualified teachers are leaving the classroom to find jobs where work is left at the office and bonuses are given for hard work and success. A recent National Education Union survey (2021) reports that one in three teachers plan to quit the classroom within five year. However, I am not one of those people.

I teach high school English. For twenty-four years, I have left my personal home to teach almost 180 sophomores writing, reading, and lessons that do not fall into either of those categories, in what has become my professional home—room C219. Here, we, a community of writers and readers, live closely with the words of William Faulkner and Jason Reynolds. We snuggle with beautiful words that have changed our world, those that now reside between the pages of anthologies. Here, I consult my muses—Burke, Gallagher, Kittle, Elbow, Sommers—for guidance on the decisions that align with the best practices to do this thing called “teaching

high school English.” In this inherently complex field of teaching, there are many ways to teach skills that transfer and turn students into confident writers and readers.

Before entering the doctoral program, I thought I was a good teacher. The students said so. The parents said so. The evaluations said so. However, there were signs that I could be more effective. Signs that I ignored for almost two decades. My classroom felt too perfect. Students answered questions when I asked them and neatly filled in my writing templates and reading guides. They were well behaved, but I had a lingering feeling that they were not engaged. I still remember the day that I truly realized the difference between students who are behaviorally engaged and those who are cognitively and emotionally engaged. It is an event that is so clear that it could have happened yesterday. I was teaching one of my favorite novels, William Faulkner’s *As I Lay Dying*, to sophomores in a Pre-AP English II course. I had spent hours preparing notes, annotations, and questions. My book was tabbed, and the scribbles in the margins of the pages could have been considered art because they were so detailed. I was ready. My students would be able to see my passion for this book, and, in turn, love it as much as I did. Being a veteran teacher, you would think that I would know that this was amateur thinking at its finest.

The lesson started strong enough. Students were listening. They were compliant. And this made me happy. I, like many teachers, like to be in control. It is part of the job. Imagine 30 middle school or high school students in a small space with a teacher who is not in control. Search “letting go of control in the classroom” on the Internet, and you will find all sorts of advice. Most are class management tips to deal with discipline. One of my favorites is the article arguing that a teacher has the right to say “no” when students have to go to the bathroom. I find

this so funny for some reason. Maybe it is the bathroom humor or because I have been teaching for so long.

But even in this moment of “good student” behavior, I knew that this—the lesson, the energy, the interaction—should look different. At that time, I had read enough of Atwell, Kittle, and Gallagher to know that I had *too* much “good behavior” in my classroom. I still knew that teachers should search for ways to give their students more control over their own learning. This is nothing new. Student-centered learning has been a buzzword for over a decade. Although theoretically I valued independence, I still taught in a way that required dependence. I was aware of student-centered learning and had formed a belief, albeit abstract, in student independence, but I had too many doubts and fears to implement this type of instruction into my own classroom. I wanted, like every teacher, to nurture my students’ creative spirit and instill passion into their reading and writing. But to be honest, I was scared and unwilling to give away control. My teaching was all tell and no show. I did not model reading, writing, or responding to others’ writing. I assigned it. Even my efforts to show students mentor texts was focused on the product and not the process of the important skills in an English class. I created questions similar to those of many other English teachers. Questions that came from the outside constraints that reinforced the well-behaved, dependence-based model of teaching. I wondered: What about the dreaded state standards and tests? People would know how my students did on the test, and what if they did poorly? What about that packaged curriculum my district spent thousands of dollars on? How would I assess all of these different types of learning?

As much as I admired Atwell and Kittle, my classroom was not like theirs, and I certainly was not Nancy or Penny. This type of class looked good on paper—the unicorn of effective and engaging learning. I could imagine it, but I had no idea how to actually implement it in room

C219. In most professional development books for English teachers, the author's classroom is depicted as perfect, and rarely are the "messy" parts of teaching English to high school students shown. In these ideal classrooms, students are always on task, engaged in insightful discussions, and excited about reading and writing. Teachers serve as the "guide on the side," instead of the "sage on the stage." Students are taught more than skills and knowledge, as teachers successfully cultivate within their students the range of personas mentioned in Burke (2013). In the classrooms featured in these books, students leave their English classes transformed into storytellers, philosophers, historians, anthropologists, reporters, critics, designers, and travelers (Burke, 2013, p. 18). After reading books by Atwell, Kittle, and Burke, the teachers in my department tried to transform our classrooms. Our students kept writer's notebooks, read and wrote on topics of their choice, and tracked the books they read. However, we soon discovered that in order to create a classroom like the ones in the books, we would need to clone ourselves. There just was not enough time to conference with every student multiple times a day and keep the other students on task. Satisfying my district's, community's, and state's requirements of what my students needed to learn and accomplish left very few minutes for me to incorporate the strategies and ideas that these published writers wrote about in their books.

On that day, I shook off the doubt and pumped myself up to power through my *As I Lay Dying* lesson. I was so excited to share this brilliant novel with my students. When the students showed up, I asked them about the reading section they should have read for homework. Some of them told me about the plot. Some of them told me what SparkNotes had to say. Some of them told me that "the book sucks." Of course, I had plenty of experiences with student flippancy, but for some reason, on this day, I silently wondered how anyone, at any age, could say that this masterpiece "sucked." I started on my *As I Lay Dying* sell. "Don't you see how Faulkner

structured the book to show the position of the characters in the family?” and “Didn’t you notice the drawing of the coffin right in the middle of the text?” One brave student responded: “All I noticed was a family of dumb country folk trying to bury their mom.” I was speechless, and I wondered just how long these feelings and thoughts my students just expressed to me had been hidden beneath the surface of good behavior and politeness. Maybe my students really did think that one of my favorite books “sucked.” However, what was more likely was that I was not constructing a space where they could engage with the book on their own terms. I expected them to connect with books as I, a middle-aged English teacher, did.

By the end of the day, I felt like I had been slapped in the face, and my English teacher's heart was shattered. I started to comfort myself by rationalizing my failure in the classroom. I told myself that kids were lazy and that they did not want to struggle in order to learn. While some of this might have been true, I had to admit to myself (and later to my students) that this train wreck was mostly my fault. I realized that students were not really reading. They could regurgitate what was said in class discussions or lectures and pass the tests even if they had not read the book. My carefully crafted bank of questions for each chapter was not helping students understand or appreciate the book. Students were only learning what *I* thought was important about the books we read. I realized that I needed to teach them how to interpret a difficult text, not what to think about it. I realized that I was teaching novels and not skills. I prided myself on asking tough questions that required students to use higher-order thinking skills, but I was the only one doing the thinking. I desperately wanted to follow Kittle’s (2008) advice to “be urgent about teaching: urgent to plan, demonstrate, encourage, and then revise our thinking” as we listen to what our students need (p. 29).

On the drive home, I realized that my teaching methods were not as effective as I had thought when I drove to school that morning. I had two choices: I could do something about it or I could move on, passively accepting that my students were not learning. I have never been one for complacency. I began to consider that if the reading instruction in my course was this ineffective, my methods of teaching writing and assessing students were most likely even worse. It did not take me long to realize that students did not think of themselves as writers because they were writing about what I thought was important. That was typically analysis of the literature we read—the dreaded literary analysis essay. Just as the *As I Lay Dying* Faulkner moment showed me the flaws in my reading instruction, a writing assignment over another canonical text, *Macbeth*, indicated I had similar problems in regards to writing instruction. My students had just read *Macbeth*, and it was time for a formative assessment, which was always an in-class essay. Because this was a Pre-AP class, I was expected to introduce my students to timed writing. I selected the 2009 released prompt from the AP English Literature and Composition below:

A symbol is an object, action, or event that represents something or that creates a range of associations beyond itself. In literary works, a symbol can express an idea, clarify meaning, or enlarge literal meaning. Select a novel or play and, focusing on one symbol, write an essay analyzing how that symbol functions in the work and what it reveals about the characters or themes of the work as a whole. Do not merely summarize the plot.

By selecting the writing prompt for my students, I was in charge of their writing, just like I was in charge of what they read and how they showed mastery of the class content. My “writing” assessments were really just reading assessments. Although the format of assessment was writing-based, I was essentially measuring a student’s knowledge of a text. A quick glance at the rest of the curriculum for my course further convinced me that my class was literature-focused,

and the only writing my students did was “school writing.” What I mean is that in these assignments, I would assess my students on their reading comprehension skills, “school grammar,” and their ability to fill in the essay template I had given them. I realized that I was the one making the meaning and learning in all parts of my class. I wondered what they could do if I allowed them more choice? What would happen if I just got out of the way? What if I gave up control? I was scared. The thought of giving control to the students was terrifying. Traditional teaching is tidy. Packaged units over novels save time. Rubrics and grading policies appear accurate and reliable. Change is scary and uncomfortable. However, what was even scarier to me was knowing that life-long learning only occurs if a person is a self-directed learner. Sadly, what I was doing in my classroom for years did not promote that mindset.

Just a few weeks after this humbling experience, I walked to UTA to take my first doctoral class: Topics in Teaching Composition. I nervously found a seat at the end of the huge boardroom table and got ready to learn. To be honest, I was not really excited about this class. My focus was literature—my beloved Southern Gothic—and I believed, like many teachers, that literature was the heart of an English course. Writing was something that I enjoyed doing in my free time, but I found teaching writing to young writers difficult. I have kept a journal since I was in middle school, and I enjoy writing about issues in education for organizations, such as the Texas Council of Teachers of English Language Arts and the Texas Association for the Gifted and Talented. Even though I knew that my writing life was not linear, I still taught writing as a process with four distinct steps: prewriting, drafting, revising, and editing. I was not even aware that writing was recursive until I began to search for reasons why my current method of teaching writing was not working. The need for a major pedagogical shift was solidified after I began to read and study the history of composition. My classroom instruction incorporated methods from



hundreds of years ago. Ones that had been proven ineffective. Obviously, it was time for a change.

### **Background of the Problem**

One issue that frustrated me about being an English teacher was the obvious dominance of literature over composition. Most of my English teacher friends entered the profession because they loved literature. They loved reading it and teaching it. Although I have always enjoyed reading and creating avid readers in my students, my most gratifying teaching moments involve the challenge of teaching writing to students. I love the magical, musical quality of words and the power that resides in the simple movement or choice of a word or phrase. It is in the messiness of writing where I have discovered truths about myself. I wanted my students to experience this too. However, I felt trapped. English meant literature. If writing was given any attention at all, it was always linked with literature, further conveying the “writing-as-an-afterthought” thinking that seemed to fill the classrooms of high school English courses, mine included. I realized after only a year as a high school English teacher that writing instruction meant formulaic writing, traditional grammar instruction, and rubrics. In other words, the profound potential of writing instruction seemed blocked by ingrained pedagogical habits. I never knew where these deep-rooted ways of instruction came from until I began studying the history of composition.

According to Nystrand et al. (1993), the 1970s is when composition studies really became an established, “serious” discipline. In some aspects, this is true, but at least in high school classrooms, composition studies remains secondary to literature. The view that literature is “far more prestigious than rhetorical study reflects an assumption that it is more important to teach students to read and understand language than to teach them to create it” (Murphy & Thaiss, 2012, p. 281). Whereas literature was seen as the future for promising scholars in the new

departments of English, composition became known “as a low-level grind, as a grueling apprenticeship, as a kind of teaching to pass through as quickly as possible” (Connors, 1997, p. 14). The culture in high school English departments reflects the hierarchy that has been established at the college level.

I have taught in three school districts during my twenty-four year career as an educator. In each of these districts, professional development days and department meetings are spent deciding what novels to teach. Planning begins and ends with literature. For example, my current district requires an essential question for each quarter. These essential questions revolve around a theme found in the texts (novel, short stories, poetry, speeches, etc.). This is an essential question for the first quarter of English I at my school: How can education (or the lack thereof) affect a society? What follows this essential question are lists of texts (*Animal Farm* and short nonfiction texts) that students will read in order to answer this question. Writing instruction does not even have its own category on school and district curriculum maps or year-at-a-glance documents. Almost all of the writing assignments focus on the literature read for that quarter. During this quarter in English I, students will write two literary analysis essays (one on *Animal Farm* and the other on a shared theme in *Animal Farm* and the shorter texts) and one expository prompt (a released expository STAAR English I prompt). To secondary English teachers, teaching literary analysis is an essential cornerstone of the curriculum. Teaching a course with so many expectations (vocabulary, grammar, speaking, reading, and writing) means that some area is going to be overlooked and relegated to the sidelines. That area has always been writing. The writing instruction that does exist is mostly formulaic writing focused on raising tests scores on state-mandated state assessments. Sadly, this is really just *assigning* writing and not *teaching* it.

So how did we get here? Answering that question is far beyond the scope of this introduction and this dissertation, but an understanding of the history of writing instruction has helped me understand the roots of instructional practices that remain dominant in high school English classrooms today. One of the most significant events in the history of composition was the move from oral discourse to written discourse, which gave the false impression that writing was gaining ground as an important skill. In ancient societies, such as Greece and Rome, being able to communicate through speaking was extremely important. Murphy and Thaiss (2012) state that writing was initially learned for functional purposes: a facilitator of oral discourse—to record, preserve, and stabilize. Only much later did writing change from a transcription method to a means of creative, artistic expression.

In the United States in the early to mid-1800s, no system of writing instruction really existed beyond elementary school. Any “training” in writing was merely just the actual, mechanical process of transcribing words to something visual, what is now known as “handwriting.” Writing did not move from a way to record speech to a way of thinking and expression until the late 1870s. According to Murphy and Thaiss (2012), the long-held dominance of oratory decreased as writing became the new method of communicating and recording. As more and more people began to read, people became interested in writing beyond the oratory-centered methods of letters and sermons. This, in turn, led to a need for manuals and textbooks to teach people how to write in these newly desired modes and genres. Hugh Blair’s *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (1783) filled this need for some people. Blair, believing that the teaching of oral and written skills were closely linked and that the study of “fine” prose could improve writing, created a broad yet accessible guide to reading and writing. Blair believed that all types of writing (poetry, drama, prose, etc.) and different subjects (philosophy, science, history, etc.)

shared similar elements and could all be studied in a rhetoric course. The speaker and writer, as well as the reader and listener, were equal in Blair's mind. This thinking, belletristic rhetoric, increased the range and types of texts studied and appreciated for its literary and writing sophistication (Murphy & Thaiss, 2012). Defined as beautiful, fine writing that is valued for its aesthetic qualities and originality of tone and style, belletristic writing's popularity is evident in the textbooks used throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Blair's text became the most widely used rhetoric text in America, and its influences can be seen in today's use of certain teaching methods. For example, belletristic rhetoric incorporates the use of models, imitation, and graded practice. Even though this gave students more examples of the ideal text, the focus was still on literature and what the teacher deemed worthy. Models came from the pages of what experienced writers wrote, reinforcing the view that the obtainment of the ideal text was reserved for adults, specifically those chosen by the teacher of the classroom. Many of today's writing instructors use model, or mentor, texts as examples of quality writing. However, the majority of these model texts are not from young adult novels or from students themselves. It seems to me that the reluctance to see and treat students as real writers who have something important to say is deeply rooted in the history of composition. The history of belletristic rhetoric also gives us a partial answer to how it came to be that English meant the study of literature. Early *writing* instruction was, to a large extent, the study of *literature*. Connors (1997) states that Blair's theories would "radically change students' relations with rhetoric texts by making the centerpiece of the course the text," accomplished by the use of question-answer methods (p. 74). This, what Connors (1997) refers to as the "degradation of college rhetoric from a lecture-tutorial system to a catechetical recitation-based discipline," can still be found in today's high school English classrooms, although I would argue that instruction

now is a combination of “lecture-tutorial” and “recitation-based” (p. 76). However, the fact remains that the legacy of Blair and the history of teaching composition with a literary basis is still popular and lives on in 21<sup>st</sup> century high school English classrooms.

### *The Student as Defective*

Another resonant moment in the history of composition was the creation of Freshman Composition, or “English A,” courses in the late 1800s. This moment further conveys the idea that composition is the ugly stepchild of literature, the “other” in the more serious field of English studies. When more than half of students failed Harvard’s written entrance exams, an outcry to fix “the illiteracy of American boys” became an obsession (Connors, 1997, p. 11). The shift for a classical curriculum to study in English became a priority. College faculty were now aware that students had far more issues writing than they had originally expected. A narrowing of theory, forced by cultural and social pressures, valorized “a product approach to teaching writing” with an insistence on formal and mechanical correctness (Connors, 1997, p. 13). Freshman Composition, considered a remedial course, was for failures, belonging to the classrooms of high school rather than college. Miller (1990) states:

The original student of composition was defined as the lower and in some ways “animal” order, in need of scrubbing. A student who took composition was to be corrected and remedied before admission to “regular” courses of study. He was either to be made fit for the entitlements within these regular curricula or finally to be excluded when he revealed the absence of an essential but limited quality—suitability for privilege. This served to separate students further into two coded groups: those who would eventually receive and assimilate the gentlemanly “principles” that literature provides to unify the elitist university’s subjectivity, and those who would not. (p. 85)

This was a way students could be classified as insiders and outsiders, failures and successes. Miller (1990) describes composition as a carnival—both have been seen as for the unintelligent, the freak, the outsider. Students of Freshman Composition needed to be “cleaned up” and corrected, much in the way that those involved in the circus did.

Like Freshman Composition and its ethos of “cleaning up” students, high school English courses face the difficult job of literacy instruction. Most English teachers have asked their students who their English teacher was last year. This question is often asked when students cannot write effectively. Teachers in higher grades look for someone to blame for the failure of “cleaning up” their current students. The job of writing instruction typically rests solely on the shoulders of English teachers. The majority of state assessments are in English courses, and the results of these high-stake tests are readily available for anyone to see. I, like many high school English teachers, have felt the pressure to solve the literacy crisis that we hear about in professional literature on education, on the news, and in our district and school meetings.

### ***Grammar Instruction***

After reading histories of composition studies, I realized that there were other reasons why, besides my focus on literature, that my students were not strong writers. I write about different approaches to grammar instruction in Chapter Four; here I merely wish to point out that for many teachers, composition teaching simply *is* grammar instruction. In an attempt to improve their students’ writing, I, like many teachers, grabbed my red pen and went on a hunt for usage, spelling, and punctuation errors. Even though I had good intentions, writing suffered yet again because my formal grammar approach took time away from instruction and practice in actual composition. I knew that my grammar instruction was ineffective. However, I did not know the best practices for grammar instruction, and I had no idea where to go to find out. I was teaching

grammar the only way I knew how to teach it—how my former teachers and my colleagues taught it. My mentors were fellow English teachers, and we were all teaching grammar the same way. In my graduate classes, I began to use the databases to research every aspect of the history of composition. As I did, I began to realize that this is where I could find actual studies and research on the aspects of my teaching that I knew were ineffective. In my twenty-four years as an English teacher, I had not received any instruction in the best practices for teaching grammar, nor had I learned that grammar instruction represents only a narrow sliver of composition pedagogy.

As I studied the history of grammar instruction, I discovered why I and other teachers were obsessed with correction errors. I learned that the obsession with correctness could be traced back to the early to mid-1800s, and perhaps even to the sixteenth century with the creation of English grammar schools and textbooks. As primary schools became more common, the concentration on the study of formal grammar increased. At this time, writing and grammar instruction were separate, although they were often taught together. Grammar study was a formal discipline that involved memorization of terms and rules. Students analyzed sentences and were asked to hunt and correct errors in these sentences (Connors, 1997). Having “correct” grammar (or “school grammar” as it is often called) was a ticket into the coveted upper class of sophisticated people, a sign of education and wealth. According to Rose (1985), this vision of correctness became the era’s most significant measure of accomplished prose, and its importance can be seen today. Little has changed since the origination of “correctness” in writing. Over thirty years ago, my high school English teacher warned of the importance of grammar. Unfortunately, high school English teachers still require students to memorize grammar rules and underline the parts of speech in sentences.

### *Formulaic Writing*

As I took more graduate courses in rhetoric and composition and read more about the history of composition, I noticed a constant theme in all areas of my instruction: structure and control. My focus on literature and correcting errors made me feel in charge. I was confident in these areas of composition, and my students received my instruction and got to work. It was a well-oiled machine. Students played the part I wanted them to: compliant students who read what I wanted them to read and wrote how I told them to write. Another way in which I exercised control was in prescribing organizational schemes. As I read more, I soon learned that how I taught writing—using templates and formulated structures and directives—began over two hundred years ago.

The history of prescriptive theme writing can be attributed to Wendell Barrett, known for his textbook *English Composition*, and the invention of the daily theme at Harvard in 1884. Barrett wanted his students to have daily practice in qualities termed “unity,” “mass,” and “coherence.” *Composition*, to Barrett, had three principles: (1) Every composition should group itself around one central idea; (2) The chief parts of every composition should be placed so they attract attention; and (3) The relation of each part of a composition to its neighbors should be unmistakable (qtd. in Connors, 1997, p. 274). Barrett’s version, and others based on the “school theme,” evolved over the next fifty years into the five-paragraph template (Tremmel, 2011). Seen as a plan or map for organizing and developing ideas, this method of teaching composition was, and still is, appealing. The five-paragraph theme was sensible to students and teachers and fit “seamlessly into a tidy, sequential approach that appealed to a certain Western love of orderliness and efficiency” (Tremmel, 2011, p. 33). Teaching writing as a formula became, and



has remained, popular because it is easy to teach and for students to grasp and apply, and it helps to raise students' standardized test scores.

The five-paragraph essay was another strategy I used to have control in my classroom. The Jane Schaffer method of teaching writing was the foundation of my writing instruction. On her website, this method, commonly taught in middle and high school English classes, is described as a “research-based writing formula,” which “provides students and teachers with a consistent and proven formula for constructing essays.” Schaffer based this method on her own research of the most effective means of crafting an essay as well as the best techniques to use in order to generate high scores on papers. Each paragraph has a set number of sentences (from 5-8) and a specific order when composing them. In addition to these requirements, the Schaffer method tells students how many words should go in each section. This method “calls for the following order of sentence writing: (a) topic sentence, (b) concrete detail, (c) two commentary sentences, and (d) a concluding sentence.” Until graduate school, I had no idea that this model began hundreds of years ago and was called the five-paragraph theme. The only aspect that has changed since then is the name. Today’s teachers call it the five-paragraph essay, and it is still used in many classrooms. I always felt that the five-paragraph essay structure was stifling. Students hated it and saw it as prescriptive school writing. However, it never occurred to me until graduate school that this was another example of “the teacher in charge of learning” model I had been emulating. After reading the history of this type of structured writing, I understood that my own teaching method reflected the history of and insistence on a top-down method of the teacher as decision maker. Still, over a hundred years later, high school English teachers still use the five-paragraph essay format and many argue its effectiveness.

### **Purpose and Significance of This Study**

Many changes have occurred because of that first doctoral class. I changed my concentration to Rhetoric and Composition. I also changed the methods I used to teach writing in my high school English course. I learned more about teaching in the courses I took in my doctoral program at UTA than I did in the actual teaching classes I took two decades ago. The histories of composition tend to have happy endings, in the sense that they assume that ineffective teaching practices are in the past, and that teachers today know better. However, my suspicion was that the majority of high school English teachers continue to favor practices that have been long been deemed ineffective by composition research. The purpose of this dissertation is to actually document the veracity of this suspicion. I hope to help other high school English teachers understand how a teacher, like me, can go decades without exposure to composition histories and studies, and when this *does* happen, how changes can be negotiated and implemented. This dissertation is my attempt to fill a gap in the key areas of the teaching of high school English that I have observed while being a teacher who goes to school. Through narrative and critical study, I explore my own teaching life and the research on peer and teacher review, service-learning, grammar, and grading. The takeaway is a set of lessons illustrating how it is possible to transform the major areas of high school English teaching.

### **Dissertation Chapters**

In Chapter 1, “Peer Review,” I analyze the methods of effective peer review. As classroom sizes continue to increase and teachers seek more ways to include writing in their curriculum, teacher feedback cannot be the only source of feedback students receive. Many teachers are using peer review to fill this gap. However, peer review remains a challenging practice for both teachers and students at all levels. Teachers and students worry that students’ reviews of writing are unreliable and invalid. In this chapter, I consult the history and research on peer review and

share results from my own informal survey of beliefs about peer review. I explain the methods of giving peer feedback, distinguish peer editing from peer review, and share what research and my experiences show as effective methods of peer review.

In Chapter 2, “Teacher Review,” I consider the various methods of teacher review and their impact on student writing. Giving quality feedback that students actually read and apply, to not only the current writing piece but also future ones, is a challenge. Composition teachers spend hours leaving feedback on their students’ texts only to see the same mistakes on the next writing assignment. I look to the background and research and share results from my own informal study on teacher review in order to explain the purpose of feedback, students’ thoughts regarding teacher feedback, and the most effective practices for commenting on student texts.

In Chapter 3, “Service-Learning,” I explain what service-learning is and review the merit of incorporating this type of project in a high school English classroom. One of the common questions regarding this type of project is how to retain the rigor and “learning” in a service-learning project. In this chapter, I review the research on service-learning, including my own implementation of service-learning in my English II Gifted and Talented course in order to show that the unique opportunities and real-world application skills this type of learning offers students cannot be obtained from other types of assignments. I seek to show how incorporating this type of learning in a high school English class is in fact learning and does not dilute the curriculum, even in advanced courses like AP English.

In Chapter 4, “Grammar Instruction,” I discuss the history of grammar instruction and error correction in the composition classroom and describe different approaches and methods. My intention is to answer the following questions: What is the definition of grammar? Do students really need to be able to identify parts of speech and other grammatical terms? Is there a

connection between having “good grammar” and writing abilities? Why is the grammar “issue” so important and a dominant focus of composition research? What presumptions are made regarding people’s grammar errors? And most importantly, what is the most effective way to teach grammar to high school students? With limited time with students, how can high school English teachers fit grammar instruction into an already packed curriculum?

In Chapter 5, “Grading,” I analyze the current grading system and argue for the implementation of a modified version of standard-based grading. I attempt to answer the following questions: What can the history of grading tell us about our current grading system? What are the purposes and problems of the traditional grading system? Why is it important that a high school English classroom move away from assessing students using letters and numbers? Is it possible to go “gradeless” in a school where grades must be submitted every quarter and a final grade must be given? What effect does the current grade-oriented climate of a school actually have on the students? I will explain the results of my attempt to “go gradeless” in my English II Gifted and Talented course. I believe that my research will provide high school English teachers with a way to eliminate the majority of the harmless effects of grading by using a modified version of standards-based grading.

In “Conclusion: Reflections and Connections,” I explain how I refined and redefined the traditional pedagogical models of peer review, teacher review, service-learning, grammar, and grading in order to increase authenticity and transfer in my high school English classroom.

## **Chapter 1:**

### **Peer Review**

As the pressure to pass state-mandated tests increases, students' ability to transfer authentic writing skills decreases. Yet, English teachers seek different approaches for teaching writing so that their students can be successful in the post-secondary world. English teachers implement various pedagogical practices in order to support their students in writing, including peer review. A proven method for establishing a productive, collaborative environment for teaching writing, and for having students work with writing in collaborative ways, is the use of peer review (Gallagher & Kittle, 2018). Defined as an arrangement in which students "of similar degree status, usually in the same course of study and often in the same year" consider "the amount, level, value, worth, quality, or successes of the product or outcomes of a product," peer review might seem to be a relatively new form of assessment (Topping, 1998, p. 250). However, research shows that it has been used for centuries (Keh, 1990). In the late 1770s, George Jardine, a professor at the University of Glasgow, spoke about the methods, uses, and benefits of the peer assessment of writing (qtd. in Topping, 2000). As the writing workshop approach gained popularity and students were encouraged to see themselves as part of a writing community, peer review became an important element in the process writing approach (Atwell, 1987; Calkins, 1986; Elbow, 1973; Gallagher & Kittle, 2018; Kittle, 2008; Murray, 1968). Part of the writing workshop and writing group approach is the sharing of writing with others. English teachers, wanting to help their students develop greater audience awareness and become engaged in conversations with other writers, saw peer review as the tool to accomplish those goals (Loretto et al., 2016). Proponents of peer review contend that peer review, when done effectively, has a positive impact on student performance (Topping, 1998) and can be as equally beneficial as

teacher or expert feedback (Schunn, et al., 2016), if not more beneficial (Cho & MacArthur, 2010; Topping, 2009). Although numerous studies address the benefits of peer review (Gielen, et al., 2010; Schunn, et al., 2016; Topping, 2009; VanDeWeghe, 2004), many teachers and students find it frustrating, a waste of time, and useless (Gallagher, 2006). They raise concerns over the accuracy and validity of peer feedback and suggest that comments left by peers are often unreliable (Lui & Carless, 2006; Topping, 1998). Participants of peer review (the teachers, the reviewer, and the reviewee) who bring this mindset into this process further complicate the process. Researchers argue that feedback is less effective for those who have negative perception about the feedback process than those with positive perceptions (Cho et al., 2006).

One of my experiences with peer review occurred shortly after reading *Inside Out: Strategies for Teaching Writing* (2013). In their book, Kirby and Crovitz state:

Writing in isolation without lively response is like singing in the shower or dancing in a coal mine: They are solitary activities devoid of feedback, appreciation, and reaction.

They may be pleasurable diversions, but without some response from an audience, they do not get much better. (p. 167)

I was struck by these words, even journaling about how they applied to my class. I wrote about how I was the only reader and responder of my students' writing. With so many concepts to cover, I rarely used peer review anymore because it required hours I did not have to devote to a procedure I had seen little benefit from. My experiences with it were frustrating. My students did not know how to respond, so they either did not take the process seriously or left smiley faces or rude comments. None of their comments could be seen as helpful to the writer. It felt like a waste of valuable class time. After reflecting on the quote and the current state of my writing instruction, I did what I often do: research. I remembered articles I read in my graduate classes,

specifically those by Chanski and Ellis (2017), Cho and Cho (2011), and Ferris (2014). In their article “Which Helps Writers More, Receiving Peer Feedback or Giving It?” Chanski and Ellis (2017) found that students reading, assessing, and composing feedback for their peers helped them to “think critically, exposed them to new ideas, and helped them stay focused on higher-order concerns” (59). Cho and Cho (2011) had similar findings. I was reminded that peer review can provide student writers with insightful and helpful feedback. I found other studies and research on peer review and started to redesign the peer review process for my students. I began to think about how I could get students talking to each other about their writing. I wanted to help them see that because the process of writing is messy, it helps to have other writers to help you along the way. Peer review seemed like the perfect way. I selected a creative writing assignment my students had just finished. I created checklists of what to look for, sentence starters on how to phrase constructive criticism, and told students to pair up and take 35 minutes to give their peer feedback. As I made my way around the room eavesdropping and peeking at what students were writing, I became disappointed. I saw a lot of smiley faces, vague comments like “Good job,” and grammatical error corrections that Grammarly would have caught. I tried different checklists and stations over the different elements I wanted students to review. I even assigned a grade to the peer review. Nothing seemed to change the outcome, so I assumed that this was yet another pedagogical tool that worked in those perfect classrooms in professional development books but not in “real” classrooms like mine. I continued to try new ways of implementing peer review, but there was little change in the result. I took “Argumentation Theory” during my first year as a doctoral student, and this class changed my approach to peer review. In this class, we read research on peer review, and then reviewed a peer’s essay. Not only did I learn what research has concluded is the best method for peer review, I put this method into practice. Using the specific

steps that my professor recommended for the peer review process enabled me to become a student again. I was able to see how this method would work in my own classroom. I read more research, including Sperling and Freedman's article (1987), which provided even more insight into how to make peer review an effective part of writing instruction. I began by addressing my main concern with peer review—students did not seem to take it seriously. I was not sure if this was because they did not know how to do it, or if they considered feedback from their classmates not as helpful as feedback from me, their teacher. The only way I would know what students thought about peer review was to ask them.

One way to save English teachers time is to use peer review. However, any teacher who has attempted to incorporate the use of peer feedback into their course knows that there are many drawbacks to this approach. Many teachers' experiences with peer review are similar to mine—vague comments and editing corrections. Certainly not what teachers want their students to get out of peer review. Much of the research on peer review focuses on college students or English Language Learners (Loretto, et al., 2016). Research on how to design and incorporate feedback into a classroom of non-ELL high school students is sparse. The few studies that do exist are worthy of reading, but they still leave quite a few questions unanswered. What is needed is a thorough knowledge of the existing studies on peer review and what students think of peer review: what comments they read and implement, what comments they want, and how teachers can make the process of peer review more successful.

In this section, I share how the graduate courses I took and the reflective thinking and research they provoked transformed the way I conduct peer review. I begin by discussing peer review versus instructor review, giving feedback, the difference between peer editing and peer review, and instruction in peer review. There have been a small number of studies of peer review



in the high school English classroom, which I will consult in this chapter. I also conducted my own survey of 338 high school students in my district, which I will include as insight into the peer review process. The majority of the studies on students' view of peer response involve college students (Loretto et al., 2016) or English Language Learners. The research that does exist on high school students' view of peer review does differ some from college students' view of peer review (Brookhart & Chen, 2016; Loretto et al., 2016; Topping, 2009; Schunn et al., 2016; VanDeWeghe, 2004). Most high school students value anonymity, checklists or guidelines, and guidance in how to respond to their peers' writing.

### **Peer Review versus Instructor Review**

As a part of a study on peer review, I asked 338 ninth to twelfth grade English students in my district (a 6A high school in a suburb of Dallas-Fort Worth) a series of questions regarding peer review. This study took place during the fall of 2021. Students who participated in the survey were enrolled in On-Level English, Advanced English, AP English Literature, AP English Language, or Gifted and Talented English courses. I did not include students taking Dual Credit English IV. The survey consisted of 15 questions (twelve strongly agree/agree/neutral/disagree/strongly disagree questions, two short answer questions, one ranking question, and a section for additional comments). I created my questionnaire (see Table 1 below) in Google forms. Students were encouraged by their English teachers to complete the survey, but were not required to do so.

**Table 1:**  
**Student Responses to Peer Review Survey**

<b>Question</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>
I look forward to getting feedback on my writing from my peers.	7% 23 students	15% 51 students	24% 81 students	43% 147 students	11% 36 students
I would rather pick the classmate who will review my writing instead of having my teacher pick.	2% 8 students	10% 33 students	16% 53 students	26% 87 students	46% 157 students
I take peer review more seriously when there is a grade attached to the process.	27% 92 students	12% 40 students	16% 54 students	39% 131 students	6% 21 students
I believe that giving my classmates feedback helps ME become a better writer.	3% 10 students	11% 36 students	24% 80 students	46% 156 students	16% 55 students
I implement most of the changes that my classmates suggest.	2% 10 students	12% 40 students	27% 90 students	50% 169 students	9% 29 students
I find checklists provided by my teacher helpful when giving feedback to my classmates.	0% 0 students	4% 15 students	10% 35 students	46% 155 students	40% 133 students
Sometimes I do not feel as if I am a strong enough writer to give helpful feedback to others.	6% 21 students	29% 96 students	22% 73 students	30% 103 students	13% 45 students
It is more difficult for me to give criticism to a classmate who is a	28%	37%	12%	15%	8%

friend than someone I do not really know.	95 students	123 students	42 students	51 students	27 students
I find it more helpful to give feedback to my classmates when I can be anonymous.	5% 17 students	15% 51 students	22% 75 students	31% 105 students	27% 90 students
I take my time when giving my classmates feedback and try to be honest.	.89% 3 students	4% 15 students	12% 41 students	58% 185 students	28% 94 students
I do not trust feedback from classmates who are not strong writers.	2% 7 students	17% 57 students	25% 84 students	37% 125 students	19% 65 students
I read every word of the writing piece when I am giving my classmates feedback.	3% 10 students	15% 51 students	18% 60 students	44% 150 students	20% 67 students

Students in my study view peer review in general as beneficial. Students were asked if they look forward to getting feedback on their writing from their peers. Responses indicate that 54% of students strongly agree or agree that they did. Additionally, findings show that students take the process of peer review seriously. When asked if they take their time giving their classmates feedback and responding honestly, 76% of students said they did. Sixty-four percent of students agreed or strongly agreed that they read every word of their peer’s writing when giving them feedback. However, some students view peer review as a time to “catch up with a friend or classmate” or a task where students “skim through each other’s essays and provide meaningless commentary.”

