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**Synthesizing Teacher Feedback, Student-Generated Criteria, and  
Differentiated Instruction in Eleventh Grade Composition**

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by

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The Road goes ever on and on  
Down from the door where it began.  
Now far ahead the Road has gone,  
And I must follow, if I can,  
Pursuing it with eager feet,  
Until it joins some larger way  
Where many paths and errands meet.  
And whither then? I cannot say.

J.R.R. Tolkien

## **ABSTRACT**

This study documents the development of a new writing process synthesizing teacher feedback on student writing, student-generated criteria in the form of a rubric, one-on-one teacher-student conferences, and individualized assessment. The study was completed in a small suburban high school in eastern Pennsylvania with 20 eleventh grade honors British Literature students. Methods of gathering data included conventional and teacher research, questionnaires, interviews, student work including essays and student-generated criteria, observations and field notes, class discussions, and journal entries. Students wrote 5 papers throughout the course of the study, 3 of which were graded in a conventional way and 2 of which were graded using the new process. In the new process, the students reviewed teacher feedback from their rough drafts and generated criteria based on specific needs. In one-on-one teacher-student conferences, the feedback and rubrics were discussed. Each of the students was then graded through the individualized self-selected criteria. At the conclusion of the study, increases were found in the following areas: student understanding of grammar, mechanics, and content; student achievement; levels of motivation and effort; and student ownership and accountability.

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## RESEARCHER STANCE

"Wisdom begins in wonder."

-Socrates

Twelve years ago. A small high school in New Jersey. An honors English class with twenty or so eager-to-learn students. An essay assigned, diligently researched and written, graded, and marinated in red ink upon its return. This is what I remember from my honors English classes as a high school student. I do not remember actually learning techniques to become a better writer; nor do I recall conferencing with my teacher or fellow peers during class time to discuss the comments, but I do remember being unrealistically expected to know how to correct the papers that my English teachers would hand back to me. On the rare occasions that I could actually comprehend the handwriting of the teachers, I would read the comments hoping that if I stared at them long enough, I would understand what they meant and be able to make improvements on my future papers. Clearly, that was not the case, since every time I handed in a paper and received it back, similar comments were on it. I would see words like *awkward* and *split infinitive*, and at times, I would even see parts of words like *frag* or *r-o*. I vividly remember quickly skimming the comments trying to decode everything the teacher was trying to convey, all the while wondering what an infinitive even was. I felt overwhelmed with not only the number of comments, but also with the various types of comments. Everything that was wrong was marked. I did not

know where to begin as far as editing and revising was concerned because my paper was drowning in errors. As if confusion about the comments themselves was not enough, there were also the cryptic drawings, lines, scribbles, and arrows to further my bewilderment. After scouring over the paper, I would merely accept my grade, shove the paper into my binder or give it back to the teacher based on his or her procedures, and forget about it. The only thing that stuck with me all along was the fact that I thought I was a terrible writer since I almost never received any positive comments. Was there nothing good about my papers? Not one positive aspect? Not being a naturally gifted writer, I began to question why I put so much hard work into my writing when my teacher did not appreciate any of it. To this day, I do not consider myself a very good writer. It takes me a long time to write my papers, and I revise and edit many times before turning in a draft that is still far from perfect. I sometimes wonder if my beliefs about my writing would be more positive had I had a different type of writing experience in high school.

Present day. A small high school in Pennsylvania. An honors English class with twenty or so eager-to-learn students. An essay assigned, diligently researched and written, graded, and marinated in purple ink upon its return. A similar scenario as above, but in this case, I sit on the other side of the desk. Every time I grade a stack of papers, I feel like I am writing the same comments over and over for the same students. This shows that students are not implementing my

comments into future written drafts. Students not only need to read the feedback I write on their papers, but they also need to interact with it. In other words, they need to take the feedback and examine what skills specifically require some more work. I am thinking from the perspective of a teacher. Yet, as I write comments on my students' papers, do I consider how I felt reviewing my own papers back in high school? Until recently. . .no. Had I turned into the type of ineffective writing teacher that I once had? Unfortunately, I believe so. But thanks to this teacher action research project, that has all changed.

Let me first begin by describing my initial experiences as a high school English teacher. Every year I require numerous process writings from my students, ranging from 3 to 15 pages depending on the type of paper, the grade level, and the ability level of the students. Generally, my honors students write 5 page papers for each unit of study and a 15 page research paper. No matter what the circumstances, however, I spend endless hours writing feedback to all of my students via the margins and the ends of their papers. While writing the feedback, I always questioned whether my students utilized the comments I spent so much time writing in order to improve their own writing. My overall hunch was that they did not. One of the reasons why I had this hunch was based on my own experiences as a student.

I did not have an effective system regarding the implementation of feedback. I did not comment at all on rough drafts. Rather, when rough drafts

were due, I had my students peer edit and revise with a partner. Then, a few days later, the final draft was handed in. When I passed back final graded papers to my students, they quickly turned to the last page to see the grade, they took a few minutes to read through my comments, and they complacently handed them back to me. I would take their papers, place them in their folders, and feed them to the black, lanky, already-stuffed, paper-eating monster that goes by the name of Filing Cabinet. The only time they saw their papers again was at the end of each marking period. Filing Cabinet would regurgitate the papers for merely a few moments when I required students to organize their folders to meet my own obsessive-compulsive needs. Undoubtedly, this “process” was not an effective one.

A second reason why I did not feel students utilized my feedback was based on the types of comments I provided. Although I tried to write clear and concise comments on student papers, there were times when I used words that may have been ambiguous to students. They would sometimes ask questions about the meanings of certain words such as “awkward” or “rework.” They had trouble making changes when they did not understand the jargon I was using. In many cases, students saw these words so often that they did not ask questions because they felt stupid; they felt like they should probably already know what the comments meant. This needed to change. Unfortunately, my sheer grading

load contributed to my lack of explanations when writing feedback. I am still trying to find a way to deal more effectively with this.

A third reason why I believed students were not using my feedback deals with student reactions, or lack thereof, to their graded papers. When I handed papers back to my students, seldom did they ask me questions about my comments. It was as if they were concerned only with the grade rather than how to improve their writing. If they were happy with the grade, they asked no questions. If they were unhappy with the grade, then they began to ask questions about the comments. The lines of communication between student and teacher needed to open with regard to written feedback. Students should ask questions whether they are content with their grades or not. I wondered if this could be established through differentiated instruction. If teachers explain that they are grading students based on individual growth, would students be more likely to take initiative to further improve their own writing by paying more attention to feedback? These were some thoughts I pondered before beginning the study.

In addition to contemplating what feedback to give and how to give it, I had also been thinking about *when* feedback should be given. Once a student receives a grade, does the feedback even matter to him or her? Should feedback be given prior to a grade written on the paper? Fortunately, I found useful answers to many of my questions. These answers will be discussed later in the thesis.

An obvious need for change helped to prompt my topic of study. When I initially began my graduate work at Moravian College, I was unsure of the topic I wanted to choose for my research. Finally, sitting in Curriculum Development and Action Research discussing the thesis with Dr. Mayer, the idea just popped into my head. Through teacher research, I hoped to improve my methods of providing feedback and to devise a way for students to use the feedback to become better and more confident writers. MacDonald (1991) and Hyland (2003) agree that well-written feedback with suggestions for improvement is valuable to writers. I no longer wanted to use the same antiquated methods of teaching writing that were used on me. My experience suggests that they simply do not work.

The purpose of my study was to find ways to help my students become better writers through feedback and differentiated instruction. The feedback I planned to give to my students during the study would act as a vehicle for differentiated instruction. Differentiated instruction would occur when I graded the final drafts of the students' papers using the rubrics that the students generated. Prior to the final due dates, I would spend time modeling and teaching the students how to create the criteria and gradations for their rubrics. Tomlinson (1999b) relays the significance of differentiating instruction in order to meet individual student needs. In this study, I would grade students based on individual and, more importantly, self-selected criteria. By allowing students to self-select

criteria, they would develop ownership over their own work. Hodges (1997) and Speck (2000) explain that modeling in the classroom and providing opportunities for students to create their own rubrics are effective ways to help students improve writing. The students would determine what is important to work on in their own writing and I would grade them accordingly. I wanted my hours of writing comments to be worthwhile. I wanted to help my colleagues, especially those in my department, teach writing more effectively. I wanted parents to know that I was working hard to devise ways to help their children. I wanted my administrators to recognize the importance of teacher research. Finally, and most importantly, I wanted my students to be successful, confident writers. I expected that this study would not only improve writing ability with regard to grammar, content, clarity, organization, use of details, etcetera, but it would also improve self-efficacy and autonomy. In turn, I believed that students would become more responsible for their own learning since each situation would be authentic to that student. What a difference from my own experiences as an honors English student.

After evaluating my own experiences as a young writer, my practice as a teacher, and my philosophies as a Moravian College graduate student, I drafted a final question for my research thesis: What will be the observed and reported experiences when teacher feedback is used as a vehicle for differentiating instruction in a high school English class?

*A few years from now. A small high school somewhere in the tri-state area. An honors English class with twenty or so eager-to-learn students. An essay assigned, diligently researched and written, and marinated in opportunities for personal and academic growth and success upon its return.*

## LITERATURE REVIEW

“If you have built castles in the air, your work need not be lost; that is where they should be. Now put the foundations under them.”

*-Henry David Thoreau*

### Introduction

The use of written and verbal teacher feedback on student writing has received significant attention among researchers. The concept of differentiated, or individualized, instruction has also received the same, if not more, attention in current studies of education. Numerous qualitative and quantitative studies have been performed at the elementary, middle, high school, and college levels regarding the different types of feedback, the effectiveness of feedback, student interpretations of and interactions with feedback, the value of peer feedback, the significance of student/teacher conferencing, the importance of rubrics, and the benefits of differentiated instruction. All of these topics are valuable to help teachers fully understand the benefits of and areas of improvement for teacher feedback, student-generated criteria, and differentiated instruction.

### Feedback

#### *Types of Feedback*

Researchers identified different types of feedback throughout their studies. Although researchers call the feedback by different names, the two most common types of feedback were content-based feedback and mechanics/grammar-based feedback. Anderson, Benson, and Lynch (2001) categorized the feedback as

discourse (content) and presentation (format, spelling, and grammar), while Wiltse (2001) identified the feedback as global (content) and local (grammar). Similarly, Hyland (2003) labeled the feedback content-focused (content) and form-focused (grammar), while Dohrer (1991) classified the feedback as textual (content) and surface (grammar). Some researchers felt that feedback needed to be separated into more than two groups. Leach, Knowles, and Duckart (1997) grouped three types of comments: global, which dealt with content, audience, and purpose; mechanical, which focused on grammar, syntax, spelling, and punctuation; and specific formal elements, which included documentation, formatting, and quotations. On the other hand, Krol (1998) compartmentalized four types of comments, but in a slightly different manner than the other researchers. Krol identified affirming comments that showed that the teacher agreed with the student, nudging comments or comments that probe the student for more information, informing comments that gave the teacher an opportunity to explain something to the student, and personal comments in which the teacher simply reacted to something by sharing a personal connection.

After researchers classified the written feedback, they then quantified the types of feedback. Hyland (2003), Dohrer (1991), and Cowie (1995) affirmed that more than 50% of teacher feedback is based on grammar, mechanics, spelling, and punctuation. “Students by and large had limited opportunity to receive content level feedback on their writing in both elementary and middle school.

Fifty-eight percent of the students received only surface-level feedback on drafts of their compositions” (Clare, Valdez, & Pathey-Chavez, 2000, p. 7). This can be viewed as problematic, since prior research suggests that mechanics and grammar-based isolated feedback will not improve student writing. Similarly, Williams (1997) notes that students are often confused by the use of jargon. Words such as *tone*, *parallelism*, and *clarification*, to name a few, may not be clear to students if they were never taught the concepts. Even if students were taught certain concepts, they may not fully understand how to apply them in their writing. Clare and Patthey-Chavez (2000) found that the most common type of comment for content was clarification. If students are confused by this word, and it is the most common type of content-based comment, how can student writing ever improve with regard to content? Likewise, if students are confused by common mechanics/grammar-based comments, how can student writing improve with regard to mechanics and grammar? Several researchers agree that jargon and other unclear words are one of the primary reasons that students struggle with teacher feedback. Dohrer (1991), MacDonald (1991), Speck (2000), Zak (1993), and Cowie (1995) point out that teachers need to be extremely careful not to include “cryptic responses” in their feedback to students. They state that ambiguous terms such as *awkward*, *reword*, and *rewrite* should not be included in feedback. Hodges (1997) and Manning and Manning (1994) confirm that teachers

need to model good writing when writing comments to students. Comments should be clear, concise, and thoughtful.

When examining types of comments, researchers also studied the use of positive and constructive comments. Norton and Norton (2001), Speck (2000), and Hodges (1997) found that self-esteem and grades are directly correlated. Too many negative comments can be destructive. “All writing teachers should seek a balance between comments that facilitate learning and those that cause damaging affective reactions in students” (Wiltse, 2001, p. 20). This balance will encourage rather than discourage students with regard to writing. Further, Monroe states that “written commentary can do more harm than good for both teachers and students, emotionally and intellectually” (Monroe, 2002, p. 102). Monroe finds that the students who need help in writing do not improve from written comments. In turn, he notes that written comments can lead to a lower self-esteem, thereby causing the student to dislike writing.

How teachers provide different types of feedback is also relevant. While researching types of feedback, Hyland (2003) and MacDonald (1991) observed how teachers were giving feedback. Some methods of providing feedback included writing in the margins of the paper, writing comments on a separate piece of paper and attaching it to the end of the student writing, correcting the student errors, circling and/or underlining student mistakes without correcting them, using lines and arrows, and writing general comments at the end of the

paper. Research from Hyland (2003) and MacDonald (1991) did not state if one method of providing feedback was better than another. Other researchers commented on the use of these methods. Monroe (2002) and Zak (1993) both indicate that teachers should not write any comments on individual student papers because it takes too long with the work load and class sizes of most teachers. Rather, they feel that teachers should write down common errors among students' papers on a separate piece of paper, list them on an overhead, and talk about them together as a whole class.

We need to relocate teacher feedback from the private piece of paper to the public forums of class discussion and e-mail. . . . Public feedback cannot be specifically about every student's writing, personally and individually, of course, but odds are that a teacher's comments hold good advice for all writers, wherever they are in the sliding continuum of their writing development. (Monroe, 2002, p. 103)

Monroe (2002) and Zak (1993) also encourage teachers to use samples of student work for modeling purposes. Although not every student will need help on every topic discussed, all students will benefit from the review. Also, class discussion is an effective way for learning to take place. In his research, Zak (1993) questions if any written feedback is needed at all. He states, "I have returned drafts of narratives to students with no marks or comments at all, and told them simply to take their papers home and make them better. And they came back better" (Zak,

1993, p. 6). Zak's views about written feedback varied from what the majority of researchers found. Along with common beliefs about types of feedback and how they are conveyed, the majority of researchers felt that feedback, overall, is effective.

### *Effectiveness of Feedback*

The extent of effectiveness is probably the most controversial aspect of the teacher feedback issue. While some researchers like Monroe (2002) and Zak (1993) feel that written feedback is not useful, the majority of researchers I consulted found that it is indeed an effective way to improve student writing, if implemented properly. In a survey analyzed by Watson and Lacina (2002), feedback was consistently mentioned as the most important aspect of a writing course. Hyland (2003) agrees that feedback of any kind is better than no feedback at all and, in addition, students will improve more in their writing between drafts if feedback is included. This point demonstrates that providing feedback on the final draft of a paper may not be as effective as providing feedback on various drafts of the same paper. MacDonald (1991) and Speck (2000) further this argument by saying that feedback should be given before a grade is given so that students can focus on the feedback rather than concerning themselves with the grade. Davis and Fulton (1997) found that providing feedback throughout the writing process makes a statistically significant difference in growth in student writing. "Feedback on students' writing--before, during, or even after the

composing process--makes a significant difference in the students' growth and outcomes of the overall quality of the written product they produce" (Davis & Fulton, 1997, p. 22). Cowie (1995) examined *when* different types of feedback were provided during the writing process. He suggests that content and organization-based feedback should be provided in early drafts, while mechanics and grammar-based feedback should be provided in later drafts so that students focus more on what they are trying to say and how they say it. He says specifically, "It seems that students pay more attention to feedback given on earlier drafts when they are more willing to make substantive changes" (Cowie, 1995, p. 193). Clare and Patthey-Chavez state that "the content-level feedback students received also, by and large, did not provide them with much of an opportunity to substantively revise their work" (Clare & Patthey-Chavez, 2000, p. 17). Cowie's recommendation would provide students with a longer period of time to make more thorough revisions. Nightingale (1991) mentions that good writing is not about the number of papers assigned in a given time; rather, it is about the quality of the papers submitted. Teachers should work for a while on one paper with students providing feedback as they go.

Alongside providing feedback throughout the writing process, teachers need to make sure that the concepts presented in feedback have already been taught to students. Dohrer (1991) explains that feedback should be based on ideas and concepts that were already discussed in class. Students should obviously be

familiar with the requirements and goals for the paper so that they understand how they are going to be assessed. Overall, the research I examined suggests that if used correctly, teacher feedback can be a significantly effective way to improve student writing.

### ***Student Interpretations of and Interactions with Feedback***

Research on teacher feedback does not only focus on the teacher. Similarly, it does not only focus on types of comments and how those comments are written. One of the most important elements of teacher feedback research is how the student responds to, interprets, and interacts with the feedback. The role of the student as learner is just as important as the role of the teacher as provider. Much research dealing with student reactions to feedback was conducted in ESL classrooms. This is important for a regular classroom teacher, in that he or she needs to be aware of the best methods for teaching writing and providing feedback for second language learners. Prior research suggests that ESL student writing should not be corrected for grammar and/or mechanics. In recent research studies, students say otherwise. Ancker (2000), Hyland (2003), and Anderson, Benson, and Lynch (2001) all note in their research that ESL students request that their errors be identified so that they have opportunities to make corrections. The majority of students in their studies wanted all of their errors indicated. Anderson, Benson, and Lynch (2001) further found that ESL students do not feel that content and organization is as important as accurate grammar and vocabulary. Non-ESL

students have similar experiences with reacting to feedback. Clare and Patthey-Chavez (2000), Wiltse (2001), and Dohrer (1991) all found that many students seemed to correct all of their mechanical errors, but they did not revise all of the content problems. At times, students just left the content the same, while at other times, they deleted the sentences with the problems altogether. This could be due to the fact that more time and effort are required to make content changes than surface changes. This time and effort difference was determined by Clare and Patthey-Chavez (2000) who quantitatively determined that middle school students who received content-based feedback increased their essays by an average of 48 words, while middle school students who received surface level feedback increased their essays by an average of only 16 words. This is assuming that students paid attention to the feedback and did not ignore content-based commentary.

As mentioned earlier, students often react to feedback based on the extent to which they understand what the teacher is asking them to do. Wiltse (2001) mentions that students often have to spend a significant amount of time interpreting teacher comments. Cowie (1995) agrees by pointing out that students may not know how to respond to teacher feedback because they may not yet have the skills to respond. These findings about student interactions with feedback connect directly to effectiveness of feedback. How teachers present feedback will determine how students respond to it. Students may react to feedback in a way

that teachers do not expect because students and teachers often interpret the same piece of writing differently. Norton and Norton (2001) found these differing interpretations to be statistically significant. They found that often students determine their grade based on effort, while the teacher focuses on mechanics and content. These varying interpretations of what makes good writing can be problematic, which is why it is necessary for teachers to provide clear requirements and expectations for their students for every major written assignment. Unfortunately, due to these different interpretations, students may only revise their work for the teacher, rather than for themselves. Dohrer (1991) and Williams (1997) both found this to be true, and they went further to say that students only revised their papers in the areas where teachers commented.

Although research suggests that there are some communication problems between teachers and students when feedback is concerned, most research does not suggest that teachers should stop giving feedback. As a matter of fact, even though there are times when students may be confused by what a teacher is asking for, students still ask for and appreciate feedback. “My students are more upset when I write no comments on their papers than when I am critical of what they have to say” (Augsburger, 1998, p. 32).

While feedback can be extremely effective, it must be implemented properly. Wiltse (2001) and Speck (2000) point out that if there are too many comments, students will ignore them, they will be inhibited as writers, and they

may have a decrease in motivation. Wiltse (2001) continues by verifying that often students will use certain types of feedback and ignore others. We, as teachers, need to determine a way to provide the most relevant feedback possible.

Clearly, all of these issues pertaining to teacher feedback are tightly connected. Teachers need to consider the types of feedback they are going to provide, when and where they are going to provide it, and how they are going to provide it so that students can effectively interpret, interact with, and respond to it.

### ***The Value of Peer Feedback***

Another area of controversy for teachers is the value of peer feedback. Peer feedback can be extremely effective, but modeling is essential. If a teacher does not model to students how to provide feedback, the outcomes of peer feedback can be disastrous. On the other hand, if a teacher models how to provide effective feedback, most researchers agree that it can be extremely beneficial for both the student receiving the feedback and the student writing the feedback. “In teaching scholarly writing, instructors should be very clear about the purposes and benefits of a strong and sustained critiquing process, and assist students in learning how to both receive and give useful feedback” (Caffarella & Barnett, 2000, p. 2). Dohrer (1991), MacDonald (1991), and Speck (2000) suggest that students should be provided with numerous opportunities to edit and revise their own papers and edit and revise peers’ papers. Many researchers agree that

students are not given enough in-class time to work on their own writing, help others with their papers, and ask questions about writing. Nightingale (1991), Augsburger (1998), and Zak (1993) feel that class time should be used for writing workshops so that students can interact with teachers and each other.

Additionally, they agree that students need a lot of feedback on their works-in-progress. Finally, they reveal that teachers should sit in on peer editing and revising sessions to watch the interactions of students and to help them support each other effectively. Leach, Knowles, and Duckart (1997) make an important point that students should have the opportunity to provide feedback to each other prior to the teacher commenting on the paper. Manning and Manning sum up the value of peer feedback the best: “Students learn so much from one another” (Manning & Manning, 1994, p. 3).

