

Dealing with the small stuff: Sentence level issues and errors

Some questions about your approach:¹

1. When you are grading, how important do you consider errors in grammar and syntax to be?
2. What sort of feedback do you give with regard to errors of this sort?
3. Do you include discussion of these sorts of errors in your tutorials, and if so, how do you do it?
4. Do you feel comfortable perceiving, diagnosing, and explaining these sorts of errors?

Your background:

1. What training have you had in terms of English grammar and syntax?
2. What advice or instructions have your instructors given you with regard to how they want these issues addressed?

¹ This handout was used as a discussion prompt for RGASC Writing TA Training sessions.

Mark Blaauw-Hara's 7-Point Guide to Discussing Grammar

1. Address grammar rhetorically, i.e. like wearing inappropriate clothes to a job interview: this can help take some of the prescriptiveness out of a prescriptive approach.
2. Focus on process
3. If possible, encourage dialogue with students to get at their meanings
4. Work on grammar issues in students' own writing (or in the sort of writing that students in your course might produce)
5. Encourage rereading
6. Provide models of good writing
7. Don't correct
 - Students should fix their **own** errors, and ideally should find most or all of them. They won't learn if you do it for them.
 - Rei Noguchi argues that grammar teaching (and feedback is teaching) ought to focus on areas in which there are a) a **high frequency** of b) errors that are considered by readers to be **severe**.

Helping Out Beyond the Red Ink

How can you integrate this feedback into the broader context of the course, or of the student's academic progress?

- Grammar instruction in tutorials
- Writing appointments (office hours)
- BB links to sites (such as the Purdue Owl)
- RGASC online modules
- Recommendations to visit the RGASC
- Tracking issues and progress over the course's length

What Would Academia Be Without a (Selected) Bibliography?

Mark Blaauw-Hara, "Why Our Students Need Instruction in Grammar, and How We Should Go about It," *Teaching English in the Two Year College* 34:2 (2006):165-178.

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