But do students actually value and use the feedback that their peers provide? Over half of students in my study agreed with the statement “I implement most of the changes that my

classmates suggests.” However, when asked to respond to the question “I do not trust feedback from classmates who are not strong writers,” over half (56%) of students indicated that they strongly agreed or agreed with this statement. This mindset of students toward writers who they consider weak writers needs to be reoriented in order to align with the scholarship. Prior research clearly shows that academic ability does not ensure that students will know how to read like writers (Simmons, 2003; VanDeWeghe, 2004). Topping (2009) agrees, and states that “a peer assessor with less skill at assessment but more time in which to do it can produce an assessment of equal reliability and validity to that of a teacher” (p. 20). According to VanDeWeghe (2004), “when teachers expect bright or advanced students to have acquired higher-level response habits of mind *because* they are advanced, an unreasonable expectation based on a false assumption results” (p. 99). What seems to be important is the timeliness of feedback. Peer feedback is quicker. Because teachers sometimes have large classes of students, they are not able to provide immediate feedback to all students when they need it most—in the process of writing. A 2004 study found that “imperfect feedback from a fellow student provided almost immediately may have much more impact than more perfect feedback from a teacher weeks later” (Gibbs et al., 2004, p. 19). The students I surveyed, as well as the students polled in other studies, indicate that, even though teacher feedback is *perceived* as significantly more useful than peer comments, there are clear advantages to peer feedback (Gielen et al., 2010; Tsui & Ng, 2000).

In my survey, when asked if students would rather have just feedback from their teacher or feedback from multiple peers, more than 90% of students viewed teacher feedback as more accurate and valuable than that of their peers. Students stated:

Yes, I value my teacher's feedback more. I know my teacher will give accurate and helpful advice while some peers we are partnered with may not take reviewing my paper seriously or do not catch as many mistakes.

I do value teacher feedback more than classmate feedback because the teacher is the expert. They are the one grading and therefore they know what they want to see. While a classmate can provide general tips (ones that can likely be applied to any writing), the teacher can make it more specific to my essay.

I really only care about the grade, and the teacher is the one grading it. So, I care more about her opinion.

These findings are similar to other studies of peer review (Gielen et al., 2010; Schunn et al., 2016). Yet, other research shows that students often perceive peer feedback as "more understandable and more useful because fellow students' are 'on the same wavelength'" (Topping, 2009, p. 22). A student from my survey states:

I value feedback from my teacher because ultimately he or she is the one who is going to be grading it. However, sometimes I feel like peer feedback tends to be more helpful because they are working on a similar assignment as me and will probably have suggestions on how to make the writing better.

Another student, who understands the important role the audience plays in writing, said that "a teacher can give more constructive criticism in regards to writing and style. However, I believe a classmate can help if a group of my peers is in the intended audience." One student acknowledged that any feedback is helpful:

I do value feedback from my teacher because they simply have more experience in writing, but I also value feedback from my peers because they can give a different insight on the paper. So overall, I equally value feedback from both, because after all, feedback is feedback.

Other research suggests that teacher feedback is sometimes misunderstood or misinterpreted by students (Gielen et al., 2010; Gibbs et al., 2004). This “intellectual distance” between students and teachers increases even more in higher education (Gielen et al., 2010, p. 145).

### **Giving Peer Feedback**

Do students believe that giving feedback helps make them better writers? Over sixty percent of students I surveyed believe that it does. My finding is similar to other studies that found that students’ writing can be improved through reviewing (Chanski & Ellis, 2017; Graff, 2009; Philippakos, 2017). One study found that students seem to improve their writing more by giving comments than by receiving them (Cho & Cho, 2011). According to Schunn et al. (2016), another perceived benefit of giving feedback is “seeing the successful strategies and weaknesses in other students’ essays” (p. 20). There are other benefits that come from giving peer review. Philippakos (2017) explains that reviewing other’s writing develops a sense of audience:

Being a reader while thinking about potential problems in a text helps [students] understand the areas where their own writing may pose challenges to the reader. As a result, they are better able to anticipate potential confusions for the reader and to make changes to assist the process of comprehension. (p. 15)

A student from my survey said that “peer review is a chance to receive feedback from an outside source. I often find that when I am writing something, I find it hard to come back to the writing with fresh eyes and read it as a reader and not the writer.” Cho and Cho agree and state that

“reviewing is a constructive learning activity in which student reviewers internalize writing criteria and repair their ineffective writing strategies” (p. 630-631). Reviewing promotes the development of knowledge because students learn by questioning and explaining.

### **Peer Editing versus Peer Review**

Butler and Winne (1995) explain that feedback serves several functions: to confirm existing information, add new information, identify and correct errors, improve conditional application of information, and aid in the wider restructuring of theoretical schemata. However, students have different definitions of peer review and that affects what they comment on when reviewing their peers’ writing. When asked “what is your definition of peer review?” students responses varied significantly:

- A peer reads over an essay, looks for mistakes, and provides editing advice.
- The review of a piece of work by someone of a similar age.
- When a student looks over your paper and grades it.
- Looking over a classmate’s paper and checking for spelling and grammar mistakes.
- An equal reviewing your work.
- Judging your peers’ work and fixing their mistakes.
- A peer looks over your paper and gives tips on how to make the writing better.

Not really editing or word choice, because those are technical things that can be done later. Issues like smoothness and flow, or if your ideas are cohesive, or even whether or not you stuck to your topic. These things can get lost when looking over your own paper. This is why a set of fresh eyes can help.

In my survey, students were asked, “What type of errors do you address when giving feedback to your classmates?” The following six error types were given and students were asked to rank them: grammar/usage/punctuation/usage, MLA, clarity, sentence variety, evidence, and organization. The following are the results of this survey question:

<b>Rank of Importance</b>	<b>Type of Error</b>
1 <sup>st</sup>	Grammar, Usage, Punctuation, Usage, Etc.
2 <sup>nd</sup>	Clarity
3 <sup>rd</sup>	Organization
4 <sup>th</sup>	Evidence
5 <sup>th</sup>	Sentence Variety
6 <sup>th</sup>	MLA

The responses to this question are telling. There are several reasons why students are not better peer responders. One is that they view grammar errors as the most important element to address when giving their classmates feedback. One could be what teachers call this process. Franklin (2010) states that “shifts in terminology reveal slight changes of philosophy about what it means to share writing in a classroom” (p. 79). *Peer editing* instructs students to conduct an error hunt for sentence-level issues, such as grammar, punctuation, and usage errors. *Peer response*, *peer review*, or *peer conference* convey a deeper look at the writing. Students in Franklin’s study (2010) noticed the different terms that teachers use:

Peer editing, review, and correcting are basically just going over errors in a paper without actually discussing the paper. In peer conferencing, you read the paper and really analyze and discuss it in order to make it better. –Kathleen



When I think of peer conferencing, I think of more of a conversation between the two people discussing the piece. Editing or correcting is more like looking for wrong mechanical errors like spelling and grammar rather than issues with the meaning and purpose. –Jayme (p. 80)

In my survey, students also noted the different names for peer response. Over 200 students of the 338 surveyed defined peer review as some form of editing. One student said: “My definition of peer review is when a student goes through and edits another student's writing.” Another student viewed the process as “reading over a paper and giving edits.” Other students said that they review their classmates’ writing and “provide surface-level grammar advice.” VanDeWeghe (2004) reports that “students respond based on the working definition of *response* that they carry from their previous experiences. Those for whom *responding* has meant primarily editing will respond far more at the word and sentence levels” (p. 97). Because students have a limited understanding of what revision means, they may only mark editing errors. They may understand that revision should include larger changes, but they may not be able to evaluate their work and diagnose any problems (Hayes et al., 1987; MacArthur, 2011, 2012, 2016). In his three years of work with high school classes who had less experience responding to their peers’ work in actual writing workshops, Simmons (2003) found that 60% of the comments left by students on their classmates’ writings noted sentence and grammatical errors. Simmons states that “it is clear that these students learned to edit as a response to text” (p. 687). The other school, which had employed writing workshops from kindergarten to senior high school, contained more feedback on global issues and reader-based insights (p. 688). Only 12% of students at this school left comments related to word and sentence-level flaws (p. 688). It is clear that more experience sharing work with their classmates and more training in how to provide content-related feedback

help move students from commenting on editing issues to leaving comments made from a reader's point of view (Simmons, 2003; Straub, 1997). Simmons' (2003) findings concluded that "students who have the most workshop experience wrote the sort of comments writers need: insights about what readers are thinking, suggestions of steps that other writers might take, engagement with the ideas of the piece, and moderate help with mechanics as needed" (p. 692). Graff (2009) also found that students respond to each other's papers with some eye toward "fixing" them rather than as readers trying to understand them (p. 81). Giving simple correctional feedback (which only identifies or corrects an error) does little to challenge the reviewer and reviewee. Topping (1998) suggests that students should be trained to question, prompt, and scaffold rather than merely supply a notionally right answer. Another reason, according to VanDeWeghe (2004) is systemic. He states:

When districts lack a system-wide K-12 writing policy that includes direct instruction in a developmental model of response, the likely result is either a total lack of such instruction or, at best, unpredictable, spotty instruction from some teachers. (p. 99)

He also explains that, because not all teachers are familiar with how to encourage higher-level responses, students do not receive instruction in this area. Teaching editing skills to their students is something most teachers feel comfortable and qualified to teach. There is a lack of materials available to writing teachers on teaching response skills to students. VanDeWeghe (2004) also explains that higher-level response "does not easily fit into units but rather becomes an integrated part of curriculum throughout the grades—a constant" (p. 99). Based on prior research and what I found in my study, part of the reason my students only focused on editing when I wanted them to respond to deeper issues, such as content and organization, is because I called the process "peer editing," and I taught it that way. When I modeled the process, I pointed out surface-level

errors and even included a proofreading checklist. However, what I wanted and expected my students to do was to respond as a reader—sharing what worked well and offering suggestions on how to improve the writing piece. As I was researching and writing this chapter, I found that even the scholarship on peer review uses different terms for the process. Some studies refer to it as “peer response,” claiming that calling it “peer review” makes students feel like they are being required to judge their classmates’ writing. I titled one assignment I used as “Peer Edit: Deep Revision through Re-Viewing Writing.” It should not have been a surprise to me that my students were confused. By using “edit,” “revision,” and “review,” I was sending my students different, conflicting messages on how I wanted them to respond to their peers’ writing.

### **Instruction in Peer Review**

In order for peer review to be valid and reliable, students must have specific support from their teachers. One way to find out what students really think about peer review is to ask them. They will be honest about what they need from teachers. Based on my survey of 338 high school students, several key elements need to be implemented in order for peer response to be a feasible and productive use of students’ and teachers’ time.

According to students, in order for peer review to be effective, teachers must carefully pair students with other classmates. High school students would rather pick their own partners to review their writing instead of having their teachers pick. According to my survey, pairing up with a peer of their choice was the second most important factor for students (strongly agree: 46%; agree: 26%). Surprisingly, there is little research on how peers should be matched (Topping, 1998). However, Franklin (2010) does acknowledge the importance of “sharing writing with an ally,” but also suggests that “growth in writing comes from risk-taking, and one important risk is sharing writing with an audience that a writer may not know well. The

classroom writing community needs a delicate balance of comfort and risk” (Franklin 83). It is clear that there needs to be more research on this part of peer review in order to say for sure that allowing students to select who reviews their writing does in fact make the process of peer review more effective. However, students do need to understand that the audience for their writing will often be strangers. I agree with Franklin (2010) that there needs to be a balance between letting students pick their own peer review partners and assigning partners. There would no doubt be more buy-in from students if they had a choice in this part of the process.

Another question regarding peer review is whether it should be graded or not. Students do want accountability for the process, but it is unclear what that might look like to them. Some students believe that attaching a grade to the peer review process makes it more effective. A student I surveyed stated that “having a grade attached to the peer review process makes the actual reviewing much more in-depth and helpful, which is beneficial to me.” Forty-five percent of students I surveyed either strongly agreed or agreed said that they would take it more seriously if it were graded. Warren (2016), in his guidelines for effective peer review, states:

Peer reviews *must* be graded in some way if students are to take them seriously. You might assign a grade for peer reviews based on the amount of effort that goes into them, the depth of explanation of problems and the quality of suggestions. Another possibility is to have writers themselves rate the helpfulness of their peers’ feedback.

However, thirty-nine percent of students disagreed. Research (Anderson & Dean, 2014; Nelson & Schunn, 2009; Willis, 1993) does not seem to take into account this group of students’ perception of grading the peer review process. One student felt that “attaching peer review to a grade isn’t beneficial because it takes away from the mindset of helping to improve the writing and replaces that with the stress of worrying about a grade.”

In addition, many students want teachers to clarify expectations and requirements. Often students and teachers have different expectations when it comes to peer review. Teachers hope that students will serve as their stand-in responder and provide their classmates with usable feedback. However, studies report problems concerning the depth, accuracy, and credibility of peer response (Nelson & Murphy, 1993). It is only when students and teachers have a shared meaning of what peer review means and looks like can the process of peer response be beneficial. Topping explains that “expectations, objectives, and acceptability need to be clarified for all stakeholders and a collaborative and trusting ethos fostered” (Topping, 1998, p. 265). As teachers, it is our responsibility to define for students what we mean by response. It is imperative that teachers look closely at what they do to prepare students to become effective responders (Simmons, 2003; VanDeWeghe, 2004). Graff (2010) gives his students specific directions on how to respond as a reader. His goal is for students to actively try to make sense of what the writer is saying in the paper. Graff (2010) recommends giving students sentence starters to assist them. Students can keep these questions in mind while reading:

- I think the writer is saying...
- This means... I expect the next thing to be...
- What I need now is...
- I'm confused by...
- Where is .... (p. 82)

Providing students with guidelines for assessing and giving feedback makes peer review more effective. Requiring students to base their assessments on specific, understandable criteria enables students to offer detailed suggestions (Gan & Hattie, 2014). Eighty-six percent of the

students I interviewed strongly agree or agree that a list of what to review is helpful. This student states: “A checklist in the past of things I should look for and check off works really well for me. Normally, I don’t know what specifically to look for, but with a checklist it makes the whole process easier.” A guideline will also help students focus on giving feedback on more global, reader-centered, issues. One student addresses this in his comment:

Knowing what to specifically look for would be helpful. Without something like a guideline or rubric, I tend to focus more on little things, like grammar and punctuation, rather than the content, general structure, and purpose of the essay.

Students will gain more from peer review when they are guided to focus more on global issues in writing, such as ideas and evidence, and when the activity develops students' awareness of audiences other than the teacher (Freedman, 1992; Philippakos, 2017; Simmons, 2003). Simple yes/no questions lead to low-quality feedback and laxness (Nelson & Schunn, 2009). In the past, my peer review checklist consisted of all yes/no questions. For example:

1. Is the thesis clear?
2. Is the significance of the problem in the paper explained?
3. Are the ideas developed logically and thoroughly?
4. Does the author use the three appeals effectively?
5. Is the word choice specific, concrete, and interesting?
6. Are the sentences clear?
7. Is the overall organization of the argument effective?
8. Are the transitions between paragraphs smooth?
9. Are there any grammatical errors?

Student could simply answer “yes” or “no” to every question above, and the student writer would gain nothing from the peer review process. Responses like this (simple and vague) do not give writers a clear understanding of why their thesis is unclear or how the organization is problematic. A clear and detailed rubric for evaluation can assist in this practice as well as serve as a tool to hold students accountable for the quality of their peer feedback. Below is a portion of one detailed peer review that I have recently used in my classes with success:

1. Explain the strengths you find in the piece. What do you particularly like? Be specific. Include the parts of the writing piece that you are referring to.
2. Tell what specific parts are unclear or why the message is not clear or effectively articulated throughout the piece.
3. Suggest changes in word choice, sentence structure, or organization, and explain your rationale for the change.
4. Suggest specific ways that the message could be adjusted to provide greater depth.
5. Explain whether you believe the best genre was chosen for the particular message of the piece and why.

However, even if students have a guideline or checklist to guide them, they will need their teacher’s help in framing constructive comments. Loretto et al. (2016) state: “Although students seemed to feel confident in their own abilities as reviewers, some students expressed reservations about providing critical feedback in a constructive manner” (p. 153). However, developing feedback protocols and criteria will result in more valid and reliable student responses to their peers’ writing (Cho et al., 2006; Panadero et al., 2013; Schunn et al., 2016). Involving students in developing peer review criteria is another way to increase reliability (Karegianes et al., 1980; Topping, 2009). It can also increase the sense of ownership and decrease anxiety.

As mentioned earlier, students expressed a desire to choose their peer review partners, but somewhat paradoxically, students also find it helpful to give feedback to their peers when they can be anonymous. In my survey, responses indicate that 58% of students strongly agree or agree that remaining anonymous is beneficial. Many other students of this survey share this student's view:

Anonymity makes the peer review process better for me. I personally am not comfortable pointing out errors (face-to-face) in other people's writing (or at all, really) if I know who they are. Like with technology, it is easier to say things and provide critique when you can be anonymous.

Loretto et al.'s study produced an even larger number of students who felt that anonymous peer review was beneficial (42% strongly agreed and 45% agreed). High school students worry about how their peers will see and treat them if they give critical feedback. This can cause students to give empty praise comments of "good job" instead of helpful comments on how their peers can improve their writing. Research on peer review at the secondary level (Christianakis, 2010; Freedman, 1992) shows that "social face-saving can derail quality feedback" (Loretto et al., p. 147). Although students consider being anonymous important in the peer review process, the majority of English teachers in my department said that their students have a tendency to not take the process seriously if they are anonymous. They even reported that many students would leave rude and offensive comments if they were allowed to hide behind the veil of anonymity. Loretto et al. (2016) found that teachers "underestimate the extent to which students value anonymity for emotional and social reasons" (p. 149). Sixty-five percent of students in my survey found it less difficult to give criticism to a friend than to someone they did not know. This is not surprising given the nature of high school. Students fear the social ramifications of giving feedback that



could be seen as negative to their peers. Using anonymous peer review would alleviate the social pressure of being honest. One disadvantage to anonymous peer review is that peer review would not involve a conversation between the reviewer and reviewee. Over a dozen students noted in my survey that anonymous feedback would not allow students to ask follow-up questions to the reviewer if they wanted to. Students in my survey said that they wanted time to ask their peer responder questions. One student said that “being able to have a conversation with the person who reviewed my writing would help me understand the feedback.” This aligns with prior research on peer review (Anderson & Dean, 2014; Willis, 1993). Students would prefer a conversation with their peers about their writing instead of just comments left on their writing without any follow-up discussion with the reviewer. In the end, it might be that different methods of partnering have different benefits and drawbacks, and no method of partnering will work best for every student in every situation.

### **Effective Peer Review**

According to Kirby and Crovitz in their book *Inside Out: Strategies for Teaching Writing* (2013), writers benefit from responses “from living human beings in close proximity to them” (p. 182). Donald Graves (1994) agrees, and notes that “real writers are eager for collaborating” and “need to hear the response of others to their writing, to discover what they do or do not understand” (p. 108). One of the ways to do this is to teach students how to provide effective feedback. Students can become more reliable, knowledgeable responders to their peers’ writing if teachers implement best practices for effective peer review. Young writers often do not employ the strategies expert writers do when examining their writing for gaps in intended meaning and actual meaning (Philippakos, 2017). They fail to see or treat review and revision as an opportunity to discover better ways to express their intended meanings (Hayes, 1996, 2004,

2006; MacArthur, 2016; MacArthur & Graham, 2016, Philippakos, 2017). So, how do we teach students *how* to implement these tools? I have found that creating effective peer review partners or groups requires a commitment to writing and sharing writing daily. Peer review needs to occur more than just a few times a year in order for students to provide quality responses (Philippakos, 2017; Simmons, 2003). Simmons (2003) discovered in his research of four high school writing classes that “students need several years of experience to develop the ability to respond helpfully to peer writing” (684). He recommends certain techniques to teach response (see Table 2). One way students can become immersed in the practice of reading one another’s work is used frequently in writing workshops. Franklin (2010) suggests several components, which are fundamental aspects of the writing workshop method:

1. Writing for a variety of audiences
2. Responding to writing in a variety of ways—from sharing without response to evaluative feedback from an authority
3. Allowing students time to talk. (p. 80)

Students also need direct instruction in response methods. Teachers must devote time to training students on these reviewing procedures. This instruction is important because it helps students understand the difference between responding and editing. Without specific guidance, students will correct editing issues of surface-level mistakes instead of revision issues. Studies (Boscolo & Ascorti, 2004; DiPardo & Freedman, 1988; Pritchard & Honeycutt, 2006; Schunn et al., 2016) show that when students understand higher-level evaluation criteria, they leave responses that are more meaningful. I have found that through instruction, students can learn how to give critical feedback. But this takes time. Students need multiple opportunities to practice responding to their classmates’ writing. Topping cites a study by Van Lehn et al. (1995)

that found that the peer review process involves “the assessor in reviewing, summarizing, clarifying, giving feedback, diagnosing misconceived knowledge, identifying missing knowledge, and considering deviations from the ideal” (p. 256). These are all cognitively demanding activities requiring that teachers spend more time teaching the skill of peer response. VanDeWeghe (2004) agrees and states that students need more than a couple of months to really develop “the skills and dispositions necessary to be able to interact wisely with other writers” (p. 96).

One method of teaching the art of peer response to students is think-alouds. Not only useful for improving reading, think-alouds, because of its emphasis on metacognition, can be effective for peer review. Showing students what we want them to do during peer review is essential. Graff (2009) suggests using think-alouds to develop students’ critical thinking skills, which will improve their responses to their peers’ writing. First, Graff recommends that students read and respond to the same type of writing their peer review will be over. However, the teacher needs to model this process before students are required to do it themselves. To do this, the teacher takes a similar text and talks out loud as she reviews it. Just as writing teachers should “write beside” (Kittle, 2008) their students in order to show what writing looks like even for mature writers, teachers should be transparent with their review process. When I did this in my classes, students told me that it was beneficial because it showed them a behind-the-scenes look at how a teacher thinks when she reviews and grades writing. After this step, the class follows this process together, coming up with a list of shared questions, thoughts, and attributes of a strong model of this type of writing. Topping (1998) states:

Providing students access to concrete examples of assessed work can also help them articulate the attributes of good and poor performance and promote the development of a vocabulary for thinking about and discussing quality. (p. 255)

Next, students complete a think-aloud on their own. Reading and explicitly processing the kinds of writing they will be doing themselves helps students better understand the genre. The reading and thinking aloud of similar texts allows students “to transfer the meaning-making process of reading to their peers' papers” (Graff, 2009, p. 83). Graff (2009) also argues that by utilizing this method with published text before they do so with each other's texts, students “build the habit of thinking aloud to understand rather than to fix; and, because students return during peer review to explicit reading strategies, they become more strategic readers” and better responders (p. 81). Also, using think-alouds before the peer review process aids students in how to treat each other's writing as a published text by writers who have something of merit to say. Responding as a reader and giving authentic, “readerly” feedback reinforces the roles of readers and writers. If we want our students to transfer writing knowledge to other situations and purposes, then “we must help them feel like authors composing for audiences who will read their work to understand it rather than merely to critique” (Graff, 2009, p. 86). Finally, think-alouds give students practice in how to respond to others' writing, which is often why their responses to their peers' writing are vague. For more effective peer review, the teacher must allow her students to actually experience quality ways of responding. Simply telling them does not work. According to Graff (2009), students “need practice responding to published text as they would to each other's drafts” (p. 81). Cho and MacArthur (2010) report that students are not always regarded as responders who have valuable feedback to provide. However, students can be trained so that their feedback becomes as effective as teacher feedback (Agricola, et al., 2020; Gielen, et al., 2010; Sadler, 1998).

## Concluding Thoughts

In this chapter, I have discussed peer review versus instructor review, giving peer review, peer editing versus peer review, and instruction in peer review. I have suggested that in order to help students feel like real writers, who have conversations with others about their writing, teachers need to model effective peer conferencing methods. As Graff (2009) states, writing teachers need to “bring together discussions about peer review, authentic writing, and the integration of reading and writing to return peer response to a place in students’ overall literacy practices and to help students treat each other’s writing as they do published writing” (p. 86). Given careful attention, peer response can provide students with feedback that helps them identify their strengths and weaknesses and target areas that need improvement and fosters the important skill of metacognition.

**Table 2**

### Techniques to Teach Response

<b>Technique</b>	<b>What the Teacher Does</b>	<b>What Students Do</b>
Sharing your writing	Shares a piece of writing and asks for response	Offers comments on the teacher’s writing
Clarifying evaluation versus response	Shows evaluation is of product Response is to writer	Understand that response is personable and helpful
Modeling specific praise	Shows how to tell what you like as a reader	Understand that cheerleading is too general to be helpful
Modeling understanding	Shows how to tell what you understand the piece to be about	Understand that reflecting back the piece to the writer is helpful
Modeling questions	Shows how to ask questions about what you didn’t understand	Understand that questions related to the writer’s purpose are helpful

Modeling suggestions	Shows how to suggest writing techniques	Understand that a responder leaves the writer knowing what to do next
Whole-class response	Moderates response by class to one classmate's piece	Offer response Hear the response of others Hear what the writer finds helpful
Partner response	Pairs up students in class to respond to pieces	Practice response learned in whole-class session
Comment review	Reads the comments of peers to writers	Get teacher feedback on comments
Response conference	Speaks individually with students responding inappropriately	Have techniques reinforced

Table 3 from Simmons, J. (May 2003). "Responders Are Taught, Not Born." *Journal of Adolescent and Adult and Adult Literacy*, 46 (8), 690.

## **Chapter 2:**

### **Teacher Review**

The review of students' writing is without a doubt one of the most important—and time consuming—jobs English teachers have. In my experience, this process requires approximately five to ten minutes per assignment, depending on the type of assignment given and commenting method used. Obviously, teachers want this time spent to result in stronger writing for their students, but how do English teachers know if their students understand or value their feedback? Based on my experiences, it seems as if students only want to know where they lost points on an assignment (if the feedback came at the end of the writing process) or what elements I wanted them to correct before the writing was turned in for a grade (if feedback was given during the writing process). In situations like these, I feel that students were merely being “good girl[s],” which only shows that they are “skillful follower[s] of directions” (Sperling and Freedman, 1987, p. 354). This led me to question not only my feedback methods, but also how I used teacher review in my class.

As someone who has always loved language, I wanted my students to feel the power of words—to hear their musical quality, to experience their power. I have always loved teaching writing. I love the challenge of helping students take risks and find their own unique writing voice. One part of a writing teacher's job I enjoy is giving my students feedback on what they compose. Although the practice of commenting takes hours, I find the conversation aspect of talking about writing with my students rewarding. Like most teachers, I want to improve my students' writing. I thought that one of the ways to do this was to leave as much feedback as possible on each writing assignment. I would spend weekends correcting students' grammatical errors and putting stickers on their essays. After I got married and began to enjoy more of life's

other offerings, such as more time with friends and family, I searched for ways to limit the time I spent commenting on student writing. I went to my department chair, a seasoned teacher, for advice. She shared her grading symbol system with me, and I replaced my narrative commenting method with her simple system. Using these editing marks, which I learned years later are used by copy editors, I was able to reduce the time it took me to comment to an hour per class. It was not until a parent-teacher meeting about an essay grade did I realize that now I was just an editor of my students' writing and not a responder. In the meeting, I struggled to explain to the student and parent why the grade on the essay was really about the deeper issues of the paper—the argument, commentary, and organization—and not at all about what I had marked. The student wondered how she could fail this writing assignment when I had only noted three missing commas, used the indent paragraph symbol once, and indicted a missing period by using the circle around a period symbol. “Did I lose thirty-five points for what you marked because I do not see any other issues with my essay?” my student asked. “You did not really answer the prompt and what few reasons you do have are not supported enough,” I responded. The parent then asked me why I did not note those issues if I was going to deduct points for them. I had no answer, and I left that meeting feeling defeated. I loved my job. I loved my students. And I wanted them to love writing. But it seemed like what I was doing was making them hate writing.

Much of my “philosophy” of writing originated from my sixth grade English teacher. Mrs. Ballew was known for covering essays in red ink. The day essays were returned would make me sick to my stomach. However, I knew that Mrs. Ballew loved us. Why else would she spend so much time correcting our papers? It became a challenge for me to get a good grade on essays in her class. Once I became a teacher, her hard-nosed approach to writing instruction became part of my style. The tough teachers are the ones you learn the most from. At least that is what I,



many of my friends, and our parents believed. During my first year of college, I had a teacher similar to Mrs. Ballew. She taught a freshman writing class, and it was in her class that I received my first failing grade on a writing assignment. In her office, she took my essay, crumpled it up, threw it in the trash, and told me that she was shocked that I was an English major. Apparently to her, just one error (using “they” with the pronoun “Everyone”) was worthy of an “F.” Once I had my own classroom, I felt like it was my job to save my students from this type of humiliation, so I marked every error I found.

Over the next fifteen years, I tried to find a commenting practice that would help my students become better writers. After that parent-teacher conference, I started to focus more on content issues instead of just surface-level errors. I built a list of the comments I often left on students’ writing. The list included: “Make sure you are showing and not telling,” “How does this support your thesis?” “Your hook should make the reader want to continue reading your essay.” I did not have any more parent-teacher conferences because of my commenting practices, but students still did not seem to be interested in reading my comments when I passed back their papers. They quickly glanced at the grade and tossed the essay in the trash on the way out of the classroom. That year I read books that discussed responding to student writing, but they only confused me more because the authors had conflicting ideas.

Years later, I started the doctoral program with a class titled “Topics in Composition.” It was in this class that I, a veteran high school English teacher, first read the scholarship on commenting. My past commenting practices contradicted everything I learned from this research. I was only leaving comments on my students’ writing when I graded it. I was mainly focused on correcting and grading their writing instead of responding as a reader. What I thought was a conversation about writing was not even close. What shocked me the most was that the

time I spent leaving comments was a waste of time since students were not reading what I wrote, and I did not give them a chance to revise their writing before turning in a final draft. In essence, I was ignoring one of the most important stages of writing: revising. I was also treating writing like a one-and-done process.

My aim in this chapter is to explain what I learned about commenting from composition studies courses and research and how I applied this knowledge to my current commenting practices. I seek to answer the following questions: How can knowing the background and history of commenting practices help high school English teachers? What are the purposes of feedback? What are students' thoughts regarding teacher feedback? What are the most effective practices for the commenting on student writing?

### **Background and Research on Feedback**

Considering how important feedback is in writing instruction and how much time is spent on it, there is a surprising lack of research that discusses all the aspects and methods of feedback. According to *A Short History of Writing Instruction* (2001), a teacher's original role was to edit, correct, and grade students' writing. Connors and Lunsford (1993) report similar findings, stating that the idea that the teacher's most important job was to "rate rather than to respond rhetorically to themes seems to have been well-nigh universal from the 1880s onward, perhaps as a result of the much-cried-up 'illiteracy crisis' of the 1880s and 1890s" (p. 201). In fact, colleges and universities created "correction cards," a rigid system of editing and symbols that allowed teachers to numerically assess their students' adherence to conventional rules and rhetorical effectiveness. However, there were issues with this method. Ones that I discovered when I used a similar system in my own classes over a hundred years later. Students who received this

hieroglyphics-type of feedback felt confused. Most importantly, they felt like what they wrote was not being taken seriously.

By the mid-1920s, teachers began to realize the ineffectiveness of this approach and wanted a way to help students' writing improve instead of merely grading it. Writing teachers discussed various ways of accomplishing this goal. Some researchers recommended including some praise, not being too harsh, and not marking every error. Despite this honest effort to find a solution to the "feedback problem," teachers' main role in giving feedback on their students' writing was thought to be "critical/judgmental rather than editorial/interventionist" (Connors & Lunsford, 1993, p. 204). James Bowman (1920) in his article "The Making of English Themes," which focuses on teacher feedback, devotes just a few sentences to rhetorical-based feedback. Bowman (1920) argues that "the comments are of far greater importance than the mark which is given. These should be stern and yet kindly. While they should overlook no error, they should, in addition, be constructive and optimistic (qtd. in "Teachers' Rhetorical Comments on Student Papers" 1993, p. 203).

By the mid-1950s, teachers were expected to be the "real" audience for their students' essays and to write long, personal comments both at the end of papers and in the margins (Connors & Lunsford, 1990). Despite this move, the majority of teachers' feedback seemed to be more of an error hunt instead of commenting on the quality, development, organization, and other aspects of the rhetorical situation, including style and appropriateness of tone. Based on Keh's (1990) definition of feedback, many teachers, who only mark grammar, spelling, and usage errors and leave feedback at the end of the writing process along with the grade, are not using feedback as intended. For years, I was one of these teachers. I marked every error because I feared that parents in my district would complain if I did not. It was quantity over quality. I became

frustrated when I saw that my students were making the same errors on future writing assignments. I thought: “I am an English teacher, and I am expected to mark all of my students’ errors.”

I wanted to know other teachers’ thoughts regarding commenting on student texts. The research studies I examined during my doctoral journey were helpful. However, these students were in different states in schools with different socioeconomic diversity than my school. Therefore, I asked twenty-two teachers in my district what they focused on when giving feedback on their students’ writing. Many admitted that they often mark surface-level errors because it makes grading faster and easier. One teacher noted:

I know that I should leave more detailed comments regarding analysis, but it is hard for me to explain exactly why a body paragraph is weak. I know that it is, but I cannot seem to find the words to describe what the student could do to improve in that area. Plus, I feel like I have already discussed and taught that, and it makes me irritated that the student has not used the notes I have provided.

Another teacher agreed, stating:

If I only leave comments that say “lack of commentary” or “lacks depth,” it will look like I did not really read or assess the writing. So, I feel like I have to mark errors in grammar so students, parents, and administration know that I was thorough. With 173 students this year, I do not have the time to provide the type of feedback needed for deeper issues of writing, like weak analysis or organization.

The results of my informal survey are similar to the finding of other writing researchers (Connors & Lunsford, 1993; Harris, 1972; Kline, 1973; Rafoth & Rubin, 1984; Searle & Dillon, 1980) who have studied the aspects of writing most frequently commented on by teachers. They

too found that teachers respond mainly to mechanics, grammar, usage and word choice in their students' writing.

It is not surprising that the goal of much of the feedback left on students' writing is to point out errors. The history of composition studies clearly shows that the teacher as "fixer" was, and still is, an important role of writing teachers. Numerous researchers (Cho et. al, 2006; Dragga, 1992; Fife & O'Neill, 2001; Smith, 1997) have also concluded that writing teachers tend to take on a variety of roles, acting as the judge, coach, and sometimes as a typical reader. Due to time constraints, the role most often taken by teachers is that of judge. In my informal survey, a teacher told me that she does not have enough time to leave facilitative comments. She stated:

I just want to tell the students what to fix so we can both move on. I feel like asking questions to the students about their writing is a waste of my time. I want them to focus on correcting the errors that I see.

Keh (1990) recommends that writing teachers must remember to communicate "in a distinctly human voice, with sincere respect for the writer as a person and a sincere interest in his improvement as a writer" (p. 976).

Research in the 1980s gives further insight into the topic of teachers' review of their students' writing. Nancy Sommer's article "Responding to Student Writing" (1982) cites the importance of giving specific comments at the appropriate stage of writing. Brannon and Knoblauch (1982) warn against evaluating students' texts against an ideal text rather than allowing students "the right to their own texts." Later, research extended the conversation regarding teacher feedback on student texts. Straub (1996, 1997) recommends that teachers should respond in a constructive, yet friendly manner and be cautious of how they exert control over their students' writing.

Connors and Lunsford (1993) studied how teachers judge the rhetorical effectiveness of student

writing. They found that many teachers are grade-driven and ignore the rhetorical context. While Connors and Lunsford have a valid point, which should prompt a much-needed conversation about the focus of grades, they fail to mention that the education system, especially in high-performing districts like mine, pressures English teachers into focusing on grades. Comments are often left to justify a grade. Because teachers are expected to have high scores on state tests, which emphasize surface-level skills outside the context of writing, teachers are forced to spend their time on these issues. Scores on state tests matter more than guiding students through the slow and messy process of writing. In addition, the importance of something complex, like the elements of the rhetorical triangle, is not shared by test creators and graders. So, why waste valuable class time teaching it?

Shockingly, the history of commenting practices has done little to change what really happens behind the closed doors of high school English teachers' classrooms. Many educators do not know this research exists, and if they do, they are too busy to find it or are confused with the ever-changing view of what is considered best practice for leaving feedback on their students' writing. Just like every other educational practice, a new and improved version is touted as the best, causing teachers to become frustrated and keep doing what they have always done. With families and lives outside of school, teachers are looking for ways to decrease their workload. Spending countless hours researching, experimenting, and reflecting on the scholarship on commenting only to have to repeat the process when that is not successful is a frustrating and daunting task for high school English teachers. However, I would argue that the time spent reviewing the research on this topic will provide noticeable results in students' writing. Consulting the research on teacher feedback practices will affirm or contradict teachers' current commenting practices. Teaching is an art, and certainly, teaching writing is one. I can attest from

my own experiences that knowing the background and history of teacher feedback has drastically changed my own practices and experience with feedback. I realized that some of my practices were over one hundred years old and had been proven ineffective. Now, I spend time responding to my students' writing as a reader. I give suggestions and ask questions. It is a true conversation between a writer and a reader. Something that I did not do in the past. I do not mark every error. I do mini-lessons for those areas that seem to be class-wide or small group or individual instruction for those students who might need specific help. I ask students what they need help with instead of just marking what I feel does not work in the piece. Now, students know that I see them as writers. The class has become a community of writers instead of an English teacher wielding her red pen.

