

Evaluating Writing

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Goals: This activity aims to give students a better understanding of the language that surrounds writing. In turn, students will be more prepared to comprehend your comments and to provide substantial feedback for their peers during workshops.

Begin by introducing common terms used for evaluating writing:

- Purpose
- Audience
- Focus
- Coherence
- Development
- Style
- Mechanics
- Grammar

Then, provide some basic definitions for these terms on an overhead. Ask students to copy them down and learn them. You might collaborate with other instructors to build these definitions or refer to The Prentice-Hall Guide for ideas. Also, the Writing@CSU teaching guide, “Rhetorical Terminology,” can be found at <http://writing.colostate.edu/references/teaching/rhet-terms/>.

Once students have a general understanding of these terms, you can allow them to self-diagnose their own writing strengths and weaknesses. For example, rather than writing lengthy comments on each student’s homework assignment, ask them to reflect on their papers and think critically about how you arrived at a particular grade.

While evaluating the papers, you might keep a list of the most common strengths and weaknesses for the class as a whole. Then, share this list with students during class and ask them to assess how they handled the criteria. Students will find this easier to accomplish if you include a brief diagnosis at the end of their draft (i.e. strong awareness of audience but focus could use improvement). As they reflect on their work, they should locate specific places in their paper to improve on and provide suggestions in the margins in case they decide to revise later. Encourage students to share specific examples with the class, citing where they did something well or noting an area for improvement. Also, offer your assistance (during office hours) to those who have difficulty assessing their work.