

Teaching Multilingual and International Students:
Strategies, Resources, and Advice for Faculty
October 6, 2015

Marking Grammar Errors in Student Writing: What, When, Where, Why, and How

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Here are five error-marking tips that you can use right away on that stack of papers waiting in your office!

1. Assess your priorities as an instructor and those of your discipline. What is the most important writing issue that you think this student needs to work on?
2. Only mark errors that you feel are ‘serious’, meaning that they obscure meaning or that they would negatively affect the student’s character in the eyes of someone reading the paper.
3. Try to send the message that ‘higher order’ concerns, such as critical engagement, development of ideas, and organization should be attended to first and are valued more highly.
4. Whatever marking strategy you use, encourage students to develop self-editing and proofreading skills.
5. Think of minor errors as making up a ‘written accent’, realizing that all multilingual students are in the process of acquiring a second language. The ability to write nearly error-free prose is a long-term goal that students should aim for, but it is unrealistic to expect this to happen quickly, and for certain idiosyncratic rules in English, such as article usage and idioms, students may always need to solicit feedback from others before submitting a final piece of writing.

See the rest of this packet for more detailed descriptions of error marking strategies.

*Visit <http://gsi.berkeley.edu/gsi-guide-contents/student-writing-intro/esl/> for the Graduate Student Instructor Teaching & Resource Center FAQs relevant to this topic.

A Continuum of Instructor Involvement in Marking Student Errors

Fix all errors for the student, becoming, essentially, a line-editor.

This strategy doesn't help the student, and it creates an unrealistic amount of work for the instructor.

Mark, but don't correct, all errors, asking students to revise.

This approach is attractive because the responsibility for fixing the error falls to the student, who is challenged to understand, then correct the errors they've made. It is time consuming for the instructor, however, and doesn't provide an opportunity for students to develop their own proofreading skills since they aren't required to find their own errors.

Line edit some errors, then ask students to fix the rest.

This might take the form of the instructor editing one paragraph but leaving one paragraph unmarked. Giving students an edited paragraph can be useful in helping students see what their errors are and possible corrections. However, marking and fixing errors requires a significant amount of time, attention, and experience. Also, some argue that fixing any errors for students discourages them from working to fix errors on their own, and encourages a passive approach to proofreading. It can also send the message that the most important part of revision is correcting grammar errors, rather than rewriting for development of ideas or the argument, organization, or other content-related elements.

Identify, but don't correct, some errors, asking students to revise and/ or find errors similar errors in the unmarked section of their paper.

An advantage to this method is that it gives students feedback on the errors they are making while also encouraging active proofreading on their part. By alerting students to the type of error they are making, instructors are giving feedback that contributes to development of effective proofreading. To encourage students to proofread their paper, assuming the instructor is marking a final draft, the student might be required to edit the final draft further before receiving a final grade.

Use minimal marking to let students know there are errors, but don't locate or identify errors for them.

This method encourages students to find and fix their own errors. The goal is to help students develop the habit of proofreading their own writing. It also avoids sending the message that the goal of revision is solely to fix grammar errors. With minimal marking, students should be encouraged to find and fix the errors. One strategy is for the instructor to raise the grade when the edited paper is returned or for the instructor to hold off on grading until the draft has been edited.

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Don't mark any errors but give the student feedback that the paper is marred with errors and will lose points.

Advantages: A big time-saver for the instructor. No responsibility on the instructor to help the student develop editing skills. Disadvantages: students may feel criticized and unsupported, leading to feelings of depression and isolation. Students are not encouraged to develop helpful academic skills.

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Marking and editing strategies

Here are three approaches to marking errors. Remember that all of these approaches are more effective when paired with a strategy for holding the students accountable for making the corrections so that they develop their own editing skills.

#1 Color Coding and Highlighting

Similar to error codes, color coding and highlighting uses a previously explained system for marking errors. This saves time when marking papers. Students often find it much easier to understand a document with different colored highlights than a document with scribbled, difficult to read shorthand markings.

Ever since 1970s, the most rapid period of technological transformation is taking place. The digital era has reshaped people's life and their relationship with the world. Older people involved are called "Digital Immigrants", while their younger counterparts who grow up in the culture are known as "Digital Natives".

Key and Examples below

..... = article error

It is a most interesting book I have read. Steve Jobs is the leader of the Apple.

..... = verb error/ wrong tense, problem forming the verb, or subject-verb error

We didn't completed the job yesterday. Disposing of electronics properly becomes a major issue.

..... = word form error

Her father is the most success software engineer in the firm.

..... = word choice error- inaccurate word choice or collocations error

The team is putting emphasis to their defense. Hybrid vehicles need more workers for production.

..... = noun ending/ singular or plural error

We have enough homeworks to last a week. The wastes have to be dealt with properly.

..... = sentence structure- punctuation, confusing grammar, or word order problem

I like apples they are delicious. The manager bought yesterday a new computer.

..... = word missing

They are interested going with us to the concert.

..... = pronoun reference unclear

We enjoyed the book and the movie, but it was more violent.

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#2 Correction Symbols

This represents a relatively short list of correction symbols. Adopting a similar key and sharing it with your students at the beginning of the term can help streamline marking and discussing writing throughout the semester. This can be useful because it helps develop a common language for describing and identifying errors. Longer and more detailed charts can be developed, depending on your goals, time limitations, and level of comfort working with students on these errors. Often, though, especially in a class not dedicated to editing practice, restricting your marking to a limited number of errors will be more effective.

Ever since 1970s<<<art., the most rapid period of technological transformation is taking<<<VT place. The digital era has reshaped people's life<<<S/P and their relationship<<<S/P with the world. Older people involved are called "Digital Immigrants", while their younger counterparts who grow up in the culture<<<wc are known as "Digital Natives".

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Symbol	Meaning	Incorrect	Correct
P	Punctuation	I live work and go to school in Walnut.	I live, work, and go to school in Walnut.
=	Capitalization Needed	The <u>d</u> odgers play in <u>l</u> os <u>a</u> ngeles.	The Dodgers play in Los Angeles.
V	Problem with the verb (tense, agreement, formation)	The manager <u>work</u> hard. I never <u>see</u> him until I came to the US.	The manager works hard. I never saw him until I came to the US.
S/P	Singular/ Plural	Apple <u>are</u> the most nutritious fruit.	Apples are the most nutritious fruit.
WC	Word Choice	The apple is delighted. <u>wc</u>	The apple is delicious.
PN	Confusing pronoun reference	The book and the film were both scary. It was much better though.	The book and the film were both scary. The book was much better though.
SS	Sentence Structure (Run on, Comma Splice, Fragment, or confusing structure)	Lily is hardworking she is employce of the month. <u>SS</u> Lily is a hard worker, she is employce of the month. <u>SS</u> Because Lily is a hard worker. She is employce of the month. <u>SS</u>	Lily is hardworking, so she is employce of the month. <u>OR</u> Lily is hardworking; therefore, she is employce of the month. Because Lily is a hard worker, she is employce of the month.
WM	Word missing	It has not been determined how these policies likely to affect small businesses. <u>wm</u>	It has not been determined how these policies are likely to affect small businesses.
ART.	Article error	In computer science, <u>crash</u> refers to a sudden error in ... <u>art.</u>	In computer science, a crash refers to a sudden error in ...

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#3 Minimal Marking

There are various forms of minimal marking, ranging from highlighting or underlining errors without making comments to writing question marks or check marks in the margins to alert students to errors. An important aspect of this approach is to withhold a grade until the revisions are made or offer to raise the grade once the revisions are made.

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