### ***Teacher-Student Conferencing***

Conferencing does not only have to take place between peers. Teacher-student conferences are excellent ways to provide verbal feedback. Beyond that, it is an excellent way for a student to have an opportunity to ask questions about his or her writing. Anderson, Benson, and Lynch (2001) refer to this type of conferencing as “metatalk”--or talk about language. They have found that there is great value in one-to-one conferencing, and metatalk is important to the writing process. “Written feedback can be fairly effective, but it appears that a higher proportion of errors are corrected where this is backed up by discussion”

(Anderson, Benson, & Lynch, 2001, p. 12). Teachers often argue that there is not enough time for individual student conferences, but researchers convey the importance of it in their findings. Caffarella and Barnett (2000) suggest that face-to-face feedback can be both useful and powerful. If time constraints do not allow for individual conferencing with each student, Hodges (1997) mentions that at the very least, time should be provided at the end of the period for students to ask questions about their papers. Also, conferencing does not have to take place during the class session. “The dialogues could be face-to-face, over the telephone, or even via electronic mail to make them convenient and conducive to individual communication and learning styles” (Wiltse, 2001, p. 21). Differentiated instruction can even occur during student and teacher conferences. Manning and Manning (1994) note that writing techniques specifically needed by an individual can be taught in a conference. Finally, comments from 45 doctoral students indicated, “Preparing and receiving critiques from professors and peers was perceived to be the most influential element in helping them to understand the process of scholarly writing and in producing a better written product” (Caffarella & Barnett, 2000, p. 2). Although not all of the research I examined mentioned teacher and student conferencing, none of the research that did mention it conveyed negative aspects of it.

### **Importance of Rubrics**

In order for students and teachers to have a common understanding with regard to feedback, they need to have a similar understanding with regard to the requirements of the assignment. This is where the rubric plays an integral role. Norton and Norton (2001) and Speck (2000) established that college professors have admitted that they sometimes have a difficult time determining grades in writing. The same holds true for writing teachers at all levels. For this reason, rubrics should be used so that students understand how they are being assessed and teachers have a clear method of grading. “Rubrics make assessing student work quick and efficient, and they help teachers to justify to parents and others the grades that they assign to students” (Andrade, 2000, p. 13). Andrade (2000) mentions that effective rubrics have two components--criteria and a “gradation of quality” (p. 14). Popham (2005) identifies three types of rubrics: task-specific, hyper-general, and skill-focused. The task-specific and hyper-general rubrics are not as useful as a skill-focused rubric. A task-specific rubric focuses so closely on one assignment that it cannot be connected to any overall skill that a student can apply elsewhere. To contrast, a hyper-general rubric has such vague and ambiguous criteria, that it can be interpreted in different ways by a student or by a teacher. The skill-focused rubric, on the other hand, is the most useful type of rubric that identifies specific skills that the student must work on for the task at hand; yet, these skills may also be applied to other assignments.

Some researchers believe that students should have an opportunity to help construct scoring criteria. Andrade (2000) suggests that students should help teachers create rubrics in writing workshop. “Thinking and talking about the qualities of good and poor work is powerfully instructive. Your students will not only help you come up with a rubric; they will also learn a lot about the topic at hand” (Andrade, 2000, p. 16). As mentioned earlier, one problem with teacher feedback is that students do not understand teacher expectations, and they have different interpretations of the same piece of writing. If students help create the rubrics, the dichotomy between student and teacher interpretations of the same piece of writing will decrease and the feedback will be more meaningful.

Lindemann (1995) describes three advantages to student-generated criteria:

First, they allow us to change roles. Instead of acting as lawgivers and rule enforcers, we become advisors, helping students define and attain standards that the class, not the teacher has established. . . .Second, when students develop their own definitions of ‘good writing,’ they become better at solving writing problems. . . .Student-generated criteria express principles of good writing in language students understand, weaning them from the security they seek (and unfortunately, have come to expect) by asking us, ‘What do you want in this paper?’ (Lindemann, 1995, p. 202)

Essentially, students will choose criteria that we would want them to choose anyway. Giving them some freedom and allowing them to make choices enhances

the writing process for all involved. Whether teachers choose to write the scoring criteria themselves or choose to involve the students in generating criteria, the importance of utilizing rubrics cannot be denied.

### **Differentiated Instruction**

Differentiated, or individualized, instruction has become popular educational jargon in recent years. This type of instruction helps all students receive a meaningful education at their own levels. In order to differentiate instruction, Tomlinson (1999a) states that the teacher “systematically modifies content, process, or product based on students’ readiness for the particular topic, materials, or skills; personal interests; and learning profiles” (Tomlinson, 1999a, p. 14). This means that the teacher can differentiate instruction in three ways: by modifying the content or what is taught to the student; by modifying the process, or how the information is taught to the student; or by modifying the product, or how the student demonstrates his or her gained knowledge to the teacher. The teacher can determine at what point to differentiate instruction based on various factors. A teacher may choose to differentiate for students of different readiness or ability levels. A teacher may also want to make a more personal connection between the content and the student and may therefore differentiate based on personal interests. Finally, the teacher may differentiate according to each student’s learning profile which “may be shaped by intelligence preferences, gender, culture, or learning style” (Tomlinson, 1999a, p. 11). Tomlinson (1999b)

logically points out that we cannot expect all students to learn the same content at exactly the same speed.

Other researchers agree that differentiation is important in the modern classroom. According to Pettig (2000), differentiation involves a number of steps. Teachers need to align their objectives, determine students' levels of prior knowledge, plan flexible grouping, and encourage an increase in student responsibility. Pettig (2000) also finds that some teachers tend to be too specific in their plans for any given class period. Choosing a general concept to teach allows for easier differentiation. It also coincides with Wiggins and McTighe's (1998) backward design theory, which promotes outcomes. It forces the teacher to ask, "What do I want my students to learn by the end of the lesson?" Holloway (2000) suggests that pre-service teachers are not adequately prepared for differentiating instruction, which is why it is so difficult to do once they become teachers. Most teachers do not provide ample activities for various types of learners, but Tomlinson (1999b) advises teachers to attempt to differentiate. She suggests that teachers should try to include different types of project choices for students, prepare independent projects for advanced learners, and tier as many lessons as possible. "With instructional models for differentiating, students are able to go beyond the typical classroom setting and materials and explore areas of interest" (Fahey, 2000, p. 72). Clearly, through differentiating instruction,

teachers can make learning meaningful, practical, and applicable for students of all ability levels.

Differentiated instruction can be directly connected to the writing process and the use of feedback. Hayes (1998) comments that prior to implementing feedback, students should be familiar with effective writing skills. Students should create goals for themselves based on what they have learned in the classroom. After creating goals, Schunk and Swartz (1993) remark that teachers should provide feedback. Feedback on student goals, according to Schunk and Swartz, can increase self-efficacy, and in turn, writing. When students create their own goals and teachers take those goals into consideration when providing feedback and grading student writing, the process of differentiated instruction begins. Many researchers point out the importance of differentiating instruction when dealing with writing. Leach, Knowles, and Duckart (1997) mention that teacher feedback should be based on individual student needs, not necessarily what the teacher needs. Ancker (2000) agrees that students have individual needs when feedback is concerned and these needs should be taken into account. Even at the collegiate level, scholars recognize the importance of individual student feedback.

### **Conclusion**

Teacher feedback can be positive or constructive, clear or ambiguous, concise or wordy. It can be located in the margins of the paper, on a separate

piece of paper, or on an overhead projector. It can increase or decrease motivation and self-esteem. It can be utilized or ignored, and interpreted how it was intended or not. It can be provided by teachers or peers, in groups or one-on-one. It can be based on a rubric or graded holistically. The value of teacher feedback can be controversial, but overall, with the use of a rubric, modeling, and good writing on the part of the teacher, it is considered by most researchers to be a significant and effective way to help improve student writing. Differentiated instruction, though time-consuming and difficult to initially implement, plays an integral role in helping all students to achieve their highest academic potential. While many teachers need to revamp their styles of teaching to differentiate, the benefits to the students are certainly worth the time and effort. According to most research, teacher feedback and differentiated instruction, when used correctly, can have a tremendous positive impact on students.

## RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

"It is good to have an end to journey toward, but it is the journey that matters in the end."

*-Ursula K. LeGuin*

### Research Goals

I had many goals in mind when I originally devised this study. I did not care if there were too many, if they were too varied, or if they were simply unattainable. I am a persistent person, and I am proud to say that I gave my very best to attempt to accomplish each of my research goals. I wanted my students to pay more attention to the comments I made on their papers and to utilize those comments to improve their own writing. I also hoped to open the lines of communication with my students so that they would ask questions and ask for clarifications about the comments I wrote. Additionally, I hoped my students would take initiative for their own learning by writing rubrics for their papers, thereby increasing self-efficacy. By grading papers with student-generated criteria, I hoped to confirm the importance of differentiating instruction. Similarly, I wanted my students' confidence levels as writers to increase. Overall, I am happy to say. . . .Well, you can read about our process for yourself.

### Setting

Before I delve into the study, it is important for me to describe where the study took place. I teach in a small suburban high school in eastern Pennsylvania. Although our school is growing, we still have fewer than one thousand students in

grades 9-12. The school is not as ethnically diverse as other schools in the area, but it is quite diverse with regard to socioeconomic status. The ability levels of students in the school are also varied. We offer numerous course levels including advanced placement, honors, college preparatory, and basic/applied. For my study, I conducted research with an eleventh grade honors English British Literature course. Along with mentioning where the study took place, it is important that I spend a moment discussing the study participants.

### **Participants**

As I just detailed above, I conducted my study with an eleventh grade honors English British Literature class. The class took place during eighth period every day and lasted a little over 40 minutes (our school is not on block scheduling). There were 22 students in the class – 5 boys and 17 girls. Though they were all in honors, their ability levels and levels of motivation had a surprisingly wide range. They also came to the class having different experiences with English since they did not all have the same teacher the prior year. Additionally, they all came to the class having different levels of enjoyment for English. Some were passionate about the subject, while others seemed to take the course because colleges would rather see honors classes on a transcript. Whatever experiences these students stepped into the room with, I looked forward to helping them further improve their skills in English class, learning about their

academic and personal goals, and collaborating throughout the semester as co-researchers.

### **Research Methods**

I initially introduced the study to my students by telling them that the project had already been approved by the HSIRB (see Appendix A) and by our principal (see Appendix B). I then described the research process overall, and more specifically the new writing process I planned to implement. This made them feel more involved and more aware of how the writing portion of my class was going to be run. I took a few class periods to do all of this, because I also needed time to hand out parent consent forms (see Appendix C) and ask for questions and comments. I received 20 signed consent forms from 3 boys and 17 girls. I collected baseline data by assigning and grading three papers the way I had traditionally done in the past. I am not proud to admit that the following is how I have implemented the writing process for the past six years, but I digress. Here is a reiteration of the old writing process: The students bring in a rough draft. I give them credit for its completion, but do not look at the content. The students spend the period peer editing and revising. They take their papers home and fix them. The final draft is due the next day. I collect the final draft, write comments, grade it, and hand it back to the students. They look over my comments, I collect the papers back, and I put them into the student folders. Need I mention Filing Cabinet again? There. I described the old process in my researcher stance. I

discussed it here again. And, yes, I am ashamed. The baseline data were the grades students received on the final drafts of their first three papers. After collecting baseline data, I implemented the strategy I designed for my study.

I began the new writing process by discussing rubrics. I taught a lesson on the rubric by explaining what it is, how it is used, and how to create one. Using a chocolate chip cookie activity I found on the Internet, I had my students practice writing rubrics about cookies (all the while enjoying a snack). They shared their rubrics with the class and we discussed why some criteria and gradations were better than others.

Students needed to learn how to create rubrics because throughout the study, I differentiated instruction based on the rubrics students had created. Therefore, the study proceeded in the following way: I assigned an essay to my students and gave them a partially completed rubric. They completed a first draft of their paper and handed it in. I read through the paper and wrote feedback on the rough draft. While writing feedback, I considered all of the traditional and teacher research I had read. I remembered that 50% of comments teachers provide are grammar related, so I made an honest attempt to comment on other aspects of the students' papers. I included the following types of comments in the margins of the students' drafts: mechanical/grammatical feedback, content-based feedback, and positive feedback. I also included a summary at the end of each paper. I then passed the papers back to the students so that they could review my comments

and ask any questions that they had. After examining the comments, the students found three areas, either skill or content related, on which they needed to improve. As I wrote comments on the papers, I kept a notepad close by and jotted down common problems that students were having. I then prepared overheads with these common issues to discuss with the students. I taught mini-lessons and reviewed formatting based on these overheads.

After the skills had been identified and taught, students were expected to complete their rubrics. These rubrics were partially filled in with specific criteria and gradations (see Appendixes D, E, F, & G). On the rubrics, there were three rows that they had to complete with criteria and gradations according to the skills that they identified as problematic in their rough drafts. This allowed me to differentiate instruction by grading essays based on individual student-generated criteria. The students completed a rough rubric and a final rubric. The rough rubric along with the rough draft was reviewed during a student-teacher conference.

One-on-one teacher-student conferences took place during the new writing process so that students would have an opportunity to ask individual questions pertaining to the feedback on their drafts, questions regarding the papers in general, and questions regarding the rough rubrics.

In the end, I compared the grades received on each of the five papers to determine the success of this strategy. I also determined the success of this

strategy through the results of numerous data gathering methods including questionnaires, interviews, journals, student work, student-generated criteria, and field notes.

### **Data Gathering Methods**

#### ***Questionnaires***

In order to answer my research question, I gathered data through various means; the first of which was a questionnaire (see Appendix H). Questionnaires were handed out to all of the student participants in my eleventh grade honors English class. These questionnaires helped me get an initial understanding of students' perceptions of teacher feedback. Also, after reviewing the questionnaires, I tried to make sure my written feedback was reflective of the students' needs. Prior to handing out the questionnaire, I discussed the study at length with them, and to an extent, made them co-researchers. By discussing their perceptions about feedback based on English classes up to the time of the questionnaire, I made sure that we all had the same understanding of feedback.

#### ***Interviews***

In addition to questionnaires, I interviewed nine of my students. I completed the first round of three interviews at the beginning of the study. The second round of three interviews occurred in the middle of the study, and the third round of three interviews took place toward the end of the study. When I was ready to conduct each set of interviews, I asked for volunteers; the first three

students to raise their hands were the students selected to be interviewed. These interviews allowed me to have more one-on-one time discussing the study with some of my students. They also gave me many insights as to the effectiveness of my new process regarding feedback, conferencing, student-generated criteria, and differentiated instruction.

### ***Journals***

Journaling is a commonly practiced form of writing in an English class, so I decided to use it as an additional means of gathering data from my students. I asked the students to complete 3 prompted journal entries describing their experiences with the study (see Appendixes I, J, & K). The first entry, which was completed early on in the study, pertained to the writing process we used when I collected the baseline data; the second entry, which was completed in the middle of the study, involved reflection on the new writing process that we used; the final entry, which was completed at the end of the study, dealt with an overall reaction to the study and the changes that occurred in our classroom over time.

### ***Student Work***

Obviously, one of the most important pieces of data was the student writing itself. Through student writing, I was able to determine patterns in areas where many students needed help. I also determined growth or a lack of growth over time in each student. I additionally examined the comments that I wrote on the students papers throughout the process; I coded and binned this feedback for

purposes of analysis. According to Burnaford, Fischer, and Hobson (2001), coding is the process of examining data and categorizing it into similar groups. Similarly, binning is the process of grouping related codes into categories. I attempted to use both positive and constructive feedback, an appropriate number of comments for students to attend to, and clear and direct language in my comments.

### ***Student-Generated Criteria***

I also used a rubric that was partially blank so that the students could generate criteria. I kept track of the criteria that all of the students generated through a table so I could determine patterns, if any, in the criteria (see Appendix L). I guided them in the rubric-writing process by providing samples, modeling how to write a rubric, and requiring student-teacher conferences.

### ***Field Notes***

Finally, I took field notes as I observed my students going through the process. I observed and took notes on their interactions during the initial peer editing and revising section, and I also took notes on conversations I had with my students when we conferenced individually. These field notes helped me get a more well-rounded view of what was going on in my classroom throughout the entire process. They were useful for both reflection and analytic purposes.

In order to keep field notes effectively, I engaged in participant observations throughout the study. I then created a two-column log with

observations from the class on one side and reflections on the other. I did this in order to keep objective and subjective comments separate.

In addition to improving my own practice, these methods may be useful for other teachers, especially other teachers in the English department. Since all English teachers assign papers, it is important for them to acknowledge how useful (or not) feedback is on students' written work. At the same time, it is equally important to understand students' perceptions with regard to feedback. Finally, determining how to help students improve their writing through the use of feedback and differentiating instruction is relevant. After all, why bother taking the time to give feedback if it is not helping our students become better writers?

### **Methodology**

Methodology for this study included a student questionnaire, 9 student interviews at three different times in the study, 5 pieces of writing per student in the study, 2 individualized rubrics per student, 3 journal entries per student, and observations and field notes. Throughout the data collection process, I analyzed my data by coding and binning information (see Appendix M). I examined my own feedback to make sure that I was using research-based types of feedback.

Along with analyzing the data as I went, I spent time reflecting on my field notes to determine patterns in my classroom. Determining patterns is an important part of analysis. I focused on finding patterns with regard to my own feedback, with regard to content and skill related problems in my students'

papers, with regard to student-generated criteria, and with regard to differentiating instruction.

In addition to this analysis, I created a pastiche based on my students' questionnaires, interviews, journal entries, and comments in class. This narrative form of analysis helped me continue to determine patterns. I also created it to convey the overall reflections of students. This process of analysis began in September of 2006 when I started my study, and continued into the spring of 2007 as I finished my thesis.

### **Trustworthiness Statement**

In order to be an ethical and trustworthy teacher researcher, certain conditions had to exist. I began the process of my research by explaining the study to my students and handing out participation consent forms for parents to sign. Once I received the consent forms, I began to keep a daily field log which Holly, Arhar, and Kasten (2000) and Burnaford, Fischer, and Hobson (2001) deem essential. This log consisted of two columns including objective observations and personal reflections. I coded and binned the field log throughout the research process to demonstrate patterns in my research. Holly, Arhar, and Kasten (2000) identify the importance of analyzing data through the coding and binning process. They also suggest that there is great value in other types of data. In addition to a field log, I collected data through student work, interviews, journals, and questionnaires. By collecting these different sources of data, I was

able to use triangulation to reinforce the validity of the data. According to Ely (1997), triangulation occurs when connections are made between three sets of data. Burnaford, Fischer, and Hobson (2001) elaborate by stating that, “triangulation is a term used for the conscious intersecting of multiple methods for data collection” (p. 70).

I minimized any possible risk of a breach in confidentiality by safeguarding my data. Students did not have access to my typed information and tangible data were kept in a locked cabinet in my home when I was not working with them. At the end of my research study, my field log was destroyed.

Along with keeping confidential records, I maintained anonymity of all student participants by replacing actual student names with pseudonyms. These pseudonyms minimize the risk of anyone knowing who the students are since they are not similar to their actual names in any way. Furthermore, a copy of the pseudonym key was not kept at school. Along with pseudonyms, minor details of students’ assignments may have been altered to protect students’ identities.

Choosing not to participate in the study did not affect the students’ grade in any way. Additionally, all of the students in my classroom received the same instruction and assignments as part of the English curriculum. Participants and non-participants were not singled out. During the course of the study, I reminded students that they were allowed to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Prior to the study beginning, students were informed of this through a

verbal explanation and through the parent consent letter. If any student would have liked to withdraw, he or she could have done so at any time by writing me a letter or sending me an e-mail. The parent or guardian was also permitted to withdraw the student through a letter or e-mail. If a student was withdrawn, or the parent or guardian chose not to have him or her participate in the study, I did not use any information pertaining to that student in my study and the student was not penalized in any way.

Prior to conducting my study, I needed to think about some biases that I had. Coming to terms with my biases allowed me to be a more objective researcher. A few of the biases that I had were based on the fact that the students I co-researched with were at the honors level. First, I assumed that all of them would already be motivated to do work. This was not necessarily the case. Since this was an honors class, I had the expectation that all of the students would complete their work every time and on time. By broadening my question, I was able to gather data regarding the extent to which they completed their work. Finally, when I initially came up with my question, I already had an answer in mind. I was assuming that my strategy would definitely improve student writing. Whether or not and in what ways this occurred will be discussed later in the thesis. Throughout the research process, I was able to unearth other significant findings unrelated to improvement in student writing. It was important that I remained open to accepting, recording, analyzing, and utilizing all of my findings.

Throughout this process, I discussed my study with my professors and my teacher support group. The insights they provided helped guide me on my journey of teacher action research. A bulleted overview of my journey is detailed in the following timeframe of study.

### **Timeframe of Study**

#### **Summer, 2006**

- Researched teacher feedback, student-generated criteria, and differentiating instruction
- Wrote literature review
- Requested study approval from my principal

#### **September, 2006**

- Discussed study and the concept of co-research with my students
- Passed out and received participant request forms
- Passed out questionnaires to all students in eleventh grade honors English
- Assigned and graded three traditional papers
- Observed students and took field notes
- Asked students to complete first journal entry
- Reflected on field notes, journals, and questionnaires

#### **October, 2006**

- Began to teach students how to write a rubric

- Interviewed three students
- Assigned first paper using the new strategy
- Followed through the new strategy (rough draft comments, student-teacher conferences, mini-lessons, creation of rubric, final draft with comments)
- Asked students to complete second journal entry
- Observed students and took field notes
- Coded and binned data
- Reflected on field notes, journals, and student interviews

**November, 2006**

- Interviewed three students
- Observed students and took field notes
- Coded and binned data
- Reflected on field notes, journals, and student interviews

**December, 2006**

- Assigned second paper using new strategy
- Re-taught, provided examples, and re-modeled writing of rubrics
- Followed through the new strategy (rough draft comments, student-teacher conferences, mini-lessons, creation of rubric, final draft with comments)

**January, 2007**

- Interviewed three students
- Finished observing and taking field notes
- Examined student work over time
- Analyzed feedback on all five student papers
- Final reflection on all field notes, journal entries, student interviews, and questionnaires
- Finished coding and binning
- Finished analyzing data and began writing thesis paper

## THIS YEAR'S STORY

“I cannot believe that the purpose of life is to be happy. I think the purpose of life is to be useful, to be responsible, to be compassionate. It is, above all to matter, to count, to stand for something, to have made some difference that you lived at all.”

*-Leo Rosten*

### **Beginnings**

As I perused my filled-to-the-brim three inch field log, I procrastinated for two days while trying to figure out where to begin drafting my story. I wanted to come up with some unique method of introduction, but finally realized after much deliberation, that the best place for me to begin. . . . is at the beginning.

Getting back into the swing of traveling to various classrooms, getting to know new faces and names, and attempting to conserve the vocal chords as much as possible so as not to lose the voice by the end of the second school day makes the first day of school quite tiring. By eighth period on August 28, 2006, the exhaustion had just about set in when I stepped into room 311 for my last class of the day – eleventh grade honors British Literature. When my 22 students filed into the room, I was pleasantly surprised with their friendly dispositions and positive attitudes. I knew a number of them already. Being the S.A.D.D. advisor, I recognized some as active S.A.D.D. members, while others were friends of students I had had the prior year. I knew these students would learn a lot from me. Little did I know just how much I would truly learn from them.