### **Purposes of Feedback**

One important aspect of feedback to consider is its purpose. There are many purposes for leaving feedback on student writing. Frost (2016) states that although feedback can accomplish multiple purposes, there are only two primary categories: formative and summative (p. 942). Formative feedback is to extend students' learning by identifying the problem and suggesting ways for improvement. Hattie and Timperley (2007) describe formative feedback in the form of questions: Where am I going?, How am I going?, and Where to next? (p. 86). The goal of formative feedback is not to grade the writing, but to "help students develop their learning strategies or knowledge to a higher degree than before the particular assessment event" (Frost, 2016, p. 942). According to Frost (2016), in order for formative feedback to be effective, three conditions must be present: The student must (1) understand the goal of the writing task; (2) compare her level of performance against that goal; and (3) take steps in order to close the gap between her performance and the goal. The teacher's goal is to help the student close this gap by

providing suggestions. Reflecting on my past commenting practices, it is clear that most of my students did not have the opportunity to “close the gap between the performance and the goal,” because I did not allow them to revise the writing after I left feedback.

On the other hand, summative feedback assesses the writing as a final draft or product. The problem is that many teachers, including me prior to my doctoral classes, only give this type of feedback. Frost (2016) suggests that a teacher who views a writing task as merely a test of a student’s existing skills may view summative feedback as appropriate and adequate. However, teachers who view writing assignments as opportunities for continued growth as writers should provide formative feedback (p. 943). It is my belief that the majority of writing teachers *do* want to help students become better writers, but time restraints force them to provide what is easier, which happens to be summative feedback. However, it is important for writing teachers to remember that only leaving feedback on the final copy is frustrating for students. A sophomore in my class noted:

If my teacher gives me feedback before I turn in my paper, I am able to actually change my writing and improve it. If I get the feedback after it is graded, I will not have the chance to actually apply the feedback to that paper. So, I am just going to look it over the comments my teacher leaves and put the paper away.

The majority of my past commenting practices were summative. I gave my students feedback on the final draft of the writing. When I began transforming my class into a workshop environment, I saw the benefit of helping writers instead of correcting them. Building confidence in my young writers became one of my most important jobs. I realized that if my students gave up on the writing assignment, they were never going to become better writers. Atwell (2017) stresses the importance of pointing out opportunities for growth instead of acting as the judge of



what is worth redeeming. Recently, one of my students told me that the best part of my class was that I treated them like real writers. In the past when I was marking every error and only giving feedback on their final drafts, students never said this to me. In an email, this student wrote:

I just wanted to thank you for leaving comments on my writing before it is due. I have never had a teacher who reads what I write before I turn it in. I feel like I am a much better writer now. I get excited to know what you think about what I have written. I have always felt like you respected my ideas. Your feedback gives me confidence in my writing.

When I eliminated judgment statements, like “why does this matter?” and “unclear,” I found that students were much more motivated to read my comments and see them as helpful. I also understood what role students wanted me to play. What did my students want me to focus on when leaving feedback? Did they want me to comment on surface-level errors at all? Because writing felt like a conversation between the reader (me) and the writer (my students), I could just ask them.

The existing research seems to suggest that students have different views on comments regarding grammar, spelling, punctuation, and usage (Burkland & Grimm, 1986; Corbin, 2019; Dinnen & Collopy, 2009; Harris, 1979; Hayes & Daiker, 1984; Lynch & Kleman, 1978). Feedback which addresses lower order concerns (LOCs), sometimes called “surface-level” or “local,” focuses on mechanics, grammar, usage, etc. errors in students’ writing. This is the type of comments I left on my students’ writing a few years ago. Global feedback, referred to as “large-scale” or “HOC (higher order concerns),” addresses issues of rhetoric, structure, meaning, argument, etc. According to research, LOCs are the most common errors teachers note on their students’ writing, and the feedback that students are more likely to implement (Dinnen &

Collopy, 2009; Kehl, 1990; Zellermyer, 1989). However, it is global feedback that has a greater possible effect on the overall quality if implemented (Nelson & Schunn, 2008). It is important to note that teachers' obsessive marking of LOCs often conveys to students that the "bigger" issues of their writing are strong, causing them to overlook larger conceptual, rhetorical, and structural revisions that would most improve their writing. This is exactly what caused my past student and her parent confusion. Sommers states:

This appropriation of the text by the teacher happens particularly when teachers identify errors in usage, diction, and style in a first draft and ask students to correct these errors when they revise; such comments give the student an impression of the importance of these errors that is all out of proportion to how they should view these errors at this point in the process. The comments create the concern that these "accidents of discourse" need to be attended to before the meaning of the text is attended to. (p. 150)

Sommers also notes that students receive contradictory messages about what to correct when feedback on LOCs are left. Teachers will command students to "be concise" and then to "extend commentary." No "scale of concern" is given to students, causing them to become confused on which error to address first (Sommers, 1982, p. 151). Students are instructed to "edit and develop at the same time," which reinforces the false notion that writing is "a series of parts—words, sentences, paragraphs—not a whole discourse" (Sommers, 1982, p. 151).

In addition, when teachers mark numerous or all of LOCs in students' writing, they are further conveying that the revision process is merely a rewording and fixing of surface-level errors. Students become even more confused on the difference between process and product and what corrections should be made when. Teachers who leave mostly LOCs are "formulating their comments as if these drafts are finished drafts and are not going to be revised. Their commenting

vocabularies justify a grade or as if the first draft was the final draft” (Sommers, 1982, p. 154). In the drafting stage, the teachers included in Sommers’ (1982) study, found that their comments need to “force students back into the chaos, back to the point where they are shaping and restructuring their meaning” (qtd. in “Responding to Student Writing,” Sommers, p. 156). In his book *Teaching Adolescent Writers*, Kelly Gallagher explains a mistake I and other teachers have made. He states:

Traditionally, teachers collect their students’ papers at the end of the writing process and it is only at that point that students receive feedback. But the midpoint is where the real growth potential lies; feedback at that stage almost always drives writing improvement better than feedback after the paper is completed. (p. 145)

McDonald Jr. (1975) makes an important point for teachers to consider when marking numerous surface-level issues. He explains:

If the content is inadequate, if the order of the parts must be rearranged significantly in the next draft, if paragraphs must be redeveloped for logic and clarity, then many sentences are likely to change or be deleted, which might eliminate the need for the correction. To identify this type of error at this stage will lead students to believe that deeper revision isn’t needed. That it’s just a grammar, spelling, mechanics issue, which means an easy fix for students. (p. 168)

Students also need to see comments as specific to their text, not formulaic. Fife and O’Neill (2001) argue that comments should not be vague or “rubber stamped” without specific reference to the individual paper. Sommers (1982) notes that comments like ““Think more about your audience,’ ‘Avoid colloquial language,’ and ‘Be clear and specific’” could be left on another student’s text, creating a guessing game of exactly where all of these errors are and how to fix

them (p. 153). Leaving feedback that directs students to correct something unclear in their writing sends them on a search without any strategies in hand to locate and correct the problems that a reader might have with their text. These errors are commonly only known by teachers and suggest to students that writing is just a matter of following these rules. According to Sommers (1982), “teachers seem to impose a series of abstract rules about written products even when some of them are not appropriate for the specific texts the student is creating” (p. 153). Through my own development as commenter, I realized that my prior commenting practices did not align with research. One checklist I used required students to match my numbered comments with the description of the error. This time-consuming process really killed the love of writing for my students. They certainly did not want to spend an hour deciphering my comments, especially when they did not see the relevance of what I had marked to their specific writing.

Additional studies support the finding that students do value detailed and meticulous feedback on HOCs (Connors & Lunsford, 1993; Corbin, 2019; Fife & O’Neill, 2001; Zellermayer, 1989). Lynch and Klemans (1973) asked students what type of comments they found the most and least helpful. Students said that “the most useful comments are those which explained why things were wrong and those which provide encouragement” (p. 146). Research (Connors & Lunsford, 1993; Corbin, 2019; Fife & O’Neill, 2001; Zellermayer, 1989) is unmistakably clear: Students consider feedback meaningful and beneficial if it is not too general or brief. One of the high school students I surveyed requested that teachers “quote the direct issues/where the improvement could be made instead of leaving broad statements.” Simply writing comments such as “awk” and “confusing” and assigning the writing a failing grade does not communicate to students what in their writing causes confusion. Students deserve to be told what their weaknesses in writing are and how they can improve them. Vague and ambiguous comments can

also result in student frustration, dissatisfaction, and a feeling of uncertainty (Agricola et al., 2020; Higgins et al., 2003; Hyatt, 2005). It is important that we not fill our students' writing with so many comments that they do not know what to correct first. This will undoubtedly cause students to give up due to frustration. Keh (1990) points out that writing teachers need to remember that students cannot pay attention to and correct everything at once. Thus, comments should be limited to fundamental comments (p. 301). D.B. Willingham concluded that writing teachers should use "a conversational tone that provides specific rather than abstract comments listed in a hierarchy reflecting relative importance" (p. 13).

### **Students' Thoughts Regarding Teacher Feedback**

Peggy O'Neill and Jane Fife (1999) state that writing teachers need "to listen to the primary audience of their comments, their students" (p. 39). The authors argue that a problem with much of the research on feedback is that it does not consider the response situation as extending outside of the teacher's comments (p. 40). I agree with O'Neill and Fife that writing teachers need to give more attention to the classroom context, because there is value in the study of students' interpretations of teachers' comments. How students interpret feedback and deal with it is important for future writing assignments (Poulos & Mahony, 2008).

What *do* students think about the feedback that teachers leave on their writing? I wanted to know what the high school students in my school thought about teacher feedback. I surveyed students from different grades (9-12) and from different levels of English classes (On-Level, Advanced, and AP). I selected classes taught by teachers of varying expertise in the teaching of composition and overall teaching experience. Students in my survey are in high school English classes taught by a range of teachers, including first-year teachers and teachers with over twenty years. In my survey of 193 high school students, 74% of them stated that they do want their

writing teachers to identify all the grammar, punctuation, spelling, and usage errors in their writing. This is similar to Diab's (2006) finding that students want to see as many errors marked as possible. Students most likely feel this way because their past English teachers deducted the most points off for these types of errors. However, other studies showed that students did not view comments that only provided feedback on conventions helpful (Dinnen & Collopy, 2009; Higgins et al, 2002). Research indicates that students want feedback that offers ways to improve their writing rather than feedback that focuses on correctness (Burnett, 2003; Dinnen & Collopy, 2009; Higgins, Hartley et al., 2002; Straub, 1997). I asked students if they wanted more feedback on content-level issues or surface-level ones. Sixty percent of these students said they wanted more feedback on content-level issues, such as focus, organization, development of ideas, etc. Over half (55%) of students also stated that they assume if the teacher only marks LOCs on their writing that these are the only issues they need to change. The results of my study and those of scholars and compositionists seem to offer a conflicting view of LOCs and HOCs. Based on these findings, I believe that students seem confused on what matters to their teachers more: LOCs or HOCs. Because their English teachers have deducted the most points for surface-level issues, students believe that LOCs are the most important. I suspect that as writers, students want teachers to focus on HOCs, but as students who are yet to be graded, they want teachers to focus on LOCs. What appears to be a contradiction in students' desires in fact reflects teachers' conflation of different types of feedback and assessment.

According to research on students' reactions to teacher comments (Auten, 1991; Fuller, 1987; Jenkins, 1987; Hattie and Timperley, 2007; Hayes and Daiker, 1984; O'Neill and Fife, 1999; E. Smith, 1989; Sperling and Freedman, 1987; Straub, 1997), students want, read, and make use of the feedback their teachers leave on their writing. They also consider certain types of feedback

more useful than other types (Land & Evans, 1987; O'Neill & Fife, 1999; Straub, 1997). There are many different types and levels of feedback, and students have opinions on the type of feedback their teacher leaves on their writing. According to researchers (Beason, 1993; Clare et al., 2000; Cho et al., 2006; Coupe, 1986; Sachse-Brown & Aldridge, 2004), feedback is based on “the scope of comment (local vs. global), the topic (mechanics, organization, and content), and the function (evaluation, suggestion, and response)” (qtd. in Cho et al., 2006, p. 262). Dinnen and Collopy (2009) suggest that “the effectiveness depends on the *approach* taken in giving the feedback as well as the *content* of feedback” (p. 241). I agree with Dinnen and Collopy. Based on my own practices and experiences, the tone and wording of feedback are important when commenting on student writing.

A common form of feedback left on students' writing is praise (or positive) comments, such as “great job!” and “love this!” Although comments such as these can increase student motivation and confidence, they do not necessarily impact writing. Research by Hillock (1986), Brophy (1981), and Ferris (1997) also found that praise comments almost never lead to changes and improvement in writing. Yet, praise is still commonly included in models of effective feedback in many educational settings (Nelson & Schunn, 2008). According to Connors and Lunsford (1993), praise comments were the shortest type of teacher feedback and were mostly found on strong writers' papers and next to A-level grades. Their study found that many teachers seem to feel that such good grades needed little explanation or commentary (p. 210). Dinnen and Collopy (2009) found that strong writers received more comments that were positive while weaker writers received mostly negative feedback (p. 239). The teachers I surveyed stated that they thought it would be more helpful to students to note what needed improving instead of wasting time telling them what was already strong. Many of these teachers admitted that they

often focused on “correcting” instead of “responding.” I was told by administrators, mentor teachers, and education professors that my job as a teacher was to teach. What I had seen as a student in composition classes prior to my doctoral studies was a focus on what areas needed improvement. I rarely received positive feedback on any of my writing in high school or undergraduate classes.

I recently asked 193 high school students from my school district a series of 19 questions regarding teacher feedback on their writing, including several questions over praise feedback (see Table 1 below).

**Table 1:**  
**Student Responses to Peer Review Survey**

Question	Results
Do you like it when your teacher identifies all the grammar, punctuation, spelling, and usage errors in your writing?	Yes- 74% No- 5% Doesn't really matter to me -21%
Overall, during which part of the writing have your English teachers left feedback?	While I'm writing during the process of writing) -33% On the final draft with the grade -41% I don't usually get feedback on my writing. -28% I normally just receive the grade and a few areas



	circled on the rubric.
On a scale of 1 beginning the least and 5 being the most, how helpful would you consider praise comments, such as “wonderful job”?	1- not helpful at all- 3% 2- slightly helpful- 7% 3- somewhat helpful- 25% 4- very helpful- 32% 5- extremely helpful- 33%
Do you find that teachers focus and leave feedback on issues that were not covered in class?	Yes- 28% No- 13% Sometimes- 59%
If teacher feedback is given during the process of writing, do you make those changes to your writing before turning in the final copy?	Yes- 94% No- 0% Sometimes- 6%
Do your English teachers tend to leave more feedback on surface-level issues, such as formatting, grammar, punctuation, vocabulary, etc., or content-level issues, such as focus, organization,	My teacher mainly leaves feedback on surface-level issues, such as formatting, grammar, punctuation, vocabulary, etc. -11%  My teacher mainly leaves feedback on content-level issues, such as focus, organization, and

development/support?	development/support. -56%  My teacher leaves feedback on both surface-level and-content-level issues. -33%
I wish my English teacher would leave more feedback on	surface-level issues, such as formatting, grammar, punctuation, vocabulary, etc. -14%  content-level issues, such as focus, organization, and development/support, etc. -60%  nothing because I am happy with the type of feedback I've received on my writing. -26%
If my teacher only identifies surface-level issues, such as formatting, grammar, punctuation, vocabulary, etc.. I believe these are the only issues I need to revise.	Yes- 55%  No- 45%
When my teacher leaves feedback on my writing, I understand the feedback and know how to apply this to future writing assignments.	Strongly agree- I understand all (or the majority) of the feedback and know how to apply it to future writing assignments. -30%

	<p>Somewhat agree- I understand most of the feedback and know how to apply it to future writing assignments. -59%</p> <p>Somewhat disagree- I don't understand more than half of the feedback left and aren't sure how to use the feedback on future writing assignments. -10%</p> <p>Strongly disagree- I don't understand all (or the majority of) the feedback and have no idea how to fix these issues in future writing assignments. -1%</p>
<p>I've received little to no feedback on the majority of the writing assignments I've completed in school.</p>	<p>Agree- 42%</p> <p>Disagree- 58%</p>
<p>I would rather my teacher</p>	<p>leave direct feedback so I know exactly what needs to be advised. -75%</p> <p>leave facilitative comments (such as questions or reflections) that help me rework the writing on my own. -25%</p>

Which type of feedback method do you prefer the MOST?	Praise comments- 2% Constructive criticism-type comments- 31% Both- 67%
---	---

A junior who took this survey made the following comment:

I like to know what I am doing right as well as wrong. Only hearing what needs to be improved can be disheartening, so balancing it with what was good makes me more receptive to constructive criticism. What is frustrating though is when the teacher only leaves positive feedback, but I receive a low grade on the essay. I do not understand why the grade and feedback do not agree.

Another student said that “praise comments motivate me to do that same thing again. It also gives me a clear example of what is good, so then I can know exactly what to do the next time I write.” Based on this comment, students seem to see the benefit of learning writing skills that transfer. Another student’s comment highlights the importance of giving encouraging comments to young writers while also indicating changes that need to be made. The student states:

Praise allows me to understand what I did right and also tells me what might work well for future writing. It also lets me know that my teacher enjoys my writing and that she can see the good in it. However, if there is only praise, I am left to wonder what I could improve on. Only providing praise does not help me improve my writing, so a mix of constructive criticism/guidance and praise is what I find the most helpful.

Just leaving criticism or “constructive” criticism did not work for me in the past. Based on the research and my recent experience commenting on students’ writing, if teachers want their

students to see themselves as writers, then they must treat them as such. All writers have moments of success, moments when their writing elicits favorable responses from readers. Leaving feedback that shows that students are respected as writers, who have important words to convey, is one way to communicate this. A student who answered my question regarding praise comments noted that “praise comments show that the teacher is actually paying attention to everything you are writing, not just searching for mistakes.” One of the most important tools a composition teacher has is the ability to really get to know her students through writing. No other subject grants its teacher this gift. However, with this gift comes the delicate job of balancing constructive feedback with encouraging words. It is through this feedback—a dialogue about writing—that a teacher builds trust with her classroom of young writers. Sommers (2006) agrees and states that teachers “too often neglect the roles of the student in this transaction and the vital partnership between teacher and student” (249).

However, 32% of the students I interviewed rated praise feedback as somewhat or slightly helpful. These students seem to feel that praise comments are “motivating, but constructive criticism is more helpful.” Students also made it clear that if they had a choice between praise and constructive comments that they would rather know what areas they need to improve. A freshman writes:

To me, praise is good for my ego, but it really does not improve my writing. I believe that when writing, we tend to have a sort of tunnel vision, a blindness to the errors that could be in our writing. Having someone to note the areas that need to be improved during the writing process is extremely helpful.

Writing teachers often worry that their comments will, as Keh (1990) states, “cause traumatic reactions in [their] students” (p. 974). However, Keh believes that students say they “*want* us to

‘tell it like it is’; the real difficulties arise when we tell it like it isn’t or when we don’t tell it at all” (p. 974). Based on his research, Hillocks (1986) states that negative feedback did not have a definitive effect on the quality of students’ writing, but it did strongly influence students’ attitudes toward writing (p. 160-168). One question on my survey asked: “I would rather my teacher (1) leave criticism so I know exactly what needs to be revised or (2) leave facilitative comments (such as questions or reflections) that help me rework the writing on my own.” Seventy-five percent of students surveyed wanted straightforward comments. This type of feedback, or what Hamp-Lyons and Chen (1998) call “imperative feedback” tells, or directs, the writer to the errors they need to correct. Many students stated that they wanted to know what to fix so they could receive a high grade on the writing assignment. Once again, we encounter the confusion caused by the fact that students both want to improve as writers and want to earn good grades. One student stated that he did not need to know *why* he should make the changes the teacher suggested. “I know that if I do not make the changes the teacher indicates in her feedback that I will have points taken off,” he said. Some researchers have found that students find this type of comment to be rude and dismissive (Gee, 1972; Sigott et al., 2019; Taylor & Hoedt, 1966). Telling a young writer to change a part of his writing because it is boring is insulting and does not foster a love for writing. Zellermyer (1989) discovered that students who receive negative feedback wrote less and developed negative attitudes about writing and their ability as writers (p. 149).

Facilitative comments, also referred to as “advice feedback” (Hamp-Lyons & Chen, 1998) and “descriptive feedback” (Dinnen & Collopy, 2009) focus on helping the writer revise the immediate writing as well as future ones. Feedback of this type is often framed as a question (“Have you considered moving this section to the previous page?”) and is interpretive and

reader-response in nature (“This example is confusing to me because...”). Facilitative comments have been shown to increase student achievement as well as help in improving student writing (Cowie, 2005; Crooks, 1988; Sadler, 1989). This type of feedback is an effective way to promote the transfer of learning, according to Sieben (2017). However, other studies show that when directive or corrective type feedback is given, students “made all of the corrections requested, but made the same mistake again on the next essay” (Frey & Fisher, 2009, p. 60). This finding suggests that writing growth comes when students are required to rethink their decisions as writers once a reader responds. When teachers tell them what to correct, students do not get the benefit of this important step—the messiness and play of writing. This could be why only 25% of the students in my survey wanted facilitative comments. It is easy for students to “play school” by giving the teacher exactly what she says she wants. Plus, it gives students the reassurance that their grade will be higher if the teacher is specific in what changes to make and students make those changes. The types of comments that best foster growth are also the ones that require the most work, and thus students have mixed feelings about them. This is yet another instance of the paradoxical feelings provoked by the “improved writing vs. good grades” dichotomy. I do believe that additional research is needed in order to say for sure if students benefit the most from facilitative comments.

### **Effective Practices for Teacher Review of Student Writing**

Teachers want a concise, yet comprehensive, way of providing feedback to their students. We want to give them feedback that they will understand, appreciate, and use in their revision processes, which will in turn make them stronger writers. Dan Kirby, in his book *Inside Out: Strategies for Teaching Writing* (1995), recommends that teachers of writing provide "specific, constructive suggestions" to student writer to improve the quality their writing and to develop

and maintain their confidence (p. 27). Additional research supports the claim that writing teachers who use constructive ways of providing feedback to students—ways that go beyond correcting structural or grammatical errors—encourage a dialogue between writer and reader that motivates students during the writing process (Frey & Fisher, 2010; Kirby et al., 2004; Sieben, 2015; Smagorinsky, 2009).

Based on the research (both by compositionists and my own), there are several clear effective methods of offering feedback on student writing. Sieben (2017) offers a list of six points to keep in mind. These strategies, listed in hierarchical order, include the following:

1. Relate and react to the content/ideas in the piece.
2. Provide a balance of compliment and critique (Positivity Ratio—3:1).
3. Use minimal marginal notes and summative endnotes.
4. Keep it conversational and ask questions.
5. Ask students to write feedback response letters and highlight paper revisions.
6. Use emoticons (speak their digital language). (p. 49)

Keh (1990) offers a similar checklist. She suggests a reference list of points to remember when leaving feedback. This list was based on input from her students.

1. Connect comments to lesson objectives (vocabulary, etc.).
2. Note improvements: “good,” plus reasons why.
3. Refer to a specific problem and a strategy for revision.
4. Write questions with enough information for students to answer.
5. Write a summative comment of strengths and weaknesses.
6. Ask “honest” questions as a reader to a writer rather than statements that assume too much about the writer’s intention/meaning. (p. 303)



Sieben and Keh's lists and the additional research I conducted and read share common points:

***1. Feedback should be specific, frequent, immediate, and easily understood by students.***

According to Agricola et al. (2020), these steps will result in increased self-efficacy and motivation (p. 8). Students need an alignment and an understanding of the expectations (goals) and the steps they can take to achieve them. Nelson and Schunn (2008) suggest including a summary of the performance, specific examples in which the problem occurred, and suggestions on how to fix the problem (p. 395).

***2. The timing of feedback makes a difference.***

When leaving feedback, teachers need to know when to comment on certain aspects of writing. HOCs should be focused on during the writing process and LOCs before the final paper is turned in. Commenting on students' writing only on the final draft and next to the grade signals to students that writing is a "one-and-done" activity and enforces the misconception that revision is either a nonexistent part of writing or has very little value. Teachers need to also intervene directly in students' composing process so students can respond through revision before the writing is due. Only 33% of the students from my survey said that their teachers give feedback during the writing process on a regular basis. A shocking 40% of students said that the only feedback they get is on the final draft with a grade. Seven percent of students said that they only received a grade on their writing and no feedback at all. The stage at which feedback is left is also important. One reason students do not revise drafts of their writing is because teachers generally only leave comments and assess final drafts. Krest (1988) states:

Students use and learn from our comments when we monitor their writing rather than simply evaluate their final papers. When students have the opportunity to immediately

incorporate ideas and changes into a paper, they understand the value of a particular comment. (p. 38)

***3. Conversations, either in conferences or one-on-one, are an important part of the writing process.***

According to Vygotsky (1978), students learn and develop when information, skills, and values are negotiated socially. Thus, student-centered writing conferences can play an important role both in reducing the repetition of mistakes and in establishing a better environment for developing skills in writing. Agricola (2020) notes that “communication is the key factor for ensuring that feedback is understood by students. A student I surveyed said:

Verbally talking through the suggestions and feedback with my teacher is something I consider really helpful. I remember that this was something that many intermediate and middle school teachers used to do, but I feel like high school teachers do not do it as much.

Research by Van der Schaaf et al. (2013) found that students who have “feedback conversations” with their teachers perceive feedback as more useful (qtd in “Impact of Feedback Forms,” p. 7). Agricola (2020) argues:

When feedback is only considered as something that is given to a student, it cannot be assumed that just providing written feedback automatically leads to a student's understanding and that he can use the feedback in subsequent work. (p. 9)

Fassler (1978) also asserts that in order to understand the success of the conference system, it is necessary to reexamine the traditional exchange between student and teacher about the student's writing. She explains:

The student hands in a paper. The teacher then withdraws with the paper into some secret place where, by a process mysterious to the student, he arrives at a grade and jots some comments on the paper in red ink. A few days later, the paper comes back to the student as one of a whole pile handed out in class. (p. 186)

We want to engage our students in conversation or dialogue about their writing. An effective method to do this is to ask students questions. For example, “what evidence supports your claim?” or “could there be exceptions to your claim?” Williams (1990) believes that asking questions encourages a student’s revising process and does not appropriate the student’s text (Brannon & Knoblauch, 1982; Williams, 1990). Kirby and Crovitz (2013) note that students have developed over the years “a kind of self-preservation instinct in writing classes. They try to figure out what teachers want and then give it to them” (p. 167). This kind of “give-the-teacher-what-she-wants” survival method can be seen in this quote from one of the students I surveyed:

If a teacher gives me feedback on my paper before grading it, I always make those changes because in the end the teacher is the one grading the paper, so I want to write how she wants me to write. Even if I do not agree with the changes the teacher notes, I will still make them because I know I will lose points if I do not.

Conferencing with students about their writing can alleviate many of the problems found in simply marking errors in students’ texts. For example, many of us remember a time when we wanted to go back and respond to our teachers’ comments on our writing. Duke (1975) states:

A way does exist for the writing teacher to deal with the problem of "going back." The student-centered writing conference can play an important role both in reducing the repetition of mistakes and in establishing a better environment for developing skills in writing. (p. 144)

As students feel more comfortable talking about their writing, they will become more willing to examine their texts both inside and outside the conference environment. Keh (1990) reminds us that writing conferences will be unsuccessful if teachers assume an authoritarian role, lead the conversation, and ignore students' questions and concerns that do not fit into their perceived ideal agenda (p. 300). Fassler (1978) adds that teachers should not merely use the conference to say orally what they otherwise would write down (p. 188). She suggests the following guidelines for implementing effective conferences:

1. Teachers should react to the student's writing as if it were a gift. "The conference method provides a rich opportunity to react to it at that level. When you do react, you help the student to perceive writing as real communication, not as the production of a dead and final *thing* which is either correct or incorrect." (p. 188)
2. The teacher should let the student in on the evaluating process. The student should be an active participant in the conference. The teacher should not talk *to* the student, but *with* him.
3. Read the paper out loud. Verbalize what you think each paragraph is about, or point out evidence for points. Express your pleasure and say why.
4. There must be analysis, summary, and some indication of priorities. The teacher should give what would be a terminal comment in writing.
5. Have students take notes. (p. 187-190)

Keh (1990) holds individual conferences with her students. She gives them questions that help them focus first on HOCs because LOCs are easier for students to notice. She asks students:

What is the main point of your essay? How have you organized your essay?

What are your points? Who is your audience? What do you hope to achieve?

What specific area do you want the teacher to look at? Are there any words, phrases, etc. that you have questions about? (p. 299)

There are numerous benefits to having conversations with our students about their writing. Too often feedback is seen as “the linear transfer of information from the sender of the message (the teacher) to a recipient (the student) via written comments” (Higgins et al., 2001, p. 53). A narrow view of learning occurs when feedback is only considered as something that is *given* to a student (Ajjawi & Boud, 2017). It cannot be assumed that just providing written feedback automatically leads to students’ understanding and that they can then use the feedback in subsequent work. Researchers believe that the interaction during the feedback exchange may increase the effectiveness of feedback (Haynes et al., 2012). Agricola et al. (2019) states that “verbal feedback seems to be the solution for the problem associated with written feedback. Students respond more positively to verbal feedback, seeing it as being closer to dialogue” (p. 9). Because dialogue is a two-way process, students can adopt a more active role.

#### **4. *Attitude matters.***

The attitudes that teachers have toward writing influence not only their teaching practices of writing but also how they evaluate and respond to student writing. Sommers (1982) says that teachers understand how to read and interpret novels and other literary texts, but lack the training necessary to read student texts. They read their students writing “with biases about what the writer should have written” (p. 154). When teachers approach students’ writing expecting errors, they will in all likelihood find them. As Sommers states, “we find what we look for,” and instead of reading and responding to the meaning of their writing, we correct their errors instead (p. 154). Teachers are often so distracted by surface-level errors that they correct these types of errors “without realizing that a much larger meaning-related problem has totally escaped their

notice” (Fuller, p. 309). The teachers that I spoke to all stated that their most important goal when leaving feedback is to address content (global) errors. However, almost 80% of the comments they left on their students’ writing were grammar, mechanics, spelling, and usage errors.

##### ***5. Be careful not to appropriate students’ texts.***

Teachers often “subvert the students’ ability to control their texts because teacher comments evaluate student writing against an ideal text and not in terms of students’ goals for that writing” (Brannon & Knoblauch, 1982 p. 302). This type of judgmental comment left in response to a teacher’s ideal text often seems to originate from some secret set of ideals that only the teacher knows (Connors & Lunsford, 1993). Sperling and Freedman (1986) also discuss this problem. They state:

The student and teacher each bring to the written response a set of information, skills, and values that may or may not be shared between them, and it is the interplay of these three elements that feeds the students’ reading and processing of teacher written comments, and that leads to misunderstandings. (p. 343)

The research clearly shows that feedback on drafts should not focus on the teacher’s version of the ideal text (Brannon & Knoblauch, 1982; Connors & Lunsford, 1993; Sperling & Freedman, 1986). McDonald (1978) asserts that as teachers comment on successive versions they should do so within “a scale of concerns that is based on what they know of the composing process while realizing that particular papers will vary from the ‘archetypes’ they have assumed” (p. 169). Every year students have a different English teacher who has her own set of expectations and pet peeves. How can students know what each individual teacher’s ideal text is? Obviously, they cannot.

## ***6. The tone of feedback is important.***

Respectful and caring feedback places value on students' ideas and on their long-term development as writers with unique voices who have much to contribute to community conversations (Sieben, 2017). Writing teachers need to adopt a facilitative rather than judgmental view of commenting practices. Kirby and Crovitz (2013) believe that “the secret of building good writer-responder relationships lies in the *touch* of the responder” (p. 167). Kelly Gallagher (2006) reminds us to remember that all writers, especially young writers, are fragile (p. 166).

### **Concluding Thoughts**

Responding to student writing is one of the most challenging parts of teaching writing. Not only does it take a lot of time, the pressure of knowing that this process influences how students feel about writing can be overwhelming. Teachers will find the process of reviewing their students' writing more effective and pleasurable once they redefine their roles from an examiner, who spends hours marking errors, to that of a mentor, who teaches students how to assess, reflect, and correct their own writing. In essence, teachers should think of commenting on student writing as a rhetorical act that must be monitored for purpose and clarity (Grant-Davie & Shapiro, 1987). In order to achieve this goal, teachers must put down their red pens and respond to students' writing as a reader. As Fassler (1978) notes: “If the teacher can be the skinless reader, the student is granted the fullest possible opportunity to watch a reader react to the paper paragraph by paragraph, an experience often highly instructive. ‘Be unwilling to be skinless’ to your students” (p. 189).

### **Chapter 3:**

#### **Service-Learning**

High school English teachers, Vicki McQuitty and Pamela Hickey, were quoted in the January 2018 “Writing is Power” edition of *The English Journal*:

Words are powerful. As teacher-writers, we know the power of crafting our world by strategically crafting our words. We wish for our students to realize this power but too often, they experience the opposite. Rather than crafting words for meaningful and important purposes, students write with neither condition nor commitment: to placate their teachers, to get a grade, to just get it done. Young writers are empowered when they see how writing can help them live better lives and better the lives of those around them.

(p. 7)

As a high school English teacher, I seek authentic, world-changing writing that inspires my students to take ownership of their words, say something important, and add their voices to the conversations around them. I want my students to develop intellectual curiosity about literacy and learning. But all too often, I am encouraged to teach to tests, such as the STAAR, AP English, and SAT. While these tests might allow students easier access to college or the ability to skip Freshman Composition courses in college, they certainly do not provide them with opportunities to position themselves as agents of change in the very community in which they live. While searching for this “unicorn” of teaching methods on my doctoral journey, I discovered service-learning. In the 2017-2018 school year, I decided to implement a service-learning project in my English II Gifted & Talented classes. Due to COVID, I was forced to skip this project during the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 school years. However, my current classes are participating in service-learning projects this year (2021-2022).



My goal in this chapter is to explain the benefits of implementing a service-learning project in a high school English class. I will discuss the background and history of this type of project, what the naysayers of service-learning projects say and how to address these concerns, and practices on how to implement a service-learning project so that the academic (the “learning”) part is effective and meaningful.

### **Definition and Characteristics of Service-Learning**

Many people confuse service-learning with community service, causing them to claim that service-learning projects are just community service that students happen to do during the school day or outside of school for some type of credit in the course. It clear that teachers use the concept of “service-learning” to refer to a wide range of student activities, including not only structured learning but community service, volunteer work, and internships (Hollis, 2002). In her article “Service Learning: A Promising Strategy for Connecting Students to Communities” (1996), Joan Schine states that it is crucial to understand that community service and service-learning are not synonymous:

Collecting canned goods for distribution at Thanksgiving is indeed a community service activity; raising money for a new youth center is a worthy undertaking. It can be argued that simply participating in the community, doing something useful and important to others, will probably carry with it some degree of learning, simply because of the "real world" nature of the experience and the interchange with others. But community service becomes service learning only when preparation and reflection are an integral part of the program, when the purpose is clear to the adult leader and to the young people. As Dan Conrad has written, "To say that experience is a good teacher...does not imply that it's easily or automatically so. If it were, we'd all be a lot wiser than we are." (p. 4)

During their service-learning project, Mastrangelo and Tischio (2005) focused on a more complex view of service-learning based not on charity, but on reciprocity as its central tenet. One way they accomplished this was to focus on integrating service-learning with reflective and academic reading and writing assignments (p. 33). They state that the “writing assignments played a pivotal role in encouraging the students to work through their experiences and finer details and to interpret those details through disciplinary lenses” (p. 33).

Also, service-learning combines traditional methods of teaching academic skills with more structured or intentional educational activities, increased opportunities for students' reflections on civic life, and experiential activities that address community needs (Eyler, et al., 1999; Gray et al., 1999; Hollis, 2002; Jacoby, 1996; Weigert, 1998). In her article “Academic Service Learning: Its Meaning and Relevance” (1998), Weigert proposes six key elements to differentiate effective service learning from voluntarism, community service, and other forms of experiential learning:

- (1) The student provides meaningful service that is useful or helpful and makes a contribution.
- (2) The service that the student provides meets a need or goal of some kind, rather than being "make work."
- (3) Members of a community define the need, a process that ideally involves collaboration between the faculty and the served community.
- (4) The service provided by the students flows from course objectives.
- (5) Service is integrated into the course by means of an assignment (or assignments) that requires some form of reflection on the service in light of course objectives.

