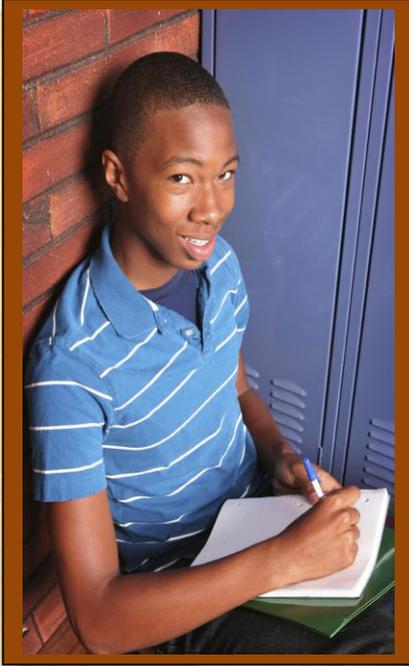


The Kentucky Writing Program: Creating a Culture of Feedback and Analysis

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KY DEPT OF EDUCATION



A system of assessing students' writing and communication skills balanced with effective feedback will guide schools in developing students as successful communicators for the 21st century world of work. As teachers become more skillful at providing feedback in a way that impacts students' motivation to learn, the learning culture of the classroom can flourish. When teachers collaborate to analyze student work in order to inform their instruction as well as schoolwide decision-making, the school transforms into a learning community for teachers and students.

This resource is designed to provide practical advice for educators to develop a system of ongoing feedback and analysis within their school. The topic is approached at three levels:

- ✓ classroom level descriptive feedback
- ✓ team level analysis of student work
- ✓ school level analysis of student work

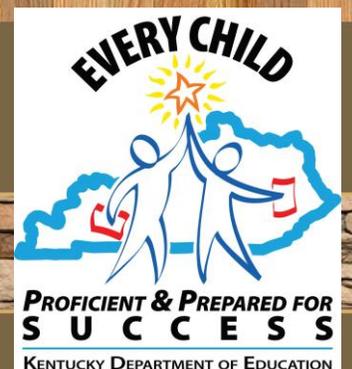
Each section describes the importance of feedback and/or analysis at that level, followed by practical information for implementation. Several resources are referenced to indicate where you can learn more.

According to *Making Writing Instruction a Priority in America's Middle and High Schools* (2007, Alliance for Excellent Education), "To prepare for college and the modern workplace, middle and high school students will need to write extensively, immersing themselves in various kinds of texts and learning how to communicate to many different audiences, for many different purposes."

No matter what grade we teach, we need to acknowledge the urgency of developing students' writing and communication skills. Effective feedback and analysis of student work can help us do just that.

Learn more about effective student feedback and Rick Stiggins' work on "Assessment for Learning" at <http://www.assessmentinst.com/author/rick-stiggins/>

KENTUCKY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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DIVISION OF CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT



Classroom Level: Effective Student Feedback

The Power of Feedback

IF ONLY we could help our students see the connection between effort and success. We all want our students to be independent thinkers and effective communicators, but do we provide them what they need to take charge of their learning? All too often, we are caught up assigning grades without giving students the information they need to improve. We may even hinder progress if students feel they have failed *again*. Grades certainly have their place and purpose when a summative assessment is needed for a report card or for grading a final product. However, we can better help our students develop their communication skills by using formative assessment combined with descriptive feedback as learning takes place. Summative grades then become more meaningful and less surprising to students.

If students know the learning target and are given clear information (descriptive feedback) on where they are in reaching that target, in addition to what next steps would move learning forward, progress is more likely to occur. Even small accomplishments are likely to build students' confidence in their ability to learn, thus increasing effort. By providing specific feedback to students, we shift the ownership of learning from teacher to student. This is the power of descriptive feedback.

“Formative assessment *does* make a difference, and it is the quality, not just the quantity, of feedback that merits our closest attention. By quality of feedback, we now realize we have to understand not just the technical structure of the feedback (such as its accuracy, comprehensiveness and appropriateness) but also its accessibility to the learning (as a communication), its catalytic and coaching value, and its ability to inspire confidence and hope.”

Anne Davies, in *Feed Back ...Feed Forward: Using Assessment to Boost Literacy Learning*, provides a list of what she thinks the research says is key to effective student feedback.