After about a week of introductory activities and a clarification of my expectations, I felt it would be an appropriate time to discuss our study. I use the word “our” intentionally, as my students played an integral role as co-researchers. I explained the basic idea behind the study to my students, and they seemed to respond positively to the whole thing. Many of them were smiling as I explained the study. Not being omniscient, I could not determine whether those smiles were due to genuine interest, nervousness, or merely a “smile and nod” knee-jerk reaction, but they put me at ease all the same. I gave the students two homework assignments that night: (1) to get their parent consent forms signed (see Appendix C) and (2) to complete their questionnaires (see Appendix H) about teacher feedback. We dove right in! Twenty students returned their consent forms the following day and the study was underway! Though 2 students did not get the parent consent forms signed, I collected the same data from all of the students. I did not include data from the 2 non-participants in my study.

### **Student Perceptions**

I was extremely impressed with the candor my students used when responding to the questionnaire. Since I asked them to complete it prior to any writing assignments for my class, their comments were reflective of the writing experiences they had had up until but not including my class. I noticed numerous patterns throughout their questionnaires including: (1) students often forget what teachers write on one paper by the time they go on to the next paper, (2) teachers

should fix some of the errors on student papers so the students know how to change their writing (in other words, teachers need to provide examples and model correct responses rather than just marking something wrong), (3) students usually spend a decent amount of time reviewing teacher comments, (4) students want specific feedback, rather than general feedback like “good” or “needs work,” and (5) positive feedback is important. Some students provided very specific directions about giving effective feedback. With regard to understanding teachers’ intentions when reading feedback, Charlotte said, “Sometimes I understand their intentions, but most of the time the feedback I get is unclear or too vague.” With regard to general suggestions, Rachel commented, “Just compliment one good thing so that we know our papers aren’t totally horrible.” I always prided myself in the fact that I provide positive feedback on all student papers. It is just as important for students to know what they are doing right, as it is for them to know in what areas they need to improve. As far as Charlotte’s comment, the ambiguity of comments is something with which I still struggle. I desperately try to write clear comments, but sometimes a sentence just sounds awkward. What else can I do but write the word “awkward”? This was something to consider as my study developed. The comments I received on the questionnaires, overall, were similar to some of the research I found in the literature. My students were already making tremendously insightful points about teacher feedback, yet I felt somewhat distanced from these comments since they did not reflect my own teaching of the

writing process. Perhaps it was time to find out what they thought about my methods, but of course, they could not determine this without first writing a paper.

### **Basking in Literature**

Over the summer, my students were required to read three texts: *Much Ado about Nothing* by William Shakespeare, *Dracula* by Bram Stoker, and *Lord of the Flies* by William Golding. When summer break came to a close and the students got comfortable back in the classroom, I encouraged them to think about the time they spent lounging on the beach basking in Benedick and Beatrice. It was time for them to write their summer essays. I assigned the students three thesis papers pertaining to the summer reading. I passed out a requirement sheet and rubric (see Appendixes N & O) and reviewed them with the class. The students were required to complete one essay per week for three weeks straight. They were allowed to hand in the essays in any order, meaning that some students chose to write about *Dracula* first, others *Much Ado about Nothing*, and still others, *Lord of the Flies*. These three essays were completed using the writing process as I had used it for the past six years. I did do one thing differently from prior years. I kept two folders for each student: a test folder, and a writing folder. Rather than keeping all student writing in one folder and feeding Filing Cabinet on a regular basis, I kept all student writing in blue folders in a basket in the classroom where I taught the class. This allowed the students to have access to all of their writing at any time. I encouraged students throughout the entire process to

review their old papers and reexamine the comments I wrote on their old papers so they would know in what areas they needed to focus on improving.

So, I assigned the papers, a week went by, we followed the old writing process, I collected and wrote feedback on the papers, and the following grades were earned: 10 As, 8 Bs, and 4 Cs. Though much of the writing was impressive due to the sheer ability level of the honors students, I was fairly generous in my grading since this was the first paper I assigned, and since the students were not completely familiar with my expectations and grading style. While grading the first set of summer essays, I created a list of 12 items that seemed like common issues among many of the student essays. I thought of it when trying to determine how to narrow the types of mini-lessons I needed to teach. I put those issues on an overhead and reviewed them with the students. I had never taken the time to do this before, though I often noticed patterns of errors in student writing. Why did I not think to do this? Was I lazy? Did I not find it important? Did I not really believe that writing could indeed be taught as a process? Perhaps it was a little bit of everything. I did not know how the students would react to the list of issues, but it seemed as though it prompted them to ask other questions that they likely would not have asked otherwise. They asked questions about content, formatting, grammar, and so on. At first when I handed back the papers and asked if they had questions, they stared at their papers and sat quietly. However, when I projected the list, prompted discussion, and probed them a bit, we had a period filled with

various mini-lessons to help them with their writing. Already, I was finding that teaching writing, not just assigning writing, was essential. I prompted the following list of common essay problems on an overhead for the students to discuss:

1. No second person (you)
2. No contractions
3. Watch for redundancies – combine sentences
4. Heading (Name, Date, Ms. D’s name, Essay number or question)
5. No “My paper is about...” / “This essay will...”
6. Stay away from clichés
7. No “I think...” / “I believe...” / “I feel”
8. Refer to sources, if needed “According to...”
9. Someone and he/she, not them
10. Works cited vs. bibliography
11. Quote, quote, Stoker 19 period period

After reading through some of the items on this list, the reader might question not only my sanity, but also my ability to teach writing (see number 11). I have found that giving students an opportunity to get up and move around the room for learning purposes will release some of the energy that may otherwise be released through the tapping of a pencil, the doodling on a notebook, and/or the excessive shifting of the fanny around in the seat. So, throughout the year, I teach

my students writing dances and grammar chants. Number 11 on my list is one of them that demonstrates how to write a quote. A second chanting of the word “period” is included at the end (repetition for emphasis) to show that the period does not go inside the quotation, rather it goes after the closing parentheses (for those of you who were wondering). One of the most common patterns I found was the need for sentence combining whether to decrease redundancy, to increase sentence variety, or to improve awkward sentence structures. Katie’s *Much Ado about Nothing* essay has some redundancies; I commented that sentence combining might be an effective technique to lessen those redundancies (see Figure 1).

best friend to a duel because Beatrice ~~has~~ asked him to. At the beginning, they had so much commotion about marriage and each other, but it was unnecessary because they ended up falling in love with each other and each was ready for marriage. Therefore, the arguing and fighting caused commotion that was needless because they ended up falling in love. If they could just swallow their pride they could've avoided the arguing. There was enough needless disorder between Beatrice and Benedick to account for the title, but on top of that Claudio's love for Hero gets complicated quickly.

*consistent verb tense*

*redundant - combine sentences*

*no contractions*

*save the*

Figure 1. Katie’s *Much Ado about Nothing* Essay Excerpt

Week number two went by, and the rough drafts for the second paper were due. I broke the students up into groups of 3-5 according to their literary works. I told them to discuss the content of the texts briefly and answer each other’s questions. Then the students were to switch papers with someone in their groups

and revise and edit. Most of the students were focused during this process and spent a significant amount of the time discussing the novels. This seemed to be useful because based on my observations, some students had misconceptions about the books. In the *Lord of the Flies* group, one student commented, “Oh, so a plane crashed on the island? I didn’t know that.” While the students were working on their second papers, I encouraged them to go into their writing folders and review their first papers to see some of the items on which they needed to work. Five students went to their folders and got their papers to review. I hoped that more students would eventually utilize their writing folders. I wanted it to be automatic for them to consult their old papers. I realized that this would take not only time, but also some gentle reminders.

The day after the peer editing and revising process, I collected the students’ final drafts, wrote comments on those drafts, and graded their papers. There were 11 As, 10 Bs, and 1 C. Again, I created a list of patterns in areas that students may have struggled with and again I put up an overhead, taught some mini-lessons, and encouraged discussion. The following items were displayed on the overhead:

1. Use consistent verb tenses
2. Introductory hook
3. Answer question / concise summary
4. Thesis statement placement (Last sentence of the first paragraph)
5. Choose appropriate quotes - Explain significance

6. Paragraphing (Indentation / Skipping spaces)
7. Unique transitions
8. Split infinitives (to never marry / to also teach)
9. Organization is key / Prewriting helps

The most significant items upon which I focused were numbers 3 and 5. I found that students would often include quotations, but would not elaborate on the importance of those quotations. Along similar lines, many students confused summary with analysis. In my comments, I encouraged numerous students to include analysis, rather than summary (see Figure 2).

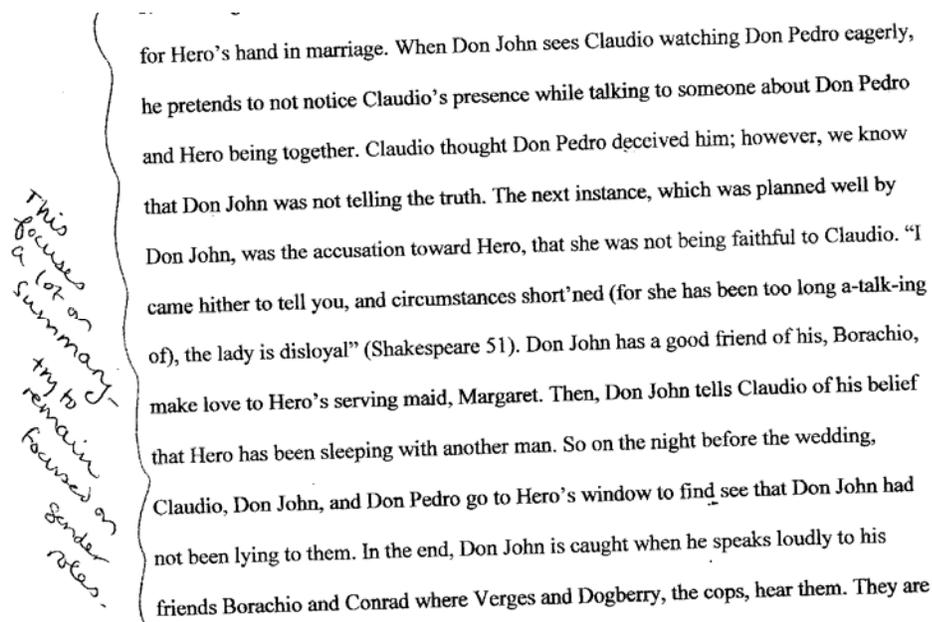


Figure 2. Dolores' *Much Ado about Nothing* Essay Excerpt

Again, the language I used for the items on the list of patterns may seem a bit vague for an outside reader, but I discussed each of the points thoroughly with the students and answered any questions that they had.

The due date for summer essay 3 quickly approached and the students followed the same process. I broke them up into small groups according to the literary work they chose for that week. They discussed the texts in general, answered each other's questions, and then completed the peer editing and revising. As I walked around the room, students asked some individual questions with regard to content, mechanics, and formatting. One student, Candace, was struggling with the topic in general so she asked me if I would sit and work with her. She was initially confused by the question, but after conferencing for about 10 minutes, she seemed to have a clear understanding of the task. Candace expressed her appreciation for the time I took to sit and conference with her. I was beginning to realize not only how important, but also how beneficial, teacher-student conferencing could be. I had to figure out a way to weave it into my writing process. This time around, very few students looked at their old papers. I was surprised by this, especially since many of them commented on that very issue in their questionnaires. They pointed out that they often forget what they needed to work on from one paper to the next.

The day after peer editing and revising, I collected summer essay 3, the third and final writing piece using the old process. I provided feedback and graded

the essays. There were 13 As, 7 Bs, and 1 C. Not bad. One student in particular, Rachel, had received a B on this essay after receiving Cs on the first two. As I passed out the papers, I watched her reaction as she looked at her grade. She turned around to Candace and showed her the paper, all the while with a big smile on her face.

### **Journals**

Since the students had already written about their writing experiences prior to eleventh grade honors English, I found it necessary to glean insights about the writing process we used for the summer essays. I gave the students a prompt (see Appendix I) pertaining to teacher feedback, peer editing and revising, and teacher-student conferencing. I asked them to be honest in their responses. The positive and constructive feedback that students provided in their initial journal entries was extremely useful. Similar to the patterns I found in student writing, I also found patterns in their journal entries. Again, I took out Mr. Overhead Projector and discussed these patterns with the students. By doing this, I was attempting to involve them as co-researchers. I took their suggestions seriously and tried to implement as many of the suggestions as possible if we all agreed that they might be effective. As a class, we discussed the following comments and patterns relevant to the study:

1. Be careful with using jargon in comments
2. Optional individual conference time with Ms. D

3. More mini-lessons of various grammatical concepts
4. More time between rough draft and final draft due dates
5. Peer conferencing is useful for content purposes, but sometimes corrections are not always accurate
6. Discussions with peers regarding content are helpful (putting people in groups according to the book they've read)
7. Access to prior papers written in class is helpful
8. Rather than using an essay evaluation sheet, allow students to write strengths and areas for improvement at the end of the paper.
9. Continue checking rough drafts as homework
10. Write comments on rough drafts

The students made excellent points regarding the writing process, and I was proud of them for being so honest, especially since we had only been working together for a little over a month. In one journal entry, Candace commented on peer editing and revising and teacher-student conferencing stating: "I like having the opinions of my peers. However, I would prefer to have the teachers look to see what I'm doing wrong. Sometimes, my peers don't exactly know what to look for." Karen stressed the importance in having access to prior papers: "I liked the comments on our paper because, for the next paper, you could use those ideas or mistakes and make the paper better." Dolores pointed out the usefulness of discussing patterns in student errors: "I also thought your notes on

things that a majority of the students were making mistakes on was helpful.”

Another student, Nadine, focused on many of the topics we discussed as a class in her entire journal entry (see Figure 3):

Sept. 26, 2006  
Ms. DeBelli Pd. 8

### Journal Entry

The writing process that we have used so far in school has been somewhat effective. I thought that it was a good idea that you separated us into groups that had written the same paper. This helped me through my paper by letting me see what the other students wrote and how I could add some details that they used to make my paper better( and vice-versa). However, I thought that we should have had some sort of discussion individually with you because it seemed that the students were not being honest in peer-editing my paper. When my classmates had to fill out the evaluation sheet, they always checked off the excellent or good column. Therefore, this made it seem that my paper did not need much improvement. However, when I would get it back from you, I got a low grade and it all did not make sense. It seemed that the students would read my paper just to read it and get it done and not be honest with me and tell me that I would need improvement.

Although there were some bad qualities about the writing process, there were also some good ones. For example, I liked being able to look at my previous papers and seeing what I needed to improve on. Also, your comments let me know what I did well on and that was good to see since it is not always the same old routine of telling me what I did wrong and just focusing on that.

Some areas of improvement could be in the aspect of the peer-editing and revising. I think we should do something where the students don't just focus on spelling errors or commas and actually read the paper and be honest if something is unclear or not. I also think that we should have time to sit and talk with you in class individually about our papers and what needs to be improved because the students don't know much of the grammatical rules that you know (or you could have a lesson on them to help us know what to look for?).

*Figure 3. Nadine's First Journal Entry*



Based on the initial journal entries, students generally seemed content with the process, but they made important suggestions for improvement. Certainly, I could not overlook my co-researchers' requests; nor could I ignore the obvious significance of implementing many of the techniques they recommended. I looked forward to learning even more from them as the process continued and as we grew together.

### **Rubrics 101**

We spent a number of weeks reading and discussing literature from the Anglo-Saxon period and the Middle Ages. As we moved into the Renaissance unit, we were getting ready to begin paper number 4. Since we had not talked specifically about the study in a few weeks, I thought it would be important to review the overall concept again. I am glad I did this because students had some questions about the new writing process. Candace asked, "So, are we each going to be getting a different rubric?" I replied that she was correct, and she responded with a genuine, "Neat." I was concerned that the students would not like the idea of getting their own rubrics. I thought they might somehow consider it unfair. I was pleasantly surprised that they seemed to be excited that they were going to be graded individually. Parallel to being graded individually, students were active in their own learning since they generated the rubrics themselves. According to educational philosopher John Dewey, "Every genuine experience has an active side which changes in some degree the objective conditions under which

experiences are had” (Dewey, 1997, p. 39). A genuine experience creates a more subjective experience. The students took my comments and chose the areas in which they felt they needed work. The genuine experience occurred as students evaluated patterns in their own writing, thus allowing them to take control of their own learning. We began “Rubrics101” by talking about what rubrics are. After we came up with our own ideas, we looked at an explanatory sheet about rubrics that I had obtained from the Internet (see Appendix P). After discussing criteria and gradation, we created a practice rubric with chocolate chip cookies. This is another idea I got from the Internet. I asked the students what criteria they would need to assess a chocolate chip cookie. “Flavor, number of chips, chewy, color” were some of the words shouted out among the students. I started writing the words on the board. I then gave them time to create criteria and gradations for their own chocolate chip cookie rubric. As they were working on this, of course, I had to pass out some chocolate chip cookies for students to try: a fun and delicious way to learn about rubrics! The next day, I wanted the students to apply what they had learned about rubric creation to their own writing. I passed out their writing folders and gave them an opportunity to look through all of the comments I had written on their first three papers. I then asked them to find three specific areas (or criteria) in which they felt they needed to improve and to create a rubric indicating gradations of those three criteria. The students were surprised with how time-consuming and difficult the rubric-writing process could be. I gave them

about 20 minutes to work, while I walked around and answered questions. Katie called me over and asked me a question regarding the directions and then she said, “Well, this isn’t really easy.” I replied with, “I never said it would be an easy task, but I think it will help you improve as a writer.” Although the look on her face showed me that she was a bit dissatisfied with my answer, she respectfully said “Okay,” and kept working. At the end of the period, I encouraged some students to share their rubrics. Many were reluctant to share, but I was able to elicit a few volunteers. Right before the bell rang, I asked them if they felt comfortable with the process. I got nodding in return and heard “yes” sporadically. I applied the “smile and nod” rule in this case, since the first rubrics that my co-researchers wrote were, well. . . . Just keep reading.

### **Round 1 Interviews**

In order to get a better sense of what students were feeling up to this point, I conducted my first round of three interviews (see Appendix Q). The first interview was with Amy; the second was a joint interview with Candace and Gabrielle. The interviewees commented on issues pertaining to strengths and weaknesses as writers, teacher feedback, student-generated criteria, and the writing process in general. Amy made two particularly insightful comments that I found motivating. She backed up the idea that she liked individualized assessment by stating, “If you’re great at one thing and it’s all you’re ever challenged to do, it’s not a challenge anymore.” She also reinforced the idea that positive feedback

and general interest on the part of the teacher are integral by mentioning, “As long as the teacher is willing to help and interested in hearing what the students have to say, the possibilities for writing are endless.” Gabrielle and Candace provided equally valuable advice in their interviews, and they were able to bounce ideas off one another. Gabrielle stated: “We’re not really taught how to write. We’re just expected to do it.” Similar to Amy, Candace expressed her approval of individualized assessment when she stated, “Grading yourself will make you work harder to get it right. When you have a general rubric, you have to focus on everything and that can be really overwhelming.”

Since the classroom does not often provide much time for individual conversations and discussions with students, the interviews were extremely useful to allow students to elaborate more deeply on their writing process views.

### **Filing Cabinet Strikes Again**

Well, this was about the time in our study when I began to get nervous. Prior to the Renaissance unit, the students were following my old writing process that I had grown so accustomed to using, no matter how wretched it might have been. It was time for change to take place and my co-researchers had to take an equally active stance in the new process. I was scared to give up complete control and wondered if students could handle it. I passed out the requirements for the mini-research paper on an influential figure of the Renaissance (see Appendix D). On the back was a partially-filled in rubric (see Appendix E). At the height of my

own anxiety, Candace uttered, “Oh, it’s starting now?” This did NOT make me feel better. There seemed to be uneasiness in the room. Was I making the right choice by letting students determine their own fates as novice writers? I pictured Filing Cabinet chomping up all of the hard work my prior students had completed, and I vowed that I would not seal my current students’ fate the same way. There was no turning back at this point. The papers were passed out. I went over the requirements. We reviewed my portion of the rubric. The period was about over. I was not convinced that we were going to get anywhere with this study based on the troubled looks on my students’ faces. John must have been reading my mind, because just as the bell rang, he enthusiastically exclaimed, “Don’t mess this up, guys!” The smiles and outgoing personalities that I had grown to love came back as they exited the room. Prepare for defeat, Filing Cabinet.

### **Plagiar. . . .What?**

After selecting their influential Renaissance figures, the students went to the library for a few days to research. Our librarian reviewed some databases where the students could find information on their individuals of study. During that week, I passed out various handouts including a website evaluation sheet and checklist, an MLA style packet, a graphic organizer for writing an introductory paragraph and thesis statement, and a list of transition words. I told the students to review the materials and feel free to ask any questions if they did not understand something. After about a week spent in the library, the students were expected to

complete rough drafts of their papers for the following week. This time around, though, I was collecting the rough drafts in order to write comments on them, rather than merely having the students do some peer editing and revising.

Creating multiple drafts is a reality in any writer's (professional or not) world.

Paulo Freire reminded me of the importance of drafts when he stated,

“Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other” (Freire, 2006, p.72). Though this comment was not contextually related to the writing process, it indeed applies. I want the draft to be a place where students can invent and re-invent themselves as writers and a place where students can use inquiry to determine what their strengths are and what improvements they need to make. On the day that I collected the rough drafts from the students, only one student was not prepared. I collected the papers on Monday, November 6<sup>th</sup> and I returned them to the students with comments on Thursday, November 9<sup>th</sup>. I must admit that I was quite proud of the thorough comments I provided on twenty-two papers in such a short period of time. I spent a significant number of hours at home within those few days responding to the drafts. I noticed that the language and style of writing that some students used was very different from how they had written earlier papers. I got more and more distressed as I realized deep down what had occurred. Plagiarism. Nasty little bugger. When I handed back the papers to the students, I lectured them again, as I

had at the beginning of the year; I reminded them that citing every source was extremely important. I told the students that some of them would have received zeroes, had the rough draft been a final draft. I understand that this style of paper, a biographical research paper, can be quite difficult to write without plagiarizing since students are simply reporting information about a person's life, but they must be very cautious of it, all the same. After I lectured them on plagiarism, Rachel asked, "How do I know when I'm supposed to use quotation marks?" I reviewed the concept of a direct quote with her again, even though she had to have some idea of what they were since she used them correctly in earlier papers. I think she just got a little nervous, because her paper was clearly plagiarized, whether intentionally or not. For homework that night, I told the students to complete their partially-completed rubrics because we would begin conferencing next week. The looks on their faces showed me that they were still a bit unsure about generating their own criteria, but they did not complain. At the end of the period Adam asked, "Is everyone going to have time to conference with you separately?" and I said, "Yes." He gave me a smile and nod. I sensed that it was genuine.