(6) Assignments rooted in service must be assessed and evaluated accordingly (that is, they must be graded based on the learning and not the service), and the community must have a role in the assessment. (p. 6-7)

Enhrlich (1999) states that service-learning is distinguished from both community service and traditional civic education by “the integration of study with hands-on activity outside the classroom, typically through a collaborative effort to address a community problem” (p. 246). In service-learning, there is an intentional effort for students to use the experience as a learning resource and link it directly to the objectives and standards of the class or course (Taylor & Ballengee-Morris, 2004, p. 8).

In her book *Combining Service and Learning* (1990), Jane Kendall wrote that there were 147 definitions of service-learning in the literature at that time. Service-learning as a pedagogy and practice can vary greatly across educators and schools, making it difficult to create a definition that elicits consensus among people (Bickford & Reynolds, 2002; Butin, 2005; Kendall, 1990; Mitchell, 2008; Varlotta, 1997). In her article “Capturing the Experience: Transforming Community Service into Service Learning” (2002), Hollis agrees and notes that “service learning means different things to different people” (p. 79). This type of ambiguity has caused confusion about what service-learning looks like in the classroom. However, there are essential qualities and guiding principles that distinguish service as a learning activity. Obert (1995) states that “service-learning is defined as an instructional strategy in which students are involved in experimental education in real life settings where they apply academic knowledge and previous experience to meet community needs” (p. 31). In order to “qualify” as an effective and true form of service-learning in the classroom, researchers agree that it has to have specific elements: a

community service action tied to an academic learning goal and ongoing reflection. It is this application and reflection that distinguishes service-learning from community service.

Through their community service, “students become active learners, bringing skills and information from community work and integrating them with the theory and curriculum of the classroom to produce new knowledge. At the same time, students’ classroom learning informs their service in the community” (Mitchell, 2008, p. 50). Umpleby (2011) stresses the importance of making sure that the service performed by students attends to a real need of the community. According to researchers (Furco & Billig, 2002; Mitchell, 2008; Umpleby, 2011), in order to ensure that the service experience is meaningful and beneficial to both the students and the community, there must be clearly identified learning objectives and student involvement in selecting and designing the service activity. In addition, service-learning should include a theoretical base and the integration of the service and the academic components. There must be a balance between the learning goals and the service outcomes. Based on this framework, Andrew Furco (1996), researcher and educator in the field of experiential education, developed a model distinguishing service learning from community service. Furco (1996) argues that community service primarily focuses on the service provided to and the benefits derived from recipients, whereas fieldwork and internships primarily focus on the students' learning. However, service learning balances the benefits of the service to the recipient and the benefits of learning for the student. According to Furco, this equal balance differentiates service learning from other types of service programs (p. 99). In order to achieve this integration, some service-learning practitioners also incorporate readings, discussions, writing assignments, and other activities that link to social issues. This addition of critical service-learning pedagogy asks students to use what is happening in the classroom to reflect on their service in the context of larger social issues (Mitchell, 2008).

## Models and Types of Service-Learning Projects

According to most research on service-learning, there are two common types (models) of service-learning: program-oriented and project-oriented (Blouin & Perry, 2009; Mitchell, 2008; Obert, 1995; Umpleby, 2011). Mitchell (2008) explains that there is “a traditional approach that emphasizes service without attention to systems of inequality, and a critical approach that is unapologetic in its aim to dismantle structures of injustice” (p. 50). According to Mitchell (2008), there are “three elements most often cited in the literature as points of departure in the two approaches are to redistribute power amongst all participants in the service-learning relationship, developing authentic relationships in the classroom and in the community, and working from a social change perspective” (p. 50). Thomas Dean, Director of the University Writing Center and Professor of English at the University of Connecticut, argues in his book *Writing Partnerships* (2002) that there are three dominant models of service-learning: “writing *about* a community, writing *for* a community, and writing *with* a community (p. 15). In Figure 1 below, Sigmon (1994) also emphasizes the importance of what is the main focus of service-learning.

**Figure 1: A Service and Learning Typology**

service-LEARNING	Learning goals primary; service outcomes secondary
SERVICE-learning	Service outcomes primary; learning goals secondary
service learning	Service and learning goals completely separate

SERVICE- LEARNING	Service and learning goals of equal weight and each enhances the other for all participants.
----------------------	--

Source: Furco, Andrew. "Service-Learning: A Balanced Approach to Experiential Education."

*Expanding Boundaries: Service and Learning*. Washington DC: Corporation for National Service, 1996. 2-6. Figure 1.

Because the content of courses varies drastically, service-learning projects can take any number of forms. One of the most common forms of service-learning is the buddy system where students pair up with other classes or organizations. For example, a high school art class joins an elementary school in order to create a community mural, a peer-assistance program in the library, or tutoring (McPherson, 1991). Other methods include a creative writing course that helps organize spoken word contests and creative writing clubs at nearby schools. In another school, service-learning might include students interviewing a community member, recording that community member's life story, and composing an exhibit for that story.

### **History and Background of Service-Learning**

Finding its way into the halls of secondary schools since the mid-1950s, the idea of service-learning is not a new one (Eyler et al., 1999; Mastrangelo & Tischio, 2005). Honor societies often make service hours a condition for membership, and many high schools now require community service for graduation. In my school district, students can choose to participate in the Success Scholars Program, which requires students to complete 100 community service hours from the 9th grade through the 12th grade. For decades, youth have been involved in community service projects, "dating back to the 1930s when William Kilpartick urged the adoption of the 'project method' as the central tool of education" (Obert, 1995, p. 30). The 1960s and '70s

witnessed a resurgence of heated debate about social change and social movements, as well as the fundamental roles and purposes of higher education (Cunningham & Vachta, 2003, p. 25). Promoting democratic values, peace, and educational opportunity became of utmost importance. Educators began to revisit the works of philosophers and progressives, such as John Dewey.

Dewey wrote over 100 years ago:

From the standpoint of the child, the great waste in the school comes from his inability to utilize the experience he gets outside the school in any complete and free way within the school itself; while on the other hand, he is unable to apply in daily life what he is learning in school. (p. 77)

According to many educators, service learning could solve this problem by encouraging—even requiring—the child to use curriculum-related skills in a real-world setting and bringing the out-of-school experience into the classroom (Schine, 1989). Dewey also argues that “purely intellectual study should not be separated from practical study or from the great practical problems confronting society” (Umpleby, 2011, p. 6). Leaders in higher education generally agree with Dewey that the interaction of knowledge and skills with experience occurs in service-learning, which could link community service and academic study so that each strengthens the other. Service-learning soon became a trend in pedagogy that marked a shift in the emphasis on teaching to one on learning (Umpleby, 2011, p. 7). Curriculum and education reformers, such as Dewey and Kilpatrick, saw the transformative potential of these “project methods” and wanted students to engage in service-learning projects so that they would recognize that their academic abilities and collective commitments could help them respond in meaningful ways to a variety of social concerns (Kahne & Westheimer, 1996, p. 594-595). In their article “In the Service of What? The Politics of Service Learning” (1996), Kahne and Westheimer state that for Dewey,

this ideal was the essence of democratic education. Dewey advocated for the creation of "miniature communities," in which students would work together to identify and respond to problems they confronted. He believed that the value of this approach extends far beyond the service students might provide for the community. What was the most important benefit was "the analytic and academic skills, the moral acuity, and the social sensitivity students would develop as they learned to assess critically and respond collectively to authentic problems" (Kahne & Westheimer, 1996, p. 595). Education reformers slowly began to agree with Dewey (1916) that all genuine education occurs through experience. Getting students to engage in projects of their own design can provide them with a real opportunity to succeed in a task that has much greater significance than a quiz or a test. Morgan and Streb (2001) believe that this type of learning also "models democratic principles in the classroom and provides the students with concrete experiences where they are personally involved in social activism (albeit at a subdued level)," and it "involves the students in specific experiences that should influence future behavior and attitudes" (p. 155).

In the 1980s, the Ford Foundation published *Growing up Forgotten*, which led to the establishment of The Center for Early Adolescence at the University of North Carolina. The Youth Service America was founded in 1986 in order to "support a global culture of engaged children and youth committed to a lifetime of meaningful service, learning, and leadership" (YSA). This organization provides resources to teachers on how to implement service-learning in their curriculum. A few years later, The Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development released *Turning Points: Preparing American Youth for the 21st Century* in 1989 in hopes of adapting educational systems to young adolescents and new conditions (Obert, 1995). Specific recommendations included the use of community service. According to David Hamburg,



President of Carnegie Corporation of New York, “there is a crucial need to help adolescents acquire durable self-esteem, flexible and inquiring habits of mind, reliable and relatively close relationships, a sense of belonging and a value group, and a sense of usefulness in some way beyond self” (qtd. in Obert, 1995, p. 30). In the early 1990s, there was a surge of this method of learning, especially in composition studies. Trim (2009) states that in 1991, The Conference of College Composition and Communication hosted one panel on service-learning. By 1994, the *Michigan Journal of Community Service-Learning* was created, and theorists began noting and acknowledging service learning as a new approach to teaching composition (p. 66). The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) even saw the potential of service-learning and launched *Reflections*, a journal devoted to service-learning in writing courses.

Ancient Greek philosophers were said to believe that knowledge of rhetoric improved character, causing compositionists to gravitate to methods of teaching writing that reflected “their good personhood, through explicit connections to democracy or inclusiveness” (Murphy & Thaiss, 1990, p. 16). Composition teachers soon began to depart from the current traditional models of teaching writing by pushing boundaries:

They took their classes outside, told students to experience their education, and instructed their classes to write what they felt. As the traditional academic essay was connected with authoritarian modes of writing instruction, teachers and students began exploring ways to make their writing less institutionalized, or more personal. (Murphy & Thaiss, 1990, p. 68)

Service-learning created another wave of this type of learning. One that, as educator and philosopher Paulo Friere believed, fostered authentic thinking that is “concerned with *reality* and does not take place in ivory tower isolation” (*Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 1970, p. 64). Ellen

Cushman states in her article “The Rhetorician as Agent of Social Change” (1996) that even though we may leave the classroom, “we’re again in ivory tower isolation, unless we actively seek our students in other contexts—particularly the community context” (11). Friere believed in co-intentional education (Cone & Harris, 1996; Eyler, 1999; Varlotta, 1996). A practice that “entails that the teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but who is herself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teaches” (Freire, 1970, p. 60-61). Friere argued that “knowledge is not produced in the hands of those who believe they hold it, but in the process of interaction between the teacher and the student or, in the case of service-learning, between the school, teacher, students, and the community agency (qtd. in Taylor & Ballengee-Morris, 2004, p. 7). Composition teachers could conceive of writing assignments as “having dual purposes: writing for social change and writing to learn about writing” (Trim, 2009, p. 67-68). According to Trim (2009), between Friere’s revolutionary pedagogy and the increased attention to identity politics during discussions of writing instruction in the mid to late 1990s, composition teachers were bound to “situate their courses according to social theories demanding attention to disenfranchised and marginalized groups” (p. 69).

The call to service continued to grow, and in 1990, President George H. W. Bush signed the National Community Service Act, which authorized \$287 million for social action programs. This was the first time in history that there was a specific education goal developed by the federal government (Taylor & Ballengee-Morris, 2004, p. 5) Later, The National and Community Service Act of 1990 and President Bill Clinton’s National Service Trust Act of 1993 both proposed legislation to expand opportunities for all Americans to serve their communities and to earn awards for their own education with the establishment of AmeriCorps, which created what is now the Corporation for National Service (Taylor & Ballengee-Morris, 2004). In 2009,

President Obama called on all Americans, especially students, to volunteer through United We Serve to help meet growing social needs resulting from the economic downturn. He challenged citizens to “identify unmet needs in their community, develop their own service projects, and engage others who are interested in the same issue—all of which is at the heart of service-learning” (Kielsmeier, 2010, p. 13). In the spring of 2009, Obama also signed the Serve America Act, which recognized service-learning as a strategy for school improvement and bridged the divide between service and education (Kielsmeier, 2010, p. 14). President Obama urged: “We must prepare our young Americans to grow into active citizens” (qtd. in Kielsmeier, 2010, p. 13).

### **Service-Learning in the English Classroom**

In the late 1990s, service-learning began to find a home in English departments, often by way of the writing program (Gere & Sinor, 1998; Herzberg, 1994; Minter et al., 1995; Schutz & Gere, 1998; Watters & Ford, 1995). Schultz and Gere (1998) state that “unencumbered by a disciplinary identity, service learning moved freely in college classrooms, sometimes attaching itself to sociology or psychology, sometimes to education or social work, and, most recently, to English” (p. 129). According to Schultz & Gere (1998), this growth in service-learning has coincided with reconfigurations within English departments, as many English departments have begun to emphasize the social processes of consuming and producing texts (p. 130). Because English courses tend to foreground ways people read and write, attend to cultural studies, and entertain questions about public policy through the texts that are read, service-learning seems to fit particularly well in English courses (Schultz & Gere, 1998, p. 131). As Gere and Sinor (1997) argue that “the processes of contending with expectations, undertaking actions, and reflecting thoughtfully fit comfortably for both the writers and service learners who seek to locate themselves in a text or context” (p. 87). Ellen Cushman (1996) believes that “service-

learning can act as one entry point for English studies to begin the reclamation process between multiple public and private spaces (p. 16). According to Schulz & Gere (1998), if done effectively, service-learning brings into English classrooms “discourses and activities in the world outside the academy, mediating the relationships between the discourses and needs of the [school and course] and those of actual community contacts” (p. 147). Thus, service-learning provides a means for teachers and students to “complicate this idea of the ‘classroom’ and the approaches to discourses, writing, and literacy that constructs” (Schultz & Gere, 1998, p. 149).

In the high school English classroom, a service-learning enhanced curriculum can bridge the gap between the theory and practice of English studies and from the classroom to the “real” world. Service-learning projects are also an effective way to meet multiple standards of the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS). Using my experience incorporating this type of learning into my English II Gifted and Talented class, I will explain how service-learning can help students read within a variety of genres and engage in authentic writing for a variety of audiences and purposes, a key focus of the TEKS, and support the affective needs of students.

### ***Authentic Writing, Various Genres, Audiences, and Purposes***

Overwhelmingly, students read textbooks summarizing knowledge or texts chosen by their teachers. These texts become the only genre students know. Although the focus on the effectiveness of student choice has increased over the past few years, teachers still struggle to give up the control of selecting texts for their classrooms. I understand that feeling and have attempted to make an effort to allow my students to read authentic materials from as many different discourse communities as possible. While this does promote the valuable and important skills secondary students need, it often feels like it is not enough.

Text genres are not just literary forms; they are dynamic patterns of communication, grounded in context, community, and social action. Research on them comes from communication studies as well as linguistics, literary criticism, and theories of composition (Goodson, 1994, p. 6). The constraints of any generic form of communication are constantly evolving (Jamieson, 1975). According to Goodson (1994), “as writers or speakers seek better ways to communicate, and as audiences demand more efficiency or entertainment, the boundaries and rules of the genre evolve” (p. 14). The importance of community in textual genres must be considered. High school students will soon leave the classroom to enter the lecture halls of colleges and universities and the world outside of academia. As Goodson (1994) so accurately states:

The notion of becoming literate is best understood in terms of becoming literate within a particular community. To become literate within a community is to learn to read, speak, write, and behave nonverbally according to the accepted conventions of that community. (p. 9)

The high school English classroom should provide multiple situational contexts for literacy-learning experiences beyond the general academic community. In his article “Reading and Writing Across Genres: Textual Form and Social Action in High School” (1994), Goodson argues that teachers should “shift their thinking from a position of helping to unlock texts (academic discourse community) to one of helping students to unlock communities” (p. 10). He suggests that teachers think of training students as ethnographers—helping them to unlock the literacy secrets of any community (p. 10). I argue that service-learning provides this opportunity.

Students should also have experiences writing within a wide variety of genres. Consider what types of writing tasks are typically assigned in high school English classrooms. Students frequently write short answer responses to a reading passage or a twenty-six lined response to a STAAR prompt. All of these writing assignments are within the artificial and contrived forms of the English class—the five-paragraph theme, the expository essay, and the teacher-generated prompts over literary or informational texts. What results is a demonstration of a rhetorical skill divorced from any social purpose. This becomes, as Aviva Freedman (1995) states, “rhetoric without purpose,” which creates “a game of smoke and mirrors” (p. 226). The most beneficial writing assignments in high school English classes are those grounded in a legitimate purpose—students writing for the school paper, students writing speeches to deliver to the city mayor, students writing reviews of a product and posting online, etc. Students need opportunities to approach the same subject from within various genres. Writing an argumentative essay for your teacher about the growing problem of mental health among teens does not offer the same authentic and meaningful experience that creating a public service announcement for the city you live in does. Teachers, and students, also need to understand that acquiring competence in one genre, specifically the genres of the academic world, will not make it easier to acquire competence in other genres unless those genres are very similar in nature (i.e. within the same discourse community). According to Goodson (1994), teachers falsely believe that they can

teach certain universal language skills in isolation, and students could apply those skills, in any situation, by themselves. [They] teach the genres and standards of the academic discourse community without a defensible argument that the skills and knowledge of academia can transfer to other situations and communities. (p. 9)

In this type of instruction, students do not become aware that the conventions of writing can actually be acquired by interacting with text rather than just completing worksheets and memorization activities. In these tasks, students are not increasing their repertoire of genres, and they are not coming to recognize that effective writing can take on numerous forms that look nothing like the five-paragraph essay done in most high school English classes.

Also, growing literacy competencies are grounded within unique communities. In order for students to practice the genres found in the “real” world, students “would need to get outside the classroom and into the social contexts in which those genres perform meaningful actions” (Warren & Otto, 2019, p. 13). The only way for students to interact with authentic genres is for high school English teachers to create a context beyond the confines of the classroom to a place where literacy matters. Students desperately need to see themselves as agents capable of change. Implementing service-learning will allow students to experience the potential power that literacy carries, and, potentially for the first time in their lives, see that they can influence their social worlds through written words and images.

### ***The Assignment***

Service-learning is not just a means for civic engagement. It also functions as a way to achieve several of the TEKS. While the TEKS do not make direct reference to service-learning, it is, in fact, a means to achieve some of the high school English standards. As part of the English II Gifted and Talented classroom, students in my class partnered with organizations in their city of Southlake and surrounding areas. This project began at the beginning of the school year and ended in May. Eight classes of students formed groups consisting of three to four students. Each group researched nearby organizations they were interested in and selected one organization. They looked for information on the organization, speculated on what the organization might

need, discussed each group member's strengths and how those could be used to meet a need of the organization, and emailed or called the organization's contact person. Based on their communication with the organization and the grading requirements for the course, each group created goals and a timeline of when tasks needed to be completed. Students completed reflections throughout the process in the form of group and class discussions, journals, and media presentations.

As part of the Introduction, Investigation, Planning, and Preparation stage, each group had to complete Task #1, which was to research the organization. This task included the following questions:

1. Why does your group want to complete a service-learning project for this organization? Is there a personal connection to the organization's work?
2. What is the organization's mission statement?
3. What is the purpose of the organization? (May be the same as the mission statement)
4. What audience is this organization trying to reach? Be specific.
5. What is the name, email address, and phone number of the contact person for communication relations and volunteer opportunities?
6. Describe the organization's website. What items are posted on this site? What culture/vibe/tone can you infer based on the contents of the website?
7. What data can you gain from the website? Example: how many people they serve, date they were created, major event they host, any upcoming events for this school year?



8. Brainstorm what your group would need to know in order to complete a service-learning project for this organization. For example, for the Alzheimer's Association, you would need to be familiar with the disease, what services they provide, and how the organization works.
9. Based on the website, brainstorm a list of needs the organization may have.

This task required students to read and view some genres that they were not familiar with because they were outside of the typical high school English curriculum. For example, one group selected Call a Ride Southlake, which provides rides for senior citizens to medical and personal appointments. This group watched a volunteer recruitment YouTube video, read testimonials, viewed a segment on NBC DFW, and learned about the history of the organization. Each of these text types were genres that encompassed specific features.

Next, after contacting and meeting with a representative from their organization, a project was agreed upon by both the students and the organization. The Call a Ride group would be tasked to create videos for volunteer recruitment and video testimonials from senior citizens who have used the service. The group working with the Southlake DPS would create a series of social media posts and videos (Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok), which would be published on the Department's social media platforms, which each have almost 100,000 followers from around the world. These posts and videos would be argumentative in nature, urging people to not text and drive, to turn off their sprinklers, and to slow down on city streets.

Almost immediately, students realized that writing genres are fluid. Not only did the groups need to consider the tone and style that best fit the organization, they were also writing for broad audiences, especially in the case of the Southlake DPS. One audience was the followers and

viewers of the organization's website and social media accounts. Another was the organization's contact person they were working with. Yet another was their teacher, me. Trim (2009) details the importance of exposure to a real audience. She believes that "for writing lessons to be more effective, students need to experience writing in contexts which have consequences beyond a grade in an English course" (p. 73). Put more broadly, "before teaching can safely enter upon conveying facts and ideas through the media of signs, schooling must provide genuine situations in which personal participation brings home the importance of the material and the problems which it conveys" (Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 1916, p. 233). When students write to an audience other than the teacher, "they write with a different identity than just as a student. They write more from a place of agency and appeal, and less formulaically. They see themselves as having a voice that matters" (Murphy & Smith, 2003, p. 21). Students learned that "it is difficult to replicate in academic assignments that attempt to simulate discrete genres" (Warren & Otto, 2019, p. 13). This valuable lesson about genre is what Carolyn Miller (1994) calls a "recurrent rhetorical situation" (p. 163). Students are taught the genre characteristics of the particular genre they are reading and writing about, but they rarely get to experience the fluid, multiple-purpose features of the text or task. According to Warren & Otto (2019), "in practice, texts that respond to authentic rhetorical situations often mix elements associated with different genres, which is a difficult lesson for students to learn unless they experience first-hand the exigencies of real-world writing" (p. 14). Students needed to create informational texts that clearly conveyed the dangers of texting and driving too fast on neighborhood streets, but they also needed to be persuasive by using visuals, specific word choices, and tone.

Service-learning provided my students with multiple opportunities for both literacy instruction and real-world literacy practice. In the first stage of the project, students

practiced nonfiction reading strategies as they researched their organization and its needs. They engaged in academic conversations as they debated the merit of working with a specific organization and the type of project to complete. They used persuasive writing techniques when they contacted the organization to express their interest in working with them. They used both persuasive and informational writing skills when they completed their videos and social media posts.

### ***Teacher Reflection***

The implementation of service-learning changed the way I viewed the assignments I gave my students. I now take a closer look at what I want students to learn and how they can best achieve that. I consider the “experience” of the assignment more than I did in the past. Academically, students’ communication and writing skills grew the most through service-learning than any other assignment I have ever tried. I really learned that true learning occurs through a cycle of action, not simply through being able to recount what has been learned in the classroom. This later type of learning is static and unlikely to be of much use after the assessment or class. John Dewey believed that learning is a wholehearted affair, linking emotions and intellect. The educated experience is one that fosters student development by capturing student interest and passion because it is intrinsically worthwhile and deals with problems that awaken student curiosity that extends over a considerable period of time (Eyler, et al., 1999, p. 8). In essence, experience enhances understanding and understanding leads to more effective action.

Not only did students demonstrate academic skills, there were other benefits I saw from implementing service-learning into my course. I saw growth in students’ affective development. Students were confident, took risks, and strengthened their interpersonal skills. Teachers attend to their students’ intellectual needs, but the affective needs of students, especially for gifted and

talented learners, are equally as important. Research supports the claim that service-learning has a positive effect on students' self-esteem, moral development, leadership development, and sense of social responsibility (Eyler, et al., 1999). In other words, service-learning provides “a unique opportunity for students to grow both professionally and personally” (Lester, e. al, 2005, p. 278). Many of my quiet students and those students who rarely completed the “traditional” assignments of the course became passionate leaders of their group’s service-learning project. I saw an increase in students’ self-esteem, most likely due to “the sense of connectedness and contribution that service-learning can bring” (Obert, 1995, p. 167). One of my students, Cole, stated:

Working with the Southlake DPS made me more responsible. I, and my group members, had to ask questions when we were confused, take ownership of the mistakes our group made, and play an active role in creating the social media posts. I am an introvert. I absolutely hate group projects. But this one was different. I didn’t hide like I do in most group projects because I wanted to do a good job for the organization. I knew that real people were counting on me to do my part. I cared about what we were writing about. It made me feel good to make other people feel good.

Another central benefit of service-learning is the link between personal and interpersonal development with academic and cognitive development—the linking of the head and heart, so to speak. Harvard researcher W.H. Perry (1970) found that personal and intellectual development are integral to each other. The development of personal identity and the ability to make committed decisions are connected to advanced levels of thinking. Few assignments in high school classrooms involve this connection. Although personal development and interpersonal skills are often viewed as secondary to academic goals in most classrooms, they are an important

part of service-learning. Throughout this project, students developed relationships and practiced the skills of compromise, effective communication, confronting problems, considering alternatives, and finding solutions. Thomas Ehrlich (1997), former President of Indiana University, noted that the most frequent criticism from community leaders and employers was that recent graduates were unprepared to collaborate as members of a team. One of the greatest benefits of service-learning is that students have the opportunity to practice skills more consistent with the learning they will be doing throughout their adulthood. The nature of the work students completed and the conditions of learning closely matched that of real work in the real world. During the service-learning project, students practiced the four domains of language (listening, speaking, reading, and writing). TEA states:

These four strands of the essential knowledge and skills for English language arts and reading are intended to be integrated for instructional purposes and are recursive in nature in order to accelerate the acquisition of language skills so that students develop high levels of social and academic language proficiency.....Additionally, students should engage in academic conversations, write, read, and be read to on a daily basis with opportunities for cross-curricular content and student choice. (TEA, 2020)

English II TEKS also instructs high school English students to:

Use the writing process recursively to compose multiple texts that are legible and use appropriate conventions by (A) planning a piece of writing appropriate for various purposes and audiences by generating ideas through a range of strategies such as brainstorming, journaling, reading, or discussing; (B) developing drafts into a focused, structured, and coherent piece of writing; (C) revising drafts to improve clarity,

development, organization, style, diction, and sentence effectiveness; and (D) editing drafts. (TEA, 2020)

In the planning stage, students wrote scripts of phone conversations and practiced a telephone business conversation via role-play. Every email they sent and every piece of writing they created for the project was shared and revised by all members of their group and me. They learned how to converse with one another about writing as writers do. Students soon learned what post-process theorist Thomas Kent (1999) believed: “the writing process act, as a kind of communicative interaction, automatically includes other language users, as well as the writer” (qtd. in Warren & Otto, 2019, p. 14). Students quickly realized that writing is not a private act. Multiple audiences would be reading their writing, and, in order to be effective, writing needed to be the social act of communication that it is. Learning to use public writing effectively is important for today’s students because this is a rhetorical art that will help them to assert their voices in the world, to be politically active, and to make a difference in their own lives and the lives of others. Students value this type of writing—writing that makes something happen in the world. Two of my students discuss this:

I’ve learned about persuasive writing since 4th grade. It wasn’t until this project that I really got to use that type of writing to make an actual difference. It felt like what I was doing was actually beneficial to the organization and me.

I loved the service-learning project. I felt for the first time that something I did in school might actually make a difference in someone’s life. I also realized that I had some negative stereotypes about senior citizens. Doing this project helped me see senior citizens as people just like me, but with wrinkles.

Eyler et al. state in their book *Where's the Learning in Service-Learning?* (1999) that students believe what they gain from service-learning “differs greatly from what they often derive from more traditional instruction” (p. 121). When teachers facilitate writing that students see as meaningful and powerful in its public function, they begin to realize that writing is not intended only for their teacher and classmates to read. Their writing is aimed at a public audience, which helps students see the real contribution they can achieve with writing in their own communities. Because of service-learning, students were beginning to see writing as a complex, meaning-making activity rather than a routine skill. Students also learned that writing is recursive. When their groups' first attempt at writing social media posts for the Southlake DPS was rejected because the tone was too serious, students learned the valuable lesson that writing is difficult and messy. They also realized that writing requires flexibility, which is something that students assigned an in-class essay did not realize.

Providing my students with the lived experience of a service-learning, as messy as it was sometimes, was one of the most valuable experiences of my teaching career. I was pleased and inspired by the changes I witnessed in my students' attitudes about the nature of literacy. Over the course of the service-learning project, my students shifted from viewing literacy through the framework of “school” literacy to seeing literacy as a fluid and complex, socially derived skill that individuals develop unevenly, depending upon social constructs. Literacy was seen as not just a basic skill, but also an ever-developing set of complex verbal, textual, and social abilities that are difficult to acquire. Students grew as writers and demonstrated rhetorical sensitivity and facility with a broad range of reading, writing, and communication skills. Students assumed, as many people do, that formal instruction and the rules of discourse produce literacy. The better one learns the rules, the more literate one is. The service-learning project exposed my students to

an alternative use of literacy and demonstrated for them that literacy is in large part, what Mastrangelo and Tischiio (2005) call, “*acquired* through an individual's participation with multiple discourse communities” (p. 34). Students developed greater rhetorical sensitivity, expanded their genre awareness, and acquired conventions of genres not found in academic discourse. Students were also able to combine inquiry and action and engage in critical disciplinary learning. Because students were encouraged to take ownership of the process, they became more passionate about the assignments in the course. They learned “to understand the distinction between the passive acquisition of literacy and the active process of learning, as well as the different ways in which these concepts are valued” (Mastrangelo & Tischiio, 2005, p. 37). The best part is that these new interpretive and rhetorical strategies can be transferred to future writing tasks.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

For decades, high school English teachers have issued calls for “authentic” writing and “real-world” assignments. However, they still assign “pretend” writing. When students see no relevant connection between learning and life, they do not try to store the learning for life, but only through the test or essay. Service-learning is a successful cure for the “empty assignment syndrome,” and it is a way to level the power structure within the class—to de-center the role of the teacher as the authoritarian and to empower students to take responsibility for making choices regarding their own writing projects and the direction of their work and the class in general. If students write only on traditional academic subjects, in response to assignments designed by and intended for the teacher, they are unlikely to develop the rhetorical awareness and adaptability that 21st century literacy demands (Warren & Otto, 2019, p. 12). When students have real responsibilities, challenging tasks, and are able to think and go beyond the



classroom, they become passionate learners, all because they are given an opportunity for what Paulo Friere calls “authentic thought” (1970, p. 71). Teachers want “writing that marches and sings and exists because there is something for it to do.” They want “writing that comes from their classrooms to carry a tune, to change minds and hearts, to stir up a conversation” (Murphy & Smith, 2020, p. 3).

Not only does service-learning address a number of the TEKS, but as Schine (1996) states, “it is also uniquely responsive to the traits of high school students—the need to test oneself, to try on adult roles, to experiment with new relationships, to be trusted, to connect with the world beyond the school and family” (3). It is clear that there is a transformative nature to service-learning. It produces students who are “more tolerant, altruistic, and culturally aware; who have stronger leadership and communication skills; and who are ‘producers and givers’ rather than the stereotype of ‘receivers and takers’” (Andrus, 1996, p.10). Service-learning challenges students beyond paragraph-and-sentence-level assignments and gives them authentic opportunities to be makers of meaning and agents for change. It is important to remember that “the writing that matters most is writing that gets up off the page or screen, puts on its working boots, and marches out to get something done” (qtd. in Murphy & Smith 2020, p. 3).

## **Chapter 4:**

### **Grammar Instruction**

“You teach English? Oh, I better watch my grammar!” Being a high school English teacher for twenty-four years, I have heard this comment thousands of times. I have learned to awkwardly laugh and quickly change the topic because I know behind the joke lies a controversial issue. One that I do not feel comfortable debating. One reason this conversation is so prevalent is that people have varying definitions of what grammar means and what grammar instruction should look like. Weaver (1996) explains that there are three kinds of grammar: (1) a description of the syntax of a language, (2) a set of prescriptions or rules for using language, and (3) the rhetorically effective use of syntactic structures (2). To most people, grammar refers to a set of rules needed to speak and write clearly and “correctly” in the conventional form of the language. As a lover of language, I have always found grammar interesting. My love affair with grammar goes back to sixth grade English and lessons on diagramming sentences. Even then, I was one of the few students who found dissecting the words in sentences to be therapeutic. I belted out the words to “Conjunction Junction” with pride. When I became a teacher, a friend bought me a coffee cup that said, “I am silently correcting your grammar.” For Christmas one year, my mother gifted me a shirt with “Let’s eat Grandma! Let’s eat, Grandma! Punctuation saves lives.” on the front. I continued the legacy of following the rules of Standard English by making my students listen to “Unpack Your Adjectives” from Schoolhouse Rock. We played grammar games in class and circled and underlined parts of speech in sentences. However, my students still could not effectively use infinitive phrases in their speeches or remember that commas are used after introductory elements. The songs, games, and grammar exercises in the textbook were not working. The teachers at my school were using the same methods of grammar

instruction, so they could not help. Books about grammar instruction mainly focused on how to make the methods I was already using more fun and engaging, which did not solve the problem. What I needed was a completely different method. In my first doctoral class, I was introduced to research on grammar instruction. It was in this class that I read articles about grammar instruction and errors by David Bartholomae, Maxine Hairston, Patrick Hartwell, Bruce Horner, and Joseph Williams. Soon after, I started to rethink and redesign the grammar instruction in my high school English classroom.

In this chapter, I will discuss the history of grammar instruction and what I have learned about grammar instruction through my doctoral research and studies as well as my twenty-four years in education. I will focus on how the history of grammar instruction can explain why formal grammar study still exists in today's classrooms. I will also share how I redefined grammar instruction in my class by narrowing the focus, using genre study, and studying the cultural capital of grammar use in order to create a study of language where the skills learned transfer to writing.

### **The History of Grammar Instruction**

I believe that writing teachers need to study the historical background of grammar. Doing so will allow teachers to understand the deep-rooted practices that still exist in the field and encourage teachers to redefine the definition of grammar instruction. The answer to why prescriptive grammar is still taught can be found in the history of England, Anglo-Saxon language in its own terms, rather than in terms of Latin (Murphy, 2012). Much of the history of composition has been shaped by cultural and social factors (Connors, 1997; Greene et al., 1993; Murphy, 2012; Nystrand et al., 1993). In order to see the power of these factors, all we need to do is look at the history of grammar instruction in composition studies. The debate about how or

if to teach grammar is one that still fills the halls of English departments in both secondary and higher education. These questions arise and linger in part because of America's obsession with "correctness" and "proper English." Writing is a complex, cognitive process, so what method could be used to teach such an intricate process? It was decided that the rules of proper grammar were the answer. This is not just a 21st-century creation. This focus on correctness in composition classes was essentially an 18th-century invention and a sign of membership in the upper strata. It can be traced back to the creation of English grammar schools and the textbook.

As enrollment in primary schools and colleges continued to increase in the late 1800s and early 1900s, students' deficiency in writing skills, particularly mechanics and correctness of writing, was highlighted (Murphy, 2012). As a result, grammar instruction in the United States became an important aspect of primary education. Originally, the focus of grammar schools was on the study of Latin grammar. Eventually, English grammar replaced Latin grammar and became the main focus of elementary grades. Early grammar instruction had little to do with writing and was instead a formal, mental discipline that required rote memorization (Murphy, 2012; Nystrand et al., 1993). This is no surprise since the memorization of speeches and the focus on oral rhetoric were the foundation of composition studies (Murphy, 1990, p. 180). Although grammar and writing were often taught together, they were still seen as separate. According to Connors (1997), the period around 1860 became the "heyday of grammar." Grammar was considered a necessary part of all composition instruction of the period and was therefore stressed at all levels (Murphy, 1990). In these grammar schools, students were often expected to memorize their grammar books and to correct sentences that had errors, citing the rule that had been broken. The preface in Lindley Murray's book *English Grammar* (1807) stated that "students who learn the definitions and rules contained in this abridgement, and apply

them by correcting the Exercises, will obtain a good knowledge of English grammar” (qtd. in Patriquin, 2017, p. 3). The thought was that this exercise would eventually help students find errors in their own prose and correct those errors. However, because the study of grammatical rules does not transfer to students’ own writing, students’ writing continued to contain errors. Many teachers believed that the way to “good” English, written and spoken, was primarily through the knowledge of grammar. In *Errors and Expectations* (1997), Shaughnessy describes this as an obsessive, rule-worship, formal error hunt that causes student essays to cease being “literary efforts.” Skill in writing meant one thing: error avoidance. Even today, many people believe that evidence of strong writing is the lack of surface-level errors.