Feedback:

- ✓ comes during, as well as after, the learning
- ✓ is easily understandable and related directly to the learning
- ✓ is specific so performance can improve
- ✓ involves choice on the part of the learner as to what and how to receive feedback
- ✓ is part of an ongoing conversation about learning
- ✓ is in comparison to models, exemplars or descriptions
- ✓ is about the performance or the work, not the person

Feedback on students' writing and communication skills can take many forms in the classroom and can be between teacher and student or between students. Here are just a few examples:

- one-on-one conversations and small group or whole class discussion
- student-friendly rubrics (and rubrics co-developed by teachers and students) that allow identification of where students are in achieving a learning target and next steps for progressing learning
- students' comparison of their assessment results to learning targets in order to identify areas of accomplishment and areas for improvement
- written notes/comments on student work that identify strengths and a specific focus for improvement
- small response groups where students provide feedback on identified criteria
- comparison of student work to models used during instruction
- student self-reflection followed by conversation with teacher

Sadler, D.R. 1998. Formative Assessment: Revisiting the Territory. *Assessment in Education*., 5(1).

Developing Student Ownership of Learning

Students are more likely to take ownership in developing their learning objectives when:

- *learning targets and rubrics are communicated and understandable for the student*
- *feedback is clear and descriptive*
- *feedback is provided often, on a regular basis and allows time for revision before any grade is assigned*
- *feedback is provided in a positive manner that allows students to set their own goals for achievement*

Resources on effective feedback

Brookhart, Susan M. 2008. *How to Give Effective Feedback to Your Students*. Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Fisher, Douglas, and Frey, Nancy. 2007. *Checking for Understanding*. Association for Supervisions and Curriculum Development.



It's All About HOW We Provide Feedback to Students

We all know the importance of providing feedback to students in a manner which is both supportive and informative. How teachers provide feedback determines whether learning is hindered or enhanced. As teachers, we may need to think differently about how we communicate with students about their achievement. If we remember that the goal is to impact learning, then we provide students a means for constant improvement to their skill sets. When we provide feedback that is descriptive about the learning accomplished and identify the next steps in learning, students' skills progress. Such on-going communication between teachers and students about feedback can help develop the environment students need to take charge of their learning.

“When we use assessment to meet students’ informational needs while there is still time for them to take action on the information to influence the final grade, we increase student’s motivation to achieve.”
Classroom Assessment for Student Learning, Rick Stiggins et al.

Team Level: Productive Analysis

Why Work Collaboratively

According to DuFour, Eaker and DuFour (2005) in *On Common Ground: The Power of Professional Learning Communities*, “Educators cannot help all students learn at high levels unless they work together collaboratively.” One of the most effective ways to improve student achievement is for teachers to collaboratively analyze student work and modify instruction accordingly. Although there are many purposes for professional learning communities, one of the most valuable ways to spend this time is looking at student work. Through ongoing discussion with other educators, teachers learn to take a close look at the connection between what students produce, instruction and the expected learning target. Teachers learn from each other as they reflect upon both what worked and what didn’t work so well, and they use that information to make future instructional decisions.



As teachers meet to review student’s writing and communication samples, the discussion should focus on the parts of the instruction, closely examining the instructional sequence to determine its effectiveness. The team may decide upon questions to guide analysis of student work.

The following examples are questions teams may use to lead discussion:

- ✓ How well are students learning the intended skill?
- ✓ Was the skill modeled for students?
- ✓ Were students given opportunities to practice the skill collaboratively?
- ✓ Did students have opportunity for independent practice?
- ✓ How were students provided descriptive feedback and how did they use it?
- ✓ Were students able to reflect on their own learning and provide feedback to their peers?
- ✓ What steps are needed to improve student learning?

“Teachers learn best from other teachers, in settings where they literally teach each other the art of teaching.” --Schmoker, M. (2005) *No Turning Back: the Ironclad Case for Professional Learning Communities*. In DuFour, R., Eaker, R. & DuFour, R. (Eds.) *On Common Ground: The Power of Professional Learning Communities*. Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree .

Establishing a Collaborative Culture

Many teachers prefer working in isolation. However, we know this is not what is best for students. (DuFour, DuFour, & Eaker, 2004). Working collaboratively can be intimidating to even the most seasoned teacher. Sharing their instruction can make educators feel vulnerable to what might seem like criticism. Teachers, just like their students, need to feel safe learning with their colleagues. Successful collaborative teams establish a culture for sharing and learning. One way to develop that culture is to choose, or design, a protocol for sharing student work that focuses on the work, the target and the parts of instruction. Shifting the focus from the teacher's lesson to helping students become successful in achieving a specific learning target helps teachers be more comfortable sharing in a collaborative setting.

Analyzing student work in order to answer guiding questions is one way to focus discussion on student learning. For instance, a science teacher may share her review of PowerPoint presentations developed by her students to teach concepts to the class. She found that students who developed informative presentations also did well on an assessment of the learning targets. On the other hand, students whose presentations lacked the necessary content to demonstrate understanding performed poorly on the assessment. This teacher came to the team with specific questions: What can I do differently to make sure all students show that they understand the content as they develop presentations and how I address the current learning gap? By coming to the group with specific concerns that lead the discussion, teachers are more comfortable sharing what happens in their classroom.