### **A Few Oddballs Here and There**

I had always strayed away from doing individual student conferences for two reasons: (1) I felt they took up too much class time, and (2) I did not know what I should have the students do while I was conferencing individually. I had to

force myself to have a new mindset about conferences. I decided that it did not matter how much time they took (within reason) if they were a benefit to the students. I also recognized that giving honors level students a list of tasks they needed to accomplish each day within a week-long time frame was not unreasonable. For the most part, I have found honors students to be very self-sufficient. I function more as a guide in the classroom than anything else. So, I typed up a lesson plan (see Appendix R) similar to one I would hand in to my principal each week and photocopied it for my students. I told them that they could work at their own pace, but by the end of the week, they would need to complete everything on their task sheet. While I conferenced with students, they would be completing the work both individually and in small groups. They were outstanding! I was so impressed with not only how hard they worked, but also how courteous they were of their peers during conferences. Not one student interrupted a conference.

Though the students worked nicely, the first day of conferencing was simply, well, awful, and this was completely my fault. In my very first conference, I made a joking comment that the entire class could hear about one of the gradations that Rachel had included on her rubric because the wording was too colloquial. She had used the phrase “a few oddballs here and there” with regard to awkward word usage, which made me and some students in the class start to laugh, and Rachel started to cry. I felt horrible. I had no intention to

embarrass her or hurt her feelings; I thought what she had written was cute. Overall, I was proud of the way she set up her rubric, but instead of giving her positive reinforcement, I inadvertently teased her. I had to recognize that this was the very first rubric-writing experience for many of these students, and though they were trying, they were going to need more help. I apologized to her in front of the class and told her that my response was inappropriate. I conferenced with only one other student that period. That rubric also needed work. I guess the chocolate chip cookie activity, though fun and delicious, was not going to be enough to turn my students into master rubric-writers. I needed to do more.

### **Time Crunch**

On the second day of conferences, I met with only five more students. My initial intention was to conference for five minutes, but the students had so many questions that many of the conferences ended up going for ten to fifteen minutes. At the rate I was going, I was never going to get to everyone by the final due date. Most of the students needed pretty significant revamping of the rubrics, but I just did not feel as though I had the time to re-teach rubric writing for that paper.

Although I felt pressures with regard to time, I was really enjoying working individually with the students. In my years of teaching, I had almost never had an opportunity to work one-on-one with my students, and it was nice to discuss their writing with them in a more in-depth level. They also seemed more comfortable asking questions about their papers in a one-on-one setting. Asa G.

Hilliard III identifies the importance of communication between teachers and students when he comments, “Teaching and learning are rooted in and dependent upon a common language between teacher and student” (Hilliard, 2002, p. 89). Clearly, students and teachers need to speak the same language in order for teachers to teach effectively and, in turn, students to learn effectively. Individual conferences provide opportunities for teachers and students to learn and speak the same language.

As I continued conferencing with the students throughout the week, the rest of the class worked productively on their assignments. While in conferences, students asked questions about citing sources, parallelism, compositional risk, and so on. The students seemed to know how to apply most grammatical concepts, but they just did not know the jargon I was using, so conferences allowed me to explain them. I was able to teach individualized mini-lessons. It was ideal. Except for the time crunch. The due date was getting closer, and I had not met with all of the students yet.

### **Finishing Up**

I finished conferencing with the students on Tuesday, November 21<sup>st</sup>. The paper was due Wednesday, November 22<sup>nd</sup>. Though this was unfair in some respects, I did give students opportunities to conference with me both before and after school for many days. There was only one student whom I did not conference with at all, Sarah. In her first journal entry, Sarah said that she did not

feel teacher-student conferences were necessary, and though I offered to meet with her after school to discuss her paper, she was fine with not having a conference. Since the due date for the final paper arrived so quickly, I did not push the issue. However, I vowed to make changes to the conferencing process so that every student would have a conference and conferences would end a few days prior to the final due date. I did have one conference after school with John. He was leaving for vacation and he wanted to make sure that he had time to talk to me about his paper. When we discussed his rubric at length, he made an important connection. He said, “Oh, this is why we did the cookie activity?” I sometimes hastily assume that students will make automatic connections, and that is not always the case. I was happy to see, though, that he did make the connection at this point. Toward the end of the conference, John said that his mom had looked over his paper and commented that she noticed improvements in his writing. Thus, my first teacher-student conferencing experience ended on a positive note.

### **Thoughts on a New Process**

The final due date for the influential Renaissance figure paper rolled around quickly, the students completed their second journal entries (see Appendix J), and the study was in full gear. All of the students, except for Amy who was home sick for a number of days, handed in their papers. I collected the rough drafts, rough rubrics, final drafts, and final rubrics. After spending a little less

than a week grading, I handed the students' papers back. There were 10 As, 9Bs, and 1 incomplete. I conjectured that there were more Bs on this paper than in some of the earlier papers, because the instruction was differentiated and the students may not have yet mastered the skills in which they specifically needed to improve. Overall, by this point in the study, I was impressed with the growth I had seen so far. I was seeing more formal writing with more precise language and more attention to detail. There were also fewer grammatical and mechanical errors in the students' papers, along with fewer typographical errors. I was really proud of the students' hard work and effort.

After having a chance to review the second journal entries, we had another rendezvous with Overhead Projector. The students seemed to feel more comfortable in the class and they were taking ownership for their own learning, not only by providing positive comments, but also by making numerous, substantive suggestions. The following items were placed on Mr. Projector:

#### Positive Comments

1. Conferencing with the teacher was very useful.
2. Comments on the rough draft were helpful. Comments were clear for the most part. If not, students asked questions during the conference.
3. Writing own rubrics was good because it individualized grading – mixed opinions.

4. Working in groups was beneficial to most since ideas were shared and questions were answered.
5. Enough time was allotted between rough and final drafts.
6. Overall, the process was better than some previous ones.

#### Difficulties

1. Finding areas of improvement and writing the rubric was difficult.

#### Suggestions

1. Provide time for teacher conferences and peer editing and revising.
2. Shorten the length of time between rough and final drafts.
3. Cut conferences to five minutes. If students need more help, come after school.
4. Provide sample papers to better demonstrate paper requirements.
5. Conference with students in the order that help is needed (i.e. students who feel they need significant help go first, etc.)
6. Don't conference with students the day before the paper is due (conferences should be done before then).
7. Choose own groups for class work assignments.

I was proud of the comments and suggestions my co-researchers had made. They were taking their writing seriously and putting a lot of thought into how to make our process as effective and efficient as possible. I was appreciative of all of their suggestions, and we implemented as many as we could into their

final writing task for the study. Some students touched upon many of these topics in their journals. I have included some of these journals to allow the students' voices to be heard.

For example, Karen mentioned the use of student-generated criteria, teacher and peer conferences, and the use of comments on the rough draft (see Figure 5). Similarly, Candace focused on the student-generated criteria and the conferencing. She also mentioned that constructive comments are important so that students know in what areas they need to improve (see Figure 6). Finally, Nancy focused much of her journal on the importance of teacher-student conferences (see Figure 7). I even decided to create a pastiche to bring some of the student voices together in one narrative form (see Figure 8). My pastiche is a collage of comments students made throughout the study pertaining to different aspects of the process we used. Again, though I previously had not made many efforts to conference with my students, this seemed to be the area in which they provided the most positive feedback. I will continue to conference with individual students on all future major written papers.

In Karen's journal entry (see Figure 5), she describes various aspects of the study that worked for her. She details that she had an easier time fixing mistakes in her paper because she was held accountable to do so when generating her own criteria. She also pointed out that even though she enjoyed having classmates read her paper, she felt it was more beneficial to have a teacher read

and comment on a draft to ensure accurate comments. Finally, she felt the conferences were very useful and appreciated the one-on-one time she had to ask her own questions and discuss her paper. The one area in which she struggled, according to her journal entry, was in choosing criteria for the rubric.

Journal #2

For our mini research paper, we had to complete an already partially filled in rubric. With this process, I thought it was easier to fix our mistakes in our paper because we kind of knew what we needed to work on. Like, for example, with sentence combining, I would read my paper over again and look for sentences that I could put together to make the paper sound better. Also, with this paper, I liked how our teacher read our rough drafts and commented on them. I like when other students read our paper, but they might miss something. With a teacher, they won't miss much, and the advice they give you helps you get a better grade. I also liked having conferences because that gives you a one on one with your teacher that you wouldn't normally have. And if you had a question, she would answer only your question, not the other ten questions that go along with it. Some things I liked about writing rough rubrics is that we are kind of grading ourselves, and it helps improve our writing. Some things I didn't like was actually looking for things that I need to improve on because it was really hard.

Figure 5. Karen's Second Journal Entry

In Candace's journal entry (see Figure 6), she also confirms that she enjoyed the second writing process we used. She seemed to feel a great sense of autonomy because she pointed out that she felt like she was grading herself. She focused most of her attention in her journal entry on comments that I wrote on her draft. Candace has a tremendous work ethic, and it did not surprise me that she pointed out that although positive comments are nice, thorough constructive criticism is essential to improve writing. Candace finally stated that she enjoyed both the rubric-writing and conferencing aspects of the process.

Journal Entry #2

I liked the most recent method much more than previous ones. I like the idea of knowing what I did wrong before I hand in a final draft. I also like creating our own rubric. It's almost like we're grading ourselves, in a sense. It focuses on what to do better in your paper, but more specifically I always like comments on papers. This is very beneficial because it clues you in on what a reader wants to hear. The negative comments are also very useful. As students, not everything is going to come out correctly so getting a comment on how to change it really helps. Writing my own rubric helped me in several ways, too. Not only did it help me fix the errors I made, but it helped me focus on the entire paper as well. At first, I thought because I wrote my own rubric, I would focus more on the negatives than the positives, but that wasn't the case. I also like conferencing because it is very helpful as well. You can get better suggestions to help guide you through your paper.

*Figure 6. Candace's Second Journal Entry*

In Nancy's journal entry (see Figure 7), she provided a list of reasons why commenting on the rough draft and having teacher conferences were useful. She specifically liked that she had the opportunity to see exactly what she needed to fix to be successful on her final draft. She also liked that she had an opportunity to ask questions about those comments if she did not understand them in teacher conferences. Nancy, similar to Karen, felt that teacher comments on drafts were more beneficial than student comments on drafts. Finally, Nancy mentioned that her small group worked effectively together as I conferenced with individual students.

Journal Entry 2

I thought this process was very useful because we had the chance to see what we should work on for our final draft. We also got one on one help with you which was even better. I liked how we had time to talk to you if we had questions on the comments you left on the rough draft. Meeting with the teacher was more effective than peer-editing because the teacher will catch more important issues that need to be fixed in the paper. Also, if the comments were unclear, we could ask the teacher to give an example in our conferences. I liked writing our own rubrics because we found what we should work on and how good it has to be to get an A. My group worked effectively in our group during the conferences because we knew what we had to do for the rest of the week so we could get it done as soon as possible.

*Figure 7. Nancy's Second Journal Entry*

I chose the three preceding journal entries because they each described major aspects of the process we had used in the study. One important aspect of providing comments on rough drafts was that students were given the opportunity to be as successful as they wanted to be in their final drafts. I use the word opportunity here because some students chose not to revise and edit their papers at all, some students chose to revise and edit selected parts of their papers, and some students chose to revise and edit the entire paper. Developing student-generated criteria was useful according to Karen, Candace, and Nancy, but some of them felt choosing criteria and gradations were difficult. Finally, conferencing seemed to be one of their favorite aspects of the new process because they had an opportunity to focus on their specific questions regarding the comments and rubrics.

Karen, Candace, and Nancy effectively expressed their views regarding feedback, student-generated criteria, and conferencing. They also made points that were commonly mentioned throughout other student journal entries, so I felt that they were representative of the entire class.

In the pastiche below (see Figure 8), I collaged comments from different students detailing their opinions about various aspects of the writing process. Similar to the preceding journal entries, student comments pertaining to feedback, student-generated criteria, and conferencing were included.

# The New Writing Process: Student Voices

I liked writing our own rubrics because we found out what we should work on and how good it has to be to get an A.

- Nancy

I liked how our teacher read the rough draft and commented on them. I like when other students read our paper, but they might miss something.

- Karen

This was useful because I was able to know better what I was being graded on.

- Michael

The entire process – rough draft comments, conferences, and all are very useful (although the rubric writing was a little confusing, and then a little redundant, and dull, but it all worked out).

- Talia

The comments that I did not understand were cleared up during the conference. The comments on my rough draft were helpful when I wrote my final draft.

- Kaelyn

I liked that you made comments because it gave me a place to start when editing my rough draft. - Camilla

*I liked working with the groups to read the literature because we were able to share our ideas about things we didn't understand. - Sarah*

The thing I liked most about the process was that I had a chance to meet with the teacher and find out what I was doing right and what I was doing wrong. - Adam

Figure 8. The New Writing Process: Student Voices Pastiche

**You Owe Us, Ms. D.**

We had already written four papers: three using the old process on *Dracula*, *Lord of the Flies*, and *Much Ado About Nothing*, and one using the new process on an influential figure during the Renaissance time period. It was time to begin discussing the final paper for our study. Drum roll please. . . . the *Macbeth* thesis paper (also known as the Macthesis by Sarah and Talia)! I passed out the requirements and partial rubric for the *Macbeth* thesis (see Appendixes F & G) and reviewed it with the students. I told them that the rough drafts would be due the day before winter break so that I had winter break to write comments on the papers. Then, the day we returned from winter break, I would return their papers, they could work on their rubrics, we would have our conferences, and they would complete their final drafts. The process would be set up in a very similar manner to last time, only I would be incorporating many of the students' suggestions from their second journal entries. I also realized, based on the first round of conferences, that I needed to re-model how to write a rubric.

From the end of November until the end of December, we spent almost every moment of class acting, listening to, and discussing *Macbeth*. The reality was that with only one month before winter break, we had to complete more than one act of the play per week, not to mention writing an entire persuasive paper on some specific aspect of the play. The speed and rigor with which we worked were unparalleled, though the writing process of the *Macbeth* thesis itself may not have been difficult for many students since it was connected directly to the literature.

Through class discussions and analysis of the play on a daily basis, the students already had an understanding of the topics on which they would write. Lev Vygotsky stresses the importance of making connections by stating, “Following this path, a child approaches writing as a natural moment in her development, and not as training from without” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 118). Vygotsky suggests that writing should be taught in context, rather than as a disconnected, individual subject. Reading and writing should be interwoven. All of the writing tasks I assigned for the purpose of the study were in conjunction with the readings that we completed for the class, whether literarily or historically based. The reality was, of course, that the students were on quite a time crunch regardless. I have never seen a group of students handle such pressure and time constraint with more grace and utter confidence than my co-researchers. They seldom complained, and in fact, they often made light of the situation by stating, “You owe us, Ms. D.”

### **Round 2 Interviews**

Now that the students have experienced both writing processes, I thought it would be an appropriate time to conduct a second round of interviews (see Appendix S). The first interview of Round 2 was conducted with Talia, the second with Sarah, and the third with Michael. The students’ comments were quite insightful as we discussed the strengths and weaknesses of the new writing process used in class. Regarding suggestions for improving the process, Talia

commented, “Hmm... more speaking to us about the rubric, I guess, because we really didn’t get it at first. And, as for the paper, sample papers would definitely have helped.” Regarding strengths, Sarah mentioned, “I think your feedback was very clear, better than most other teachers. Usually teachers don’t take the time to actually write comments and feedback on papers; they just fix grammar mistakes. I was actually surprised with the amount of comments you make on our papers.” Finally, Michael made an important point pertaining to differentiated instruction: “Grading based on needs was useful because it helped us work on the areas in our writing where we needed improvement. However it was difficult as well because now we are being graded directly on what we’re not good at and it could seriously affect our grades if we did poorly in an area of the rubric.” The students had been so astute in their comments up through this point, and I made every attempt to incorporate as many of their suggestions as possible into the study. After all, they were my co-researchers. Their ideas and suggestions were equally important to my own.

### **In Times of Chaos**

Winter break was about two weeks away, and the study was in full force. I still needed to accomplish a number of tasks, including assigning the final journal entries, interviewing three more students, and, oh yeah, finishing *Macbeth* and requiring that students complete a rough draft of a thesis paper. We were RUSHED. In times of chaos, it is important to organize. Therefore, I typed up

lesson plans for the remaining two weeks before break and passed them out to the students (see Appendix T). I told them it was essential that we stay on task in order to accomplish our goals. I must admit, though, that I felt rather guilty rushing them through the play. I had no other choice. I was beginning to stress even more than I had been all semester. Although the students clearly understood the play based on their test scores, I felt as though I were gypping them out of some fun activities that I had always done in the past. I kept reminding them that soon enough they would have a well-deserved break. I, on the other hand, knew I would be spending my break catching up on all of my work, my field log, my readings, and perhaps even a bit of sleep.

#### **Macbeth Beheaded. . . . Finally**

Although we were feeling the impact of a significant time constraint, I certainly had no intention of eliminating any of the suggestions the students had made to improve the process. I brought a stack of last year's *Macbeth* papers to school for students to review. I also took time to review the rubric writing process again, and I provided a packet of sample rubrics for students to keep and use as models. On Monday, November 18<sup>th</sup>, I walked around and checked the students' thesis statements that were due. They had a rough draft due that Thursday, and we had not even finished the play. Luckily, we were beginning Act V, which was a fairly short act. I was a little concerned that the students were feeling lost with regard to organization of their papers since we were moving so quickly. I wanted

to provide them with some guidance for brainstorming and prewriting, so I handed out a thesis detail sheet for them to complete for homework (see Appendix U). I also thought this detail sheet was important since many students struggled with analyzing quotes in earlier papers. The next day I checked the detail sheets and many students commented that they were useful. I think they realized just how useful when they needed quotations and explanations of the quotes to put into their papers.

By Wednesday, we learned that Macbeth's tragic demise would be a beheading. Whew! We finished the play. After some extensive thought, I found it unreasonable to require students to hand in a paper one day after finishing the play, so I gave them two. How generous of me (yes, that was sarcasm). I told the students they could hand in their rough drafts on Friday if they so desired. They desired. I would have extended the due dates a little more, but Friday was our last day before winter break, so I had no room for more extensions.

Thursday we spent the period finishing up our discussion of *Macbeth* and I answered any questions that the students had regarding content of the play and the paper itself. I also reviewed the rubric packet with the students. I provided seven different rubrics including a power point rubric, a poem rubric, 2 regular essay rubrics, an S.A.T. essay rubric, and 2 P.S.S.A. rubrics. This had a dual purpose. Students could better understand how to generate criteria and gradations, while at

the same time examine how they are going to be assessed on the S.A.T. and P.S.S.A.

It was Friday. The whole school was watching a holiday movie, so my students had to come find me to hand in their papers. They all handed in their papers on time. We made it through *Macbeth*. We made it through the writing process. We made it to winter break, surprisingly unscathed.

### **A New Year**

The day we got back from winter break, I promptly handed the students their rough drafts and asked them to review my comments. I told them to take a few minutes to do this and to ask me any questions that they had. Karen asked, “What does ‘too colloquial’ mean?” Another student asked a question about a citation. In addition to answering their questions, I also took time to explain some of the symbols that I used on their drafts. At the end of the period, I reminded the students that their rough rubrics were due the next day since we were beginning to conference. I also passed out the final journal entry topics and asked the students to complete them for Thursday. In the journal entry prompt, I reviewed both the old and new processes. John aptly concluded our discussion for the day: “We have done a lot this year!”

### **Conferences**

I must admit that I was rather dreading the conferencing process since it was quite a disaster the first time. I decided to make one significant change this time around; I used an egg timer to make sure I did not go over five minutes in any conference. I told the students before beginning that when the timer went off we had to stop, but if any student felt as though he or she needed more conferencing time, I would be more than happy to meet before or after school. What a difference the timer made! I met with 7 students on the first day. While I was conferencing, the rest of the class viewed the film version of *Macbeth*. All of the conferences were extremely productive. A few students asked what I meant by certain comments, but overall they asked *how* they could go about making changes more effectively. Along with reviewing the students' essays, I took time to review their self-generated rubrics. The sample rubric packet and second discussion about how to write rubrics clearly had an impact on their understanding of the process, because the rubrics were MUCH better the second time around. Many students decided to focus on some of the same criteria as they did in their first papers, which I said was perfectly acceptable if they felt as though they did not master it the first time. When I met with Morgan, she mentioned that she was more confident in the *Macbeth* paper than any other. I told her that I agreed that it was her best process piece to date. She said that the textual evidence brainstorming sheet that I handed out was particularly helpful. I was beyond impressed with Morgan's paper. She exuded confidence in her

writing. She also seemed motivated and excited when she talked to me about the paper, and she was more than willing to allow me to use her paper as a sample for future classes. After meeting with her, I was thinking that in the future I should provide more prewriting and brainstorming activities for all of the papers.

On the second day of conferencing, I met with 9 students. What a difference from the first set of conferences! I told the whole class that I was impressed with their rubrics. When I met with John, he made an excellent analogy that I had not thought of using. He said, "It's [the rubric] like a ladder." I thought that was such a nice way to describe a rubric and I wish I would have thought to teach it using that comparison.

On the third day of conferencing, I met with the rest of the students and even had time to spare. Only three days conferencing! This was amazing in comparison to the amount of time I had spent conferencing on the last paper. Since the students had already gone through the process, they had a better idea of how to write their rubrics. I was so proud of the growth that I saw in the students as both thinkers and writers.

### **Final Journals**

After the conferences, I collected the students' third and final journal entries. I took them home and read them carefully, and similar to the first two entries, I typed a list of patterns for class discussion. Overall, the students commented in the following ways:

Useful

1. Rough draft comments
2. Student-teacher conferences
3. Extended time between rough and final drafts

Mixed Opinions

1. Peer editing and revising – most students did not find it very useful, but some said it could be helpful, especially for discussion purposes (to have small discussions about the stories)
2. Rubric writing – Trouble choosing categories and unnecessary if feedback is given on rough drafts (students know what they need to work on already)

Interesting Comments

1. The only downfall to comments on rough drafts is that that is all students will focus on fixing. Students will not take the time to look for other things to fix.