Eventually, “school grammar” began to be seen as impractical and sterile, which caused several universities to combine grammar and writing (Murphy, 2012). However, still seen as a sign of intelligence, grammar correctness retained its place as a problem to be solved. Many teachers continued the “drill and kill” methods from previous years. Because it appeared as if students did not remember their early grammar lessons, these lessons were repeated with the aim that this knowledge would eventually transform into the ability to write well (Murphy, 2012, p. 45). In these “drill and kill” lessons, students were given lists of grammar rules to memorize and worksheets where they were directed to identify those grammar elements. For example, a lesson on clauses might include the memorization of words that begin subordinate clauses. Students would then have to underline these words in a given set of sentences. However, because students were not taught how to effectively use subordinate clauses, they would place them incorrectly in their own writing, leading to confusion and awkwardness.

As more colleges expanded their rhetoric and composition programs, researchers began to pay more attention to the importance of writing, discovering that prescriptive grammar instruction

was ineffective. Steps, such as the memorization of rules, previously taken to combat this problem, were not working. Prescriptive grammar came under attack for being sterile and impractical. Composition teachers began to view discourse as “more organic than mechanical”—a skill that “needed to be nurtured” (Connors, 1997, p. 302). Amare (2005) explains that “grammar was perceived then as it often is now as contrary to creative and critical thinking” (p. 158). However, education is slow to change. Today, textbook companies still include *Warriner's Handbook* in their adoptions and English teachers keep requiring it (or similar handbooks) for their classes. Teachers continue to cling to antiquated practices of grammar instruction, and those who realize that “what we have always done” does not work are at a loss for what to do instead. Why has handbook grammar continued for so long? One reason is that it was a significant part of most adults' English classes. In addition, having one set—a “correct”—list of rules allows people to believe that there is one way to success that anyone in our democratic world has access to (Dunn & Lindblom, 2003). Because writing is such a fluid and complex process and is anything but black-and-white, a handy set of rules makes grading easier for teachers. Teachers will agree that avoiding questions such as “why did I get points taken off for this?” or “why is my grade a 90 instead of a 100?” makes their lives easier. It is difficult to explain to a student what “works” in a writing piece. Correcting grammar and usage errors serves as a type of feedback, which otherwise can take hours, and keeps the teacher in a position of authority.

By the early 1900s, the belief that “good” writing was “correct” writing was challenged, and mechanical “correctness” as the most important grading element for student writing was questioned (Connors, 1997; Greene et al., 1993; Miller, 2011; Murphy, 2012). English teachers began to discuss two questions: what should “grammar” be, and if it should be taught, how can it help students read and write better? However, change did not come until the mid-1900s when

the CCCC and NCTE (and its publication of *The English Journal*) were founded and voiced the need for the movement away from composition-as-grammar (Murphy, 2012). As a result, teachers started to look to something other than grammar textbooks for support and research into their craft. Once again, a shift in focus occurred in the field of composition. Similar to the mid-1800s, formal grammar was under attack, and those teaching rhetoric realized that students' writing was not improving (Connors, 1997). Many realized that the research indicated (and still does) that the teaching and focus on formal, "school" grammar can actually have a harmful effect on writing because it takes time and instruction away from writing (Braddock, 1963). Soon after, the focus moved from the acquisition of grammar rules to the acquisition of language (Murphy, 2012). In these changes, from the concentration of formal grammar study to writing and back again, we can see the start of something that has not changed since these times: the question of whether English instructors should focus on the surface-level features of writing *or* the process and/or product of writing (the written text).

The late 1960s became a time for questioning and, yet again, a literary crisis (Murphy, 2012). In 1975, the article "Why Johnny Can't Write?" made many teachers and researchers contemplate the teaching of writing. Questions, such as "how can we, or should we, teach writing as an art?" "should we teach the formal and rhetorical aspects of writing separately?" and "what part does the reader/audience play in the teaching of writing?" helped establish the field of composition into, what many claim, was its first real appearance as a field worthy of its own specialization within English studies. Soon after, another attempt to find the true focus of composition pedagogy occurred. In this same decade, the whole language approach fought to integrate reading, writing, speaking, and listening, which is still the focus of most of the state standards for elementary through high school English (Murphy, 2012).

One of the most disturbing mindsets left over from the history of grammar instruction is the cultural implications of grammatical errors. According to Dunn and Lindblom (2003), the grammar debate is really about conflicting social forces people would rather not discuss: race and ethnicity, power and privilege, oppression and marginalization. Having a single standard does help facilitate communication between people separated by time and space. Although the purpose of prescriptive grammar was not to discriminate, its use still allows people to judge and discriminate against those who commit the sin of grammatical errors. The notion that there is one “correct” way of writing and grammar use ignores the fact that all varieties of language are rule-governed. Even more frightening is that it gives power to those who speak and use formal English correctly, even though research (Krashen, 1998; Shaughnessy, 1979; Weaver, 1996) shows that knowing the rules is largely irrelevant to communication. Dunn and Lindblom (2003) state that if teachers continue to teach their students that there is one “correct” way to speak and write, they are communicating that they agree with a discriminatory power system. Cultural and social capital are associated with the use of correct grammar, something Micciche (2004) discusses. If “handbook English” is promoted as the only “correct” form of grammar, then English teachers are inherently advocating that some language-use conventions are better than others are. That is, as Dunn and Lindbolm (2003) so accurately explain, is a discriminatory power system. What counts as “correct” grammar depends on where the text is read or spoken and by whom. As Bartholomae (1980) states, it is the teacher’s job to see, study, and understand the particular “idiosyncratic dialect” of each writer (p. 254). In actuality, writing is effective because it achieves its purpose for the audience it was written for, not because it has an absence of errors.



The history of grammar instruction explains why teachers today are confused on how to effectively teach these separate, but deeply connected, elements of English. The debate over the red pen and the often damaging “blood” it spills on students’ writing still rages today. Many teachers either teach grammar isolated from reading and writing, try to embed it within writing instruction, or do not teach it at all. Some continue to use grammar handbooks. Reading the research on the teaching of grammar, however, suggests that the best way to teach grammar is to teach it as rhetorical language, remembering that writers use language for different purposes and for different audiences. Also, language (and hence, grammar) comes with cultural baggage and assumptions made regarding people’s intelligence and wealth.

### **Redefining and Rethinking Errors**

As stated earlier, the grammar debate exists in some regard because researchers and teachers have different definitions of grammar and grammar instruction (Petruzzella, 1996, p. 69). To most people, “formal” or “school” grammar refers to a set of rules and terminology. This type of grammar instruction (prescriptive grammar) often includes memorization and what Bartholomae (1980) calls the “drill and kill” method of assigning worksheets. Classroom teachers generally associate the term “grammar” with mechanics (usage skills such as subject-verb agreement, punctuation, and spelling). Among linguists, however, grammar “most often refers to the internalized linguistic system that a person develops through language immersion, a system so deeply embedded in the unconscious as to be nearly inaccessible” (Warren & Otto, 2020, p. 2). Grammar, in my mind, meant errors in mechanics and usage. It was the instruction of formal, “school” grammar.

Part of the change in my grammar instruction involved how I viewed errors. The research from my education classes in the 1990s taught me that children do not learn the basic structure of

their native language through direct instruction, but through their own discovery and experimentation (Loban, 1976; Weaver, 1996). Yet, because I have always taught middle and high school students, I wanted my English class to be challenging and prepare my students for the more advanced English courses they would take in the future, like AP English, American Studies, and Dual Credit. Like many teachers, I resorted to direct instruction methods, more of a product (behavioral) approach rather than a process (constructivist) approach. I did not consider the “why” surrounding students’ errors. I fixated on the “what.” Errors were bad, not good. My goal of instruction was a teaching perspective—to eliminate all errors by establishing correct, automatic habits—and not a learning perspective (Kroll & Schafer, 1978, p. 243). In the first decade of my teaching career, I did incorporate engaging learning activities in my course. However, few of these assignments focused on grammar. Most were based on literature or writing. My focus on errors even gave me the reputation as a “hard grader.” At the time, I felt like I was being a good teacher, challenging students and helping them to become stronger writers. It was not until I read the research on grammar instruction in my first doctoral class that I realized I was wasting my time and my students’ time. Shortly after, I began to redefine and rethink how I viewed and treated errors in my class.

One major shift in my thinking and instruction included seeing errors as necessary and something that accompanies growth. As students learn language, they make various types of errors. Even in high school, the sophisticated language we want our students to use is uncomfortable and unfamiliar to them. Weaver (1996) conducted a study with John, a five-year-old student. Even though John is obviously younger than high school students are, the study does provide some interesting insight into developmental characteristics that apply to writing. Based on John’s drawings, we can see that learners do not show mastery of concepts all at once. As

they grow as learners, students may even make mistakes in areas they previously showed mastery of. In Weaver's study, John includes arms in two of the first drawings, but they are simple line arms versus two-dimensional ones. Weaver notes that "learners may develop several hypotheses about how something is done before achieving adult or expert competence" (p. 60). In another picture, John includes other body features and omits the arms. Based on this drawing, we can conclude that students will sometimes not incorporate learned concepts when they are trying something new. Shaughnessy (1977) states that "it is not unusual for people acquiring a skill to get 'worse' before they get better and for writers to err more as they venture more" (p. 120). This may seem apparent to many people, but because my students were teens, I assumed that they would be able to understand a grammatical concept and then correctly incorporate it into their own writing. Many teachers misconceive the natural role of error in writing growth. Mistakes have to accompany learning and should be viewed as an active part of learning. Haswell (1988) argues that "writing errors may be not so much mistakes as mis-takes, missteps, inevitable in traversing new ground" (p. 481). Thus, it is helpful to realize that students' errors are often the result of thinking and not carelessness. A piece of writing should not be seen as a "test" of the student's ability, or lack of it, to produce perfect prose, but rather as a chance for a developing writer to use all of his present language capabilities to their fullest extent to produce genuine written communication (Rosen, 1987, p. 64). Harris (1981) encourages teachers to view errors as indications of "linguistic growth" (p. 177). She argues that "rather than being a case for the red pencil, [errors] are a chance for a teacher to encourage growing linguistic strength" (p. 177). As the concepts in my course became more difficult, I saw what Weaver (1996) notes in her book. Instruction in how to do something new will "often result in writers making new kinds of errors" (p. 70). In addition, as students grow as writers, more sophisticated errors will replace

less sophisticated ones. Because writing is a risk-taking process, attempts at new writing patterns will create new error patterns as students progress.

As I began to better understand the reason for my students' errors, I remembered articles by Bartholomae (1980) and Williams (1981) that addressed this topic. Both authors discuss errors and the tendency for teachers to look for errors, what Bartholomae calls reading "as policemen, examiners, and gatekeepers" (p. 255). Williams (1981) questions why it is acceptable for published writers to not follow the rules in grammar handbooks and textbooks, yet student writers are expected to strictly follow these rules. For over a decade, I was applauding writers, like William Faulkner, who took risks in writing, breaking the rules for rhetorical and stylistic effect. I would even share these writers' works with my students. However, I would later "correct" errors in my students' writing. As Bartholomae (1980) mentions in his text, I was guilty of dismissing my students' texts as "non-writing, as meaningless, or imperfect writing" (p. 254). Similar to Shaughnessy's work (1977), Bartholomae (1980) believes that teachers should view students' writing as "processes of thought" (p. 255). He states that it is the teacher's job "to see, study, and understand the particular 'idiosyncratic dialect' that each writer has" (255). Errors are interesting clues about what is going on in our students' minds, "clues to the linguistic and cognitive processes that function unobserved" (Kroll & Schafer, 1978, p. 242). As my view of errors changed, I began to move from grammar to rhetoric, realizing that "grammar maps out the possible; rhetoric narrows the possible down to the desirable or effective" (Christen & Christensen, 1978, p. 59). As students played with more sophisticated stylistic and grammatical elements in their writing, I came to expect errors to accompany that growth. And I was okay, even happy, with that.

## Reimagining the Teaching of Grammar

When I first began teaching, I taught grammar through sentence diagramming because that was the way I learned it. When sentence diagramming went out of style, I did what many English teachers do. I assigned the grammar exercises in books like the *McGraw-Hill Handbook of English Grammar* or the grammar textbooks that my district adopted. I knew that this was not helping students' writing because I would continue to see grammar errors on topics I had taught. I also knew that teaching from a grammar textbook was not transferring to writing. It soon became clear that I needed to revise how I thought about and taught grammar if I wanted my students to learn and apply what they learned. However, it was not until I read the research about formal grammar instruction that I understood what Sams (2003) states in his article: "direct instruction in grammar doesn't work because it's not related to writing" (p. 63). As my notion of grammar instruction changed, I was left wondering what to do. If years of teaching "school" grammar was not beneficial, then how was I supposed to teach students these elements? Certain grammar concepts are required as part of the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS). I have always been a ruler-follower, especially when it is mandated by the state. I knew from the research I read that I wanted to focus on the rhetorical and stylistic aspects of grammar—an approach that would bring grammar to life and take grammar instruction beyond a strict list of rules. I wanted my classroom to be filled with discussions throughout the writing process of rhetorical and stylistic issues that were meaningful to my students. I wanted to heighten the rhetorical possibilities of different grammatical structures. My solution was to teach grammar as part of the writing workshop and in the context of students' own writing. Since the 1980s, and especially in the last decade, researchers have advocated for teachers to guide their students through the processes and strategies that published writers use (Calkins, 1983; Gallagher, 2011;

Kirby & Crovitz, 2013; Kittle, 2008; Murray, 1985; Sommers, 1980). I realized that the practices and philosophies of a writing workshop were the perfect fit for grammar instruction. Weaver (1996) states that the first step toward dealing with errors and grammar more effectively is “to guide [students] through the intermingled phases of the writing process. It means serving as an advocate, rather than an adversary, a critic, or judge” (p. 83-84). As my teaching evolved, I added in more effective practices, such as the workshop method. In my classroom, students had choice in what they wrote, and we were a community of writers. Students took their writing through each phase of the writing process, and they seemed to enjoy writing more than they had in the past. However, I still taught grammar out of the context of writing. Students were making the same mistakes as before, and my red pen was still busy correcting grammatical errors in students’ writing. From my research, I knew that there were other ways to “teach” grammar. I decided to take the methods that the research (Benjamin & Olivia, 2007; Dunn & Lindholm, 2011; Kolln, 2009; Weaver, 1996) proved as effective and revise the grammar instruction in my class. I decided to focus on four key elements. I would:

1. narrow the focus and not teach every grammar rule;
2. use genre study to incorporate grammar skills;
3. investigate the relationship between grammar (language) and power; and
4. redefine grammar instruction as language study, which I would call “rhetorical grammar.”

### ***Narrow the Focus***

Before my doctoral journey, I was stuck in red-pen mode, marking every error on students’ writing. I would then spend hours writing sentences so my students could underline the subject and circle the verb, thinking that this would help lessen the number of subject-verb agreement

errors I saw in their papers. I did what the research says not to do: concentrate on errors as “right” or “wrong.” I failed to consider what Devereaux and Crovitz (2018) say about language—that language work must be more about effective contextual use than correct answers (p. 24). I also took a well-known statement from Braddock et al. (1963)—“the teaching of formal grammar has a negligible...or even harmful effect on the improvement of writing”—to mean that grammar should not be taught at all. Petruzzella (1996) explains:

Not teaching formal grammar does not mean abandoning all attempts to teach the conventions of Standard English. After all, clear and coherent content is an important component of good writing, and the control of mechanical conventions is also essential for clear communication. (p. 71)

The first step I took to revise how I taught grammar was to narrow the focus and limit the grammar terminology I used in class. I included only those features that would be most helpful to my students. Sedgwick (1986) cautions teachers not to spend time on minor or archaic rules, such as ending a sentence with a preposition or splitting infinitives (p. 14). Instead, teachers should focus on major problems that occur in their students’ own writing. Even advocates of error analysis (Hillocks, 1986; Sedgwick, 1989; Shaughnessy, 1977; Sherwin, 1969) suggest concentrating on specific types of errors, analyzing patterns and causes of these errors, and then developing instruction strategies specifically to deal with these patterns. Devereaux and Crovitz (2018) maintain that because our brains process language in chunks, phrases, and clauses, composition teachers should begin grammar instruction by discussing and analyzing these chunks instead of overwhelming students with numerous terms and rules (p. 21). Noguchi (1991) agrees and recommends that teachers focus on the grammar elements that correspond to the errors that commonly occur in the writing of students in composition classes and “those that

seriously bother people who hold positions of power in the business and professional community (p. 105). However, other research argues that what is considered a serious error to one person, even English teachers, may not bother other people (Connors & Lunsford, 1988). Connors and Lunsford (1988) state:

Teacher's ideas about error definition and classification have always been absolute products of their time and cultures. Teachers have always marked different phenomena as errors, called them different things, given them different weights. (p. 399)

This conflicting information is confusing to teachers. If different errors bother different people, then how do English teachers know what to focus on? Research (Connors & Lunsford, 1988; Noguchi, 1991) indicates that the good news is that most of the errors mentioned in research studies on grammar “seem to be ones that we can help students learn to eliminate simply through examples” (Weaver, 1996, p. 117). These include the omission of apostrophes from possessives, ineffective fragments, comma splices, and the misspelling of common homophones, such as *their, there, they're*. Learning the names for the parts of speech can be done incidentally during the course of reading and writing, according to Weaver (1996). Thus, teachers can teach basic grammatical terminology simply by using it. I tried this in my own classes and found it to be successful. For example, while working on their mini-memoir, I introduced my students to participial phrases, absolute phrases, and gerund phrases. I did not make them memorize the terms. I showed them examples from published texts using these phrases and had them practice them in their own writing. I knew that writing a memoir would require students to use constructions that added description and voice to their writing, which is why I selected the three types of phrases listed above. Many of my students were already using them, so I asked them where they learned them. One student stated: “I don't even know what they are called. I just



know that I've seen them used in things I've read." After a more in-depth discussion with my students, I really began to see that students can "learn" grammar without being taught a long list of grammar terminology or having to identify grammar elements. Another assignment that allowed me to target specific errors in my students' writing was the Grammar Log (Appendix A). After I marked examples of a particular error in their writing, my students completed a log, which instructed them to:

- (1) to keep a running tally of all the times they commit a particular type of error,
- (2) to correct these errors,
- (3) to record the applicable rule in their own words,
- (4) to reflect on why this rule gives them trouble, and
- (5) to develop a plan for internalizing the rule. (Warren & Otto, 2020, p. 9)

The Grammar Log, because it targets students' individual language problems, allows teachers to do more than just "cover" grammar. English teachers can "tailor instruction to the specific problems an individual student has with error, and unlike workbooks, keep attention focused on the student's own writing" (Hull, 1986, p. 220). The teaching of "formal" grammar is not what an assignment like the Grammar Log focuses on. Many researchers (Meckel, 1963; Neuleib & Brosnahan, 1987) advocate for a form of error analysis where students work only on the errors in their own writing and not on rules external to that writing.

### ***Genre Study and Grammar***

Next, because I saw the benefit of matching grammar with genre study in my memoir assignment, I wanted to see what the research said about teaching different grammar concepts within different genres. Again, because my class used the workshop structure, I was familiar with incorporating numerous genres into the class. Students, more often than not, had a choice in

what they read, and I did organize the course around specific genres. I began with numerous opportunities to dig deep into texts. Katie Wood Ray (1999) states that the writer's eye can be trained to notice writerly shapes (p. 51). Students need multiple opportunities to discuss what types of language usage and sentence constructions a writer uses in a particular text, and how these choices help accomplish the meaning and purpose. In fact, language is and always has been about making the best choices out of the options available in a particular situation. Micciche (2004) suggests that students analyze texts as skillfully crafted documents that convey and perform different kinds of meaning—among them, aesthetic, rhetorical, and political” (p. 724). I have found that looking at the ways other writers use language helps students read like writers and write like readers. Dean (2011) recommends looking at different types of texts. He states that “more than exposure, they need *immersion* in texts of all kinds” (p. 23). However, “most of us were taught about language from the outside in, off a chalkboard instead of from beautiful texts” (Ray, 1999, p. 44) Dean gives a helpful example on how to help students explore language. His example pertains to the study of online book reviews:

- What do we notice about the language of this genre? How formal or informal is it?
- What do we notice about the way the sentences are structured? Are there similar kinds of sentences?
- What language regularities do you notice across several examples? What language choices do you see only in one or two examples?
- How do these choices compare and contrast to choices in other genres you are familiar with?

- How could the language choices reflect the situation of this genre, its users (writers and readers—and their relationship to each other) and its place (online or in print, for example)? (p. 23)

### ***Language and Power***

Stanford linguist, Alexandra Shashkevich (2016) studied how language is interpreted by people and found that “even small differences in language use can correspond with biased beliefs of the speakers” (p. 3). Although people react differently to errors in writing, evidence suggests that employers take standard usage seriously, and they expect English teachers to teach it. Charney et al. (1992) investigated how job recruiters looking to fill mechanical engineering and marketing positions viewed resumes with errors. In their study, Charney et al. wanted to know what errors were penalized and which ones were overlooked or ignored. They found that resumes that did not follow standard conventions for mechanics were not taken seriously even if the candidates were qualified (p. 69). In her study of 101 professional people, Hairston (1981) found that respondents reacted most strongly against errors “that were so glaring they might be called ‘status markers’” (p. 796). Errors such as incorrect verb tense (“He brung” and “We was”), double negatives, and objective pronouns used as subjects were the errors that those surveyed disapproved of the most. Next were errors such as sentence fragments, parallel structure, and fault adverb forms (p. 797). Despite the concern for these errors, this group of professionals was even more concerned about content; they cared more about clarity and economy than they did about surface features (p. 798). Hairston (1981) emphasizes that teachers and students should realize that “this fairly representative sample of middle-aged and influential Americans has strong conservative views about usage” (p. 799). Based on this study and similar studies, it is clear that we cannot afford to let students leave our classrooms thinking that surface

errors of discourse do not matter. It is difficult to predict the way a given reader will react to errors. Beason (2001) found that “error gravity does not simply depend on *who* is reading, but *what* they are reading” (p. 42). He believes that it is crucial to understand extra-textual features.

He states:

Too many students, if not teachers, view errors simply in terms of "breaking rules"—a failure to adhere to textbook dictums for producing a text. By considering how forces beyond the text shape the reader's reactions and by considering how errors in turn shape the writer's ethos perhaps students can better understand that writing means more than the production of texts, more than adhering to abstract guidelines removed from the needs, biases, and intentions of readers. (p. 47-48)

However, students should not be taught that “a slip in grammar” or a mistake in spelling is “a kind of sin” (Metcalf qtd. in Dunn & Lindblom, 2011, p. 3). Doing so implies that “one variety of English is deemed inherently superior to other varieties” (Warren & Otto, 2020, p. 9). Because language is a rich, multifaceted tool for effective communication, students must learn to attend to the expectations of the audience and genre characteristics. Traditional grammar instruction rarely develops these skills. So, how do composition teachers teach grammar that is culturally sensitive? In the “From the Editor” section of the *English Journal*’s issue “Beyond Grammar: The Richness of English Language” (2011), Ken Lindblom gives five concepts about language that readers should consider. I believe that these concepts are important for everyone to know when discussing grammar. They are:

- *Consider the problem of “The.”* Lindblom (2011) states that “although we think of our language as ‘The English Language,’ the idea that there is one English language is a

myth. There are, in fact, many, many specific versions of English language that function effectively and continuously all over the world.” (p. 10)

- *Consider using the phrase “standardized English” instead of “Standard English.”*  
Lindblom (2011) believes that using “Standard English” conveys that this formal version of English, the one taught in schools, is somehow superior to other versions of English.
- *Take an additive approach, not a deficit approach in language study.* According to Lindblom, students already know more about language than teachers give them credit for. They “don’t come to us broken” and they “don’t need to be fixed” (p. 11). As language teachers, our job is to give them transferable skills to grow as writers, readers, and speakers. In order to do this, Lindblom recommends having a “both/and” attitude (p. 11) by including and honoring any version of English even if we focus more on standardized English.
- *Take a constructivist approach, not a correctionist approach, to student writing and speaking.* “Instead of using examples of supposedly ‘correct’ and ‘incorrect’ English, help students understand the varieties of English that operate in the world and which versions are effective in what rhetorical situations.” (p. 11)
- *Give students options, not rules.* If students want to communicate effectively, they need to know the options available to them. Help students understand that there are different ways to write for different purposes. “Writing style doesn’t come after students learn ‘the rules.’ Rules come from what stylistic options writers care to make use of in a particular rhetorical situation.” (Lindblom, 2011, p. 11)

An assignment that I have found especially helpful for investigating and critically examining the assumptions implied about language and people are Grammar Rants (Appendix B). In their book *Grammar Rants*, Dunn and Lindblom suggest exposing students to grammar rants, published complaints about other people's language use. Through these grammar rants, students will learn a great deal about writing and are more likely to become savvy writers who "know the conventions of the genre, their own levels of power in each writing situation, and the expectations of their audience" (Dunn & Lindblom, 2011, p. xiii). The word choice, syntax, and punctuation of our students' writing affect how readers view the students themselves. In 1756, Thomas Sheridan remarked that "a revival of the art of speaking, and the study of our language, might contribute, in a great measure to the cure of the evils of immorality, ignorance, and false taste" (qtd. in Nunan, 2005, p. 71). Today, many people share Sheridan's view of language. Grammatical correctness is still a measure of a person's character, education, and wealth. Beason (2001) says that not only do "errors create misunderstandings of the text's *meaning*, they harm the *image* of the writer" (p. 48). Much of the controversy surrounding errors and corrections in writing has to do with power, status, and class (Hull, 1985). Unfortunately, powerful people, like potential employers, make value judgments about writers' intelligence, education, morals, and personality based on language use and the errors found in their writing. In or after high school, my students will apply for jobs. Because errors can have an impact on their image and communicability, error avoidance needs to have a place in my curriculum. Students need to have the opportunity to recognize the ramifications of real language use in specific contexts. Devereaux and Crovitz (2018) suggest inviting students to have a messy discussion regarding the question of power and ethics when it comes to language use (p. 23). According to Horner (1992):

If we accept the view that errors are the product of social relationships, and that editing is a matter of negotiating those relationships, then our teaching of error will have to engage issues of power, authority, and conflict. What counts as an error will have to be taught as negotiable and thus variable, dependent on the specific historical and social context in which a notation occurs, its status as an error varying from reader to reader, even from reading to reading, as agreements as to relationships of power and authority are renegotiated. (p. 176)

Prescriptive grammar instruction, where there is a “domain of right/wrong,” causes students to believe that they have no control over or authority on their own writing (Horner, 1992, p. 181). English teachers must stop viewing their jobs as “protectors of pure English,” what Shaughnessy (1977) calls “guarding the tower” and “holding off the barbarians who will corrupt the language if we relax our vigilance (qtd. in Hairston, 1981, p. 794). There is also “an ethical reason to embrace linguistic diversity” (Warren & Otto, 2020, p. 11). Writers often use “the language of home and heart,” and privileging standard, “correct” English over other dialects communicates that people who use other variations of our language are less intelligent and less moral than we are (Benjamin & Olivia, 2007, p. 24). In his essay “If Black English Isn’t a Language, Then Tell Me, What Is?” (1979) James Baldwin states:

Language is also a political instrument, means, and proof of power. It is the most vital and crucial key to identify: It reveals the private identity, and connects one with, or divorces one from, the larger, public, or communal identity. (p. 129)

Ignoring Baldwin’s words and the research that shows that people do judge others based on the errors they make in writing would be a disservice to high school students.

## *Rhetorical Grammar*

I, like many English teachers, expected my students to understand grammatical rules without explaining their purpose in writing. Some students were able to do this. However, the vast majority of my students struggled to correctly identify the grammar elements I taught and could not smoothly incorporate them into their writing. There did not seem to be any noticeable growth in students' writing from formal grammar instruction.

Prior to my doctoral classes and research, I had no idea that despite the still widespread practice of prescriptive grammar instruction, research consistently proves that students struggle to learn and apply the rules of traditional grammar when they write. Macaulay's (1947) series of studies showed that high school students who received extensive study of traditional grammar had difficulty learning, remembering, and identifying the parts of speech (qtd. in Andrews et al., 2006, p. 40). Krashen (1986) also researched the teaching of grammar. The title of his article "Teaching Grammar: Why Bother?" clearly depicts his thoughts. He states that "research on the relationship between formal grammar instruction and performance on measures of writing ability is very consistent: There is no relationship between grammar study and writing" (p. 8) So, why do teachers continue to implement formal grammar instruction? Weaver (1996) gives several reasons:

- Teachers may not be aware of the research.
- They may not believe the research.
- They believe grammar is interesting and teach it for that reason.
- Teachers notice that some students are good readers and writers and are also good at grammar, so they assume that this correlation shows cause and effect.
- They are required to teach grammar.



- Teachers feel pressure from parents or other community members to teach grammar.
- They feel that although grammar may not help the average student, it still may help some students. (p. 24)

I taught formal grammar for many of these same reasons. I recently sent a survey to the twenty-three English teachers on my campus. Of these teachers, twenty responded. The teachers that responded also agreed with Weaver's (1996) reasons above. They said that they teach formal grammar because it is the way they were taught. One freshman English teacher said: "I don't necessarily believe that my grammar instruction is effective, but I am not sure what to do instead."

In 2010, I read Stephen King's book *On Writing: A Memoir of the Craft* and fell in love with the book. The chapter titled "Toolbox" was my favorite. King's view of a metaphorical box of writing tools used to improve writing spoke to me. So much so that I bought plastic tools in the toy section of Walmart and hung them in my room along with quotes from that section. However, even then, as a teacher with ten years of experience, I failed to understand grammar's role as a tool in students' writing toolboxes. Instead, I saw grammar as separate, divorced from writing. What I did instead was focus my writing instruction on the other "tools" King recommended: the importance of paragraphs and diction. Even though grammar is a tool King mentions, I did not know *how* to teach grammar except for the worksheets and workbooks I was already using. Similar to King's toolbox metaphor, Noden (1999) describes grammar as an artist's tool, stating that "writing is not constructed merely from experiences, information, characters or plots, but from fundamental artistic elements of grammar" (p. 3). Even Kolln (2009), a proponent of traditional grammar, advocates the teaching of rhetorical grammar

because it is “a tool that enables the writer to make effective choices” (p. 31). Nunan (2005) declares that teachers should give students the tools “by which to think with greater breadth and depth and act independently on those thoughts” (p. 72). This type of grammar instruction pushes students into what Vygotsky (1989) calls their “zone of proximal development,” allowing them to create and communicate deeper thoughts appropriately. Rhetorical grammar offers students a perspective on the way people purposefully use language. Micciche (2004) argues that it presents students with a framework and a vocabulary “for examining how language affects and infects social reality” and “provides them with tools for creating effective discourse” (p. 724).

When I started to reimagine what grammar instruction should look like in my class, I started by renaming what we did when we covered grammar elements. I thought of it as the study of language and not grammar. Devereaux and Crovitz (2018) state that students need to recognize the power of specific language choices and the range of rhetorical options for communication that are available. They explain that “substituting the more innocuous phrase *language study* for the G-word suggests a wider purpose and shifts students to more constructive work with words” (p. 19). Language study gives students the freedom to really explore “the region between a single word and a larger passage” (Devereaux & Crovitz, 2018, p.19). Grammar study, on the other hand, “with its morass of rules and conventions, is a realm of abstract, supposed truth rather than a contextual fit” (Devereaux & Crovitz, 2018, p. 20). Language study also allows us to discuss the power dynamics of language and privileged dialects such as Standard American English (Devereaux & Crovitz, 2018, p. 20). Finally, Devereaux & Crovitz (2018) argue that “starting from a linguistic perspective (rather than the often-alienating nomenclature of grammar) acknowledges students themselves as legitimate *experts with language* in their own right” (p.

20). I wanted my students to have a substantial toolbox of sophisticated resources to use to suit their purpose, audience, and form of discourse. As Dunn and Lindblom (2003) state:

Effective writing is not effective due to the absence of error. Effective writing works because it achieves its purposes with the particular audience for whom it was intended to work. (p. 44)

I also knew that students needed more time to discuss what they read with their classmates and experiment with the language and patterns that professional writers use. Weaver (1995) suggests “immersing students in good literature, including literature that is particularly interesting or challenging syntactically” (p. 144). One way to do this is by having students keep a Field Notebook (Appendix C). For this assignment, students record a passage of their own choosing and then analyze how grammar and content work together to convey meaning. According to Micciche (2004), this way of thinking challenges students' preconceptions about grammar as a rigid system for producing correctness. The Field Notebook is what Micciche (2004) defines as a book kept by a rhetorician as “a storehouse of materials to be remembered or quoted,” which shows the “relationship between *what* and *how* we say something” (p. 335). For this assignment, I wanted my students to take on the role of a grammar researcher. Like professional researchers, they collected data and made field notes as they analyzed their findings. The goal was for students to notice and name grammar “in the wild,” and then experiment and apply their findings to their own writing. Embedded in authentic literacy practice, the closeness to language encouraged by the Field Notebook requires students to dig around in the writing of others and really think about what makes it effective. This intimacy with language is a powerful way to show students that writing is made and that grammar has a role in that creation. Zuidema

(2012) adds that “when we, as readers, explore how grammar works in another author’s text, we also have the opportunity to think about how we author grammar in our own texts” (p. 64).

In the Field Notebook, students are required to note and name the grammar elements and structures we are currently studying. Students then comment on patterns and speculate why the author of the text used this specific grammatical choice. While some people might disagree with having students know certain specialized grammatical terms, researchers, such as Petruzzella (1996), believe that students need to have this common vocabulary. She states: “how could I talk to them about the most basic writing concepts...without using words like *subject* or *verb*?” (p. 68). Warren and Otto also agree, stating that “some specialized terminology is unavoidable if students are to develop the metalinguistic awareness required to isolate, name, and modify the linguistic conventions that constitute their own internalized grammars” (p. 6). Similarly, Zuidema (2012) believes that there is power in naming. Even the NCTE (2002) supports the use of some grammar terminology because “it is the language that makes it possible for us to talk about language” (qtd. in Otto & Warren, 2020, p. 6).

If the problem with prescriptive grammar is the lack of application and transfer, teaching grammar for its rhetorical effects is a possible solution. High school English students need to see language as authentic, living, and changing. Benjamin and Olivia (2007) suggest that we teach students “how to get language to do what we want it to do. How to make language beautiful as well as functional, unobtrusive as well as powerful, efficient as well as thorough” (p. 23).

Rhetorical grammar accomplishes all of this.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

It is time that high school English teachers realize that isolated grammar exercises and drills are not effective. Redefining and rethinking grammar instruction as rhetorical language study in

the context of genre study and writing instruction will lead to accuracy in usage. By using assignments such as the Grammar Log, Grammar Rants, and Field Notebook, students will engage in the sophisticated discussion of language and develop an insightful understanding of how language works.

## Chapter 5:

### Grading

“Mrs. Otto, I have an 89.4 in your class. How can I raise my grade? I will do anything.”

Sadly, this is something that I have heard from students for over 20 years. In my high school, if you are not ranked, then you had better get your application to McDonald’s filled out. At first, I would get irritated at my students when they would start grade-grubbing. Then I realized that our educational system is to blame. It has created an obsession with numbers, using them to define and control students and teachers. Parents put bumper stickers, like the well known “My student is an honor roll student,” on their cars. Questions like “How is school?” are asked not to elicit conversation about all of the interesting concepts learned in school, but to see how that child is performing in classes. Numbers—test scores and GPA—become the foundation of conversations with and about students.

I work in a district where the hashtag #protectthetradition is part of the culture of the school. Accolades, such as *Newsweek*’s Best High Schools in the Nation, National Blue Ribbon School, the largest Texas exemplary school district, and numerous state athletic championships, seem to have created a data-driven district that is motivated by titles, trophies, and numbers. There is no denying that being one of the top academic and athletic schools in Texas is an honor. However, educational psychologists have found that “an overemphasis on grades and achievement can actually undermine the pursuit of excellence” (Maehr, 1996, p. 23).

In the past, I have accepted late work from students, given extensive feedback on assignments, and tried to grade fairly. Yet, I felt like grades were the focus of the class. Students would regularly ask me what they needed to do to earn an “A” on assignments. When I would

pass back graded assignments, I witnessed students frantically turning pages to see the grade. Immediately after learning what they made on the assignment, they would throw it in the trash, not even reading the feedback that took me hours to leave. I felt like my relationships with my students were suffering. I was specifically concerned about grading writing. Every year I give my students an assignment I call “What’s Your Story?” In this assignment, students write a mini-memoir, focusing on one moment or event that shaped who they are. One of my students wrote about her stay in a mental hospital because of an eating disorder. Her piece was unorganized and full of grammatical errors. However, the raw emotional power and voice of the piece was something that I still remember, seven years later. I struggled to manipulate the rubric to honor the risks and strengths of this student’s writing, but I also had to be consistent. The department had a common rubric that we were directed to use. If I did not follow it, then my colleagues and principal would know. I really felt like I needed to find an effective alternative to the traditional grading system that I had used for years. I knew that I needed to “neuter grades” (Kohn, 2013, p. 16) and find a more accurate and specific way of assessing my students—one that would create a population of learners who truly seek and value the process of learning. I wanted to inspire intrinsic motivation in my students. I began experimenting with ways to assess students and still abide by the grade-reporting handbook of my district. I found ways to engage students in learning and to make my grading system a better reflection of that learning. However, I still struggled to make this student-centered approach to grading fit with my district’s reporting system. Until I read the research on grading practices in my doctoral classes, I had no clear direction on what to do next.

