# TEACHING AND ASSESSING GRAMMAR IN THE WRITING CLASSROOM



# Assessing Grammar Effectively

#### This presentation will cover:

- Ways to address grammar in the writing classroom.
- Methods of marking grammatical errors in student papers.
- Grammar resources for students outside the classroom.



### Students and Grammar

Students' relationship with grammar is often an antagonistic one. They may believe that...

- Grammar isn't as important as expression.
- If they're bad at grammar, then they're bad writers.
- Writing is only a matter of grammar.



## Grammar in the Classroom

#### However...

- •Grammar mistakes can distract the reader from their ideas/expression.
- •Grammar affects a writer's ethos:
  - Did the writer seem educated?
  - Did s/he appear to take the work seriously?
  - Tools like spell check aren't always accurate.



## Grammar in the Classroom

#### Methods of including grammar instruction:

Weekly "mini" lessons.

Student grammar presentations.

Conference "tutorials."

Independent study guide and test.



## Weekly Mini-Lessons

#### If your strength is lecture:

- •Choose a common error you've noticed in students' papers that week.
- •Illustrate the error in context.
  - Bring photocopies of a paper excerpt.
  - Work on an overhead copy.
- Offer methods of recognizing the error.
- •Have students work in pairs on a sample text



## Weekly Mini-Lessons

- •Inform students early on that their papers will be used as sample texts.
- Don't identify the writers of sample papers.
- Nobody wants to be the "bad example."
- •Give students a chance to identify/fix the error before you give it away.
- Let students do the work



#### If you're a fan of group work:

- •Have students pair up and draw grammar topic from a hat.
- On their scheduled day, each pair will:
  - Give a 10-minute presentation.
  - Create an accompanying handout for the class.
- ■Encourage students to make presentations fun (quiz shows with prizes, role playing, etc.).



- Point students to resources like the OWL or a writing handbook.
- Make sure students understand the grammatical jargon they encounter/use. Will their audience understand it?
- Meet with pairs during conferences to preview their presentations.



#### If you need to use conference time:

- Address grammar one-on-one in context.
- Using the student's recent writing:
  - Focus on one pattern of error at a time
  - Have the student identify and correct the errors in his/her own paper
  - Model revision techniques/alternatives



- ■Don't overwhelm the student. Focus on only one or two errors per conference.
- •Give students a mini-assignment or goal for next time:
  - Example: Eliminate comma splices in your next paper.
  - Example: Be able to summarize the rules for semicolon use.



# Independent Study Guide

#### If you're a proponent of individual study:

- •Hand out a packet of grammar study materials at the beginning of the semester.
- •Use a sample text each week to illustrate a grammar rule from the packet.
- Hold a class review session.
- Schedule a test or quizzes over the materials



# Independent Study Guide

- Give students opportunities to see the grammar rules and concepts in context.
- Review rules and concepts in conferences.
- Have students work on sample texts in class.



### Making Grammatical Errors

#### When you're grading papers:

- •Focus on a **pattern** of error.
- Correct only the first instance of an error.
- ■Place a check mark in the margin beside the line where the error occurs.
- Discuss patterns during conferences.
- •Resist the urge to edit—let the student do the work!



# **Proofreading Strategies**

Discuss proofreading strategies in class and encourage students to:

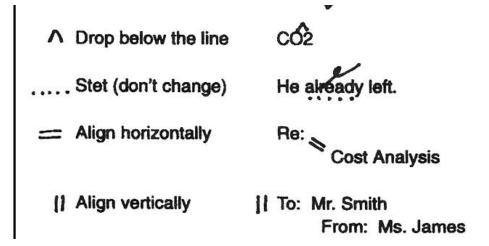
- 1. Read their papers out loud.
- 2. Have a friend or roommate read it out loud while they look on.





# Proofreading Strategies

- 3. Read backwards (from last sentence to first) in order to focus the brain on sentence-level error.
- 4. Print a paper copy and edit by hand. Give students a handout of editorial symbols to help them.
- Insert a dash or change a hyphen to a dash
  Spell out
  Use lowercase letter
  Capitalize
  She's here finally!
  Speople
  First Quarter
  Wilbury avenue





# **Grading Follow-Up**

#### Tips:

- 1. Encourage students to review and work on their errors:
- 2. Discuss errors during conferences.
- 3. Have each student review and summarize comments on his/her paper.
- 4. How will s/he recognize and correct this error from now on?



## THANK YOU

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