2. Gabrielle's suggested writing process:

Day 1 – rough draft one is due / peer edit and revise

Day 2 – rough draft two is due / teacher collects and comments

Day 3 – pass back papers / students review comments in the evening

Day 4 – class discussion / answer questions about papers / provide time to complete final draft

Days later – final draft is due

Because the whole process was very new during the influential Renaissance figures paper, I did not make time for peer editing and revising. Because we were on such serious time constraints with the *Macbeth* paper, we did not have the time for peer editing and revising. I think the writing process that Gabrielle devised is probably the most ideal, and I would like to replicate it almost exactly for future process writings. I have been grateful and lucky to have such honest students throughout all of this. During the class discussion, Katie said that she especially liked the one-on-one conferencing with the teacher so that she can discuss her work more in-depth. Kaelyn agreed and said that talking about the papers as a class is nice, but she did not feel comfortable asking individualized questions since they do not relate to the rest of the class. Kaelyn continued to provide thoughtful reflections in her journal entry pertaining to the new process as a whole (see Figure 9). Camilla similarly provided practical suggestions regarding conferencing and rubrics in her final journal entry (see Figure 10). The journal entries were one of the best ways to get positive and constructive comments from all of the student participants; every student had a voice.

### Journal Entry 3

Overall, the techniques that we used throughout the year were very helpful. The only one that was not very useful was peer editing. I don't think the students knew exactly what to look for. Instead of looking for mistakes, it seemed that they would reread sentences in their own writing style. So instead of helping with the questions I had, they actually changed my paper from my writing style to theirs. On the other hand, the teacher feedback and teacher conferences were the most helpful. They both give me a good idea as to what I needed to work on individually, which I could then apply to the rubric. I really liked having our papers graded according to our own needs. Using a rubric that I wrote really helped me understand exactly what I should write in the paper. My ideal writing process would be similar to the one we used for our Renaissance figures. I think I got the perfect amount of guidance to write my paper between the feedback and the conference. From these techniques, I feel that my own writing has improved. Although this is an extraordinary class, I am NOT a fan of their peer editing and revising.

Figure 9. Kaelyn's Third Journal Entry

### Journal #3

The useful techniques that we used so far were teacher conferences, peer editing, and writing our own rubrics. Conferencing with a teacher was really helpful because we could ask all the questions that we want & get the teacher's feedback on things we needed to change or make better. Peer editing was helpful b/c we got other students' opinions on our papers & corrections. Writing our own rubrics made us pick out our weaknesses and work on them to make our papers better. This process was good because we got to strengthen the areas of writing that we know we are not good at b/c the rubric kind of forced us to. I think that the teacher conferences are the best way to really help a student. I feel a lot more confident about my paper after teacher feedback because I know that the teacher is the one who's grading it and they know what they are looking for.

Figure 10. Camilla's Third Journal Entry

### Round 3 Interviews

I conducted the final three interviews with Adam, Katie, and Naomi (see Appendix V) during the second week back from winter break. These interviews provided students with opportunities to share their overall thoughts as developing writers. As in prior interviews I conducted, the students discussed feedback, strengths, and weaknesses. They also described what they liked overall about the process and what suggestions they had for improvements. Pertaining to student-generated criteria, Adam said, “I think that grading papers on individual needs is a great idea because I get better at what I really need help with.” Katie made an interesting suggestion about student-generated rubrics when she commented, “Something that may be useful is to start the student off with a small paper, like 2-3 pages, and a rubric where only one spot was blank so that the student could get used to writing a rubric.” Essentially, Katie is referring to the process of scaffolding, a commonly-known teaching technique. I thought this was an excellent suggestion, especially if I eventually want to try this technique with a non-honors class. Finally, Naomi commented on the process as a whole by stating, “I believe that if the writing process is tweaked a little bit, papers may improve even more. I personally believe this writing experience has been the best I’ve had in my high school career.” Similar to the journal entries, the interviews are a valuable tool for measuring the success of the new writing process.

### The End is Near

I collected the final *Macbeth* papers. I wrote comments on them. I put grades on them. They were outstanding! There were 18 As, and 2 Bs. There were no Cs and no incompletes. What an improvement the students had shown in their writing since the beginning of the year!

Though I continued to provide constructive comments on the students' *Macbeth* papers, the quality of writing warranted significant positive feedback. For example, Morgan made an obvious effort to provide relevant textual evidence to back up her thesis as stated in the last criteria of her rubric (see Figure 11).

**Eleventh Grade Honors English *Macbeth* Thesis Paper Rubric**

	1	2	3	4
<b>GENERAL CONTENT</b>	Paper lacks accurate information regarding William Shakespeare's <i>Macbeth</i> .	Accurate information regarding William Shakespeare's <i>Macbeth</i> is included.	Complete and accurate information regarding William Shakespeare's <i>Macbeth</i> is included.	Significant, complete, and accurate information regarding William Shakespeare's <i>Macbeth</i> is included.
<b>LENGTH</b>	Paper is less than 3 pages in length OR font is larger than 12.	Paper is 3 full pages in length (no larger than 12 font, double spaced).	Paper is 4 full pages in length (no larger than 12 font, double spaced).	Paper is 5 full pages in length (no larger than 12 font, double spaced).
<b>COMPLETION AND PREPAREDNESS</b>	Rough draft, rough rubric, final draft, and final rubric are three days late.	Rough draft, rough rubric, final draft, and final rubric are two days late.	Rough draft, rough rubric, final draft, and final rubric are one day late or not ready to be handed in at the beginning of class.	Rough draft, rough rubric, final draft, and final rubric are completed, printed, stapled and ready to hand in on time.
<b>ORGANIZATION</b>	No organization, paper lacks flow, sentences are awkward, and paragraphs are off topic.	Little organization, many awkward sentences throughout paper.	Somewhat organized, room for improvement, flows but some awkward wording.	Very organized, paper flows very well, and paragraphs make sense.
<b>MECHANICS</b>	Many spelling errors, no punctuation, more than 5 contractions.	More than 4 spelling, grammar, or punctuation errors, more than 3 contractions.	Less than 3 spelling or grammar errors, punctuation errors, and less than 2 contractions.	No contractions, no spelling or grammar errors, and no punctuation errors.
<b>DETAILS, QUOTES &amp; TEXTUAL EVIDENCE</b>	Details are wrong, no examples, or textual evidence, no quotes included.	Some detail, little textual evidence, few examples, less than 3 quotes.	Good detail, good textual evidence included, no less than 4 quotes.	Great details, plenty of great examples, more than 6 quotes, and great textual evidence.

A+

Figure 11. Morgan's *Macbeth* Essay Rubric



Eleventh Grade Honors English *Macbeth* Thesis Paper Rubric

	1	2	3	4
<b>GENERAL CONTENT</b>	Paper lacks accurate information regarding William Shakespeare's <i>Macbeth</i> .	Accurate information regarding William Shakespeare's <i>Macbeth</i> is included.	Complete and accurate information regarding William Shakespeare's <i>Macbeth</i> is included.	Significant, complete, and accurate information regarding William Shakespeare's <i>Macbeth</i> is included.
<b>LENGTH</b>	Paper is less than 3 pages in length OR font is larger than 12.	Paper is 3 full pages in length (no larger than 12 font, double spaced).	Paper is 4 full pages in length (no larger than 12 font, double spaced).	Paper is 5 full pages in length (no larger than 12 font, double spaced).
<b>COMPLETION AND PREPAREDNESS</b>	Rough draft, rough rubric, final draft, and final rubric are three days late.	Rough draft, rough rubric, final draft, and final rubric are two days late.	Rough draft, rough rubric, final draft, and final rubric are one day late or not ready to be handed in at the beginning of class.	Rough draft, rough rubric, final draft, and final rubric are completed, printed, stapled and ready to hand in on time.
<b>FOCUS AND ORGANIZATION</b>	Paper is disorganized and is not focused or written in a sequential manner.	Paper is somewhat focused with little organization throughout.	Paper is focused and written sequentially.	Paper is clearly focused and is well-written in a sequential manner.
<b>DETAILS AND EXAMPLES</b>	Paper lacks supporting details and examples that are cited incorrectly.	Paper contains few details and examples are cited incorrectly.	Paper contains supporting details and examples that are cited correctly.	Paper contains a variety of supporting details and an exceeded amount of examples that are cited correctly.
<b>MECHANICS</b>	Paper contains numerous grammatical errors (more than 7).	Paper contains several grammatical errors (5-7).	Paper contains few grammatical errors (3-5).	Paper contains almost no grammatical errors (1-2).

5/20/18

A+

Figure 13. Candace's *Macbeth* Essay Rubric

murderers to kill Banquo and his son, Fleance. He even convinces the elected murderers that Banquo was their enemy so they would not feel any sympathy in killing him. The first murderer says, "And I another/So weary with disasters, tugged with fortune,/That I would set my life on any chance,/ To mend it or be rid on't" (3.1.111-114). Macbeth answers with, "Both of you/Know Banquo was your enemy" (3.1.114-115). This quote shows how Macbeth controlled others to do his dirty work. He literally gets into people's heads and makes them realize filthy lies. Even later in the play, his actions continue to worsen. As in the beginning of the play, he wishes to see the <sup>ghost</sup> witches for a prophecy.

Good. Better organization 20 points in this draft.

Figure 14. Candace's *Macbeth* Essay Excerpt

### A Necessary Process

I received numerous thoughtful ideas from my students and many insights about the importance of providing individualized feedback. As I said before, I always felt that there was never enough time to make writing a process, but after seeing the benefits, I recognized fairly early on, that it is necessary to make time for writing. I thought it would be useful to see a progression of the student grades over time, so as the study was coming to a close, I created a chart to show how the grades changed from the first summer essay up through the fifth and final essay of the study (see Figure 15). Paper 1 represents the first summer essay; paper 2 is the second summer essay; paper 3 is the final summer essay; paper 4 is the influential Renaissance figure paper; and paper 5 is the *Macbeth* thesis paper.

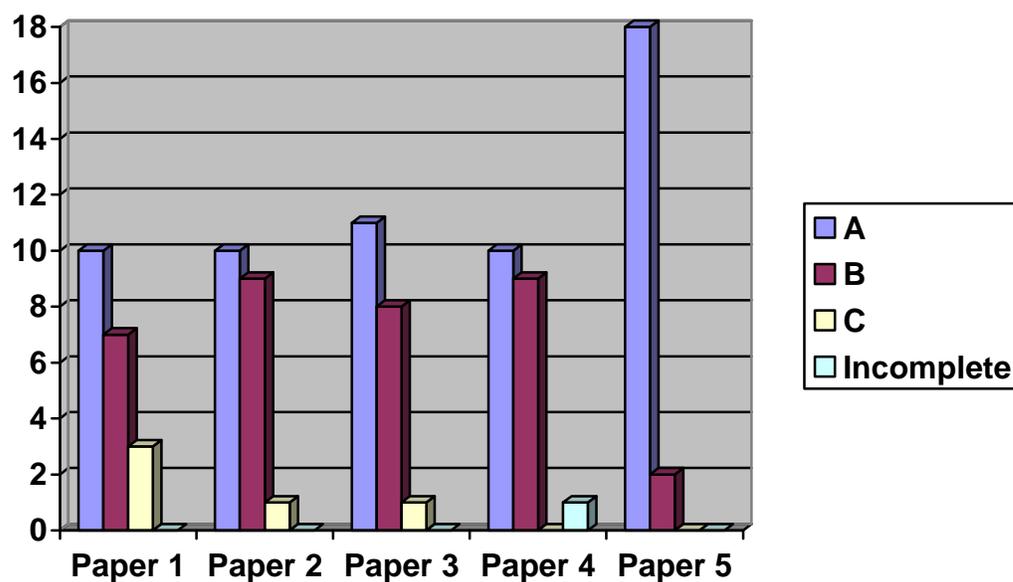


Figure 15. Essay Grade Chart

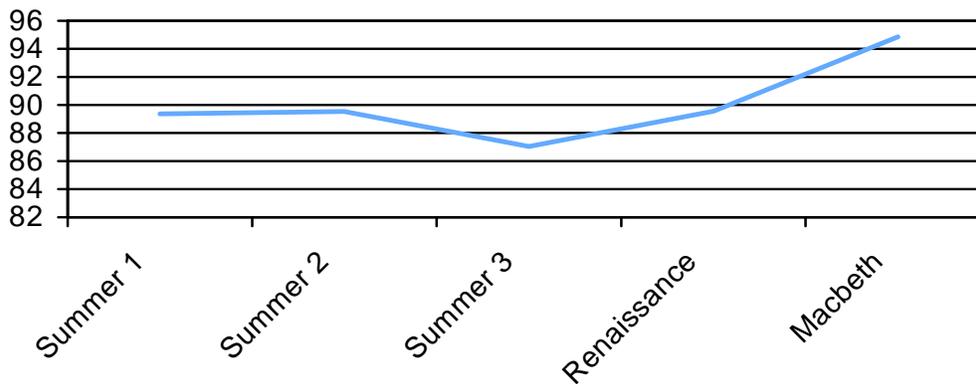
Along with an overall grade chart, I thought a similar, but more detailed chart, showing individual student grades for each of the five papers would be useful again to show progression (see Table 1).

*Table 1. Student Essay Grades*

<b>NAME</b>	<b>Summer 1</b>	<b>Summer 2</b>	<b>Summer 3</b>	<b>Renaissance</b>	<b>Macbeth</b>
Michael	80	88	80	88	95
Nancy	80	85	80	88	80
Nadine	88	88	90	85	98
Charlotte	95	95	95	95	98
Talia	100	98	90	90	98
Chrissy	95	95	95	98	95
Adam	95	88	88	95	80
Katie	95	90	90	85	95
Kaelyn	98	95	88	100	100
Morgan	75	85	70	85	98
Gabrielle	98	98	95	90	98
Camilla	90	90	90	88	98
Rachel	75	70	85	85	90
Amy	98	90	80	(Incomplete)	95
Sarah	95	88	90	85	98
John	80	90	80	95	98
Candace	85	88	88	90	98
Karen	88	85	90	80	95
Dolores	88	95	90	90	95
Naomi	75	88	90	95	95

Finally, after examining all of the individual student grades, I decided that it would be useful to find the average for each column of grades. I found the average of summer essay 1 by adding all of the essay scores and dividing the total by 20. I did the same for the other four essay columns. The average for summer essay 1 was 88.65%; the average for summer essay 2 was 89.45%; the average for summer essay 3 was 87.2%; the average for the Renaissance essay was 89.84; and

the average for the Macbeth essay was 94.85. The best way to visually convey this data was through a line graph (see Figure 16).



*Figure 16. Student Essay Grade Averages*

After reviewing the observations and other data from my field log, I came to some conclusions as to why the line graph looked as it did. Summer essays 1, 2, and 3 were the baseline data. The averages for summer essays 1 and 2 stayed quite consistent, while the average for summer essay 3 was lower. When discussing the summer essays with the students, many of them mentioned that they saved the book that they felt was the most difficult for last. Because they were not as comfortable with the content of the final summer book, they did not achieve to the same levels that they did on the first two essays. The Renaissance essay showed improvement because we used the new writing process. However, the amount of improvement may have been minimal because the essay was a mini-research paper based on the life of an influential figure of the Renaissance. It was not based on a work of literature that we spent time studying in class.

Therefore, this was not only a new style of writing (it was a research paper rather than a thesis paper), but also the students had very little prior knowledge with regard to content. Finally, the average for the *Macbeth* essay showed dramatic improvement. This was the second time that the students used the new writing process, so they were more comfortable with it. Also, we spent weeks in class reading, discussing, and analyzing the play so the students were quite familiar with the content. Overall, the average grade for all of the baseline data was 88.4%, while the average grade using the new writing process was 92.3%.

I wrote my last field log on January 11, 2007. Though I did my share of complaining about the amount of work I had to do during the data collection process, I felt somewhat saddened that my study was coming to an end. On the other hand, I was thrilled with the outcome of my study. The study was a success. And it was a success in more ways than one!

## **METHODS OF ANALYSIS**

"You can tell whether a man is clever by his answers. You can tell whether a man is wise by his questions."

*-Naguib Mahfouz*

### **Memo Analysis**

During and after the data-collection process, I used various methods to analyze my data, the first of which being analytic, reflective, and methodological memos. I completed an analytic memo in the form of a figurative language analysis. Here, I examined the literal and implied meanings of figurative language in student communications pertaining to the study. I also analyzed data through four reflective memos. I studied the educational theories of John Dewey (1997), Paulo Freire (2003), Lev Vygotsky (1978) and Lisa Delpit (2002). I then made direct connections between those theories and my own study. I additionally completed a methodological memo in the form of a mid-study data assessment. Here I identified my research question, along with potential sub-questions. I then prepared a chronological roster of observational field log entries detailing topics of study and insights I gleaned through the process. I completed the same procedure for a chronological roster of surveys, interviews, and student work.

### **Questionnaires, Journals, and Interviews**

As mentioned earlier in my research design, I administered questionnaires, prompted journal entries, and conducted interviews throughout the study. In order for analysis to take place, I read, coded, and binned all of this data. According to

Ely, Vinz, Anzul and Downing (1997), coding is the process of creating categories of patterns found in the data. The categories are then placed into larger thematic groups known as bins. With regard to the questionnaires, journal entries, and interviews, I made sure that I had a complete understanding of the students' comments. If any of the students' comments were unclear in their questionnaires or journal entries, I asked clarification questions. During the interviews, I attempted to ask high-level questions.

### **Student Work**

Along with reviewing student comments about the writing process, I analyzed the writing process itself. I coded and binned my feedback on student essays. I analyzed my feedback by dividing it into four different categories: (1) positive, (2) ambiguous or unclear, (3) grammatical/mechanical, and (4) content-based. I also analyzed student work by comparing essay grades over time both individually and collectively. Finally, I compared the rough and final drafts of student essays, along with the rough and final drafts of student-generated rubrics.

### **Field Log Analysis**

I began analyzing my field log data as I wrote it down. I continuously read and re-read my data. I discussed my data with colleagues, professors, and my support group to get various perspectives on my findings. I separated my observations from my reflections so that I could accurately analyze what happened in the classroom. I kept a coding index in the front of my field log,

which I continuously changed and updated, as needed. The coding index was reflective of the patterns I found throughout my field log. “Finding patterns in experience facilitates learning. Noticing patterns in experience, from the simplest to the most complex, enables us to draw our data together in new ways” (Holly, Arhar, & Kasten, 2001, p. 206). When I gathered a significant number of codes, I began to bin them. As the study progressed, I continued to re-read my observations and revise my codes and bins. I created a graphic organizer to effectively display my codes and bins (see Figure 17). While reviewing my bins, themes pertaining to my study began to emerge. I created one theme statement for each bin (see Figure 18). At the end of the study, I reviewed my entire field log and completed a final revision of my codes, bins, and theme statements.

### Codes and Bins

<p><b>TEACHING STRATEGIES</b></p> <p>Mini-Lessons Modeling Questioning Editing and Revising</p>	<p><b>COLLABORATION</b></p> <p>Conferencing with the Teacher Learning in Cooperative Groups Involving the Parents</p>
<p><b>AFFECTIVE COMPONENTS</b></p> <p>Attitudes Regarding Student-Generated Rubrics Attitudes Regarding Writing Effort</p>	<p><b>STUDENT WRITING</b></p> <p>Student Achievement Specific Writing Problems Importance of Journaling Use of Previous Papers</p>
<p><b>TEACHER FEEDBACK</b></p> <p>Student Comments Regarding Teacher Feedback Feedback (Potentially Ambiguous or Unclear) Feedback (Content-Based) Feedback (Grammatical/Mechanical) Feedback (Positive)</p>	<p><b>RUBRICS</b></p> <p>Rubrics</p>

*Figure 17. Codes and Bins Graphic Organizer*

## Theme Statements

### **Teaching Strategies**

Student understanding of grammatical and mechanical constructs develops when mini-lessons are taught, concepts are modeled, questions are asked, and editing and revising takes place.

### **Collaboration**

Student achievement in writing improves when students have an opportunity to confer with their teacher. Student achievement in writing may improve when students have an opportunity to collaborate with their peers and to discuss with their parents.

### **Affective Components**

Student motivation and levels of effort increase when students are given autonomy and accountability in the classroom.

### **Student Writing**

Student achievement in writing occurs when students are given opportunities to view and utilize their previous papers, to identify specific writing problems, and to reflect on the writing process through journaling.

### **Teacher Feedback**

Student understanding of grammatical, mechanical, and content-based information occurs when teachers provide clear, appropriately-placed, constructive feedback on drafts of student writing. Student motivation and levels of effort increase when teachers provide positive feedback (in addition to constructive feedback) on drafts of student writing.

### **Student-Generated Criteria**

Student achievement in writing, student ownership and accountability, and student motivation increase when differentiated instruction takes place through individualized, student-generated criteria.

*Figure 18. Theme Statements Graphic Organizer*

## FINDINGS

“Ah, but a man's reach should exceed his grasp,  
Or what's a heaven for?”  
-Robert Browning

### Teaching Strategies

*Student understanding of grammatical and mechanical constructs develops when mini-lessons are taught, concepts are modeled, questions are asked, and editing and revising takes place.*

After responding to each set of student papers, I put overheads on the projector detailing common concerns that I had identified. I taught mini-lessons that were directly related to these areas, so that students could focus on addressing them in the next paper. I also taught mini-lessons in individual conferences with students. Finally, I assigned additional practice for homework related to topics such as parallel structure and sentence combining, to name a few. Dohrer (1991) suggests that students should only be expected to respond to feedback that has already been taught and discussed in class. As I compared and contrasted the essays at the beginning of the study to those at the end of the study, I noticed that many of the grammatical and mechanical problems that students had early on were no longer problems at the end of the study. This can also be illustrated through the increase in student grades over time (see Table 1). Through mini-lessons, student understanding increases.

Modeling is essential when teaching a new concept. The students pointed this out early in the study when they completed their questionnaires. Most of the students relayed the importance of providing specific examples when teachers make corrections on a paper. With regard to feedback Nadine said, “It’s helpful when they say what I’ve done wrong and give an example.” Chrissy also stated that teachers should include “what exactly should be different and what would be better, maybe some examples.”

The importance of modeling surfaced again when students learned how to generate their own criteria. The first time I went over the rubric-writing process, we did an activity and talked about how to write a rubric, but many still seemed lost. Charlotte mentioned that “the only thing I disliked about writing my own [rubric] was that it was hard to fill in some of the spaces.” Amy agreed, “I had a difficult time figuring out the rubric itself.” When we reviewed the process again, I provided a packet of sample rubrics, we discussed each at more length, and students seemed more comfortable writing their rubrics for the final paper. Camilla pointed out, “This process was good because we got to strengthen the areas of writing that we know we are not good at because the rubric kind of forced us to.” The conferences the second time around went much more smoothly because the students had few changes to make on their rubrics. In turn, they were more focused when writing their papers, I suspect, because they had clear criteria

and gradations in their rubrics. Also, the errors in the final papers were minimal in comparison to their first papers.