In this chapter, I will begin with a review of the literature on the history of grading practices. Then, I will discuss grading practices, including the purposes and problems of the traditional

grading system. Next, I will explain why a high school English course needs to move away from the current grading system. I will also discuss how my thinking on grading has evolved during my time in the PhD program. Finally, I will share what I learned from the research on grading practices and how I used this body of research to create a new assessment system in a district that requires grades.

### **Historical Perspective**

What can we learn from the history of grades? After reading the history of grading practices, I realized that the current grading practices are grounded in tradition and history instead of best practices. Each year of my twenty-four years in education, I have wondered why grades have “acquired an almost cult-like importance in American schools” (qtd. in Knight & Cooper, 2019). Examining the historical perspective of grades helped me understand how they are “deeply ingrained not only in education but in our culture” (Vatterott, 2015, p. 6). Brown (1963) agrees and explains that grading is “a trapping of the outworn past” (p. 206).

The urge to measure, rank, and categorize students has always been a part of formal education and has manifested itself in many different forms. For instance, the practice of assessing students to determine their level of knowledge has existed since the ancient Greeks (Guskey, 2009). According to Brookhart et al. (2016), the earliest research on grading focused on the reliability of the grades teachers assigned to their students’ work. Harvard began using “academic ‘divisions’ and a system of ‘classes’ to rank students in 1877. In 1897, Mount Holyoke College adopted the familiar system of A-D and F for grading students” (Lahey, 2014, p. 4). The multifarious nature of grades was even noted in 1888 by Edgeworth. In the *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society*, Edgeworth states that there are multiple sources of variation or error in grading (Guskey, 2013). During this time, students were grouped by age, and teachers wrote narrative descriptions of their



students' skill levels and readiness to advance to the next grade (Guskey, 2013). In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, students' progress was communicated to the parents orally (Brookhart et al., 2016, p. 805). However, written explanations of grades replaced these oral reports soon after (Guskey & Bailey, 2001).

As the 20th century approached, a more standard method of evaluating people's education was needed, which caused a shift from narrative, descriptive feedback to letters and percentage systems (Kirschenbaum et al., 1971). Elementary schools stayed with narrative evaluations but high schools moved to number grades because narrative evaluations were viewed as "time-consuming and lacking cost-effectiveness" (Brookhart et al., 2016, p. 805). As the student population grew and became more diverse, "high schools sought a way to manage the increasing demands and complexity of evaluating student progress" (Guskey & Bailey, 2001, p. 17). According to research (Brookhart et al., 2016; Stiggins, 2005) on grading practices, traditional grading was based on the industrial, factory model of education. This factory model allowed education itself to operate more efficiently. According to Stiggins (2005), "schools were designed to sort [people] into the various segments of [the] social and economic system" (p. 324). Researchers (Brookhart et al., 2016; Knight & Cooper, 2019) indicate that by the 1920s, teachers began to adopt grading systems with fewer and broader categories. By the 1940s, 80% of high schools used the A-F grading system (Brookhart et al., 2016, p. 805). In the early 1980s, grades remained the focus of schools. Brookhart (2013) states:

During this era of educational accountability, assessing student achievement of standards became firmly entrenched in the public's mind, along with support for achievement testing and making comparisons. (p. 53)

For more than a century, “grades have remained the primary indicator of how well students performed in school and the basis for making important decisions about students” (Guskey, 2015, p. 3). Because there are few discussions regarding the history and disadvantages of the current grading system, teachers’ views on grading are largely formed from “the past in a backward-looking fashion” (Olsen & Buchanan, 2019, p. 2017).

### **Grading Practices**

Guskey (2009) was correct when he said that teachers at all levels struggle to assign grades that are fair, accurate, and meaningful (p. 1). This occurs in part because people do not agree on the purposes of grading. So, what *is* the purpose of grades? To reward? To measure? To assess? What does “grading” mean? Researchers (Brookhart, 2011; Jung & Guskey, 2011) argue that in order to change grading practices and policies, all stakeholders must agree on the purpose and function of grades. One of the first conversations I had regarding grading policies occurred during my first year in my current district. A student and her parents were waiting for me when I arrived one morning. The parents were upset that their daughter could not participate in the Homecoming band halftime show because she was failing. “We have spent over three hundred dollars on this chrysanthemum,” the mom said while waving the receipt in my face. I calmly tried to explain to the parent that their daughter was missing half of the assignments in my class. “Why haven’t you allowed her to turn in those missing assignments?” the father asked. I responded that I do not take late work in this advanced sophomore English class. What followed was a heated discussion of the district’s policy on grading. Other teachers were having similar problems that year because of the lack of guidance and clarity on grading. The next year the district created the Grade Reporting Handbook. Its purpose was to:

Ensure that each campus or instructional level develops guidelines for teachers to follow in determining grades for students. Principals shall be responsible for ensuring that grades accurately reflect a student's relative mastery of an assignment and that a sufficient number of grades are taken to support the grade average assigned. In addition, the policy states that guidelines for grading shall be clearly communicated by teachers to students and parents. The grading guidelines also ensure consistency between campuses with corresponding grade configurations as well as horizontal alignment of grading and reporting practices on each CISD campus. ("Grade Reporting Handbook," C.I.S.D.)

In order to prevent a situation like mine, it is important that there is clear communication and an understanding of the purposes of grades, but, as will be revealed in this chapter, even an explicit policy like the one above contains a certain amount of ambiguity regarding the purpose of grades.

### **Grading Purposes**

I recently sent out a survey on grading to the teachers in my school. Of the 102 teachers who received the survey, 87 responded. One question on the survey asked teachers: "what do think is the main purpose of grades?" Teachers could choose from any of the following purposes that they believe applied: academic achievement, effort, participation, behavior, and attendance.

Although most of the teachers I surveyed stated that the function of grades is to show academic achievement, many teachers also said that grades should reflect non-academic criteria such as behavior. Just twelve of the 87 teachers at my school who responded believe that grades should only include academics. These survey results are telling. If teachers cannot even agree on the main purpose of grades, then how can the system possibly be consistent and fair?

Many researchers (Brookhart, 2004; Sackstein, 2015; Zerwin, 2020) argue that the main purpose of grades is to communicate the level of knowledge and mastery of skills a student has obtained in the course. However, grades are also used for other reasons. Crey and Carifio (2012) state:

Grading is made to serve a number of conflicted and confounded purposes, including (a) providing salient formative feedback to students and parents for the purposes of informing students during the learning process, (b) providing teachers with information for instructional planning and administrators with information for program evaluation, and (c) to bear witness and certify that graduates have indeed mastered required skills and are ready for higher levels of learning or other outside opportunities. (p. 202)

Alfie Kohn (1994), a well-known opponent of using grades, believes that grades are frequently used as a way of (a) sorting, (b) motivating, and (c) providing feedback. Marzano (2000) lists similar reasons, but stresses the importance of using grades as a way to give feedback to students, parents, and teachers regarding content-specific goals.

Today's current grading system serves multiple purposes. Many of which Kohn (1994) and Marzano (2000) mention. However, grades are not only a measure of students' mastery of concepts and a way to sort and rank students. Teachers use grades as a tool to inspire and control students, and sadly, many teachers use grades as a source of power (Olsen & Buchanan, 2019). The teachers I surveyed told me that they believe the main purpose of grades is to communicate to their students how they are doing in the class. Olsen and Buchanan (2019) found:

In one form or another, all 15 teachers said that grades tell students how they are faring relative to: (a) their own prior levels of mastery, (b) the levels at which their peers are, (c) the teacher's own expectations (for the one student or for all students in the class), or (d)

some objective standard established by the teacher, school, standardized tests, or the state. (p. 2014)

While teachers may agree that these purposes for grading are important, they seldom agree on which purpose is the most important (Guskey, 2015). These indirect purposes and multidimensional measures of academic knowledge, engagement, and persistence are what make grading a complicated process (Brookhart et al., 2016, p. 820).

### **Problems of the Traditional Grading System**

Traditional grading systems use a report card with a percentage or letter grade for each course. Assignments are typically divided into formative (daily, homework, quiz) and summative (tests and projects). Formative assignments are the assessments *for* learning and given during the grading period or the process of learning. On the other hand, summative assignments are assessments *of* learning and are at the end of the unit or grading period. For most teachers, summative assignments are always graded and involve more than one concept or skill. Students see this type of assignment as high-stakes because it is often heavily weighted. Typically, each student is given a score from 0-100 on each of these assignments. In my district, we are required to have a minimum of three major (summative) grades and eight minor (formative) grades. Major grades account for 60% of a student's grade, and minor grades are 40% of the grade. Each grade is recorded and averaged at the end of the reporting period. This grading system, as explained earlier, has been used for over 100 years. Because grades are calculated using numbers (math), they have been considered objective and accurate. However, this is not true.

***Grades are not an accurate, valid, and reliable means of students' learning.***

Even though grading is a mathematical process, it is also a very subjective one. Kohn (1999) writes that “what grades offer is spurious precision—a subjective rating masquerading as an

objective evaluation” (p. 1). As an example of subjective rating, even though teachers in Zoeckler’s (2007) study stated that their grading did not reflect judgments about their students’ character, they did admit to passing a borderline student who they deemed to have good character and failing a borderline student who they judged to be of bad character (p. 96). Because there is not a consistent set of specific criteria grades are based on, the interpretation of grades can vary between teachers and classes. Brookhart et al. (2016) found that “one hundred years of grading research have generally confirmed large variation among teachers in the validity and reliability of grades, both in the meaning of grades and in the accuracy of reporting” (p. 835). As hard as teachers try to be fair, objective, and consistent, grades are *always* subjective and not really an impartial and accurate measure of students’ learning. Wiggins (2015) states that “all scoring by human judges, including assigning points and taking them off is subjective. The question is not whether it is subjective, but whether it is defensible and credible” (p. 6).

Marzano (2000) details another problem with grades. Grades lack accuracy and validity because “teachers often consider factors other than academic achievement” (Marzano, 2000, p. 9). Carey and Carifio (2009) argue that other factors are included in grades, including neatness, behavior, attendance, and a teacher’s personal assessment of a student’s traits and characteristics. I recently overheard a conversation between students regarding a math teacher’s bathroom policy. The three female students were very upset that this teacher only allowed students to leave if they used one of the four bathroom passes that were given for each semester. If students did not use any of the bathroom passes, they could “redeem” them for extra points on a test. “I don’t understand how she can punish me academically if I have to use the bathroom,” one student exclaimed. Earlier this year, a student brought in a box of Kleenex and asked me if I could make sure to put her bonus points in the grade book. “I’m not sure what you’re talking about,” I

responded. “Isn’t it this class that gives bonus points for bringing in a box of Kleenex?” she asked. I shook my head, thinking about the students whose budget did not allow them to buy Kleenex in exchange for points. There are many issues with these two examples, but regardless, when teachers combine factors unrelated to academic progress and mastery into a single grade, it becomes difficult to determine what qualifies as academic and what qualifies as other traits (Jung & Guskey, 2011). Although measurement experts recommend that these elements not be included in student grades, the practice still exists (McMillan, 2001, p. 30). If one teacher in the English department includes (arguably) nonacademic factors, such as attendance, behavior, or attitude as part of a grade, students in that class will most likely receive a different grade than the students in the teacher’s class where these elements were not included in the grade. The grade earned on that assignment can create confusion for students and parents and result in grade disparity. Some researchers defend the mixing of academic and nonacademic considerations when assigning grades. Stitt and Pula (2014), for instance, argue that teachers include both subjectivity and objectivity in their grading process in order to balance objective grades. They state:

If the betterment of students so they can successfully contribute to society as adults is a key goal of education, then teachers and students should cultivate a classroom that includes both subjective and objective assessment—a classroom where biases can be minimized because both types of assessment can be used as checks and balances for each other. (p. 25)

The issue with what Stitt and Pula (2014) propose is that grading for nonacademic concepts allows for even more teacher bias and causes grades to be even more inaccurate and unreliable than just grading academic skills.

I have come to the conclusion that the real problem is our grading system, which forces teachers to assign a single score to assignments and to the course. This overall indicator of student performance causes the loss of valuable information about students. Brookhart (1991) called the traditional grading system a “hodgepodge” (p. 36). Olsen and Buchanan (2019) add that teachers draw from a wide variety of factors—cognitive and noncognitive—when grading their students’ work. Miller (2014) discusses the importance of the exclusion of factors outside of the student's knowledge of the course content. Miller states:

The difference between failure and the honor roll often depends on the grading policies of the teacher. To reduce the failure rate, schools don’t need a new curriculum, a new principal, new teachers, or new technology. They just need a better grading system. (p. 85)

Teachers also weigh individual elements of the same assignment differently. Although the TEKS provide a framework for the curriculum and district handbooks on grading provide requirements, it is up to each teacher to decide how to assess the learning standards. If a history teacher believes that the process of writing, such as brainstorming, rough draft, and revision, is just as important as the final product (the essay), then it may be included in the final essay grade. Another teacher who teaches the same course may believe that the process stage of writing is just a preparation necessary for the final product, and that the final essay grade should consist only of the product. One math teacher may count off when a student does not show her work, but a teacher in the same department may base the grade on the final answer, regardless of how the student reached it. This inclusion of different elements to be graded in the “same” assignments can be manipulated in ways that make grades less valid, reliable, and accurate. Difficult assignments can be discounted and easier ones inflated. To illustrate the ambiguous and



subjective nature of grades, consider my personal experience. I recently gave an essay a 60. As a means of calibrating grading, I asked another English teacher at my school, one who teaches the same course, to grade this essay using the same district-created and approved rubric. Her grade? An 85. When we met to discuss the reasoning behind our grades, the other teacher explained that she based her grade not only on the product (the final essay), but also on the process (brainstorming, drafting, revisions, etc.). The rubric did not include a category for the process portion of the assignment. In my class, students' process of writing was included as a daily (formative) grade and not included in the final grade (summative) for writing assignments. The difference in how my colleague and I graded writing would result in drastically different overall grades for our students. My grades would be noticeably lower. Even with the use of what we thought was a fair grading system, my colleague and I were 25 points apart. Yes, this is an example of two English teachers disagreeing on what points should be rewarded for each category. However, it was more than just that. The grades given on this assignment clearly showed what we regarded as important, which occurred even with a rubric.

Grading should be reliable. It should not change markedly from one teacher to another. My district has created common rubrics in order to achieve reliability in grading, specifically when it comes to grading writing. Although this does help English teachers focus on common and important criteria, it still does not change the fact that *how* teachers arrive at an individual grade is typically up to them. A similar experiment was done in 2011, when educational researcher Hunter Brimi conducted a study where he asked 90 high school teachers, with almost 100 hours of writing assessment instruction, to grade the same student paper on a 100-point percentage scale. Shockingly, the scores ranged from 50 to 96. This same study has been repeated in which 128 Geometry teachers graded the same assignment. The scores ranged from 28 to 95 (Brimi,

2011, p. 6). Both studies show how vastly different teachers' assessment methods are. Some teachers give partial credit, deduct points for spelling errors, or count off when a student does not put his name on an assignment. Elbow (1993) points out that research in evaluation has shown that "if we give a paper to a set of readers, those readers tend to give it the full range of grades" (p. 188). Maybe this is because teachers have not received sufficient training. These studies also confirm Hillocks' (2006) argument that "many teachers lack preparation to teach composition at a level beyond the basic requirements of state assessments" (qtd. in Brimi, 2011, p. 6). We cannot just assume that teachers will apply the same criteria in the same ways, as if teachers were born grade normed. Regardless of why teachers grade the way they do, grading is a subjective and biased process and can result an unclear picture of what a student actually knows. Research (Elbow, 1993; Brimi, 201) indicates that it cannot be assumed that teachers will apply the same criteria in the same ways. As a teacher, I struggle to grade fairly. What does an "A" even mean? Typically, I have a certain description of this grade in my mind, but sometimes I do not know until students turn in the assignment. At that point, it is too late. I have not clearly defined my expectations ahead of time. Lahey (2014) reminds us of the real problem. Teachers "are asked to assess students precisely and with the appearance of objectivity while using an inherently subjective process" (Lahey, 2014, p. 2).

Even if we narrow the scope of grades to what students know, are grades an accurate representation of what a student knows? I believe they are not. A 2011 study supports my view, finding that "historically, grades have not been reliable indicators of what students know and are able to do" (Jung & Guskey, 2011). Additional research into teachers' practices and perspectives of grades explains why grades are unreliable and not an effective tool for knowing what students

have learned (Andersen, 2018; Brookhart, 1991; Kelly, 2008; McMillan & Nash, 2000; Tierney, et al., 2011). Olsen and Buchanan (2019) explain:

Teachers draw from a wide variety of cognitive and noncognitive factors to grade student work. As a result, classroom grades are frequently an ill-fitting attempt at capturing unclear mixtures of effort, ability, achievement, and behavior. For example, teachers frequently view grades as either a reflection of student growth or as bargaining currency: competing images that likely contain whole teaching ideologies. (p. 2006)

Because it allows for a single grade, the current grading system limits teachers' means of evaluating their students. Elbow (1993) adamantly expresses his opinion on grades as accurate measures of what students know. He believes that grades "say nothing that couldn't be said with gold stars or black marks or smiley-faces" (p. 190).

### ***Grades can be harmful.***

Grades have historically been used to classify students in order to establish classroom hierarchies and methods of sorting and ranking. Elbow (1993) states:

We see around us a deep hunger to rank—to create pecking orders: to see who we can look down on and who we must look up to, or in the military metaphor, who we can kick and who we must salute. (p. 191)

The long-term effects of grade-based hierarchies extend well beyond the classroom. For example, high schools use grades to identify and group or sort students for particular educational paths or programs (Feldmesser, 1971; Guskey, 2015). Once rejected for creating inequality, this tactic is still used in schools today. Olsen and Buchanan (2019) report that "grades, historically, were for tracking people. They still are. Tracking who should go to college, who shouldn't" (p. 2015). In 1997, Texas passed House Bill 588, the "Top 10 Percent Law," which guarantees that

Texas students graduating in the top 10% of their high school class gain automatic admittance to all state-funded universities. Kohn (1994) believes that sorting students does not help them learn. Clark and Mayer (2008) found that grouping students for instructional purposes contributes to the achievement gap between students. Using grades to sort, rank, and track students emphasizes competition and reward, not learning (Potts, 2010). The goal then becomes “to defeat others” and “not to learn” (Kohn, 2013, p. 2). In their study, Spidell and Thelin (2006) found that students’ obsession with “making the grade” causes them to become involved in a tug-of-war with themselves, their peers, and their teacher (p. 36). Grades help determine a student’s life after high school. Because getting into college is a highly competitive process, high school students feel the extreme pressure to receive high grades. Colleges look at GPA, and financial aid is often given based on grades. Parents may consider getting into college a status symbol or the only path to a high-paying job. Grades “function as a type of academic currency” that students use “to gain access to other valuable economic goods such as graduation honors, scholarships, social standing, graduate admissions, etc.” (Close, 2009, p. 2). It is no wonder that students become hyper-focused on grades.

Yet another use of grades stems from the common belief that students are not motivated on their own to complete difficult tasks needed to master a course’s content (Zoeckler, 2007, p. 86). Grades are often used by teachers as a form of external motivation. The research completed by Olsen and Buchanan (2019) gives us valuable insight into this issue:

Grading becomes an extension or reflection of what teachers think motivates students. If they think that school is about controlling students, or that their students need to be controlled—and most do think that, or have been taught that, or at least have not been

taught to think otherwise—then they use grading as a tool for classroom management, and sometimes as a weapon or a dangling piece of cheese. (p. 2016)

Peckham (1993) had similar findings. He found that some teachers believe that “grades are the carrots that keep the mules moving forward” (p. 21). He also states that it is not unusual for teachers to assume that “they have to buy their students’ cooperation with grades” (p. 22).

Guskey (2009) found that teachers often use grades as a “vital component of classroom management and control” (p. 11).

On the other hand, even if they are a device to control behavior, grades can also function as a way to motivate students to be engaged and to learn the material. Some researchers (Filene, 2005; Immerwahr, 2011; McKeachie, 1999) believe that grades *do* motivate some students to complete their work and learn. However, if grades were indeed a successful means of motivating students to complete assignments and learn course content, then students would only have one low grade or zero before stepping up their efforts. But low grades are rarely motivating, especially for students who are not high-achievers (Butler, 1988; Chamberlain et al., 2018; Gooblar, 2017). Even if some students are encouraged to complete course work because a grade depends on doing so, this does not mean that students are engaged and learning is occurring. Memorizing information for a test and receiving an “A” for this effort does not mean that transferable skills have been gained. A much more effective method of engaging high school English students is to create meaningful, creative assignments that incorporate student choice. The focus on grades will, in some part, increase compliance, and teachers will have a classroom of well-behaved students. But is that really all high school English teachers want? I highly doubt it. Schwartz and Sharpe (2011) state that “grades cause a shift in focus from learning the material to a game of grade maximizing” (p. 2). “Grades-as-incentives” encourages gamesmanship

instead of excellence (p. 2). Schwartz and Sharpe (2011) also introduce another consequence of using grades as a motivation tool:

Today's grading system encourages cheating because students realize that the game they have to play is meaningless, and their commiseration emboldens them to dishonesty. If the only purpose of learning is getting the grade, then the only reason not to cheat is the fear of being caught. That encourages an increased cat-and-mouse frenzy—a system of mutually assured escalation—as students use internet tools and programs to plagiarize others' papers—or even hire other students to write them—and faculty turn to computer programs designed to catch them. (p. 3-4)

Close (2009) argues that using grades to increase motivation goes against two important elements all grading should include: (a) grades should represent a student's mastery of concepts and (b) grades should be objective.

The line dividing academic and nonacademic performance is not a clear one. It is important to note that what some assessment experts consider nonacademic *are* actually academic. There is no question that performing certain tasks, such as revising, should be rewarded because they lead to improved writing and are habits that lead to learning. Only assessing students on reaching proficiency is problematic for those students, many of them gifted and talented, who come to class already having reached proficiency or mastery. Assessing effort, improvement, and participation will keep these students actively involved in the learning. Consistent effort does lead to learning and mastery, and both are markers of active learning. Therefore, it is no surprise that many teachers want to reward their students for this hard work and dedication to learning. Many people would argue that assessing effort and improvement are difficult. That is why it is important that teachers have clear guidelines and expectations for their students.

Another harmful effect of grades is that students with low self-confidence regarding their learning will often go into shut-down mode when receiving zeroes or low grades. They become discouraged, feel like they may not pass the class, and give up. Often ignored are the emotional effects that low and failing grades can have on student engagement, effort, and perseverance. Research (Carifio & Rhodes, 2002) confirms that “the assigning of even one low grade can act as a salient cue that will often trigger defensive and self-destructive responses in students, including reductions in student effort and increases in disruptive behavior” (p. 128). Students “often internalize grades, which affects self-esteem” (qtd. in Olsen & Buchanan, 2019, p. 2005). Grades are seen as measures of merit, and “many youths feel marginal to the central school population partly because they are receiving messages (in the form of failing grades) that they do not belong in school” (Sinclair & Ghory, 1987, p. 23).

I have used grades as a weapon to motivate students, and I have worried that if a grade was not associated with an assignment that students would not complete it. In his book *Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us* (2009), Daniel Pink asserts that using grades as “the sticks and carrots of a classroom,” does not cultivate motivation and self-discipline. He notes seven deadly flaws of “the carrot and stick” motivational approach:

1. They can extinguish intrinsic motivation.
2. They can diminish performance.
3. They can crush creativity.
4. They can crowd out good behavior.
5. They can encourage cheating, shortcuts, and unethical behavior.
6. They can become addictive.
7. They can foster short-term thinking. (p. 59)

It is important to note that Pink's deadly flaw of extrinsic motivation number four ("They can crowd out good behavior") is something that the hyperfocus on grades actually encourages. This is why students ask what they can do to get an "A" on assignments and want their English teacher to tell them exactly what to correct in their writing so they can get the grade they want. Here, I consider "good behavior" to be the "numbers game" that is prevalent when using the traditional grading system. In this sense, most teachers do not want this type of "good behavior." To solve this problem, Pink (2009) argues that intrinsic motivation is the key to success. He states that completing tasks simply for the pleasure of doing them is what brings results (p. 65). Pink identifies three qualities of intrinsic motivation: autonomy, mastery, and purpose. Considering Pink's advice in regard to grading, teachers want students who are learning-focused and not grade-focused. Students who have choice in their learning (autonomy), can overcome obstacles and problem-solve (mastery), see meaning in the work teachers assign (purpose), and develop skills that transfer from classroom to classroom and from classroom to "real" life. It is also important to note that additional literature also reveals that grades affect student interest, confidence, self-efficacy, motivation, and future performance (Brookhart, 1994; Guskey, 1994).

Even though research proves that grades generally do not motivate students and can be harmful to learning, present grading policies have not changed to reflect this information (Kohn, 2013). For some students, grades may provide an extrinsic, short-term satisfaction, but once the grades no longer matter, then the drive disappears. Using grades to motivate students "has no educational value and, in the long run, adversely affects students, teachers, and the relationships they share" (Guskey, 2013, p. 70). By using grades to motivate or punish, we are damaging the relationships we have worked so hard to build. We are left to hold a meaningless carrot and stick and forced to rebuild the adversarial environment we have created.



***Grades become the focus of the class instead of learning.***

One of the most frequent questions I received when I had a points-based classroom was “is this for a grade?” Depending on my answer to this question, students determined whether to complete the assignment or not. Some people might argue that this might seem to justify the use of grades as an incentive. However, in my experience, I have found that when students focus on analyzing the rubric to see how many points they need to get an “A,” they are not actively engaged in the deep processes of learning that transfer outside of that particular assignment. One reason the “is this for a grade?” question is common in most high school classrooms is because high school students are conditioned “to expect to be given a grade for every activity that goes on in the classroom” (Briggs, 1964, p. 281). When I returned graded assignments, I could expect a long line of students wanting to talk to me about why they lost points. Most of these students did not even read my feedback. If they did read the comments, they only did so to see why they received the grade they did. More often than not though, the grade was the only piece of information they read, and many did not like it. I found myself spending extra time giving feedback, not to help my students learn, but to justify the grade so the long line of students would be somewhat shorter. I felt the growing animosity between my students and me. I felt like the main part of my job was being “an accountant rather than a teacher” (Peckham, 1993, p. 22). I teach in a high-performing district where students are hopelessly addicted to grades, and their obsession with grades can be exhausting. When rank comes out, I can expect students crying or jumping for joy. There is no other reaction. As Sciffiny (2008) states: “grades are paramount, and education is only secondary” (p. 71). The educational system is set up to perpetuate this grade-centric mindset, causing students to become passive learners who rely on the teacher, the

textbook, and online materials to be in charge of their learning. The result is that students become “passive agents,” leading to conformity and mediocrity (Briggs, 1964, p. 282).

### **The Subjective Nature of the High School English Class**

English classes pose a special challenge when converting student performance into a number. Zoeckler (2007) argues that “moral issues surrounding grading are perhaps nowhere more evident as they are in English courses” (p. 84). Zoeckler (2007) explains that grading in an English classroom is a moral activity. He states that “both moral attentiveness and intellectual attentiveness demand that teachers tailor grades in very individual ways, despite the fact that their school grading system imposes at least an appearance of uniformity among grades” (96). In English classes, student performance is not easily converted into numbers and requires subjective responses from the teacher. Zoeckler (2007) explains that “divergent answers require judgment, and a teacher’s feelings about these answers can often affect the assignment of grades to a given response” (p. 84). Reducing the complex process of writing to a single symbol, letter, or number is just not possible. Even if English teachers grade using a rubric, students do not necessarily know what the finished product should look like. Brookhart et al. (2016) conducted a study where 73 English teachers graded one essay. The range of scores was 46 points and covered all five letter grades (ABCDF). Even when these teachers regraded the writing, they changed their grades. McDonald (1975) suggests:

We look again at precisely what we as composition teachers do when we go through the series of responses and actions that end in the placing of a grade on a paper and ultimately on a grade sheet. Such a look will confirm that there is a distinction between evaluating and grading, that evaluating has instructional values we should not give up

lightly, but that "grading" itself is of limited relevance and actually does a disservice to an otherwise valuable process. (p. 154)

Grading in an English class is a very subjective process. With rubric in hand, my students have asked me what “insightful thinking” looks like. Even when I showed them examples of insightful thinking, they were still confused about how they could achieve that. This leads me to believe that English teachers need to grade differently. The hours we spend grading do not pay off in terms of improved student writing. Putting a number on students’ writing does not encourage a continuum of improvement because at that point the work is completed. Students need the opportunity to write for something other than the grade. As Warrington et al. (2018) remind us that “real writers don’t write for a grade; they write for an audience” (p. 34). There are multiple methods high school English teachers can use to go gradeless and help focus on the important reading and writing work our students need to do— work that is not quantifiable.

### **A Gradeless Classroom in Practice**

When I realized that I could not take one more year of fighting students and their parents about grades, I began to reimagine what my class would look like without grades. Because I teach in a highly competitive, grade-driven school, I knew that I needed to consider the questions my principal, students, parents, and colleagues would have when they heard that I was “going gradeless.” First, I reviewed all of the research on grading practices. I could not find many high school English teachers who had successfully revamped their classes from grade-focused to learning-focused. The ones who had—Grant Wiggins, Sarah Zerwin, and Mark Barnes—became my mentors. I decided to try a hybrid approach, using standards-based grading, portfolios, extensive student-teacher conferences, self-assessment, and reflection.

In order to fix what some people view as an archaic and broken assessment system, educators have started to investigate new methods of evaluating their students, resulting in the birth of standards-based grading (SBG). SBG is a grading system that measures students' ability on a set of well-defined objectives. A scale of 4, 3, 2, and 1 corresponds to the specific objectives. There are two main features of SBG that I thought would help change how my students viewed their learning:

1. SBG is accurate and meaningful because a student's grade is based only on academic factors. It is clear what a student has specifically learned.
2. SBG, because of its design, creates consistency. All grades are based on a specific set of standards, and these objectives (TEKS) are clearly communicated to students, parents, and teachers so that everyone has a clear expectation for mastery. O'Connor's (2002) chart below compares traditional grading with standards-based grading practices.

<b>Traditional Grading</b>	<b>Standards-Based Grading</b>
Based on assessment methods (quizzes, tests, homework, projects, etc.). One grade/entry is given per assessment.	Based on learning goals and performance standards. One grade/entry is given per learning goal or standard.
Assessments are based on a percentage or points system. Criteria for success may be unclear.	Standards are criterion or proficiency-based. Criteria and targets are communicated to students ahead of time.
Mix of assessment, effort, behavior, attendance, and participation. May use late penalties and extra credit.	Measures achievement only OR separates achievement from elements such as attendance and behavior. No penalties or extra credit given.

Adapted from O'Connor, Ken. *How to Grade for Learning: Linking Grades to Standards* (2nd ed.). Corwin Press, 2002.

Combining carefully articulated learning standards with specific feedback would allow my students to monitor their own progress and set goals, which would force them to finally accept responsibility for their own learning. Moving to a hybrid model of a SBG classroom would allow me to establish a learning environment that was student-centered and encouraged self-regulation and self-evaluation. Students would know what specific steps needed to be taken in order to demonstrate mastery of each skill. However, I did want to find a way to reward participation and effort because I knew those actions do lead to growth. Such growth is important for students who have not yet reached the standards, but it is perhaps even more important for students who meet standards early because it prevents them from simply reaping the rewards from what they already know.

For me, the most difficult part of the process of focusing on learning instead of grades was how this would look in my classroom. I knew that I wanted a student-centered classroom where students could take risks in their learning. I also needed to build a classroom that lowered students' academic stress and allowed them the freedom to live the lives of real readers and writers. This was going to be a challenge because I had to accomplish this in a district that still required grades.

I went back to the research. In her book *So What Do They Really Know?*, Tovani (2011) lists four beliefs that guide best practices in grading:

Belief 1: Critical thinking matters more than factual recall.

Belief 2: Risk, struggle, and practice are essential to learning.

Belief 3: Smart is something you become.

Belief 4: The world is an interesting place. The more my classroom mirrors the world, the more engaged students will be. (p. 140)

Tovani's beliefs were ones that I wanted to see in my own classroom. Even though SBG and advocates of going completely gradeless, such as Kohn (1994), disagree with assessing and rewarding risk, struggle, and practice, I knew that skills such as these would inevitably lead to learning. In her article "How I Revamped My Grading System" (2020), Vanahal discusses how she created a grading system that reflects her educational philosophy. She created a "Student Bill of Rights" to communicate the objectives of her new grading system. It includes the following three principles:

1. Grades should be an objective reflection of what a student actually knows and can demonstrate, not a reflection of behavioral, personal, or socioeconomic characteristics.
2. Grade reporting should communicate useful information. Grades should be a record of an individual's academic strengths and weaknesses and should be used for improvement.
3. Mistakes are an opportunity to learn, and everyone learns at different paces and in different ways. Students should therefore be allowed multiple opportunities to practice and demonstrate learning of clearly communicated learning objectives. (p. 69)

I reflected on my own teaching philosophy and drafted a similar list. The principles of my revamped class were as follows:

1. Students would be active participants in all aspects of their learning. For years, I had given students choice in what they read and wrote. However, they were never a part of the assessment process. I created and provided the goals, rubrics, and grades. I wanted students to be a part of this process.

2. Students would be assessed on the growth they made during the course. Growth is likely to lead to proficiency and mastery of concepts. As a team, students and I would record and discuss strengths and needs, and we would both act on that knowledge. I would provide support in the form of mini-lessons, resources, mentor texts, and encouragement. Students would reassess and refocus their goals as needed. I would use goal-setting and conferences in order to accomplish this.
3. Students would be assessed on the process. I wanted to see students' thinking during the process of reading and writing. I wanted students to think about their thinking. The use of drafting and revision, portfolios, self-assessment, and reflection would be my tools for this goal.

In one of my doctoral classes, "Topics in Composition," I researched SBG and wrote a paper on using this method to move students' focus from grades to learning. I was still not completely convinced that this model would be successful in my classroom. Many of the characteristics of SBG, such as the implementation of learning goals and specific objectives, were ones that I agreed with. But I also knew that what Tovani (2011) and Vanahal (2020) discussed in their texts would work in my own classroom. No one knew my students and my class the way I did. So, a hybrid approach was what I created.

Once my list of objectives was completed, I began to look at the TEKS for my grade level. Because I was already satisfied with the curriculum for my course, I just needed to decide how to restructure the assignments without grades as the product. I wrote down each grade-reporting deadline (progress reports) and mapped out how much time it would take for students to get the assignments completed and for conferencing and feedback to occur. For example, students write a research argumentative paper. I give students two weeks to complete the assignment. During

the first week, students brainstorm ideas and research their chosen topic. Week two is spent on drafting the paper. When students are close to finishing a rough draft, they sign up for conferences with me. I spend from five to eight minutes conferencing with each student. In order to allow students the opportunity to select their due date and fulfill my district's reporting requirements, I do set a final date for completion.

Giving feedback to students has always been important to me, but now I needed to decide how to structure student-teacher conferences. Prior to their conference with me, students were required to have two students review their work. During their conferences with me, I had students read their work aloud. I answered any questions they had, and we talked about the strengths of the piece. Together, we discussed revisions. I told students what I thought about their writing, not in terms of what they did right or wrong, but as a reader and a human being. Although doing this is a subjective process (I am, of course, only one reader), I felt that providing "readerly" comments would help my students grow as writers.

One concern I had was what would happen if students did not do the work. How could I conference with a student who did not have anything to review? My solution was to use the time to help students start writing. During those conferences, we brainstormed ideas, talked about ways to begin, and what sources might be helpful. I ended the conference by asking these students to share their plans for completing the assignment by the due date. We set another conference time, and the student left with an outline and steps to complete the assignment. Procrastination and prioritization are not something that just today's students do. It became clear that I needed to teach students how to manage multiple responsibilities and encourage them along the way.



Teaching students the important skill of self-assessment was another one of my goals. Bob Fecho (2011) states:

If assessment is always something done *to* us rather than *with* us or *by* us, it will rarely ever be *for* us. Nor will it provide us with the skills to call our own abilities into focus.