Asking questions seems like an obvious solution when one does not understand something. However, at the high school level, some students feel intimidated or embarrassed to ask questions. Sometimes, they feel as though the question may not pertain to anyone else, so they refrain from asking. During one of our class discussions about the study, Kaelyn said that although whole class discussions about the papers are nice, she will not ask individualized questions that do not relate to the rest of the class. In her second journal entry Charlotte stated, "Conferencing gives me the time to ask specific questions and also learn how to fix my mistakes." By providing one-on-one time with students, they had more opportunities to ask questions relevant to their own essays. Also, by making them co-researchers and reviewing information with them on overheads throughout the study, they had multiple opportunities to ask questions. We had interesting discussions on many occasions that began with one student question. I also provided time early in the study for students to work together not only to peer edit and revise, but also to ask questions to each other about their summer reading books. This allowed them to increase their understandings of the readings. Nightingale (1991), Augsburger (1998), and Zak (1993) mentioned that writing workshops should be implemented during class time so students have opportunities to discuss writing with each other. Also with regard to the

usefulness of the small group discussions, Sarah commented, “we were able to share our ideas about things we didn’t understand.” Because students had so many opportunities to ask questions in whole-class, small-group, and one-on-one settings, their essays demonstrated great improvement. Additionally, some students who tended to be quiet in the beginning of the year seemed to feel more comfortable to speak with their peers and with me.

Editing and revising are valuable components of the writing process. Early in the study, students only had one night to edit and revise their essays before submitting their final drafts. Prior to doing this study, I thought that one night was enough time for students to edit and revise, but after reading journal entries, interviewing students, and observing essay grades, I recognized that students should have more time to make revise and edit their work. In the initial list of journal entry comments and patterns that I displayed on the overhead, students pointed out that more time was needed between the rough and final draft due dates to allow for such editing and revising. Later in the study, I gave students a week in between due dates. I noticed from the rough drafts to the final drafts that they were more attentive to their edits and revisions.

Mini-lessons, models, questions, and edits and revisions are all useful strategies in the writing process. Though it may take some time to perfect, utilizing these strategies to some extent will help improve students’ understanding of many grammatical and mechanical concepts.

### **Collaboration**

*Student achievement in writing improves when students have an opportunity to confer with their teacher. Student achievement in writing may improve when students have an opportunity to collaborate with their peers and to discuss with their parents.*

Peer collaboration can be a useful tool in the classroom when scaffolded appropriately. Students had mixed feelings with regard to peer collaboration because they said that some students did not have the knowledge-base to help them to edit and revise their papers. If students are taught mini-lessons and then asked to peer edit and revise those skills specifically, peer editing and revision can be helpful. Dohrer (1991), MacDonald (1991), and Speck (2000) also suggest that students should be given opportunities to edit and revise not only their papers, but also their peers' papers.

Some students mentioned throughout the study that they discussed their papers with their parents. A few parents even helped their children revise and edit. One student mentioned that even his mother noticed improvement in his writing from his first paper to his last. All teachers know what an important role parents play in education. Providing support simply by showing interest in their child's writing can be an influential factor in student success.

Individual teacher-student conferences were the most successful form of collaboration in this study. Students reiterated through their journals, interviews,

and class discussions that the conferences were one of the most helpful aspects of the new writing process. In her second journal entry, Nancy stated, “I liked how we had time to talk to you if we had questions on the comments you left on the rough drafts.” Adam communicated that, “The thing that I liked most about the process was that I had a chance to meet with the teacher and find out what I was doing right and what I was doing wrong.” Anderson, Benson, and Lynch (2001) describe that through conferencing, more errors are corrected than through feedback alone. Collaboration allowed students to ask general questions about the texts, more specific questions about my feedback on their drafts, more academic questions about the student-generated criteria, and more personal questions about their growth as young writers.

Peer editing and revising and parental support can be helpful during the writing process. However, the teacher-student conferences were one of the most successful and well-liked aspects of the study; the conferences definitely improved levels of student achievement.

### **Affective Components**

*Student motivation and levels of effort increase when students are given autonomy and accountability in the classroom.*

Giving students autonomy and making them accountable for their own learning are difficult tasks; the teacher must give up some control in the classroom and have a certain level of trust in his or her students. Research

suggests, however, that making students accountable is a benefit to the students. Andrade (2000) pointed out that when made accountable, students will be able to determine the difference between good and poor work. Though I admit I did have trouble giving up control in my classroom, I was delighted to see the extent to which the students took responsibility for their own learning.

Though motivation and effort are difficult to determine, I made observations throughout my field log regarding these two affective components among students. I determined that motivation and levels of effort increased through individual conversations I had with students, through body language, through conversations students had with one another, and through essay grades.

Specific examples of effort were evident throughout the study. Students took a considerable amount of time to read my comments on their papers and ask questions about them. The students also showed effort and motivation by consistently staying on task in their small groups while we had one-on-one conferences. In addition, individual students demonstrated effort throughout the writing process. Naomi asked me during homeroom if I could revise and edit an early draft of her paper. She was one of the students who received a C on the first paper. Writing an early draft for me to review exemplified her effort. As I mentioned earlier, Candace asked me to review the essay prompt with her because she was confused by the wording of the question. Clearly, she showed effort by taking the time to thoroughly examine each aspect of the question. The sheer fact

that every student handed every paper in on time every time (with one exception due to illness) demonstrates the effort that the students displayed. Motivation was further evident in student interviews and journal entries. Many students commented on an increase in these areas. One of the best examples of motivation was when John blurted out to the class, “Don’t mess this up, guys,” when we began our new writing process.

Generally, at the honors level, students are motivated and show effort in their work. This was certainly the case with my class. Yet, when I gave them some autonomy, their levels of effort and motivation increased even more. Also, Lindemann (1995) pointed out that when given autonomy, students are “weaned away” from the security they usually seek. I could not have asked for a harder working group of students with whom to complete this project.

### **Student Writing**

*Student achievement in writing occurs when students are given opportunities to view and utilize their previous papers, to identify specific writing problems, and to reflect on the writing process through journaling.*

As the reader already knows, I am far from proud of my old writing process. When students did not have access to their old papers, they did not remember in what areas they needed to improve their writing. When I handed out a general rubric to the students, they did not focus their attention on areas they needed to work on; rather, they simply followed the rubric to get a good grade.

Without using some form of metacognitive activity such as a journal entry, I did not have an understanding of how useful or not the writing process was in helping the students become better writers.

On the other hand, through the new process, I allowed the students to have access to their old writing, they generated some of the criteria on which they were graded, and they completed various journal entries so I could determine how to better meet their needs.

Through all of these methods, student writing improved. Overall, the grades increased from the first papers to the final papers (see Table 1 & Figure 16). More specifically, 13 out of 20 students showed improvement from the first paper to the fifth, some increasing 2 whole letter grades. In all of my future classes, students will have access to all of their writing and they will be required to complete some type of metacognitive activity. In some of my future classes, students will write their own criteria.

### **Teacher Feedback**

*Student understanding of grammatical, mechanical, and content-based information occurs when teachers provide clear, appropriately-placed, constructive feedback on drafts of student writing. Student motivation and levels of effort increase when teachers provide positive feedback (in addition to constructive feedback) on drafts of student writing.*

My entire study began with the concept of teacher feedback. It has grown in many directions, but here is where the study was first conceived. If used appropriately, teacher feedback can make a difference in student understanding of grammar, mechanics, and content. First, feedback must be clear. Williams (1997) mentioned that students are often confused when teachers use too much jargon in their comments. Dohrer (1991), MacDonald (1991), Speck (2000), Zak (1993), and Cowie (1995) reiterated that teachers should not use cryptic, or obscure, responses. In their initial questionnaires, students pointed out that sometimes they did not understand teachers' comments on their papers. Nadine articulated, "Sometimes teachers put that my paragraphs are unclear, but when I read them, they sound fine to me." Charlotte also stated, "Sometimes I understand their intentions, but most of the time the feedback is unclear or too vague." Finally, Adam stated, "Usually I don't understand exactly what the teacher wants so I ask them about it."

After making a conscious effort to use clear, appropriately-placed, constructive feedback, students' understandings increased. In their final journal entries of the study, students conveyed the usefulness of appropriate feedback. Talia commented, "I always got a better idea of what you were looking for in the next paper from the last one, and the comments made our papers even better (and boosted our self-esteem, I think)." Rachel also expressed, "Having you read and comment on our papers beforehand really gave us insight as to what to change

and reasons as to why they need to be changed.” Dolores added, “I know our rough drafts are very sloppy, however, the corrections you make are extremely useful because we as students cannot find them all.” Finally, Camilla affirmed, “I found the comments on my paper very useful. They were clear and I changed or adjusted everything that needed to be fixed.” Based on the literature and the numerous student responses I received throughout the study, it is evident that feedback is most useful when it is clear, appropriately-placed, and constructive.

In addition to providing constructive feedback, positive feedback is necessary to enhance motivation and levels of effort. Norton and Norton (2001), Speck (2000), and Hodges (1997) stated that positive feedback should be included in addition to constructive feedback. Many of my students stressed the importance of positive feedback, too. In her first journal entry Katie said, “I really like that you not only criticize, but compliment our strong points.” In the first round of interviews Amy pointed out, “If I don’t get any positive feedback at all I get discouraged. When you know you’re going to receive positive feedback, you try harder.” Clearly, including positive feedback on student writing is just as important as including constructive feedback.

### **Student-Generated Criteria**

*Student achievement in writing, student ownership and accountability, and student motivation increase when differentiated instruction takes place through individualized, student-generated criteria.*

As mentioned earlier in the findings, student motivation and effort increased while the study was conducted. Additionally, student achievement, ownership, and accountability increased. While there are many justifications as to why these increases took place, one of the most significant reasons was the inclusion of individualized, student-generated criteria. Research suggests that the use of rubrics is extremely important, and when students have an opportunity to help generate those rubrics, the results could be dramatic. Andrade (2000) detailed that rubrics make grading efficient and, whenever possible, students should help their teachers generate criteria for the rubrics. Lindemann (1995) conveyed that when students help generate rubrics, the students and teachers change roles and the students' levels of ownership and accountability are increased. Tomlinson (1999) communicated the importance of rubrics by pointing out that teachers cannot expect all students to learn in the same way and at the same pace.

Many of the students expressed that since they were writing their own rubrics, and essentially identifying their own standards, they felt they needed to work as hard as possible to achieve those standards. In an interview, Candace stated, "Grading yourself will make you work harder to get it right. When you have a general rubric, you have to focus on everything and that can be really overwhelming." The writing of the rubric demonstrates accountability, while the need to work hard exhibits ownership over the rubric.

Some students found the rubric-writing process difficult, yet they still found value in completing the task. Consistently in journals and interviews, students detailed that writing rubrics was beneficial. Katie explained, “Each student has different needs and by allowing us to create our own rubrics is like making us focus on our weak areas to improve them.” Kaelyn stated, “I really liked having our papers graded according to our own needs. Using a rubric that I wrote really helped me understand exactly what I should write in the paper.” Rather than every student mastering the same competencies in writing, grading was completely individualized. Since the student established the criteria for grading, he or she had no choice but to be held accountable. If the student did not generate criteria, I could not grade the paper. Every study participant completed the rubric on time and to the best of his or her ability. Students asked specific questions about the rubrics and how to improve them in individual conferences.

Clearly, the use of student-generated criteria improves student achievement, ownership, accountability, and motivation.

### **The Road**

This study has come to an end. And yet, I have so many unanswered questions, so many new questions to ponder. Would this process work in a non-honors class? How can I make the process even better? Would the study have turned out differently if I had the students peer edit and revise all five papers? Since modeling was so useful, how can I better implement modeling in other

areas of my teaching? Should I give students prompted journal entries in other classes to find out if I am meeting their needs? How can I use a process like this for the senior research paper? What types of pre-writing strategies can be included in the writing process? How can I deal with time constraints? In what ways can I include more contextualized grammar instruction? What can I do to persuade other members of my department to consider implementing a similar process? And the most treacherous question of all: What if I slip back into my old ways now that the end is here? I can answer that last question now. It will not happen. I will not let Filing Cabinet get the best of me.

I know I will think more deeply about my teaching strategies, I will take more time to involve my students with their own learning, and I will discuss my ideas with my colleagues. It is somewhat difficult to see my study come to such an abrupt end, but I will do my best to think of this as a cyclical process, as my professors have taught me so consistently over the years. And so, I will end where I began:

The Road goes ever on and on,  
Down from the door where it began.  
Now far ahead the Road has gone,  
And I must follow, if I can,  
Pursuing it with eager feet,  
Until it joins some larger way  
Where many paths and errands meet.  
And whither then? I cannot say.

J.R.R. Tolkien

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**APPENDIX A****MORAVIAN COLLEGE**

July 12, 2006

Jennifer A. DeBelli  
519 Iron Street  
Easton, PA 18042

Dear Jennifer A. DeBelli

The Moravian College Human Subjects Internal Review Board has accepted your proposal: How can the use of teacher feedback as a vehicle for differentiating instruction improve student writing in high school English class? Given the materials submitted, your proposal received an expedited review. A copy of your proposal will remain with the HSIRB Chair.

Please note that if you intend on venturing into other topics than the ones indicated in your proposal, you must inform the HSIRB about what those topics will be.

Should any other aspect of your research change or extend past one year of the date of this letter, you must file those changes or extensions with the HSIRB before implementation.

This letter has been sent to you through U.S. Mail and e-mail. Please do not hesitate to contact me by telephone (610-861-1415) or through e-mail ([medwh02@moravian.edu](mailto:medwh02@moravian.edu)) should you have any questions about the committee's requests.

Debra Wetcher-Hendricks  
Chair, Human Subjects Internal Review Board  
Moravian College  
610-861-1415

## APPENDIX B

July 17, 2006

Dear Principal,

During the 2006-2007 school year, I will be taking courses toward a Master's Degree in Curriculum and Instruction at Moravian College. These courses assist me in implementing the most effective teaching strategies in order to provide meaningful learning experiences for my students.

During this semester, August 30<sup>th</sup> through December 23<sup>rd</sup>, I am required to conduct a systematic study of my own teaching practice. The focus of my research is how to use teacher feedback as a vehicle for differentiating instruction. By doing this, I hope to improve student writing in a high school English class. My goal is to help all students achieve greater academic success.

I will be gathering information to support my study through questionnaires, student interviews, work samples, and observation. This data collection will help me determine how I can better meet my students' needs. All of the students' names will be kept confidential as well as the names of teachers, other staff, and the school. Only my name, the names of my sponsoring professors, and Moravian College will appear in this study. No names will be included on work samples or in any reports of my study. Minor details of a student's writing may be altered to ensure confidentiality. All research materials will be kept in a secure location in my home and all data gathered during the study will be destroyed at the conclusion of the study.

All of the students in my classroom will receive the same instruction and assignments as part of the English curriculum. Participation in this study is entirely voluntary and will not affect the student's grade in any way. Any student may withdraw from the study at any time by writing me a letter or sending me an e-mail stating that he or she would like to do so. The parent or guardian may also withdraw the student through a letter or e-mail. If a student is withdrawn, or the parent or guardian chooses not to have him or her participate in the study, I will not use any information pertaining to that student in my study and the student will not be penalized in any way.

My faculty sponsor is Dr. Charlotte Zales. She can be contacted at Moravian College by phone at 610-625-7958 or by e-mail at [crzales@moravian.edu](mailto:crzales@moravian.edu).

If you have any questions or concerns about my project, please feel free to speak with me or e-mail me. If you have no questions, please sign and return the bottom portion of this letter. Thank you very much for all of your help.

Sincerely,  
Jen DeBelli

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I attest that I am the principal of the teacher conducting this research study, that I have read and understand this consent form, and that I have received a copy. Jen DeBelli has my permission to conduct this study.

Principal's Signature : \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX C

August 28, 2006

Dear Parent(s) or Guardian(s),

Currently, I am taking courses toward a Master's Degree in Curriculum and Instruction at Moravian College. These courses assist me in implementing the most effective teaching strategies in order to provide meaningful learning experiences for my students.

During this semester, August 30, 2006 through December 23, 2006, I am required to conduct a systematic study of my own teaching practice. The focus of my research is how to use teacher feedback as a vehicle for differentiating instruction. By doing this, I hope to improve student writing in a high school English class. My goal is to help all students achieve greater academic success.

I will be gathering information to support my study through questionnaires, student interviews, work samples, and observation. This data collection will help me determine how I can better meet my students' needs. All of the students' names will be kept confidential as well as the names of teachers, other staff, and the school. Only my name, the names of my sponsoring professors, and Moravian College will appear in this study. No names will be included on work samples or in any reports of my study. Minor details of a student's writing may be altered to ensure confidentiality. All research materials will be kept in a secure location in my home and all data gathered during the study will be destroyed at the conclusion of the study.

All of the students in my classroom will receive the same instruction and assignments as part of the English curriculum. Participation in this study is entirely voluntary and will not affect the student's grade in any way. Any student may withdraw from the study at any time by writing me a letter or sending me an e-mail stating that he or she would like to do so. The parent or guardian may also withdraw the student through a letter or e-mail. If a student is withdrawn, or the parent or guardian chooses not to have him or her participate in the study, I will not use any information pertaining to that student in my study and the student will not be penalized in any way.

If you have any questions or concerns about my research at any time, please contact me by phone or by e-mail. My faculty sponsor is Dr. Charlotte Zales. She can be contacted at Moravian College by phone at 610-625-7958 or by e-mail at [crzales@moravian.edu](mailto:crzales@moravian.edu).

If you approve of your child being a participant in my teacher research, please sign and return the bottom portion of this letter. Thank you very much for all of your help.

Sincerely,  
Jen DeBelli

---

I understand that Ms. DeBelli will be observing and collecting data as part of her teacher research on improving student writing. My child has permission to be a participant in the study.

Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Parent/Guardian Signature : \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX D

### Influential Figures of the English Renaissance: A Mini-Research Paper



Since we will not be writing research papers in English class this year, I would like to at least begin to familiarize all of you with the research process. Although for this paper we will not be using note cards, we will learn proper MLA documentation along with appropriate research techniques.

You will be writing a 4-5 page biographical research paper on one of the influential figures of the English Renaissance listed below. You are to research fully the life of your Renaissance man or woman and convey details through your paper about the person's childhood, young life, adult life, accomplishments, failures, influences, families, etc.

You must have a minimum of five sources of research. At least two of the sources must be books. We will have time in the library to work on the paper, but you are also expected to work from home. If you have a public library card, you can access many of the school's useful databases through power library.

#### **Influential Renaissance Figures:**

Henry VII	Sir Walter Raleigh
Galileo	James VI of Scotland
Leonardo da Vinci	William Shakespeare
Michelangelo	Oliver Cromwell
Christopher Columbus	King Charles II
Pope Julius II	John Milton
Johannes Gutenberg	King Philip of Spain
William Caxton	Thomas More
Desiderius Erasmus	Martin Luther
Henry VIII	Bloody Mary
Elizabeth I	Catherine of Aragon
Anne Boleyn	Edmund Spenser
Edward VI	Mary Stuart

Rough Draft Due: \_\_\_\_\_ Final Draft Due: \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX E

### Influential Figures of the Renaissance Rubric

	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>General Content</b>	Paper lacks accurate information regarding the life of the Renaissance figure.	Accurate information regarding the life of the Renaissance figure is included.	Complete and accurate information regarding the life of the Renaissance figure is included.	Significant, complete, and accurate information regarding the life of the Renaissance figure is included.
<b>MLA Documentation</b>	Less than five book sources are documented according to the MLA style OR documentation does not follow MLA.	Five sources (1 book source) are documented according to the MLA handbook.	Five sources (2 book sources) are documented according to the MLA handbook.	Five sources (2 book sources) are documented completely and correctly according to the MLA handbook.
<b>Length and Format</b>	Paper is less than three pages in length and somewhat follows the format of a traditional research paper.	Paper is three pages in length and follows the format of a traditional research paper.	Paper is four pages in length and effectively follows the format of a traditional research paper.	Paper is five pages in length and effectively follows the format of a traditional research paper.

## APPENDIX F

### Eleventh Grade Honors English *Macbeth* Thesis Paper



Write a 3-5 page persuasive essay for *Macbeth* on a topic of your choice. Be creative as you think of essay topics, but be sure to choose a specific focus for your paper. Some general topics you may want to begin to ponder include:

- a. Ambition
- b. Struggles between good and evil
- c. Punishment of sins
- d. Degeneration of character
- e. What is in a name?
- f. The law
- g. Commitment and integrity
- h. Gender roles
- i. Greed
- j. Supernatural influence in society
- k. Concept of tragedy

Create a thesis statement that relates to *Macbeth* in some way. Remember, the purpose of the essay is to persuade. Be sure to keep this in mind as you are writing. Use the rubric to guide you. Maintain a clear focus on the topic at hand and use textual evidence, specific details and quotations, to back up your points. When you cite a line from the text, cite it using the following format:

“Nothing in his life became him like the leaving of it” (1.4.7-8).

Your paper will be graded according rubric you complete on the back. For every day your paper is late, it will drop a letter grade. On the day the paper is due, you must hand in your rough draft, rough rubric, final draft, and final rubric.

**THESIS PAPER ROUGH DRAFT/RUBRIC DUE:** \_\_\_\_\_

**THESIS PAPER FINAL DRAFT/RUBRIC DUE:** \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX G

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_ DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

**Eleventh Grade Honors English *Macbeth* Thesis Paper Rubric**

	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>GENERAL CONTENT</b>	Paper lacks accurate information regarding William Shakespeare's <i>Macbeth</i> .	Accurate information regarding William Shakespeare's <i>Macbeth</i> is included.	Complete and accurate information regarding William Shakespeare's <i>Macbeth</i> is included.	Significant, complete, and accurate information regarding William Shakespeare's <i>Macbeth</i> is included.
<b>LENGTH</b>	Paper is less than 3 pages in length OR font is larger than 12.	Paper is 3 full pages in length (no larger than 12 font, double spaced).	Paper is 4 full pages in length (no larger than 12 font, double spaced).	Paper is 5 full pages in length (no larger than 12 font, double spaced).
<b>COMPLETION AND PREPAREDNESS</b>	Rough draft, rough rubric, final draft, and final rubric are three days late.	Rough draft, rough rubric, final draft, and final rubric are two days late.	Rough draft, rough rubric, final draft, and final rubric are one day late or not ready to be handed in at the beginning of class.	Rough draft, rough rubric, final draft, and final rubric are completed, printed, stapled and ready to hand in on time.

**APPENDIX H**

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_ DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

**Teacher Feedback on Student Writing:  
A Student's Perspective****RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE**

1. How carefully do you read feedback that teachers write on your papers? Please explain.
  
2. What makes teacher feedback on your written assignments helpful? Please explain.
  
3. In what ways do you use teacher feedback to redraft your papers? In what ways do you apply teacher feedback to other papers in the same course or in different courses?
  
4. To what extent do you understand teachers' intentions when reading their Feedback? Explain.
  
5. What other types of feedback should teachers include that they currently do not include?
  
6. What suggestions do you have for teachers to help you become a better writer? Can effective teacher feedback help you become a better writer? Why or why not?

## APPENDIX I

### Honors English British Literature - Journal Entry 1: Teacher Feedback



Now that you have finished the summer reading assignment essays, I would like you to take a few minutes to think about to what extent the process we used was valuable for you. On the day the essay was due, I would give you homework credit for having your rough draft completed in class. I would then break you into groups of 3-5 according to your book title and ask you to take a few minutes to discuss the book and answer each other's questions regarding content. Then, I would ask you to switch your paper with someone in your group to edit and revise. You would be given an essay evaluation sheet in order to provide comments for your peer. At the end of the period, you would pass the essay and evaluation sheet back to the student who wrote the paper. The next day you would hand in a final draft to Ms. DeBelli which was checked as a homework credit and collected for a grade out of 100 points.

Write an informal journal entry describing the usefulness of the writing process we have used in class so far. Please be honest. I am not looking for a specific answer. I want to use your responses to improve my own teaching methods and to help you as young writers. There is no length requirement for this entry. You can type or handwrite your entry. Below is a list of questions to help you get started. You do not have to answer all of these questions and you are not limited to only these questions.

- Was this process useful? If so, to what extent?
- What do you like about this process?
- What suggestions do you have to make this process more effective?
- Do you like peer editing and revising?
- Do you prefer to edit and revise your own papers?
- Do you prefer conferencing with the teacher?
- Would you like to have access to old papers when editing and revising?
- Did you find my comments on your final draft useful?
- Were my comments clear or vague?
- What other questions or comments do you have?

Thank you for your input! : )

## APPENDIX J

### Honors English British Literature - Journal Entry 2: A New Process



At this point in the year, you have written a number of major pieces for this course, including three summer reading essays and a mini-research paper on an influential figure of the British Renaissance. I would like you to take some time to think about the process that we used for our most recent paper. You completed a rough draft which I checked as a homework assignment and collected. After writing comments on your papers and passing them back, you were expected to review the comments and generate an already partially-completed rubric. I then checked your rubrics and conferenced with each of you to discuss both your rough draft and your rough rubric. After a 5-15 minute conference, I asked you to create a final rubric and revise and edit your draft for Wednesday, November 22<sup>nd</sup>. You then handed in the rough drafts of your paper and rubric and the final drafts of your paper and rubric which were checked as a homework assignment and collected for a grade out of 100 points.

Write an informal journal entry describing the usefulness of the new process we used in class. Please be honest. I am not looking for a specific answer. I want to use your responses to improve my own teaching methods and to help you as young writers. There is no length requirement for this entry. You can type or handwrite your entry. Below is a list of questions to help you get started. You do not have to answer all of these questions and you are not limited to only these questions.

1. Was this process useful? If so, to what extent?
2. What do you like about this process?
3. What suggestions do you have to make this process more effective?
4. Was conferencing with Ms. DeBelli useful? Why or why not?
5. What would you change about the conferencing process?
6. What would you keep the same about the conferencing process?
7. Did you work effectively in your small groups while Ms. DeBelli was conferencing with individual students?
8. Did you find the comments on your rough drafts useful?
9. Were my comments clear or vague?
10. What did you like about writing your own rubrics?
11. What did you dislike about writing your own rubrics?
12. Was the rubric-writing process worthwhile? Why or why not?
13. What other questions or comments do you have?

Again, thank you for your input! : )

## APPENDIX K

### Honors English British Literature - Journal Entry 3: Final Thoughts



Although we are just beginning the second half of the school year, your role as co-researchers for this study is coming to a close. I want to begin by thanking all of you for your hard work and dedication to making this study such an enlightening experience. I certainly could not have done this without all of your input and support. I hope I will have the opportunity in the future to work with another class as extraordinary as yours.

In a measly four months you have crafted five pieces of thoughtful writing based on *Lord of the Flies*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Dracula*, an influential Renaissance figure, and *Macbeth*. Also throughout the four months, we have experimented with peer editing and revising sessions, teacher conferences, rubric-writing, and differentiated instruction. We have examined comments on your papers and discussed what works and what doesn't work. We have reviewed writing techniques such as sentence combining and using parallel structure. We even crunched three acts of *Macbeth* into two weeks (with time to spare to listen to the Porter one last time). In other words, we have done A LOT! Your last task as co-researchers (other than finishing up the final drafts of your *Macbeth* papers) is to complete this journal entry.

Write an informal journal entry describing your writing experiences so far this year. Comment on the feedback that I have provided on all of your papers, the writing processes that we have used, the peer editing and revising, the teacher conferences, the use of rubrics, and the grading of papers based on individual needs. If you could pick and choose from what we have done so far to create your ideal writing process, what would you pick and why? What would your ideal writing process look like? Please be honest. I am not looking for a specific answer. I want to use your responses to improve my own teaching methods and to help you as young writers. There is no length requirement for this entry. You can type or handwrite your entry. Below is a list of questions to help you get started. You do not have to answer all of these questions and you are not limited to only these questions.

1. What techniques have we used from September through December that were useful? What techniques were not useful?
2. What suggestions do you have for the writing process for future papers?
3. What questions or comments do you have about teacher feedback?
4. What questions or comments do you have about peer editing and revising?
5. What questions or comments do you have about teacher conferences?
6. What questions or comments do you have about rubrics?
7. What other questions or comments do you have?

## APPENDIX L

## Period 8 Student-Generated Rubrics / Selected Criteria

<b>Student Name</b>	<b>Paper 1 Student-Generated Rubric Criteria (Figures of the Renaissance)</b>	<b>Paper 2 Student-Generated Rubric Criteria (Macbeth Thesis Paper)</b>
Michael	Citations Sentences Mechanics	Quote Analysis Grammatical Errors Sentences
Nancy	Introduction and Conclusion Organization Direct Quotes	Organization Introduction and Conclusion Quotes
Nadine	Organization References/Quotes Grammar and verb tenses	Effective Quotes Correct MLA Verb Tense and Grammar
Charlotte	Sentence Structure and Variety Details and Supporting Information Organization	Organization Details and Explanations Grammar
Talia	Concise Language Citations Mechanics	Parallelism Run-ons and Fragments Mechanics
Chrissy	Explanation of Points Transitions Mechanics	Explanation of Points Transitions Mechanics
Adam	Cite Resources and Quotations Mechanics Language and Wording	Transitions Direct Quotes Accuracy
Katie	Mechanics and Grammar Precision and Clarity Verb Tenses	Grammar and Mechanics Clear and Concise Quotations
Kaelyn	Details and Examples Focus and Organization Mechanics	Focus and Organization Details and Examples Mechanics
Morgan	Sentence Structure Sentence Variety Grammar/Mechanics	Organization Mechanics Details, Quotes, and Evidence
Gabrielle	Citations Grammar and Mechanics Paragraph Structure	Grammar and Mechanics Citations Sentence Quality/Variety
Camilla	Main Topic Sentence/Thesis Transitions Citations	Citations Introduction and Conclusion Explanations
Rachel	Organization Mechanics Content and Cites	Organization Cites and Quotes Mechanics

Amy	(Incomplete Essay and Rubric)	Citing Grammar/Composition Organization
Sarah	Organization Style Transitions	Mechanics Organization Vocabulary
John	Direct Quotes and Citations Grammar and Mechanics Organization	Thesis Statement and Details Direct Quote / Citation Grammar / Mechanical Errors
Candace	Sentence Structure Quotes/Citations Mechanics	Focus and Organization Details and Examples Mechanics
Karen	Introductory Paragraph Transitions Sentence Combining	Contractions Introductory Paragraph Colloquialisms
Dolores	Sentence Structure Proper Usage of Quotes Organization and Mechanics/Spelling	Sentence Structure Proper Use of Quotes Mechanics/Spelling
Naomi	Organization Mechanics/Spelling Wording and Sentence Structure Usage of Quotes	Mechanics/Spelling Textual Analysis Usage of Quotes

**APPENDIX M**  
**FIELD LOG BINS**

<b>TEACHING STRATEGIES</b>	<b>COLLABORATION</b>
Mini-Lessons	Conferencing with the Teacher
Modeling	Learning in Cooperative Groups
Questioning	Involving the Parents
Editing and Revising	
<b>AFFECTIVE COMPONENTS</b>	<b>STUDENT WRITING</b>
Attitudes Regarding Student-Generated Rubrics	Student Achievement
Attitudes Regarding Writing	Specific Writing Problems
Effort	Importance of Journaling
	Use of Previous Papers
<b>TEACHER FEEDBACK</b>	<b>RUBRICS</b>
Student Comments Regarding Teacher Feedback	Rubrics
Feedback (Potentially Ambiguous or Unclear)	
Feedback (Content-Based)	
Feedback (Grammatical/Mechanical)	
Feedback (Positive)	

## APPENDIX N

### Summer Reading Assignment Essays

**Directions:** For each text, choose one essay and write a 4-5 page paper fully answering the question. Use specific details from your text to answer the question and be sure to include quotations to back up your thoughts. You will hand in one essay a week for the next three weeks. You may hand in the essays in any order.

**Due Dates:**

Essay 1: \_\_\_\_\_

Essay 2: \_\_\_\_\_

Essay 3: \_\_\_\_\_

#### *Lord of the Flies* by William Golding

- William Golding, author of *Lord of the Flies*, says the following about the novel:  
*The theme is an attempt to trace the defects of society back to the defects of human nature. The moral is that the shape of a society must depend on the ethical nature of the individual and not any political system however apparently logical or respectable. The whole book is symbolic in nature except the rescue in the end where adult life appears, dignified and capable, but in reality enmeshed in the same evil as the symbolic life of the children on the island.*  
 After reading the novel and this quote, write an essay discussing Golding's views on the concept of human nature. Use details and quotes from the novel to back up your points.
- The title of Golding's novel, *Lord of the Flies*, is an English translation of Beelzebub, an archaic name for the devil. Knowing this, discuss the literal and symbolic use of the lord of the flies in the novel. Also, describe the incident between the lord of the flies and Simon and how it is significant to Golding's message.
- William Golding's views on civilization significantly changed after returning home from World War II. He voices many of these views through symbolism in *Lord of the Flies*. Explain how the island in the novel is a microcosm of society at large.

#### *Much Ado About Nothing* by William Shakespeare

- Consider the themes in *Much Ado About Nothing*. Choose three themes and describe them using specific examples from the play. Then, briefly explain how those themes are relevant in today's society.
- What does the phrase *much ado about nothing* mean? Why is it an effective title for this play? Elaborate on the title using at least five specific events from the play.
- William Shakespeare is known for examining gender roles in his plays. Discuss the gender roles in *Much Ado About Nothing* and include specific quotations to back up your points.

#### *Dracula* by Bram Stoker

- Research the characteristics of a gothic novel. Discuss the gothic elements in one of the most famous gothic novels of all time, *Dracula*. Use examples and quotes from the story to support your argument.
- Some scholars believe that Count Dracula was based entirely on an actual figure, Vlad the Impaler, while other scholars believe that there were only loose connections between the two. Research Vlad the Impaler and write an essay comparing and contrasting Count Dracula and Vlad the Impaler. In your essay, include a paragraph detailing to what extent you believe Stoker's Dracula was based on Vlad the Impaler.
- This essay question pertains to Stoker's writing style in addition to content. Throughout *Dracula*, Stoker conveys the plot through a series of journals and letters. His tremendous use of imagery and eloquence of language are admired by scholars. Through this imagery, Stoker creates high moments of suspense for the reader. In addition to imagery, explain *how* Stoker creates suspense and identify specific moments of suspense using details, quotes, and descriptions of writing technique. Although I expect you to use significant aspects of the plot to support your points, I want your focus to be on writing style.

\* You must include a list of MLA formatted citations at the end of each paper.

**Summer Assignment Essay Rubric**  
*Lord of the Flies, Much Ado About Nothing, and Dracula*

	1	2	3	4
<b>Answering the Question</b>	Paper does not answer the question and does not include elaboration and discussion on the given prompt.	Paper somewhat answers the question but lacks elaboration and discussion on the given prompt.	Paper answers the question and incorporates elaboration and discussion on the given prompt.	Paper fully and effectively answers the question and incorporates elaboration and discussion on the given prompt.
<b>Supporting Information</b>	Paper lacks specific and significant details, examples, and quotations that effectively back up the position statement.	Paper lacks specific and significant details, examples, and/or quotations that effectively back up the position statement.	Paper includes some specific and significant details, examples, and quotations that effectively back up the position statement.	Paper includes numerous specific and significant details, examples, and quotations that effectively back up the position statement.
<b>Organization, Mechanics, Spelling</b>	Paper is disorganized and has extensive errors in mechanics, spelling, etc.	Paper lacks organization and/or has many errors in mechanics, spelling, etc.	Paper is clearly organized and has few errors in mechanics, spelling, etc.	Paper is clearly and artfully organized and has no errors in mechanics, spelling, etc.
<b>Length</b>	Paper is less than 3 full pages in length.	Paper is 3 full pages in length.	Paper is 4 full pages in length.	Paper is 5 full pages in length.
<b>Citations</b>	Paper lacks MLA citations OR citations have extensive formatting errors.	Paper has MLA citations with some formatting errors.	Paper has complete MLA citations with a few formatting errors.	Paper has complete and correct MLA citations.

**APPENDIX O**

## APPENDIX P

# RUBRIC TOOL

### What is a rubric?

A rubric is a great tool for teachers, because it is a simple way to set up a grading criteria for assignments. Not only is this tool useful for teachers, it is helpful for students as well. A rubric defines in writing what is expected of the student to get a particular grade on an assignment.

Heidi Goodrich Andrade, a rubrics expert, defines a rubric as "a scoring tool that lists the criteria for a piece of work or 'what counts.'" For example, a rubric for an essay might tell students that their work will be judged on *purpose, organization, details, voice, and mechanics*.

A good rubric also describes levels of quality for each of the criteria. These levels of performance may be written as different ratings (e.g., Excellent, Good, Needs Improvement) or as numerical scores (e.g., 4, 3, 2, 1). Under mechanics, for example, the rubric might define the lowest level of performance as "7-10 misspellings, grammar, and punctuation errors," and the highest level as "all words are spelled correctly; your work shows that you understand subject-verb agreement, when to make words possessive, and how to use commas, semicolons and periods."

### Why use rubrics?

According to Heidi Goodrich Andrade:

- Rubrics help students and teachers define "quality."
- When students use rubrics regularly to judge their own work, they begin to accept more responsibility for the end product. It cuts down on the "am I done yet?" questions.
- Rubrics reduce the time teachers spend grading student work and makes it easier for teachers to explain to students why they got the grade they did and what they can do to improve.
- Parents usually like the rubrics concept once they understand it, and they find rubrics useful when helping with homework. As one teacher says: "They know exactly what their child needs to do to be successful."

### Involve your students

- Understanding a Rubric: Arrange the students into groups of four or more and give them the rubric you will be using for a particular task. Tell the students to discuss the task you have given them and create quick samples of papers which would receive marks in each of the categories. The groups will then present their results to the whole class.
- Creating a Rubric: It is a good idea to involve your students in creating their own rubrics for classroom assignments. A student who can write the rubric for a math problem knows the whole process inside and out, and he/she can apply the knowledge and skills learned from the process to future assignments.

### How do I create a good rubric?

#### 1. List the criteria that will be used in assessing performance.

The criteria you use should be related to the learning outcome(s) that you are assessing. For example, a musical performance might be rated for intonation, rhythmic accuracy, and tone quality and an oral presentation might be rated for content, organization, delivery and language. Be sure that your criteria are explicit. "Neatness" would not be a good criterion because the term "neat" is not explicit enough. What is *neatness*? You may want to look at some actual examples of student work to see if you have omitted any important criteria.

#### 2. Determine your performance levels.

Examples of performance levels may be:

- Descriptors (In Progress, Basic, Proficient, Advanced)
- Numbers (1,2,3,4)

#### 3. Write a description for each performance level.

Describe the different levels of performance that match each criterion. You may want to start with the best and worst levels of quality, and then fill in the middle levels based on your knowledge of common problems. It may be helpful to sort examples of actual student work into three piles: the very best, the poorest and those in between. Try to articulate what makes the good assignments good and the poor assignments poor.

#### Things to consider when writing a rubric:

- Does the rubric relate to the outcome(s) being measured? Does it address anything extraneous?
- Does the rubric cover important dimensions of student performance?
- Do the criteria reflect current conceptions of "excellence" in the field?
- Are the categories or scales well-defined?
- Is there a clear basis for assigning scores at each scale point?
- Can the rubric be applied consistently by different scorers?
- Can the rubric be understood by students and parents?
- Is the rubric developmentally appropriate?
- Can the rubric be applied to a variety of tasks?
- Is the rubric fair and free from bias?
- Is the rubric useful, feasible, manageable and practical?

<http://www.uen.org/rubric/html/know.html>

## APPENDIX Q

**Round 1 Interview**  
**Interview with Amy**  
**Wednesday, October 18, 2006**  
**3:00p.m. – 3:30p.m.**

**1. How do you feel you are as a writer?**

I know I have things to work on. I need help with some grammatical things. As I keep writing I feel like I am becoming a better writer. I feel like I have a good vocabulary. My mom is a writer. She has stories and poems published so she forces me to use a good vocabulary. I don't mind that.

**2. Do teachers' comments help you become a better writer? If not, what does? Explain.**

The more you write, the better a writer you become. Teacher comments do help because you can't fix everything yourself. Peer editing is good, but not always completely accurate because some people do mess up.

**3. Do teacher comments ever shut you down to writing?**

If I don't get any positive feedback at all I get discouraged. When you know you're going to receive positive feedback, you try harder.

**4. What are your strengths and weaknesses as a writer?**

My strengths are vocabulary and grammar. My weaknesses are organization and transitioning between paragraphs. With organization, I want to get everything out at once, but I don't go back then and reorganize.

**5. What can I do to help you further as a writer?**

What's going on in class is already helping. The feedback is insightful and I can apply it to other papers. The fact that you're going to look over the draft and take our opinions into account is really good.

**6. Have you ever had an English teacher who didn't write comments?**

I'm sure I have, but I can't remember a specific teacher. Sometimes, the feedback wasn't great. Help [feedback] during the rough draft is really useful.

**7. Do you like the idea of writing your own rubric? Why or why not?**

Yes. I think it's good; it's individualized. If you're great at one thing and it's all you're ever challenged to do, it's not a challenge anymore. It's especially good because we're in an honors class. The cookie activity was fun because we had to write it along with you, and we got an idea of how a rubric was supposed to be set up. When we were working on it, I also used other rubrics to see what I would have to do. Rubrics are important to me to understand what the assignment is because sometimes I can't remember everything we're required to do when the teacher just explains it verbally.

**8. Was my feedback clear on your papers so far this year?**

There was one thing – I didn't know what a split infinitive was. I understood most of it. The content and focus was fine. Some grammar – well, I understood pretty much everything except one comment.

**9. What else can be done to better your writing experiences?**

As long as the teacher is willing to help and interested in hearing what the students have to say, the possibilities for writing are endless.

**10. Any other questions or comments about teacher feedback and/or writing your own rubrics?**

Nothing negative, just that we should keep doing it [writing of the rubrics]. What we've done already has got me thinking now about what I need to improve on and it's already motivating me now to become a better writer. You know you have to learn it and improve so you want to do it faster. You have to do it yourself. You have to challenge yourself and be more independent.

**Round 1 Interview**

**Joint Interview with Candace and Gabrielle**

**Thursday, October 19, 2006**

**2:45p.m. – 3:15p.m.**

**1. How do you feel you are as writers?**

**G** – I'm really consistent. I don't think I'm a bad writer. Once I learn something, I learn it. We're not really taught how to write. We're just expected to do it. By tenth grade we're already in our set ways as writers.

**C** – I think I'm okay. Grammar and organization I'm pretty good at but I wasn't taught organization skills when writing.

**2. What can I do as a teacher to teach writing?**

**G** – I think examples are really important. You almost can't teach someone how to write because it's so individual. One of the reasons why I'm more comfortable with writing is because I read a lot. Looking at professional writing helps – like published work.

**C** - Reading helps because you can see different styles. But teachers should teach the basics like grammar, organization, and transitioning.

**3. Do teachers' comments help you become better writers?**

**G** - Yes, as long as they're constructive. Don't just mark it wrong – explain why it's wrong and how it can be fixed. I need to be able to see where I have the problems.

**C** – (agrees)

**4. What are your strengths and weaknesses as writers?**

**G** – Grammar and hooks are strengths. I felt weird reviewing the parts of speech the other day although I still struggle with participles and things like that. Learning the structure for writing a paragraph is useful. Transitioning is a weakness. Sometimes I don't know how to connect things. I often ask my mom to proofread things for me and she does a good job. I work better when I write last minute.

**C** – I'm good at introductions and grammar. I also like learning the general structure of paragraphs. Organization and how to find closure and bring up the next point is something I struggle with. I work better right before it's due. I don't notice my own mistakes, so I like when I get feedback from someone else.

**5. So comments from others do help? What about looking at student work on the Smart Board?**

**G** – Comments can't be all bad or all good. Constructive comments are important. If we look at student work, it should be from a student in another class so our students aren't humiliated or singled out at all.

**C** – Positive comments are good so you know what you're doing right, but negative comments are okay, too. I like working with other kids, but I don't think the points are always accurate. Sometimes I make changes based on what a peer says, but then the changes aren't right. When I sat down with you last time to look at my paper, it was helpful... really, really helpful. (Candace and I conferred for about 10 minutes to review her last paper – I didn't do this with many students.)

**6. Do you like the idea of writing your own rubric? Why or why not?**

**G** – Yes, it's like a checklist. If it's stuff I specifically need to work on, I'll help it.

**C**- Yes. Grading yourself will make you work harder to get it right. When you have a general rubric, you have to focus on everything and that can be really overwhelming.

**7. What's going to be challenging about writing your own rubrics? What about this don't you like?**

**G** – If you don't realize you're doing something wrong, then you're not going to fix it. It will be frustrating if you keep making the same mistakes, even after you write your own rubric.

**C** – I guess it's based on the person. I can't really find anything wrong with the idea.

**8. Any other comments or questions?**

**G** – I really like the idea of conferences. When I work with other students sometimes it's difficult because we all have different styles. Sometimes it's correct, but I would just word it differently because I have a different style. I want to word it differently and sometimes I can't tell if it's just style or awkward wording.