We remain, for the most part, at the mercy of the judgment of others. Unless learners are engaged in the process, assessment is largely monological. It is mostly something done to the disempowered. (p. 32; italics in original)

Sackstein (2015) reminds us that assessment “must be a conversation, a narrative that enhances students’ understanding of what they know, what they can do, and what needs further work” (p. 14). John Hattie reported in his study “Visible Learning,” the 138 influences that are related to learning outcomes. Self-assessment ranked number two in this study (2008). Sadly, teachers’ monopoly of evaluation has caused students to be passive in their learning. Taking the focus off grades allows teachers to focus on more important elements of education, such as growth and reflection. At the beginning of each quarter, I list the learning objectives for that grading period, and students must insert hyperlinks to work that demonstrates those skills. This document is used during conferences.

At the end of each grading period, students send me letters of self-assessment. Inspired by Vermont school administrator Arthur Chiaravalli’s use of a “linked letter,” students reflect on the grading period, make a case for what grade should be entered for this quarter, and hyperlink “evidence” supporting their argument. This created a portfolio approach to assessment that focused on growth and reflection, which were principles of my “Student Bill of Rights” mentioned previously. Evidence included completed assignments, evidence of planning and thinking, attempts to redo or revise assignments, and goals for further growth in specific

areas. Upon completing the letter, students signed up for an end-of-quarter conference with me, and we agreed on the final grade for the quarter.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

Although I have developed a deeper understanding of “grades” and all that is implied by that term, by no means have I solved the problem of how to navigate this hopelessly complicated terrain. Kohn (2012) argues that “grades do not prepare students for the ‘real world’—unless one has in mind a world where interest in learning and quality of thinking is unimportant” (p. 16). There is no one perfect solution or one-size-fits-all method for focusing on learning instead of grades. However, research (Brookhart, 1993, 1994; Cross & Frary, 1999) suggests that a clear grading system that is used consistently is more likely to result in fair and accurate measures of students' growth. Without grades to get in the way, my students grew as readers, writers, thinkers, and communicators. Students took more risks, became more confident, and felt like real writers. My district still requires grades, but by changing how my students and I view grades, students experienced an appreciation for intrinsic learning. When revising their writing, students made deep revisions instead of surface-level changes. Each class became the community of writers and readers that I had always wanted. One of the biggest benefits of this change was I saw more authentic student-teacher relationships. Instead of having a line of students wanting to argue their grades, I spent my time having meaningful conversations with students. I realized what Peckham (1993) notes:

When learning how to write in order to get along better in a literate culture, learning how to use text as a mediating agent between self and others, and learning how to realize one's self through text are working together, I do not have to reward or punish each essay in my

class with grades. Instead, I am free to join the conversation. (p. 24)

## **Conclusion:**

### **Reflections and Connections**

Composition researchers have become increasingly concerned with the issue of the transfer of skills. Students may be able to perform a given task in a specific situation, but they have difficulty replicating it in another context. Formal education is to blame for part of this problem because it operates as a series of discrete levels far removed from the settings to which knowledge is supposed to transfer. For example, students are grouped in different grades and classes. They are also isolated from other students and the professional world by the walls that create the buildings that house them. This self-contained nature of education creates a very structured environment. Although this is beneficial in some aspects, it prevents the students' ability to transfer much of the information learned in school to the "real" world.

In this dissertation, I have examined how the information I learned in my doctoral classes changed how I approach composition studies in my high school English class. Each of these areas in the study of composition (peer review, teacher review, service-learning, grammar, and grading) share one important issue: they were too structured in my class before I started my doctorate. Researchers have examined why skills taught and practiced in writing courses do not transfer and found that this problem can be explained by considering "well-structured" and "ill-structured" problems (King & Kitchener, 1994; Wardle, 2013). There is only one answer or way to approach a well-structured problem. Just think about math problems. I was teaching composition this way.

I realized that just as I ask my students to analyze texts, I needed to analyze the texts that drove my classroom instructional practices. I needed to study my writing assignments, peer editing handouts, grammar activities, and grading policies. How *did* these teaching texts really

work? Did they even work at all? During the process of reflecting on my pedagogical practices, I often referred to the notion of *revision*. I took a step back from my usual practices and unexamined expectations and assumptions in order to reconsider my vision. I did what Nancy Welch (1997) recommends. I decided to “get restless” with my teaching, and ask myself, “something missing, something else?” (p. 136). I questioned if there was a connection between *what* I was doing with *why* I was doing it. Teachers, without the capacity for reflective thinking, become slaves to imitation and tradition. I had become like this. I did what I saw others doing, what had always been done, and what I was told to do without considering whether other possibilities existed. Like many teachers, I often looked for activities, assignments, lessons, and strategies that were foolproof. However, this one-size-fits-all thinking resulted in formulas, templates, and outdated tools that did not work. I discovered that my students were not the only ones in the classroom who need to be rhetorically aware. Teaching composition also requires that high school English teachers have rhetorical awareness—an ability to evaluate a situation, assess what it requires, and respond accordingly.

Through the doctoral degree process, I learned how to redefine and refine my pedagogical practices in order to increase authenticity and transfer. With peer review, I discovered how to teach my students to respond more like real readers instead of like copy editors. This change provided both writers and reviewers with practice in advanced literacy skills that will transfer to communicative contexts beyond school. For my commenting techniques, I shifted my students’ goals toward communication and growth instead of simply giving me what they thought I wanted. One of my greatest lessons came from the implementation of service-learning into my course. Unlike most of my other writing assignments, service-learning got my students outside my classroom and achieved the seemingly impossible—getting students to write for an audience

other than me. In the past, my students were not writing to be read; they were writing to be evaluated. Writing was about not about conversation; it was about performance. I was not reading their writing; I was grading it. Now, students not only write in my class, but they study and discuss writing. Instead of having students memorize an abstract collection of grammar rules, I redefined my grammar instruction in order to get my students to think about the rhetorical effects of prose conventions. Finally, grading is now a practice that I enjoy instead of one that feels like a slavish devotion to a rubric. I was having conversations with students—authentic dialogues—about their writing.

High school English teachers have adopted a “well-structured” and “ill-structured” strategy by applying rigid rules of grammar, review of students’ texts, antiquated grading principles, and writing templates. What students and teachers need instead is a classroom full of flexible strategies they can adapt to any assignment, writing situation, or text. I propose that high school English teachers stop using practices that have been proven to be ineffective and get out of their own way. If high school English teachers want to increase transfer, then they must give students choice, freedom, and skills that are not grounded in a specific assignment.

Appendix A:  
Grammar Log

## Appendix A: Grammar Log

For each writing assignment you complete this term, I will mark two types of surface-level errors that we have discussed in class. Each time a marked error occurs in your paper, make a log entry for it below.

Assignment Name	Description of Error	Original Sentence	Revised Sentence	How I Will Improve
<i>Synthesis Essay</i>	<i>Sentence Fragment</i>	<i>“In the four years since this article was published.”</i>	<i>“Much has changed in the four years since this article was published.”</i>	<i>If a group of words doesn’t make sense after the phrase “I am convinced that,” then I know I have a fragment.</i>



Appendix B:  
Grammar Rants

## Appendix B: Grammar Rants

Make an entry in the table below for each error mentioned in the “grammar rant” articles we read. Add your own “pet peeves.” Ask other people about their pet peeves, and add those. You should make at least 15 entries to receive full credit. At the end of this unit, we will make a class “Top Ten Pet Peeves” and discuss the social implications of each item.

Pet Peeve	Why It Is Considered an Error	Does It Impede The Meaning?	Marker of Race of Class?	Comments
<i>“aks” for “ask”</i>	<i>“ask” reflects the correct spelling and punctuation in standard English</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>I admit I have always thought “aks” sounded ignorant. It now makes sense to me why people use that pronunciation.</i>
<i>confusing “your” and “you’re”</i>	<i>“your” means something belongs to you; “you’re” is a contraction of “you are”</i>	<i>Rarely</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>I make this mistake all the time when I’m texting, yet it still drives me crazy when other people do it!</i>

Appendix C:  
Field Notebook

## Appendix C: Field Notebook

For this assignment, you will take on the role of a grammar researcher. Like professional researchers, your team will collect data and make field notes as you analyze your findings. You will notice and name grammar “in the wild,” and then experiment and apply your findings to your own writing. The closeness to language encouraged by this assignment will require you to dig around in the writing of others (you get to become a stalker of sorts!) and really think about what makes it effective. This intimacy with language is a powerful way to show you that writing is made and that grammar has a role in that creation.

### Tasks:

#### 1. *Form Your Team of Researchers*

Gather a team of 3-4 of your peers. Select one person to be the leader. Team leaders will rotate for each language topic, so each student will be the leader three or four times, depending on how many students are in your team and how many concepts we’ve studied.

Team leaders will include a one page minimum commentary that functions like a researcher’s analytical memo. I will show you an example of what this might look like. Leaders will also note any questions that arise as you work in your research teams. These questions will be the basis of daily class conversations. Past questions have included: Why did Faulkner use so many run-on sentences? Why does so much of Mary Shelley’s writing sound so philosophical? Toni Morrison’s work sounds so lyrical, almost like a hymn. Why didn’t she just write a song instead? I will take each teams’ questions, and we will work through them as a class.

#### 2. *Select an Author*

Look at the list of authors that I posted online. Select a few authors from the list whose work you’ve read and enjoyed or authors you have always wanted to read. Go to your favorite place, the Internet, and research the authors you’re interested in. Think about these questions as you search and read: Why is this author considered important? What awards has this author won? Are there certain types of genres this author writes in? Read a few short excerpts or texts the author has written. What techniques does the author use?

Next, select one author whose writing your team feels is worthy of emulating. If you have another author your team would like to select, please see me for approval.

#### 3. *Selecting Mentor Texts*

Gather at least six samples of the author’s work. (Chapters or sections from novels are acceptable) These samples will be your team’s mentor texts.

#### **4. *Language Topics***

Throughout this year, we will study various language topics, including sentence patterns, gendered language, sentence rhythm, and more. Your team will study and analyze these language topics using your mentor texts. You will notice, name, and discuss how the writer's language choices affect you as a reader.

But don't worry. We will work through each language topic as a class first, so your team knows what to do. Before you tackle analyzing and commenting on how your selected author uses these language moves in his/her texts, we will notice, name, and imitate using class mentor texts.

#### **5. *Requirements of the Field Notebook***

In your Field Notebooks, each team will include a sample of the author's work with the team's annotations (marking, marginalia, analytical commentary, etc.). The specific requirements of the Field Notebook assignment are as following:

- **Note and Name**

In their mentor text, each team member will highlight the structure(s) we are currently studying. Annotate the text by labeling forms and functions, commenting about patterns, remarking on the author's possible motivations, and noting your own reactions as readers. Consider the following questions when completing your Field Notebook entries: How does the author use this grammatical technique? What is especially important, surprising, etc. about the author's grammar craft? What are possible pitfalls and concerns when using this technique? Teams will meet to compare the findings and come to an agreement on what was noticed.

- **Imitation of a Writer's Form**

You will also imitate the author's use of these elements by including them in your own writing. In these entries (the number of entries required will vary depending on the element), you will not only mimic the author's use of this element, but you will also explain the specific effects created by the use of this element.

- **Team Presentation: The Sage on the Stage**

At the end of each language topic study, each team will lead a 30 min. discussion on its author. You will provide the sample text to me ahead of time so that I can post it for the other students. Teams not presenting that day will annotate other teams' sample text as homework.

- **Applying: The Show and Tell Essay**

This part of the Field Notebook will help you see grammar as something other than a static body of knowledge. You will complete The Show and Tell essay (min. 2 ½ pages) each quarter about the language topics we've studied that quarter. You will apply the knowledge gained from your work in the Field Notebook by experimenting with these specific topics of study.

Begin The Show and Tell Essay by selecting your topic, target audience, and genre. Then share a witty observation, offer cultural commentary, recount your own story about a grammar pet peeve

or struggle, present a persuasive argument, or respond to one of the lessons (grammar rants) we've covered in class. Next, practice and play with the grammar techniques we've studied in this quarter. Highlight these moves and use the "comment" button to note their purpose and desired effect.

### ***6. Assessing and Grading***

During each research team meeting, I will check that each student has done his/her homework. These checks will be combined as multiple daily grades. I will only collect one Field Notebook per team per concept, so it's important that all members agree on what to write in their Field Notebook. On the due date, the team leader for that concept will turn in one copy of the annotated mentor text pages and the team's Field Notebook. This will count as a test grade.

## References

- Agricola, Bas T., Frans J. Prins and Dominique M. A. Sluijsmans. "Impact of Feedback Request Forms and Verbal Feedback on Higher Education Students' Feedback Perception, Self-Efficacy, and Motivation," *Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy & Practice*, vol. 27, no. 1, 2020, pp. 6-25, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0969594X.2019.1688764>.
- Ajjawi, Rola, and David Boud. "Researching Feedback Dialogue: An Interactional Analysis Approach." *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, vol. 42, no. 2, Mar. 2017, pp. 252–65. *EBSCOhost*, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.uta.edu/10.1080/02602938.2015.1102863>.
- Amare, Nicole. "Style: The New Grammar in Composition Studies?" *Refiguring Prose Style: Possibilities For Writing Pedagogy*, edited by T. R. Johnson and Tom Pace, University Press of Colorado, 2005, pp. 153–66, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt4cgq34.17>.
- Andersen, Ida Gran. "Pygmalion in Instruction? Tracking, Teacher Reward Structures, and Educational Inequality." *Social Psychology of Education: An International Journal*, vol. 21, no. 5, Nov. 2018, pp. 1021–44. *EBSCOhost*, [search-ebSCOhost-com.ezproxy.uta.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ1196669&site=ehost-live](https://search-ebSCOhost-com.ezproxy.uta.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ1196669&site=ehost-live).
- Anderson, Jeff, and Deborah Dean. *Revision Decisions: Talking Through Sentences and Beyond*. Stenhouse Publishers, 2014.
- Andrews, Richard, et al. "The Effect of Grammar Teaching on Writing Development." *British Educational Research Journal*, vol. 32, no. 1, 2006, pp. 39–55, [www.jstor.org/stable/30032657](http://www.jstor.org/stable/30032657).
- Andrus, Elaine. "Service Learning: Taking Students Beyond Community Service," *Middle School Journal*, vol. 28, no. 2, 1996, pp. 10-18, DOI: 10.1080/00940771.1996.11494434.
- Atwell, Nancie. *In the Middle: New Understandings About Writing, Reading, and Listening*. Heinemann, 1987.

- . *Lessons That Change Writers*. Heinemann, 2017.
- Auten, J. G. "How Students Read Us: Audience Awareness and Teacher Commentary on Writing." *The Writing Instructor*, vol. 11, no. 2, 1992, pp. 83.
- Barnes, Mark. *Assessment 3.0: Throw Out Your Grade Book and Inspire Learning*, Corwin, 2015.
- Benjamin, Amy, and Tom Olivia. *Engaging Grammar: Practice Advice for Real Classrooms*. National Council of Teachers of English, 2007.
- Bickford, Donna M and Nedra Reynolds. "Activism and Service-Learning: Reframing Volunteerism as Acts of Dissent." *Pedagogy*, vol. 2 no. 2, 2002, p. 229-252. *Project MUSE*, [muse.jhu.edu/article/26395](http://muse.jhu.edu/article/26395).
- Blair, Hugh. *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*. Andesite Press, 2017.
- Blouin, David D., and Evelyn M. Perry. "Whom Does Service Learning Really Serve? Community-Based Organizations' Perspectives on Service Learning." *Teaching Sociology*, vol. 37, no. 2, Apr. 2009, pp. 120–135, doi:10.1177/0092055X0903700201.
- Boscolo, Pietro, and Katia Ascorti. "Effects of Collaborative Revision on Children's Ability to Write Understandable Narrative Texts." In L. Allai, L. Chanquoy, & P. Largy (Eds.), *Revision: Cognitive and Instructional Processes*, pp. 157-170. Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Kluwer Academic, 2004.
- Braddock, Richard. *Research in Written Composition*. National Council of Teachers of English, 1963.
- Brannon, Lil, and C. H. Knoblauch. "On Students' Rights to Their Own Texts: A Model of Teacher Response." *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 33, no. 2, National Council of Teachers of English, 1982, pp. 157–66, <https://doi.org/10.2307/357623>.
- Briggs, Frances M. "Grades—Tool or Tyrant? A Commentary on High School Grades." *The High*



*School Journal*, vol. 47, no. 7, University of North Carolina Press, 1964, pp. 280–84,  
[www.jstor.org/stable/40366371](http://www.jstor.org/stable/40366371).

Brookhart, Susan M. “Grading Practices and Validity.” *Educational Measurement: Issues and Practices*, vol. 7, 1991, pp. 279-201, [www.jstor.org/stable/1435460](http://www.jstor.org/stable/1435460).

Brookhart, Susan M., et al. “A Century of Grading Research: Meaning and Value in the Most Common Educational Measure.” *Review of Educational Research*, vol. 86, no. 4, Dec. 2016, pp. 803–48. *EBSCOhost*, [search-ebSCOhost-com.ezproxy.uta.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ1121566&site=ehost-live](http://search-ebSCOhost-com.ezproxy.uta.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ1121566&site=ehost-live).

Brophy, Jere. “Teacher Praise: A Functional Analysis.” *Review of Educational Research*, vol. 51, no. 1, [Sage Publications, Inc., American Educational Research Association], 1981, pp. 5–32, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1170249>.

Brown, B. Frank. “The Non-Graded High School. *The Phi Delta Kappan*, vol. 44, no. 5, Feb. 1963, pp. 206-209, [www.jstor.org/stable/20342905](http://www.jstor.org/stable/20342905).

Burkland, Jill, and Nancy Grimm. “Motivating through Responding.” *Journal of Teaching Writing*, vol. 5, no. 2, Jan. 1986, pp. 237–47. *EBSCOhost*, [search-ebSCOhost-com.ezproxy.uta.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ359106&site=ehost-live](http://search-ebSCOhost-com.ezproxy.uta.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ359106&site=ehost-live).

Butin, Dan. *Service-Learning in Higher Education: Critical Issues and Directions*. Palgrave Macmillan US, 2005.

Butler, Deborah L., and Philip H. Winne. “Feedback and Self-Regulated Learning: A Theoretical Synthesis.” *Review of Educational Research*, vol. 65, no. 3, [Sage Publications, Inc., American Educational Research Association], 1995, pp. 245–81, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1170684>.

Butturff, Douglas, and Nancy Sommers. “Placing Revision in a Reinvented Rhetorical

- Tradition.” *In Reinventing the Rhetorical Tradition*, Aviva Freedman and Ian Pringle (Eds.), pp. 99-104, Canadian Council of Teachers of English, 1980.
- Buzzelli, Cary, and Bill Johnston. *The Moral Dimensions of Teaching: Language, Power and Culture in Classroom Interaction*. New York: Routledge/Falmer Press, 2002.
- Calkins, Lucy. *The Art of Teaching Writing*. Heinemann, 1986.
- Carey, Theodore, and James Carifio. “The Minimum Grading Controversy: Results of a Quantitative Study of Seven Years of Grading Data From an Urban High School.” *Educational Researcher*, vol. 41, no. 6, [American Educational Research Association, Sage Publications, Inc.], 2012, pp. 201–08, [www.jstor.org/stable/23254130](http://www.jstor.org/stable/23254130).
- Chanski, Sarah, and Lindsay Ellis. “Which Helps Writers More, Receiving Peer Feedback or Giving It?” *The English Journal*, vol. 106, no. 6, National Council of Teachers of English, 2017, pp. 54–60, [www.jstor.org/stable/26359548](http://www.jstor.org/stable/26359548).
- Charney, Davida H, et al., “How Writing Quality Influences Readers’ Judgments of Résumés Business and Engineering.” *Journal of Business and Technical Communication*. vol. 6, no. 1, 1992, pp. 38-74, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1050651992006001002>.
- Cho, Kwangsu, et al. “Commenting on Writing: Typology and Perceived Helpfulness of Comments from Novice Peer Reviewers and Subject Matter Experts.” *Written Communication*, vol. 23, no. 3, Jan. 2006, pp. 260–94. *EBSCOhost*, [search-ebSCOhost-com.ezproxy.uta.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ738411&site=ehost-live](http://search-ebSCOhost-com.ezproxy.uta.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ738411&site=ehost-live).
- Cho, Kwangsu, and MacArthur, Charles. “Student Revision with Peer and Expert Reviewing.” *Learning and Instruction*, vol. 20, no. 4, 2010, pp. 328-338. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.learninstruc.2009.08.006>.
- Cho, Young Hoan, and Kwangsu Cho. “Peer Reviewers Learn from Giving Comments.”

*Instructional Science*, vol. 39, no. 5, Springer, 2011, pp. 629–43, [www.jstor.org/stable/23882823](http://www.jstor.org/stable/23882823).

Christianakis, Mary. “‘I Don’t Need Your Help!’ Peer Status, Race, and Gender during Peer Writing Interactions.” *Journal of Literacy Research*, vol. 42, no. 4, Jan. 2010, pp. 418–58. *EBSCOhost*, [search-ebSCOhost-com.ezproxy.uta.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ908443&site=ehost-live](http://search-ebSCOhost-com.ezproxy.uta.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ908443&site=ehost-live).

Clark, Ruth Colvin, and Richard E. Mayer. “Learning by Viewing versus Learning by Doing: Evidence-Based Guidelines for Principled Learning Environments.” *Performance Improvement*, vol. 47, no. 9, Oct. 2008, pp. 55-13, <https://doi.org/10.1002/pfi.20028>.

Close, Daryl. “Fair Grades” *Teaching Philosophy*, vol. 32, no. 4. Dec. 2009, pp. 361-398. [www.pdcnet.org/8525737F00588478/file/B082745254667525852576800055CC87/\\$FILE/teachphil\\_2009\\_0032\\_0004\\_0035\\_0072.pdf](http://www.pdcnet.org/8525737F00588478/file/B082745254667525852576800055CC87/$FILE/teachphil_2009_0032_0004_0035_0072.pdf).

Cone, Dick, and Susan Harris. “Service-Learning Practice: Developing a Theoretical Framework.” *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*, vol. 3, Fall 1996, pp. 31-43.

Connors, Robert. *Composition-Rhetoric: Backgrounds, Theory, and Pedagogy*. University of Pittsburgh Press, 1997.

Connors, Robert J., and Andrea A. Lunsford. “Teachers’ Rhetorical Comments on Student Papers.” *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 44, no. 2, National Council of Teachers of English, 1993, pp. 200–23, <https://doi.org/10.2307/358839>.

Cowie, Bronwen. “Pupil Commentary on Assessment for Learning.” *Curriculum Journal*, vol. 16, no. 2, June 2005, pp. 137–51. *EBSCOhost*, [search-ebSCOhost-com.ezproxy.uta.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ694939&site=ehost-live](http://search-ebSCOhost-com.ezproxy.uta.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ694939&site=ehost-live).

Crooks, Terence J. “The Impact of Classroom Evaluation Practices on Students.” *Review of*

- Educational Research*, vol. 58, no. 4, Jan. 1988, pp. 438–81. *EBSCOhost*, search-ebSCOhost-com.ezproxy.uta.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ407950&site=ehost-live.
- Cross, Lawrence H., and Robert B. Frary. “Hodgepodge Grading: Endorsed by Students and Teachers Alike.” *Applied Measurement in Education*, vol. 12, no. 1, Jan. 1999, p. 53. *EBSCOhost*, [https://doi-org.ezproxy.uta.edu/10.1207/s15324818ame1201\\_4](https://doi-org.ezproxy.uta.edu/10.1207/s15324818ame1201_4).
- Cunningham, Ken, and Kerry E. Vachta. “Critical Currents in Community Service Learning and Community-Based Research: History, Theory and Practice.” *Journal of Applied Sociology*, vol. 20, no. 2, Sage Publications, Inc., 2003, pp. 23–41, [www.jstor.org/stable/43736066](http://www.jstor.org/stable/43736066).
- Cushman, Ellen. “Sustainable Service Learning Programs.” *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 54, no. 1, National Council of Teachers of English, 2002, pp. 40–65, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1512101>.
- Deans, Thomas. *Writing Partnerships: Service Learning in Composition*. National Council of Teachers of English, 2002.
- Devereaux, Michelle D., and Darren Crovitz. “Power Play: From Grammar to Language Study.” *The English Journal*, vol. 107, no. 3, National Council of Teachers of English, 2018, pp. 19–25, [www.jstor.org/stable/26450160](http://www.jstor.org/stable/26450160).
- Dewey, John. “Waste in Education” Chapter 3 in *The School and Society*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1907, pp. 77-110.
- Diab, Rula L. (2005). “Teachers' and Students' Beliefs about Responding to ESL Writing: A Case Study.” *TESL Canada Journal*, vol. 23, pp. 28-43, <https://doi.org/10.18806/tesl.v23i1.76>.
- Dillon, David, and Dennis Searle. “The Message of Marking: Teacher Written Responses to Student Writing at Intermediate Grade Levels.” *Research in the Teaching of English*, vol. 14,

no. 3, Oct. 1980, pp. 233–42. *EBSCOhost*, [search-ebSCOhost-com.ezproxy.uta.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ236507&site=ehost-live](https://search-ebSCOhost-com.ezproxy.uta.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ236507&site=ehost-live).

Dinnen, Janet L. D., and Rachel M. B. Collophy. “An Analysis of Feedback Given to Strong and Weak Student Writers.” *Reading Horizons*, vol. 49, no. 3, Jan. 2009, pp. 239–56. *EBSCOhost*, [search-ebSCOhost-com.ezproxy.uta.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ867140&site=ehost-live](https://search-ebSCOhost-com.ezproxy.uta.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ867140&site=ehost-live).

DiPardo, A., & Freedman, S.W. “Peer Response Groups in the Writing Classroom: Theoretic Foundations and New Directions.” Review of *Educational Research*, vol. 58, no. 2, 1998, pp. 119-149. doi:10.3102/00346543058002119

Dragga, Sam. “Evaluating Pictorial Illustrations.” *Technical Communication Quarterly*, vol. 1, no. 2, Jan. 1992, pp. 47–62. *EBSCOhost*, [search-ebSCOhost-com.ezproxy.uta.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ445696&site=ehost-live](https://search-ebSCOhost-com.ezproxy.uta.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ445696&site=ehost-live).

Duke, Charles R. “The Student-Centered Conference and the Writing Process.” *The English Journal*, vol. 64, no. 9, National Council of Teachers of English, 1975, pp. 44–47, <https://doi.org/10.2307/816029>.

Dunn, Patricia A., and Ken Lindblom. *Grammar Rants: How a Backstage Tour of Writing Complaints Can Help Students Make Informed, Savvy Choices About Their Writing*. Heinemann, 2011.

Ehrlich, Thomas. “Civic Learning: ‘Democracy and Education’ Revisited.” *Educational Record*, vol. 78, no. 3–4, Jan. 1997, pp. 56–65. *EBSCOhost*, <https://search-ebSCOhost-com.ezproxy.uta.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ552363&site=ehost-live>.

Elbow, Peter. “Ranking, Evaluating, and Liking: Sorting out Three Forms of Judgment.” *College English*, vol. 55, no. 2, National Council of Teachers of English, 1993, pp. 187–206,

<https://doi.org/10.2307/378503>.

---. "Taking Time Out from Grading and Evaluating While Working in a Conventional System." *Assessing Writing*, vol. 4, no. 1, Jan. 1997, pp. 5–27. *EBSCOhost*, search-ebSCOhost-com.ezproxy.uta.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ563847&site=ehost-live.

---. *Writing Without Teachers*. Oxford University Press, 1973.

Elgin, Suzette Haden. "Why 'Newsweek' Can't Tell Us Why Johnny Can't Write." *The English Journal*, vol. 65, no. 8, National Council of Teachers of English, 1976, pp. 29–35, <https://doi.org/10.2307/815562>.

Evans, Kathryn. "That's Not What I Meant": Failures of Interpretation in the Writing Conference. Mar. 1994. *EBSCOhost*, search-ebSCOhost-com.ezproxy.uta.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=ED375399&site=ehost-live.

Eyler, et al. *Where's the Learning in Service-Learning?* Jossey-Bass, 1999.

Fassler, Barbara. "The Red Pen Revisited: Teaching Composition through Student Conferences." *College English*, vol. 40, no. 2, National Council of Teachers of English, 1978, pp. 186–90, <https://doi.org/10.2307/375750>.

Fecho, Bob. *Teaching for the Students: Habits of Heart, Mind, and Practice in the Engaged Classroom*. Teachers College Press, 2011.

Feldmesser, Robert A., and Washington, DC. American Educational Research Association. *The Positive Functions of Grades*. Feb. 1971. *EBSCOhost*, <https://search-ebSCOhost-com.ezproxy.uta.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=ED049704&site=ehost-live>.

Ferris, Dana R. "The Influence of Teacher Commentary on Student Revision." *TESOL Quarterly*, vol. 31, no. 2, [Wiley, Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, Inc.

- (TESOL)], 1997, pp. 315–39, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3588049>.
- Fife, Jane Mathison, and Peggy O’Neill. “Moving beyond the Written Comment: Narrowing the Gap between Response Practice and Research.” *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 53, no. 2, National Council of Teachers of English, 2001, pp. 300–21, <https://doi.org/10.2307/359079>.
- Fisher, Douglas, and Nancy Frey. “Feed up, Feedback, and Feed Forward.” *Science and Children*, vol. 48, no. 9, July 2011, pp. 26–30. *EBSCOhost*, [search-ebSCOhost-com.ezproxy.uta.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ944165&site=ehost-live](http://search-ebSCOhost-com.ezproxy.uta.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ944165&site=ehost-live).
- Fitzgerald (Eds.), *Handbook of Writing Research* (pp. 28-40). New York, NY: Guilford. Hayes, 2006.
- Frankenberg-Garcia, Ana. “Providing Student Writers with Pre-Text Feedback.” *ELT Journal*, vol. 53, no. 2, Jan. 1999, pp. 100–06. *EBSCOhost*, [search-ebSCOhost-com.ezproxy.uta.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ581940&site=ehost-live](http://search-ebSCOhost-com.ezproxy.uta.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ581940&site=ehost-live).
- Franklin, Keri. “Thank You for Sharing: Developing Students’ Social Skills to Improve Peer Writing Conferences.” *The English Journal*, vol. 99, no. 5, National Council of Teachers of English, 2010, pp. 79–84, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27807198>.
- Freedman, Aviva. “Show and Tell? The Role of Explicit Teaching in the Learning of New Genres.” *Research in the Teaching of English*, vol. 27, no. 3, National Council of Teachers of English, 1993, pp. 222–51, [www.jstor.org/stable/40171225](http://www.jstor.org/stable/40171225).
- Freedman, Sarah Warshauer. “Outside-in and Inside-Out: Peer Response Groups in Two Ninth-Grade Classes.” *Research in the Teaching of English*, vol. 26, no. 1, National Council of Teachers of English, 1992, pp. 71–107, [www.jstor.org/stable/40171295](http://www.jstor.org/stable/40171295).
- Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed: 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition*. 2018.

- Frey, Nancy, and Douglas Fisher. "A Formative Assessment System for Writing Improvement." *The English Journal*, vol. 103, no. 1, National Council of Teachers of English, 2013, pp. 66–71, [www.jstor.org/stable/24484063](http://www.jstor.org/stable/24484063).
- Frost, Elizabeth Ruiz. "Feedback Distortion: The Shortcomings of Model Answers as Formative Feedback." *Journal of Legal Education*, vol. 65, no. 4, [Association of American Law Schools, Southwestern Law School], 2016, pp. 938–65, [www.jstor.org/stable/26453485](http://www.jstor.org/stable/26453485).
- Fuller, David C. "Teacher Commentary That Communicates: Practicing What We Preach in the Writing Class." *Journal of Teaching Writing*, vol. 6, no. 2, Jan. 1987, pp. 307–17. *EBSCOhost*, <https://search-ebSCOhost-com.ezproxy.uta.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ371936&site=ehost-live>.
- Furco, Andrew, and Shelley H. Billig. *Service-Learning: The Essence of the Pedagogy*. *Advances in Service-Learning Research*. 2002. *EBSCOhost*, <https://search-ebSCOhost-com.ezproxy.uta.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=ED462631&site=ehost-live>.
- Gallagher, Kelly. *Teaching Adolescent Writers*. Stenhouse Publishers, 2006.
- Gallagher, Kelly, and Penny Kittle. *180 Days: Two Teachers and the Quest to Engage and Empower Adolescents*. Heinemann, 2018.
- Gan, Mark J. S., and John Hattie. "Prompting Secondary Students' Use of Criteria, Feedback Specificity and Feedback Levels during an Investigative Task." *Instructional Science*, vol. 42, no. 6, Springer, 2014, pp. 861–878, [www.jstor.org/stable/43575483](http://www.jstor.org/stable/43575483).
- Gebhardt, Richard C. "An Alternative to Grades." *Improving College and University Teaching*, vol. 24, no. 2, Taylor & Francis, Ltd., 1976, pp. 82–86, [www.jstor.org/stable/27564934](http://www.jstor.org/stable/27564934).
- Gere, Anne Ruggles, and Jennifer Sinor. "Composing Service Learning." *The Writing Instructor*, 1997, pp. 53-63.



- Gibbs, Graham and Simpson, Claire. "Conditions Under Which Assessment Supports Students' Learning." *Learning and Teaching in Higher Education*, vol. 1, 2005, pp. 331.
- Gielen, Sarah, et al. "A Comparative Study of Peer and Teacher Feedback and of Various Peer Feedback Forms in a Secondary School Writing Curriculum." *British Educational Research Journal*, vol. 36, no. 1, 2004, pp. 143–62, [www.jstor.org/stable/27823591](http://www.jstor.org/stable/27823591).
- . "Improving the Effectiveness of Peer Feedback for Learning." *Learning and Instruction*, vol. 20, no. 4, 2010, pp. 304-315, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.learninstruc.2009.08.007>.
- Goldberg, Gravity, and Renee Houser. "Battling Decision Fatigue." *Edutopia*. 19 July 2017. [www.edutopia.org/blog/battling-decision-fatigue-gravity-goldberg-renee-houser](http://www.edutopia.org/blog/battling-decision-fatigue-gravity-goldberg-renee-houser).
- Goodson, F. Todd. "Reading and Writing across Genres: Textual Form and Social Action in the High School." *Journal of Reading*, vol. 38, no. 1, [Wiley, International Reading Association], 1994, pp. 6–12, [www.jstor.org/stable/40016485](http://www.jstor.org/stable/40016485).
- Graff, Nelson. "Approaching Authentic Peer Review." *The English Journal*, vol. 98, no. 5, National Council of Teachers of English, 2009, pp. 81–87, [www.jstor.org/stable/40503303](http://www.jstor.org/stable/40503303).
- Grant-Davie, Keith, and Nancy Shapiro. *Curing the Nervous Tick: Reader-Based Response to Student Writing*. Mar. 1987. *EBSCOhost*, <https://search-ebSCOhost-com.ezproxy.uta.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=E282196&site=ehost-live>.
- Graves, Donald. *A Fresh Look at Writing*. Heinemann, 1994.
- Guskey, Thomas R. "Bound by Tradition: Teachers' Views of Crucial Grading and Reporting Issues." Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (San Francisco, CA), April 2009, <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED509342.pdf>.
- . *On Your Mark: Challenging the Conventions of Grading and Reporting*.

Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree Press, 2015.

---. "The Case Against Percentage Grades." *Educational Leadership*, vol. 71, no. 1,

2013, pp. 68-72, <https://tguskey.com/wp-content/uploads/Grading-2-The-Case-Against-Percentage-Grades.pdf>.

Guskey, Thomas R., & Bailey, J. M. *Developing Grading and Reporting Systems for Student Learning*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin, 2001.

Hairston, Maxine. "Breaking Our Bonds and Reaffirming Our Connections." *College Composition and Communication*, National Council of Teachers of English, vol. 36, no. 3, 1985, pp. 272-282.

Hamp-Lyons, Liz & Chen, Julia. *An Investigation into the Effectiveness of Teacher Feedback on Student Writing*, January 1998, Figure 2.

Hattie, John. *Visible Learning: A Synthesis of Over 800 Meta-Analyses Relating to Achievement*. Routledge, 2008.

Hattie, John, and Helen Timperley. "The Power of Feedback." *Review of Educational Research*, vol. 77, no. 1, [Sage Publications, Inc., American Educational Research Association], 2007, pp. 81–112, [www.jstor.org/stable/4624888](http://www.jstor.org/stable/4624888).

Hayes, John. *New Directions in Writing Theory*. In C.A. MacArthur, S. Graham, & J., 2006.

---. "A New Framework for Understanding Cognition and Affect in Writing. In C.M. Levy & S. Ransdell (Eds.), *The Science of Writing*, pp. 1-27. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum, 1996, [www.researchgate.net/publication/271429714\\_A\\_new\\_framework\\_for\\_understanding\\_cognition\\_and\\_affect\\_in\\_writing#fullTextFileContent](http://www.researchgate.net/publication/271429714_A_new_framework_for_understanding_cognition_and_affect_in_writing#fullTextFileContent).

---. "What Triggers Revision?" In L. Allai, L. Chanquoy, & P. Largy (Eds.), *Revision, Cognition, and Instructional Processes*, pp. 9-20. Dordrecht, The Netherlands:

Kluwer Academic, 2004.

Hayes, John, and Linda Flower. "Identifying the Organization of Writing Processes." In L. Gregg & E.R. Steinberg (Eds.), *Cognitive Processes in Writing*, pp. 3-30. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum, 1980.

Hayes, Linda, et. al. "Cognitive Processes in Revision." In S. Rosenberg (Ed.), *Advances in Applied Psycholinguistics: Vol. 2. Reading, Writing, and Language Processing*, pp. 176-240. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1987.

Hayes, Mary F., and Donald A. Daiker. "Using Protocol Analysis in Evaluating Responses to Student Writing." *Freshman English News*, vol. 13, no. 2, University of Cincinnati on behalf of Composition Studies, 1984, pp. 1–10, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43518858>.

Herzberg, Bruce. "Community Service and Critical Thinking." *College Composition and Communication*. vol. 45, 1994, pp. 307-319.

Higgins, Richard, et al. "Getting the Message Across: the Problem of Communicating Assessment Feedback." *Teaching in Higher Education*, vol. 6, 2001, pp. 69- 274. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13562510120045230>.

---. "The Conscientious Consumer: Reconsidering the Role of Assessment Feedback in Student Learning." *Studies in Higher Education*, vol. 27, no. 1, 2002, pp. 53–64. [www.dpod.kakelbont.ca/bibliography/Higgins%20et%20al.%20-%202002%20-%20The%20Conscientious%20Consumer%20Reconsidering%20the%20role.pdf](http://www.dpod.kakelbont.ca/bibliography/Higgins%20et%20al.%20-%202002%20-%20The%20Conscientious%20Consumer%20Reconsidering%20the%20role.pdf).

Hillocks, George, Jr. *Research on Written Composition: New Directions for Teaching*. Urbana, Illinois: ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading and Communication Skills, 1986.

Hollis, Shirley A. "Capturing the Experience: Transforming Community Service into Service Learning." *Teaching Sociology*, vol. 30, no. 2, [Sage Publications, Inc., American

- Sociological Association], 2002, pp. 200–13, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3211383>.
- Hunter, Susan, and Richard A. Brisbin. “The Impact of Service Learning on Democratic and Civic Values.” *PS: Political Science and Politics*, vol. 33, no. 3, [American Political Science Association, Cambridge University Press], 2000, pp. 623–26, <https://doi.org/10.2307/420868>.
- Hyatt, David F. “‘Yes, a Very Good Point!’ A Critical Genre Analysis of a Corpus of Feedback Commentaries on Master of Education Assignments.” *Teaching in Higher Education*, vol. 10, no. 3, July 2005, pp. 339–53. *EBSCOhost*, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.uta.edu/10.1080/13562510500122222>.
- Jacoby, Barbara. “Service-Learning in Today’s Higher Education.” In B. Jacoby, & Associates (Eds.), *Service-Learning in Higher Education: Concepts and Practices*, 1996, pp. 3-25. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Jung, Lee Ann, and Thomas Guskey. *Grading Exceptional and Struggling Learners*. Corwin, 2011.
- Kahne, Joseph, and Joel Westheimer. “In the Service of What? The Politics of Service Learning.” *The Phi Delta Kappan*, vol. 77, no. 9, Phi Delta Kappa International, 1996, pp. 592–99, [www.jstor.org/stable/20405655](http://www.jstor.org/stable/20405655).
- Karegianes, Myra L., et al. “The Effects of Peer Editing on the Writing Proficiency of Low-Achieving Tenth Grade Students.” *The Journal of Educational Research*, vol. 73, no. 4, Taylor & Francis, Ltd., 1980, pp. 203–07, [www.jstor.org/stable/27539750](http://www.jstor.org/stable/27539750).
- Keh, Claudia L. “Feedback in the Writing Process: A Model and Methods for Implementation.” *ELT Journal*, vol. 44, no. 4, Jan. 1990, pp. 294–304. *EBSCOhost*, [search-ebscohost-com.ezproxy.uta.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ416710&site=ehost-live](http://search-ebscohost-com.ezproxy.uta.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ416710&site=ehost-live).

- Kendall, Jane C. *Combining Service and Learning: A Resource Book for Community and Public Service*. National Society for Experiential, 1990.
- Kielsmeier, James C. "Build a Bridge Between Service and Learning." *Phi Delta Kappan*, vol. 91, no. 5, Feb. 2010, pp. 8–15. *EBSCOhost*, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.uta.edu/10.1177/003172171009100503>.
- Kirby, Dawn Latta, and Darren Crovitz. *Inside Out: Strategies for Teaching Writing*. Heinemann, 2013.
- Kirschenbaum, Howard, Rodney Napier, and Sidney Simon. *Wad-Ja-Get? The Grading Game in American Education*. Michigan Publishing Services, 1971.
- Kittle, Penny. *Write Beside Them: Risk, Voice, and Clarity in High School Writing*. Heinemann, 2008.
- Knight, Megan, and Robyn Cooper. "Taking on a New Grading System: The Interconnected Effects of Standards-Based Grading on Teaching, Learning, Assessment, and Student Behavior." *NASSP Bulletin*, vol. 103, no. 1, Mar. 2019, pp. 65–92. *EBSCOhost*, [search-ebSCOhost-com.ezproxy.uta.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ1210701&site=ehost-live](https://search-ebSCOhost-com.ezproxy.uta.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ1210701&site=ehost-live).
- Knoblauch, C. H., and Lil Brannon. "Teacher Commentary on Student Writing: The State of the Art." *Freshman English News*, vol. 10, no. 2, University of Cincinnati on behalf of Composition Studies, 1981, pp. 1–4, [www.jstor.org/stable/43518564](http://www.jstor.org/stable/43518564).
- Knowles, Malcolm S. *Using Learning Contracts*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1986.
- Knight, Megan, and Robyn Cooper. "Taking on a New Grading System: The Interconnected Effects of Standards-Based Grading on Teaching, Learning, Assessment, and Student Behavior." *NASSP Bulletin*. Vol. 109, no. 1, 2019, pp. 65-92. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0192636519826709>.

Kohn, Alfie. "From Degrading to De-Grading." *High School Magazine*, vol. 6, no. 5, Jan. 1999, pp. 38–43. *EBSCOhost*, search-ebSCOhost-com.ezproxy.uta.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ585547&site=ehost-live.

---. "The Case Against Grades." *Counterpoints*, vol. 451, 2013, pp. 143–53, www.jstor.org/stable/42982088.

Kohn, Alfie, and Urbana, IL. ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education. *The Risks of Rewards. ERIC Digest*. Dec. 1994. *EBSCOhost*, https://search-ebSCOhost-com.ezproxy.uta.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=ED376990&site=ehost-live.

Kolln, Martha J., and Loretta Gray. *Rhetorical Grammar: Grammatical Choices, Rhetorical Effects*. 6<sup>th</sup> edition, Longman, 2009.

Krashen, Stephen. "Teaching Grammar: Why Bother?" *California English*, vol.3, no. 8, 1988, pp. 1-3. [http://www.sdkrashen.com/content/articles/teaching\\_grammar\\_why\\_bother.pdf](http://www.sdkrashen.com/content/articles/teaching_grammar_why_bother.pdf).

Krest, Maggie. "Monitoring Student Writing: How to Avoid the Draft" *Journal of Teaching Writing*. V 7 n1 p27-39. Spr-Sum 1988.

Lahey, Jessica. "Letter Grades Deserve an 'F'." *The Atlantic*, 2014, www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2014/03/letter-grades-deserve-an-f/284372/.

Land, Robert E., Jr., and Sandra Evans. "What Our Students Taught Us about Paper Marking." *English Journal*, vol. 76, no. 2, Jan. 1987, pp. 113–16. *EBSCOhost*, https://search-ebSCOhost-com.ezproxy.uta.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ347069&site=ehost-live.

Lehman, Erin, et al. "Investigating the Relationship of Standards-Based Grades vs. Traditional-Based Grades to Results of the Scholastic Math Inventory at the Middle School Level." *Education Leadership Review of Doctoral Research*, vol. 6, Jan. 2018, pp. 1–16. *EBSCOhost*, search-

ebscohost-com.ezproxy.uta.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ1204463&site=ehost-live.

Leki, Ilona. "Potential Problems with Peer Responding in ESL Writing Classes." *CATESOL Journal*, vol. 3, 1990, pp. 5-19. [http://www.catesoljournal.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/CJ3\\_leki.pdf](http://www.catesoljournal.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/CJ3_leki.pdf).

Liu, Ngar-Fun, and David Carless. "Peer Feedback: The Learning Element of Peer Assessment." *Teaching in Higher Education*, vol. 11, no. 3, 2006, pp. 279-290, [www.doi.10.1080/13562510600680582](http://www.doi.org/10.1080/13562510600680582).

Loewus, Liana. "Why Teachers Leave—or Don't: A Look at the Numbers." *Education Week*, vol. 40, no. 32, May 2021, [www.proquest.com/docview/2562861684/fulltext/1E99EB11A953413APQ/1?accountid=7117](http://www.proquest.com/docview/2562861684/fulltext/1E99EB11A953413APQ/1?accountid=7117).

Loretto, Adam, et al. "Secondary Students' Perceptions of Peer Review of Writing." *Research in the Teaching of English*, vol. 51, no. 2, National Council of Teachers of English, 2016, pp. 134–61, [www.jstor.org/stable/24889912](http://www.jstor.org/stable/24889912).

Lunsford, Andrea A. "Composing Ourselves: Politics, Commitment, and the Teaching of Writing." *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 41, no. 1, National Council of Teachers of English, 1990, pp. 71–82, <https://doi.org/10.2307/357884>.

Lynch, Catherine, and Patricia Klemans. "Evaluating Our Evaluations." *College English*, vol. 40, no. 2, National Council of Teachers of English, 1978, pp. 166–80, <https://doi.org/10.2307/375748>.

MacArthur, Charles A. "Strategies Instruction." In K.R. Harris, S. Graham, & T. Urdan (Eds.), *Educational Psychology Handbook: Vol. 3. Applications of Educational Psychology to Learning and Teaching*, pp. 379–401. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2011.

---. "Evaluation and Revision Processes in Writing." In V.W. Berninger (Ed.), *Past, Present, and Future Contributions of Cognitive Writing Research to Cognitive Psychology*, pp. 461–483.

London, UK: Psychology, 2012.

---. "Instruction in Evaluation and Revision." In C.A. MacArthur, S. Graham, & J.

Fitzgerald (Eds.), *Handbook of Writing Research*, 2nd ed., pp. 272–287. New York,

NY: Guilford, 2016.

MacArthur, Charles A., and Steve Graham. "Writing Research from a Cognitive Perspective." In

C.A. MacArthur, S. Graham, & J. Fitzgerald (Eds.), *Handbook of Writing Research*, 2nd ed., pp.

24–40. New York, NY: Guilford, 2016.

MacArthur, Charles A., et. al. "Effects of a Reciprocal Peer Revision Strategy in Special

Education Classrooms." *Learning Disabilities Research and Practice*, vol. 6, no. 4, Jan. 1991,

pp. 201–10. *EBSCOhost*, [search-ebSCOhost-com.ezproxy.uta.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ437758&site=ehost-live](http://search-ebSCOhost-com.ezproxy.uta.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ437758&site=ehost-live).

---. "Knowledge of Revision and Revising Behavior Among Students with

Learning Disabilities." *Learning Disability Quarterly*, vol. 14, no. 1, 1991, pp. 61–73.

<https://doi:10.2307/1510373>.

Maehr, Martin L, and Carol Midgley. *Transforming School Cultures*. Westview Press, 1996.

Marzano, Robert J., and Sandra Arthur. "Teacher Comments on Student Essays: It Doesn't

Matter What You Say." 1 Jan. 1977. *EBSCOhost*, [search-ebSCOhost-com.ezproxy.uta.edu/](http://search-ebSCOhost-com.ezproxy.uta.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=ED147864&site=ehost-live)

[login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=ED147864&site=ehost-live](http://login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=ED147864&site=ehost-live).

Mastrangelo, Lisa, and Victoria Tischio. "Integrating Writing, Academic Discourses, and Service

Learning" Project Renaissance and School/College Literacy Collaborations. *Composition*

*Studies*, vol. 33, no. 1, 2005, pp. 31-53. Retrieved from <https://login.ezproxy.uta.edu/login?url=>



<https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/integrating-writing-academic-discourses-service/docview/213783824/se-2?accountid=7117>.

McDonald, W. U. "Grading Student Writing: A Plea for Change." *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 26, no. 2, National Council of Teachers of English, 1975, pp. 154–58, <https://doi.org/10.2307/357107>.

---. "The Revising Process and the Marking of Student Papers." *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 29, no. 2, National Council of Teachers of English, 1978, pp. 167–70, <https://doi.org/10.2307/357305>.

McMillan, James H. "Secondary Teachers' Classroom Assessment and Grading Practices." *Educational Measurement: Issues and Practice*, vol. 20, no. 1, Jan. 2001, pp. 20–32. *EBSCOhost*, [search-ebSCOhost-com.ezproxy.uta.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ630354&site=ehost-live](https://search-ebSCOhost-com.ezproxy.uta.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ630354&site=ehost-live).

McMillan, James H., and Suzanne Nash. *Teacher Classroom Assessment and Grading Practices Decision Making*. Apr. 2000. *EBSCOhost*, <https://search-ebSCOhost-com.ezproxy.uta.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=ED447195&site=ehost-live>.

McPherson, Kate. "Project Service Leadership: School Service Projects in Washington State." *Phi Delta Kappan*, vol.1, no. 2, 1991, pp. 750-753.

Micciche, Laura R. "Making a Case for Rhetorical Grammar." *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 55, no. 4, National Council of Teachers of English, 2004, pp. 716–37, <https://doi.org/10.2307/4140668>.

Miller, Susan. *Textual Carnivals: The Politics of Composition*. Southern Illinois University Press, 1990.

Miller, Thomas P. *The Evolution of College English: Literacy Studies from the Puritans to the*  
201

- Postmoderns*. Pittsburgh: U of Pittsburgh P, 2011.
- Minter, Deborah Williams, et al. "Learning Literacies." *College English*, vol. 57, no. 6, National Council of Teachers of English, 1995, pp. 669–87, <https://doi.org/10.2307/378571>.
- Mitchell, Tania D. "Traditional vs. Critical Service-Learning: Engaging the Literature to Differentiate Two Models." *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*, vol. 14, no. 2, 2008, pp. 50-65, <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ831374.pdf>.
- Morgan, William, and Matthew Streb. "Building Citizenship: How Quality Service Learning Develops Civic Values." *Social Science Quarterly*, vol. 82, 2001, pp. 154-169. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/0038-4941.00014>.
- Murray, Donald. *A Writer Teaches Writing*. Cengage Learning, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 2003.
- Murphy, James J., and Chris Thaiss. *A Short History of Writing Instruction: From Ancient Greece to Contemporary American*. Routledge, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, 2012.
- Murphy, Raymond. *Essential Grammar in Use*. Cambridge University Press, 1990.
- Murphy, Sandra. *Writing to Make an Impact: Expanding the Vision of Writing in the Secondary Classroom*. Teachers College Press, 2020.
- Nelson, Melissa M., and Christian D. Schunn. "The Nature of Feedback: How Different Types of Peer Feedback Affect Writing Performance." *Instructional Science*, vol. 37, no. 4, Springer, 2009, pp. 375–401, [www.jstor.org/stable/23372520](http://www.jstor.org/stable/23372520).
- Noden, Harry. *Image Grammar: Teaching Grammar as Part of the Writing Process*. Heinemann, 2011.
- Nunan, Susan Losee. "Forgiving Ourselves and Forging Ahead: Teaching Grammar in a New Millennium." *The English Journal*, vol. 94, no. 4, National Council of Teachers of English, 2005, pp. 70–75, <https://doi.org/10.2307/30046463>.

Nystrand, Greene, et al. "Where Did Composition Studies Come From?: An Intellectual History."

*Written Communication*. vol. 10, no. 3, 1993, pp. 267-333.

Obert, Debora L. "'Give and You Shall Receive:' School-Based Service Learning." *Middle School*

*Journal*, vol. 26, no. 4, Association for Middle Level Education (AMLE), 1995, pp. 30–33,

[www.jstor.org/stable/23023246](http://www.jstor.org/stable/23023246).

O'Connor, John S., and Avi D. Lessing. "What We Talk about When We Don't Talk about

Grades." *Schools: Studies in Education*, vol. 14, no. 2, Jan. 2017, pp. 303–18. *EBSCOhost*, search-

[ebscohost-com.ezproxy.uta.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ1160172&site=ehost-](http://ebscohost-com.ezproxy.uta.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ1160172&site=ehost-live)

[live](http://ebscohost-com.ezproxy.uta.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ1160172&site=ehost-live).

O'Connor, Ken. *How to Grade for Learning: Linking Grades to Standards (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.)*, Corwin Press,

2002.

---. *Repair Kit for Grading: Fifteen Fixes for Broken Grades*. Pearson, 2010.

Olsen, Brad, and Rebecca Buchanan. "An Investigation of Teachers Encouraged to Reform Grading

Practices in Secondary Schools." *American Educational Research Journal*, vol. 56, no. 5, Oct.

2019, pp. 2004–39. *EBSCOhost*, [search-ebscohost-com.ezproxy.uta.edu/login.aspx?](http://search-ebscohost-com.ezproxy.uta.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ1228092&site=ehost-live)

[direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ1228092&site=ehost-live](http://search-ebscohost-com.ezproxy.uta.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ1228092&site=ehost-live).

O'Neill, Peggy, and Jane Mathison Fife. "Listening to Students: Contextualizing Response to

Student Writing." *Composition Studies*, vol. 27, no. 2, University of Cincinnati on behalf of

Composition Studies, 1999, pp. 39–51, [www.jstor.org/stable/43501433](http://www.jstor.org/stable/43501433).

Panadero, Ernesto, et. al. "The Impact of a Rubric and Friendship on Peer Assessment: Effects

on Construct Validity, Performance, and Perceptions of Fairness and Comfort," *Studies in*

*Educational Evaluation*, vol. 39, no. 4, 2013, pp. 195-203. [https://doi.org/10.1016/](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.stueduc.2013.10.005)

[j.stueduc.2013.10.005](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.stueduc.2013.10.005).

- Patriquin, Hannah. "An Archival Study of Grammar Instruction: Looking to the Past for Future Best Practices in Writing Instruction." *Virtual Commons Bridgewater State University*, May 2017, [https://vc.bridgew.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1230&context=honors\\_proj](https://vc.bridgew.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1230&context=honors_proj).
- Pattison, Evangeleen, et al. "Is the Sky Falling? Grade Inflation and the Signaling Power of Grades." *Educational Researcher*, vol. 42, no. 5, Jan. 2013, pp. 259–65. *EBSCOhost*, search-[ebscohost-com.ezproxy.uta.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ1015047&site=ehost-live](https://search.ebscohost-com.ezproxy.uta.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ1015047&site=ehost-live).
- Peckham, Irvin. "Beyond Grades." *Composition Studies*, vol. 21, no. 2, University of Cincinnati on behalf of Composition Studies, 1993, pp. 16–31, [www.jstor.org/stable/43501895](http://www.jstor.org/stable/43501895).
- Petruzzella, Brenda Arnett. "Grammar Instruction: What Teachers Say." *The English Journal*, vol. 85, no. 7, National Council of Teachers of English, 1996, pp. 68–72, <https://doi.org/10.2307/820510>.
- Philippakos, Zoi A. "Giving Feedback: Preparing Students for Peer Review and Self-Evaluation." *The Reading Teacher*, vol. 71, no. 1, [Wiley, International Literacy Association], 2017, pp. 13–22, [www.jstor.org/stable/26632503](http://www.jstor.org/stable/26632503).
- Potts, Glenda. "A Simple Alternative to Grading." *Inquiry*, vol. 15, no. 1, Jan. 2010, pp. 29–42. *EBSCOhost*, search-[ebscohost-com.ezproxy.uta.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ881563&site=ehost-live](https://search.ebscohost-com.ezproxy.uta.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ881563&site=ehost-live).
- Poulos, Ann, and Mary Jane Mahony. "Effectiveness of Feedback: The Students' Perspective." *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, vol. 33, no. 2, Apr. 2008, pp. 143–54. *EBSCOhost*, search-[ebscohost-com.ezproxy.uta.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ787594&site=ehost-live](https://search.ebscohost-com.ezproxy.uta.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ787594&site=ehost-live).
- Pritchard, Ruie J, and Ronald Honeycutt. "The Process Approach to Writing Instruction: Examining Its Effectiveness." In C.A. MacArthur, S. Graham, & J. Fitzgerald (eds.),

*Handbook of Writing Research*, 2006, pp. 157-189). New York: NY: Guilford.

archive.nwp.org/cs/public/download/nwp\_file/8500/Writing\_Research\_-\_Chapter\_19\_-\_Reduced.pdf?x-r=pcfile\_d.

Randall, Jennifer, and George Engelhard. "Examining the Grading Practices of Teachers, Teaching, and Teacher Education," vol. 26, no. 7, 2010, pp.1372-1380,  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2010.03.008>.

Rose, Mike. "The Language of Exclusion: Writing Instruction at the University." *College English*, vol. 47, no. 4, National Council of Teachers of English, 1985, pp. 341–59,  
<https://doi.org/10.2307/376957>.

Russell, David. *Writing in the Academic Disciplines, 1870-1990: A Curricular History*. Southern Illinois University Press, 1991.

Sachse-Brown, Pat, and Joanne Aldridge. "Descriptive Feedback." University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2004, [www.fammed.wisc.edu/files/webfm-uploads/documents/faculty-dev/ccr-protocol-descriptive-feedback-strategies.pdf](http://www.fammed.wisc.edu/files/webfm-uploads/documents/faculty-dev/ccr-protocol-descriptive-feedback-strategies.pdf)

Sackstein, Starr. *Hacking Assessment: 10 Ways to Go Gradeless in a Traditional Grades School*. Times 10 Publication, 2015.

Sadler, Philip M., and Eddie Good. "The Impact of Self- and Peer-Grading on Student Learning." *Educational Assessment*, vol. 11, no. 1, Jan. 2006, pp. 1–31. *EBSCOhost*, search-[ebscohost-com.ezproxy.uta.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ733697&site=ehost-live](http://ebscohost-com.ezproxy.uta.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ733697&site=ehost-live).

Schine, Joan. "Service Learning: A Promising Strategy for Connecting Students to Communities." *Middle School Journal*, vol. 28, no. 2, 1996, pp. 3-9, DOI: 10.1080/00940771.1996.11494433.

- Schunn, Christian, et al. "The Reliability and Validity of Peer Review of Writing in High School AP English Classes." *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, vol. 60, no. 1, [Wiley, International Literacy Association], 2016, pp. 13–23, [www.jstor.org/stable/44011344](http://www.jstor.org/stable/44011344).
- Scriffiny, Patricia L. "Seven Reasons for Standards-Based Grading." *Educational Leadership*, vol. 66, no. 2, Oct. 2008, pp. 70–74. *EBSCOhost*, [search-ebSCOhost-com.ezproxy.uta.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ814365&site=ehost-live](http://search-ebSCOhost-com.ezproxy.uta.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ814365&site=ehost-live).
- Shaughnessy, Mina P. *Errors and Expectations: A Guide for the Teacher of Basic Writing*. Oxford University Press, 1979.
- Sieben, Nicole. "Building Hopeful Secondary School Writers through Effective Feedback Strategies." *The English Journal*, vol. 106, no. 6, National Council of Teachers of English, 2017, pp. 48–53, [www.jstor.org/stable/26359546](http://www.jstor.org/stable/26359546).
- Sigmon, Robert L. "Serving to Learn, Learning to Serve." *Linking Service with Learning*. Council for Independent Colleges Report, 1994.
- Sigott, Günther, et al. "The Effect of Written Feedback Types on Students' Academic Texts: A Pilot Study." *AAA: Arbeiten Aus Anglistik Und Amerikanistik*, vol. 44, no. 2, Narr Francke Attempto Verlag GmbH Co. KG, 2019, pp. 195–216, [www.jstor.org/stable/26926437](http://www.jstor.org/stable/26926437).
- Simmons, Jay. "Responders Are Taught, Not Born." *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, vol. 46, no. 8, [Wiley, International Reading Association], 2003, pp. 684–93, [www.jstor.org/stable/40017173](http://www.jstor.org/stable/40017173).
- Smagorinsky, Peter, et al. "Teaching Grammar and Writing: A Beginning Teacher's Dilemma." *English Education*, vol. 43, no. 3, National Council of Teachers of English, 2011, pp. 262–92, [www.jstor.org/stable/23017093](http://www.jstor.org/stable/23017093).
- Smith, Roslin. "Chapter Three: Class Wars: How to Use Your Jedi Master." *Counterpoints*, vol.

- 486, Peter Lang AG, 2017, pp. 17–22, [www.jstor.org/stable/45177612](http://www.jstor.org/stable/45177612).
- Sommers, Nancy. “Across the Drafts.” *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 58, no. 2, National Council of Teachers of English, 2006, pp. 248–57, [www.jstor.org/stable/20456939](http://www.jstor.org/stable/20456939).
- . “Responding to Student Writing.” *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 33, no. 2, National Council of Teachers of English, 1982, pp. 148–56, <https://doi.org/10.2307/357622>.
- Sparks, Merla. “An Alternative to the Traditional Grading System.” *The English Journal*, vol. 56, no. 7, National Council of Teachers of English, 1967, pp. 1032–34, <https://doi.org/10.2307/812652>.
- Sperling, Melanie, and Sarah Freedman. “A Good Girl Writes Like a Good Girl: Written Responses to Student Writing.” *Written Communication*, vol. 9, no. 9, Jan. 1987, pp. 343–69. *EBSCOhost*, [search-ebSCOhost-com.ezproxy.uta.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ362172&site=ehost-live](http://search-ebSCOhost-com.ezproxy.uta.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ362172&site=ehost-live).
- Spidell, Cathy, and William H. Thelin. “Not Ready To Let Go: A Study of Resistance to Grading Contracts.” *Composition Studies*, vol. 34, no. 1, University of Cincinnati on behalf of Composition Studies, 2006, pp. 35–68, [www.jstor.org/stable/43501638](http://www.jstor.org/stable/43501638).
- Starch, Daniel, and Edward C. Elliott. “Reliability of the Grading of High-School Work in English.” *The School Review*, vol. 20, no. 7, University of Chicago Press, 1912, pp. 442–57, [www.jstor.org/stable/1076706](http://www.jstor.org/stable/1076706).
- Stiggins, Rick. “From Formative Assessment to Assessment for Learning: A Path to Success in Standards-Based Schools.” *The Phi Delta Kappan*, vol. 87, no. 4, [Phi Delta Kappa International, Sage Publications, Inc.], 2005, pp. 324–28, [www.jstor.org/stable/20441998](http://www.jstor.org/stable/20441998)

- Stitt, Jennifer L., and Judith J. Pula. "Voting for Subjectivity: Adding Some Gray Areas to Black-and-White, Objective Grading Practices." *Delta Kappa Gamma Bulletin*, vol. 80, no. 3, 2014, pp. 24-27, [www.proquest.com/docview/1509200297?parentSessionId=F0XjuAIhn8i3QH0Bdt5okKd8L9KZ0MFohIdk7CCqlmI%3D](http://www.proquest.com/docview/1509200297?parentSessionId=F0XjuAIhn8i3QH0Bdt5okKd8L9KZ0MFohIdk7CCqlmI%3D)
- Straub, Richard. "Students' Reactions to Teacher Comments: An Exploratory Study." *Research in the Teaching of English*, vol. 31, no. 1, National Council of Teachers of English, 1997, pp. 91–119, [www.jstor.org/stable/40171265](http://www.jstor.org/stable/40171265).
- Taylor, Pamela G., and Christine Ballengee-Morris. "Service-Learning: A Language of 'We.'" *Art Education*, vol. 57, no. 5, Sept. 2004, pp. 6–12. *EBSCOhost*, <https://search-ebSCOhost-com.ezproxy.uta.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ740169&site=ehost-live>.
- Taylor, Winnifred F., and Kenneth C. Hoedt. "The Effect of Praise upon the Quality and Quantity of Creative Writing." *The Journal of Educational Research*, vol. 60, no. 2, Taylor & Francis, Ltd., 1966, pp. 80–83, [www.jstor.org/stable/27531808](http://www.jstor.org/stable/27531808).
- Tierney, Robin D., et al. "Being Fair: Teachers' Interpretations of Principles for Standards-Based Grading." *Educational Forum*, vol. 75, no. 3, Jan. 2011, pp. 210–27. *EBSCOhost*, <https://search-ebSCOhost-com.ezproxy.uta.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ929274&site=ehost-live>.
- Topping, Keith J. "Peer Assessment." *Theory Into Practice*, vol. 48, no. 1, Taylor & Francis, Ltd., 2009, pp. 20–27, [www.jstor.org/stable/40071572](http://www.jstor.org/stable/40071572).
- "Peer Assessment between Students in Colleges and Universities." *Review of Educational Research*, vol. 68, no. 3, [Sage Publications, Inc., American Educational Research Association], 1998, pp. 249–76, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1170598>.



- Tovani, Cris. *So What Do They Really Know? Assessment That Informs Teaching and Learning*, Stenhouse Publishers, 2011.
- Tremmel, Michelle. "What to Make of the Five-Paragraph Theme: History of the Genre and Implications." *Teaching English in the Two-Year College*, vol. 39, no. 1, Sept. 2011, pp. 29–42. *EBSCOhost*, <https://search-ebSCOhost-com.ezproxy.uta.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ940947&site=ehost-live>.
- Trim, Michelle. "Going Beyond Good Intentions: Reconsidering Motivations and Examining Responsibility in Composition-Based Service Learning." *Modern Language Studies*, vol. 39, no. 1, Modern Language Studies, 2009, pp. 66–81, [www.jstor.org/stable/40347454](http://www.jstor.org/stable/40347454).
- Tsui, Amy B, and Maria Ng. "Do Secondary L2 Writers Benefit from Peer Comments?" *Journal of Second Language Writing*, vol. 9, 2000, pp. 147-170. [www.jstor.org/stable/43190028](http://www.jstor.org/stable/43190028).
- Umpleby, Stuart. "Service-Learning as a Method of Instruction." *Journal of the Washington Academy of Sciences*, vol. 97, no. 4, Washington Academy of Sciences, 2011, pp. 1–15, [www.jstor.org/stable/24536459](http://www.jstor.org/stable/24536459).
- Van Lehn, Kurt, et al. *Towards a Theory of Learning During Tutoring*. Pittsburg University PA Learning Research and Development Center, 1995.
- VanDeWeghe, Rick. "Research Matters: 'Awesome, Dude!' Responding Helpfully to Peer Writing." *The English Journal*, vol. 94, no. 1, National Council of Teachers of English, 2004, pp. 95–99, <https://doi.org/10.2307/4128855>.
- Vanhala, Michelle. "How I Revamped My Grading System." *Educational Leadership*, vol. 78, no. 1, Sept. 2020, pp. 67–70. *EBSCOhost*, <https://search-ebSCOhost-com.ezproxy.uta.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ1267581&site=ehost-live>.
- Varlotta, Lori E. "A Critique of Service-Learning's Definitions, Continuums, and Paradigms: A

- Move towards a Discourse-Praxis Community.” *Educational Foundations*, vol. 11, no. 3, 1997, pp. 53-85. [www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/critique-service-learnings-definitions-continuums/docview/1468388519/se-2?accountid=7117](http://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/critique-service-learnings-definitions-continuums/docview/1468388519/se-2?accountid=7117).
- Vatterott, Cathy. *Rethinking Grading: Meaningful Assessment for Standards-Based Learning*. ACSD, 2015.
- Warren, James E. “Peer Review.” English 5389: Topics of Composition. The University of Texas at Arlington, 2016.
- Warren, James E., and Karen Otto. “Beyond the Classroom Border: Student Writing in Service-Learning Partnerships.” *English in Texas*. vol. 9, no. 1, Spring/Summer 2019, pp. 12-16. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1262278.pdf>.
- . “Raising the Volume of Student Voices Through Grammar Instruction.” *English in Texas*, vol. 50, no. 1, Spring/Summer 2020, pp. 31-37. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1304608.pdf>.
- Warrington, Amber, et al. “Finding Value in the Process: Student Empowerment through Self-Assessment.” *The English Journal*, vol. 107, no. 3, National Council of Teachers of English, 2018, pp. 32–38, [www.jstor.org/stable/26450162](http://www.jstor.org/stable/26450162).
- Weaver, Constance. *Teaching Grammar in Context*. Heinemann, 1996.
- Weigert, Kathleen Maas. “Academic Service Learning: Its Meaning and Relevance.” *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*, no. 73, Jan. 1998, pp. 3–10. *EBSCOhost*, <https://search-ebSCOhost-com.ezproxy.uta.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ561314&site=ehost-live>.
- Willis, Meredith Sue. *Deep Revision: A Guide for Teachers, Students, and Other Writers*. Teachers & Writers Collaborative, 1993.

- Wormeli, R. "Redos and Retakes Done Right." *Educational Leadership*, vol. 69, no. 2, 2011, pp. 22-26. [www.ascd.org/el/articles/redos-and-retakes-done-right](http://www.ascd.org/el/articles/redos-and-retakes-done-right).
- Wormeli, R. *Fair Isn't Always Equal: Assessing & Grading in the Differentiated Classroom*. Stenhouse Publishers, 2018.
- Zamel, Vivian. "Responding to Student Writing." *TESOL Quarterly*, vol. 19, no. 1, Jan. 1985, pp. 79–97. *EBSCOhost*, <https://search-ebSCOhost-com.ezproxy.uta.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ317006&site=ehost-live>.
- Zellermayer, Michal. "The Study of Teachers' Written Feedback to Students' Writing: Changes in Theoretical Considerations and the Expansion of Research Contexts." *Instructional Science*, vol. 18, no. 2, Springer, 1989, pp. 145–65, [www.jstor.org/stable/23369144](http://www.jstor.org/stable/23369144).
- Zoeckler, Laurence G. "Moral Aspects of Grading: A Study of High School English Teachers' Perceptions." *American Secondary Education*, vol. 35, no. 2, Dwight Schar College of Education, Ashland University, 2007, pp. 83–102, [www.jstor.org/stable/41406291](http://www.jstor.org/stable/41406291).
- Zuidema, Leah A. "The Grammar Workshop: Systematic Language Study in Reading and Writing Contexts." *The English Journal*, vol. 101, no. 5, National Council of Teachers of English, 2012, pp. 63–71, [www.jstor.org/stable/23269531](http://www.jstor.org/stable/23269531).

## Biographical Information

Karen Stelter Otto is currently an English II Gifted and Talented teacher in the DFW area. She has been an educator for twenty-four years and began teaching 6<sup>th</sup> grade Gifted and Talented Language Arts. Since then, she has spent time teaching middle and high school students in schools of varying socioeconomic diversity. Otto spent nine years as the yearbook advisor for her current high school, where she created the journalism program for her campus. During that time *The Vision* won several state awards for design, layout, and theme. In her English classroom, Otto strives to create a community of learners by giving students choice in what they read and write. Using the workshop method, Otto helps her students learn how to write like readers and read like writers. She believes that a classroom should be full of laughter, conversations, and creativity and should extend outside the four walls of the school building.

Otto has won multiple Teacher of the Year awards from the districts she has worked in, as well as state-level awards. She won (TAGT) Texas Association of Gifted and Talented's Educator of the Year award in 2018 and (TCTELA) Texas Council of Teachers of English Language Arts' Secondary Teacher of the Year award in 2019. She has co-authored three articles on writing, which were published in *English in Texas*. She hopes to publish a book on grammar instruction in the near future. Otto enjoys presenting at local and state-level conferences on topics related to literacy. She has helped over two dozen Texas school districts improve their writing programs. Otto has also served as the chair of the TAGT Advocacy Committee and currently serves on TAGT's Education Committee. She is a member of TCTELA's High English Section, where she contributes to their podcast and newsletter.

In addition, Otto has earned a Ph.D. in Rhetoric and Composition from the University of Texas at Arlington. She holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in English with a minor in history from Texas State University. Otto has also earned a Master of English degree with a focus on African American literature, from Texas State University and a Master of Education degree in Educational Leadership and Policy from the University of Texas at Arlington. She is state certified to teach Secondary English (grades 6-12), English as a Second Language, Technology Education, and Journalism. Otto also holds a Gifted and Talented supplemental certification as well as her Principal certification. Her research interests include composition studies, service-learning, grammar instruction, grading practices, gifted and talented education, creativity, African American literature and poetry, and Southern Gothic literature.

In her free time, Otto enjoys reading, watching true crime shows and documentaries, visiting her mom and brother in Waco, and spending time with her husband and two Siberian huskies, Meka and Kona.