**C** – I also like the idea of conferences

**9. Do you enjoy writing?**

**G** – yes

**C** – yes

(\*creative writing a favorite of both students)

## APPENDIX R

### English 11 Honors November 13<sup>th</sup> – November 17<sup>th</sup> Cooperative Assignments / Student Conferences

#### Monday, November 13<sup>th</sup>

1. Origin J Quiz
2. Check and go over vocabulary lessons 10-11
3. Check rough rubrics
4. In small groups, discuss soliloquy, monologue, and “To be or not to be” p.292-293
5. Individual student conferences – review rough draft and rough rubric

*Homework:* n/a

#### Tuesday, November 14<sup>th</sup>

1. In small groups, read, take notes, and discuss John Donne’s biography p.300-301
2. Read *Death Be Not Proud* background information p.312
3. Notes for hyperbole, metaphysical poetry, and paradox
4. Read, notes, and discuss *Death Be Not Proud* p.313
5. Individual student conferences – review rough draft and rough rubric

*Homework:* Complete vocabulary flashcards lessons 10-11

#### Wednesday, November 15<sup>th</sup>

1. Check vocabulary flashcards
2. In small groups, read, take notes, and discuss John Milton’s background and *Paradise Lost* background p.361-365
3. Begin reading and discussing *Paradise Lost* p.366-375
4. Individual student conferences – review rough draft and rough rubric

*Homework:* n/a

#### Thursday, November 16<sup>th</sup>

1. Finish reading, notes, and discussing *Paradise Lost* p.365-375
2. Review for vocabulary quiz lessons 10-11
3. Individual student conferences – review rough draft and rough rubric

*Homework:* Study for vocabulary quiz lessons 10-11

#### Friday, November 17<sup>th</sup>

1. Vocabulary Quiz Lessons 10-11
2. Pleasure Read

*Homework:* Origin Quiz K Tuesday / Complete vocabulary lesson 12 (will not be here Monday / conference – vocabulary and flashcards due Tuesday) / Final paper drafts due Wednesday, November 22<sup>nd</sup> (include rough draft, rough rubric, and final rubric)

## APPENDIX S

**Round 2 Interview**  
**Interview with Talia**  
**Thursday, December 7, 2006**  
**3:00-3:30 p.m.**

**1. What was useful with regard to creating your own rubric? In what ways was it difficult to do? In what ways was it easy? Please explain.**

A lot of us are used to writing, so it's difficult to find discrepancies in our writing. Also, it was just hard to find stuff the other stuff (after we got the major points down) to fill in.

Writing the rubric, after we had ideas, was easy, though.

**2. Do you think the grading of the papers based on individual needs was fair and useful? Why or why not?**

Very fair, definitely. Working one on one gets everything we need to work on put into our heads, and if we don't understand what it is you're talking about or don't agree with what you say, we can speak to you about it.

**3. What suggestions do you have to make this process better? What did you like best about the process? What did you like least?**

Hmm... more speaking to us about the rubric, I guess, because we really didn't get it at first. And, as for the paper, sample papers would definitely have helped. I liked the conferences and comments. Speaking directly to us, you know? I didn't like the rubrics so much. I liked the idea, it's a capital idea, but the whole writing it bit was difficult.

**4. What else can be done to better your writing experience in the second half of the school year?**

More creative writing! I love creative writing. More voice and style! It's fun to write about, like, stuff we imagine in contrast to the usual research or whatever.

Poetry is boring, only in my opinion.

**5. What types of feedback were most useful on your papers? Was the feedback clear? In other words, did you understand what I was asking for in my feedback?**

Yes, very clear. It pointed out my ridiculous mistakes, and stuff I definitely shouldn't have overlooked. Also, the feedback allowed me to figure out what I needed to improve upon, whereas, had a student, for example, or just myself proofread my paper I wouldn't have noticed anything.

**6. How did you use the feedback to redraft your papers? What was your thought process?**

I would pick the partially completed rubric, because it helps us focus on what we need to work on individually, instead of having to keep to the standard "mechanics, content, organization" rubrics that we should have mastered by now and probably already know how to earn ourselves an A on. Also, once again, it allows us to focus our attention on our personal improvements.

**7. What other questions, comments, or concerns do you have regarding teacher feedback or student-generated rubrics?**

I like this process better than the peer-editing one. I always got stuck with people who ended up making my paper worse instead of improving it - they have poor grammar skills.

**Round 2 Interview**  
**Interview with Sarah**  
**Thursday, December 7, 2006**  
**3:00-3:20 p.m.**

**1. What was useful with regard to creating your own rubric? In what ways was it difficult to do? In what ways was it easy? Please explain.**

It was difficult to find enough things really wrong with my writing to fill the rubric, so I had to find a few random things to throw in there. It was easy because I was able to work on what I needed to, and not have to use a generic rubric made for everyone. It was fun to actually write the rough draft of the rubric.

**2. Do you think the grading of the papers based on individual needs was fair and useful? Why or why not?**

I think grading based on individual needs was very fair because some kids are horrible at certain areas of writing, so they won't get points off on every paper just because of their one weakness.

**3. What suggestions do you have to make this process better? What did you like best about the process? What did you like least?**

Creative writing really helps with voice and style, so that we can better incorporate it into the thesis and research papers. Yeah, poetry is pretty boring, and I don't think it helps at all with writing. I think we should have to write a completely random story so we feel more comfortable writing other papers.

**4. What types of feedback were most useful on your papers? Was the feedback clear? In other words, did you understand what I was asking for in my feedback?**

I think your feedback was very clear, better than most other teachers. Usually teachers don't take the time to actually write comments and feedback on papers; they just fix grammar mistakes. I was actually surprised with the amount of comments you make on our papers.

**5. How did you use the feedback to redraft your papers? What was your thought process?**

For some things I think it's better to have a completed rubric, like certain projects or research papers. On thesis or creative writing I think it's better to have an open rubric because then there are more things that we can improve on with these papers. Research papers are just really blah, so a completed rubric is much more helpful. Also, we then know exactly what you're looking for in the paper.

**6. What other questions, comments, or concerns do you have regarding teacher feedback or student-generated rubrics?**

The process of meeting with you while peer editing in groups is really effective, because sometimes, well, most of the time, Talia and I are in groups with people who are worse at writing than we are.

**Round 2 Interview**  
**Interview with Michael**  
**Friday, December 8, 2006**  
**3:00-3:30 p.m.**

**1. What was useful with regard to creating your own rubric? In what ways was it difficult to do? In what ways was it easy? Please explain.**

With creating our own rubrics, it made it easier to know what we were being graded on. As we were working on our papers we already knew what was expected so we didn't have to look on a paper and see if I did everything that was required.

**2. Do you think the grading of the papers based on individual needs was fair and useful? Why or why not?**

Grading based on needs was useful because it helps us work on the areas in our writing where we needed improvement. However it was difficult, as well, because now we are being graded directly on what we're not good at and it could seriously affect our grades if we did poorly in an area of the rubric.

**3. What suggestions do you have to make this process better?**

I'm not sure. I really don't have an opinion on this subject. Perhaps if there were a way to find topics for the rubric it would make it better.

**4. What did you like best about the process? What did you like least?**

I liked that we were able to talk to you about the choices we had made. However, I found it difficult to find topics that weren't already covered.

**5. Explain why you did or did not improve overall as a writer throughout this process.**

Yes, I believe that this helped me with my paper. I am learning to be a better writer slowly due to poor schooling previously and I find that talking with the teacher, going over the rubric, and developing ideas with the teacher and in class is very helpful.

**6. What else can be done to better your writing experience in the second half of the school year?**

If we were able to go over better prewriting it would be a great help. If we could learn better writing skills and how to better apply them, I think that it would really help. An example of this is brainstorming. Everybody knows what it is, but maybe not how to effectively use it. If we to make an outline of our paper, with topic sentence, headings, and bullet ideas for body paragraphs, I think would be a really good idea.

**7. What types of feedback were most useful on your papers? Was the feedback clear? In other words, did you understand what I was asking for in my feedback?**

Feedback that can be used. Something like an explanation of what was wrong and how to fix it. Most of the feedback was clear and easy to understand. The feedback helps a lot with creating the rubric, too.

**8. How did you use the feedback to redraft your papers? What was your thought process?**

I tried to make the changes that were suggested and fix places where I made same mistakes. I felt that it was good to know what to fix.

**9. What other questions, comments, or concerns do you have regarding teacher feedback or student-generated rubrics?**

I don't know; it was something new and it was ok. It needs some tweaking, but overall it was good to try.

## APPENDIX T

### Eleventh Grade Honors English December Plans



#### Monday, December 11<sup>th</sup>

1. Check and go over vocabulary lesson 15
2. Origin Quiz N
3. Vocabulary Quiz 13-14
4. Review notes/answer questions for Act II

*Homework:* November pleasure reading project / Act II Quiz

#### Tuesday, December 12<sup>th</sup>

1. Check and collect November project
2. Act II Quiz
3. Begin Act III

*Homework:* Finish up through Act III, Scene IV

#### Wednesday, December 13<sup>th</sup>

1. Discuss Act III up through Scene IV
2. Finish Act III
3. Begin Act IV

*Homework:* Work on sentence combining activities / Work on *Macbeth* unit packet activities (due Monday) / Think of a topic for the thesis

#### Thursday, December 14<sup>th</sup>

1. Go over sentence combining activities
2. Answer questions regarding *Macbeth* unit packet activities
3. Discuss topics for thesis
4. Continue Act IV

*Homework:* Finish Act IV / Work on *Macbeth* unit packet activities / Thesis statement due Monday / Study for vocabulary quiz 15

#### Friday, December 15<sup>th</sup>

1. Vocabulary quiz 15

2. Review sample *Macbeth* papers / Answer questions
3. Discuss Act IV
4. Begin Act V, if time

*Homework:* Complete *Macbeth* unit packet activities / Write a tentative thesis statement for the paper / Paper rough draft due Thursday / Act IV quiz Monday

### **Monday, December 18<sup>th</sup>**

1. No Origin Quiz today / Act IV Quiz
2. Check and collect *Macbeth* unit packets
3. Check tentative thesis statements
4. Work on thesis paper detail sheet

*Homework:* Complete thesis detail sheet / Work on parallel structure exercises

### **Tuesday, December 19<sup>th</sup>**

1. Check and answer questions regarding thesis detail sheet – questions
2. Discuss parallel structure exercises
3. Read and discuss Act V

*Homework:* Finish reading/notes Act V / Act V quiz tomorrow

### **Wednesday, December 20<sup>th</sup>**

1. Discuss Act V / Quiz
2. Review and discuss sample rubrics

*Homework:* Thesis paper rough draft due tomorrow

### **Thursday, December 21<sup>st</sup>**

1. Collect thesis rough draft
2. Vocabulary quiz lessons 13-15

*Homework:* None

### **Friday, December 22<sup>nd</sup>**

1. Happy Holidays!

*Homework:* Have a wonderful break....

- *Macbeth* thesis paper rough drafts will be returned Tuesday, January 2, 2007. You will have one night to write your rough rubric. Conferences will begin Wednesday, January 3, 2007. They will be strictly five minutes. Additional needed conference time will take place before or after school.
- *Macbeth* thesis paper final drafts will be due Wednesday, January 10<sup>th</sup>.
- Three final interviews will need to be conducted the week of January 8<sup>th</sup>. I need three more volunteers.
- Origin Quizzes will begin again on Monday, January 8, 2007.
- Vocabulary lessons 16-17 will be due Monday, January 8, 2007.



**Part II:** Looking at the quotes you have chosen and thinking about other details and examples you plan to use from the play *Macbeth*, create a list of arguments that you are going to include in your thesis paper. Attempt to organize your thoughts here. There are various ways to organize a paper: order of time (chronological, reverse), order of complexity (simple to complex, complex to simple), order of logic (cause and effect, one event must occur before the next), and order of importance (least important to most important, most important to least important).

Argument	Explanations/Details/Examples/Quotes
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	

## APPENDIX V

**Round 3 Interview**  
**Interview with Adam**  
**Thursday, January 4, 2007**  
**3:00p.m. – 3:30p.m.**

**1. How do you feel you are as a writer?**

I think I am a pretty good writer. Sometimes I do not write as well on some days than others, but usually I think I write well. I usually write better when I have to write a paper opposed to an essay because I have more time to think.

**2. Do teacher's comments help you become a better writer? What does?**

Not necessarily. It depends on what type of grading system the teacher uses. Most of the teachers I have had stick too closely to a rubric and do not grade on style or anything like that. My other teachers just told me what was wrong grammatically and told me to fix it. They did not tell me how to write better.

**3. What are your strengths as a writer? What are your weaknesses?**

I think my greatest strength as a writer is my vocabulary. I think my weakness is transitions between paragraphs. I have trouble linking paragraphs.

**4. What can I do to help you as a writer?**

You can tell me how to create better transitions between paragraphs and show me how to write with more style.

**5. What was useful with regard to creating your own rubric? In what ways was it difficult to do? In what ways was it easy? Please explain.**

The hardest part of the rubric was to pick things that would actually challenge me to write better, because sometimes when I write I don't know what I should actually try to improve.

**6. Do you think the grading of papers based on individual needs was fair and useful? Why or why not?**

I think that grading the papers on individual needs is a great idea because I get better at what I really need help with.

**7. What suggestions do you have to make this process better?**

I think that we should have a little more time to write our rough rubrics or we should have a little time to ask you what we should put in our rubric.

**8. What did you like best about the process? What did you like least?**

The best parts of the process I like is writing the rubric and meeting with the teacher so that I can ask any questions I might have. Since I can put in the rubric what I think I really need to improve on, I won't lose points because I disagree with the teacher about something. I like writing the rubrics because the teacher does not solely determine whether you can get an A or not because if he has a certain opinion of how you should write and he doesn't like your writing style you won't get a bad grade. The thing I like least is the short deadlines. Sometimes we get a lot of time to write the paper and sometimes we don't.

**9. Explain why you did or did not improve overall as a writer throughout this process.**

I improved as a writer because I had a chance to focus on my weaknesses.

**10. What else can be done to better your writing experience in the second half of the school year?**

More time to write papers.

**11. What types of feedback were most useful on your papers? Was the feedback clear? In other words, did you understand what I was asking for in my feedback?**

Most of the time the feedback was clear so I didn't have to ask you what meant.

**12. How did you use the feedback to redraft your papers? What was your thought process?**

I used the feedback as a guideline for what I needed to correct and then I went over the paper again and changed things that I wanted.

**13. What other questions, comments, or concerns do you have regarding teacher feedback or student-generated rubrics?**

I like the student generated rubric better than a regular grading rubric that a teacher would make.

**Interview with Katie**

**Monday, January 8, 2007**

**2:45p.m. – 3:30p.m.**

**1. How do you feel you are as a writer?**

I have confidence in my abilities as a writer, but every writer has weaknesses. I would rate myself around a 7 or an 8 on a 1-10 scale. (1 being lowest- 10 being the highest).

**2. Do teacher's comments help you become a better writer? What does?**

It is very helpful in many ways. Different teachers are looking for different strengths in papers. A social studies teacher may not focus on grammatical errors or mechanical errors. Their comments could better guide a student to a paper that certain teachers feel that are worthy of an A.

**3. What are your strengths as a writer? What are your weaknesses?**

I believe that my strengths would include introductions, logical order, and transitions between ideas. A major weakness of mine would be careless mistakes that I over look during rough drafts and even a few that slip through into my final draft.

**4. What can I do to help you as a writer?**

As a teacher to high school students all you can do is really make suggestions and comment on a rough draft. We should know by now how to correctly use commas, use transitions, write thesis statements, and so on. If errors are excessive throughout a majority of papers you could just do a short review.

**5. What was useful with regard to creating your own rubric? In what ways was it difficult to do? In what ways was it easy? Please explain.**

I think the rubric was a great help to a student writer. In the slots that you left open in our rubrics, we filled in what we needed to focus on. Regular rubrics focus on very general topics, which some students may excel at while other are terrible at. Each student has different needs and by allowing

us to create our own rubrics is like making us focus on our weak areas to improve them. It was difficult to pick out exactly what topics to use in our rubrics because some of us have weaknesses that are not as apparent as others. At first, it was difficult to write the rubric underneath the different point values because the style of writing is much different than we are used to, but it was easy to adapt to it. I believe that with your help and conferencing the rubrics themselves were easy. If the wording was awkward you help us develop better ways of stating things. It was also easier writing a rubric the second time around because I was more familiar with the rubric writing style.

**6. Do you think the grading of papers based on individual needs was fair and useful? Why or why not?**

I think it was fair and useful more so than regular rubrics. Regular rubrics are targeted on common areas that many students tend to have trouble with, but some students get As on their papers because they have already mastered the material that is always on the rubrics like length, spelling, and citation. The rubrics based on individual needs allow students to be graded on their weakness. The categories may vary in level of difficulty. Weaker writers would have easier rubrics and stronger writers would have harder rubrics. So in essence, students get a rubric that is at their level. Expectations are not too high or not too low for an individual student.

**7. What suggestions do you have to make this process better?**

I believe the process you have developed is great. There are some things that need fine-tuning, but you are working on them. I believe that peer editing, teacher editing, conferencing, revision, and final draft has proved to be useful to many students' papers. Something that may be useful is to start the student off with a small paper, like 2-3 pages, and a rubric where only one spot was blank so that the student could get used to writing a rubric. When a larger paper, such as the one we did with the Renaissance figures comes along a student won't feel overwhelmed by the task of writing a rubric. The student will already be familiar with the writing style therefore a better rubric will emerge.

**8. What did you like best about the process? What did you like least?**

I really like the fact that you comment on rough drafts. Not only do you target problem areas and pick up mistakes that we may have missed, you also write comments about our strength. When you write about our strengths it makes students feel more confident in their writing abilities and also shows what you are looking for in a great paper. It is great that you include some positives because I know I hate receiving a paper back and it being littered with red marks. It makes you feel like your paper was horrible.

**9. Explain why you did or did not improve overall as a writer throughout this process.**

I think I still have yet to see how I improved because the year is only half way over. I think that I have learned to use clarity in my papers and write concise sentences. This year I can say I've learned to write citations correctly. Your comments helped me fix my errors, but the dance helped [Quote, Quote, Stoker 19, Period Period]. I also think that I have learned to really pay attention to details, check my comma usage, and make sure all my words are spelled correctly. Although these things are some of the easiest things to do, I feel that they are the most overlooked.

**10. What else can be done to better your writing experience in the second half of the school year?**

I am really impressed already with the system you have come up with. At first, I thought it was going to be the most tedious and useless thing I was going to do in eleventh grade, but I was surprised with how much it really did help. I think the system of peer editing, teacher editing, and

conferencing would be the best system. Having sign-ups for conferencing would be helpful because if only a few students want to conference you can split up the time in one or two periods, so that each student gets 5, 6, or 7 minutes depending on the time allotted, how many students need help, and what they need help on.

**11. What types of feedback were most useful on your papers? Was the feedback clear? In other words, did you understand what I was asking for in my feedback?**

All the feedback was extremely helpful! I think that the comment on how your paper could be improved and suggestions tended to be the best. Many writers can find spelling mistakes in their writing, but when you give suggestions on how to improve the paper (word choices, logical ordering, and clarity) help a writer improve their writing style. It doesn't just change their papers.

**12. How did you use the feedback to redraft your papers? What was your thought process?**

When I reread my paper and read your comments, I fix the mistakes that you point out. I then reread my paper and change more scholarly wording. I also try to include more transitions. I fix what you point out and suggest, but I fix things I do not think is right. I read all of your suggestions, but I maintain my writing style.

**13. What other questions, comments, or concerns do you have regarding teacher feedback or student-generated rubrics?**

I just think you are working very hard and you have developed a great writing process. Your feedback is useful and positive at the same time, which many teachers do not do. You're a young teacher and it is impressive to see that you have created something that is so useful that many teachers that have been doing this for 30 years cannot do.

**Interview with Naomi  
Tuesday, January 9, 2007  
2:45p.m. – 3:20p.m.**

**1. How do you feel you are as a writer?**

I feel that I can develop good arguments for persuasive essays, reach into my imagination for creative pieces, and give thesis papers a little extra style of my own. These traits I feel are essential for all good writers to have, so I feel, on a scale from one to ten, that as a writer, I am about an eight.

**2. Do teacher's comments help you become a better writer? What does?**

I believe being able to see what specific details I can improve on in my papers and what I have been doing well within my papers help me to focus on certain things to work on in final drafts and other papers to follow. It is nice to have more than just negative criticism.

**3. What are your strengths as a writer? What are your weaknesses?**

As I stated in my first answer, I feel I have the strength as a writer to develop any of the previously stated pieces of writing with my own style, while still answering the question at hand. As far as weaknesses, I tend to summarize too much in some papers where summary is not needed. For example, the *Macbeth* paper I have just finished had to be changed significantly in the last two pages because of summary. Another problem I faced at the beginning of the year, was organizing my paper in an order that would makes sense to the reader, not just myself.

**4. What can I do to help you as a writer?**

Your writing process - rough draft, peer edit, comments, conference - all have helped me become a better writer I believe. I think that we should try and do another mini-research paper to make sure we know how to organize and word a paper that would be more factual than creative. Since the mini-research paper, I've been able to write more "boring" for my DBQs in my AP History class. Giving us mini-papers within a topic always helps us to not only become better writers, but also understand different components of a topic.

**5. What was useful with regard to creating your own rubric? In what ways was it difficult to do? In what ways was it easy? Please explain.**

I think that creating our own rubrics was useful because it allowed us to focus on certain things we individually had weaknesses in, whereas the straightforward rubrics might be harsher on those who lack the ideas of the required guidelines.

**6. Do you think the grading of papers based on individual needs was fair and useful? Why or why not?**

Yes, I believe that if students are given their rough drafts to reflect on what they as individuals need to improve on, then they will work hard to do that in their final drafts to get a better grade by improving in trouble spots they put on their rubrics.

**7. What suggestions do you have to make this process better?**

I liked the idea Gabrielle had to have a few days set aside to discuss problems and brainstorm with one another. I also liked the idea of the second rough draft.

**8. What did you like best about the process? What did you like least?**

I liked the conferencing and comments on the papers. I didn't not like any of the ideas of the process, but there could be other things added to it to make it better.

**9. Explain why you did or did not improve overall as a writer throughout this process.**

I have improved from this process in organization for the research paper and focusing my topic and not summarizing for the Macbeth paper.

**10. What else can be done to better your writing experience in the second half of the school year?**

Like I have stated before, I believe that if the writing process is tweaked a little bit, papers may improve even more. I personally believe the writing experience has been the best I've had in my high school career.

**11. What types of feedback were most useful on your papers? Was the feedback clear? In other words, did you understand what I was asking for in my feedback?**

All of the feedback was beneficial. Most of the feedback was clear and if there were any concerns, we could discuss them in conferences.

**12. How did you use the feedback to redraft your papers? What was your thought process?**

I used your comments to improve my papers by changing the wording of sentences, re-organizing my entire paper, and changing the focus of my paper to it was targeted toward someone who knew about the book we read like *Macbeth*.

**13. What other questions, comments, or concerns do you have regarding teacher feedback or student-generated rubrics?**

I believe, as I have said many times before, that this was the most beneficial writing process ever used in my high school career.