Teachers also may work together to analyze common assessments that were developed collaboratively by those on the team. It's more likely that each may show greater success on specific questions. Teachers can share instructional strategies they feel helped students reach the target. Likewise, they can work together to plan to address gaps overall. Careful analysis of each question and the corresponding instructional support drives the discussion.

Two minds are definitely better than one. Think what can be accomplished with all the minds of a team of teachers. Only by stepping out of a comfort

zone and seeing the impact of a professional learning community will teachers begin to feel comfortable sharing that part of their classrooms. But as they begin to see results, they'll surely deem such collaborative work one of the best professional learning opportunities they will ever do.



Helpful Resources on Developing Effective Collaborative Teams

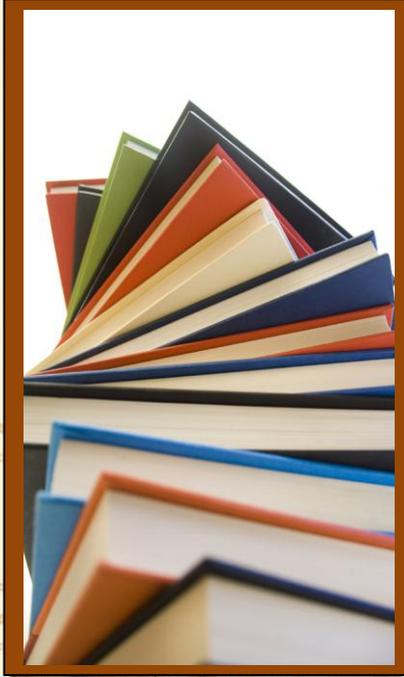
Schmoker, M. (2006). *Results Now: How We Can Achieve Unprecedented Improvements in Teaching and Learning*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Dufour, R., DuFour, R., Eaker, R., & Karhanek, G. (2004). *Whatever It Takes: How Professional Learning Communities Respond When Kids Don't Learn*. Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree.

Moving to the Next Level

Teachers analyzing student work at the team level may share a variety of student communications produced during the learning process. This may include media presentations, recorded speeches, writing to learn or to demonstrate learning samples and drafts for publication. Some of these samples may be part of the student's portfolio collection showcasing their best work, interests and learning process. It is useful to periodically review these collections, not only inform whole class instruction, but to identify implications for the school's overall writing and communications program. This is often completed at the school level.

School Level: Writing Analysis



“Writing is the purposeful act of thinking and expression that uses language to explore ideas and communicate meaning to others. It is a complex, multifaceted act of communication.”

Writing, as defined by KRS 158.6453

Why Complete a Portfolio Analysis?

Completing an analysis of students’ writing portfolios provides teachers and leadership with valuable information that can be used for ongoing improvement. Whether portfolios are paper or digital, a structured analysis can identify strengths and weaknesses in your school’s writing and communications program. It will also target areas for revision to the program that will make the most impact on student learning.

School leadership can use the data to refine the school’s program, continuing to build on overall students’ strengths and addressing areas of need in writing and communication skills.

Teachers can use the data provided to address classroom instructional needs. The best scenario would be for teachers to plan together to meet the communication needs of their students.

Getting Started

Preparing for the writing portfolio analysis:

- Choose the grade level for the review process.
- Familiarize faculty with the tool you will use to review student work. You may also need to familiarize faculty with appropriate expectations for writing at the grade level being reviewed.

***Note:** The templates linked to this model use the language from the Kentucky Analytical Writing Rubric. You may choose to use another tool as selected by your school/district. Therefore, you may wish to modify the forms provided here.*

- Assign portfolios to reviewers.
- Familiarize reviewers with the forms and review process before they begin the analysis.

Materials you will need:

- ✓ A [Portfolio Analysis Data Sheet](#) for each reviewer
- ✓ A [Portfolio Analysis Reflection Sheet](#) for each reviewer
- ✓ Chart paper
- ✓ Markers

Completing the Analysis

Depending on access to portfolios (especially if portfolios are digital), steps 1-3 may occur independently with the expectation for completion before meeting whole group. Team and whole group sharing comprise steps 4-5.

Step 1: Review the student's entire portfolio.

After reviewing the student's entire portfolio, respond on the *Portfolio Analysis Data Sheet* as shown on the form to indicate if the portfolio reflects the following:

- writing process
- writing across content areas
- authentic writing & communications activities
- student's interest
- variety of audiences, purposes & forms for communicating
- valuable, descriptive feedback on student's communication skills

Step 2: Read the polished student samples in the portfolio.

- Read 3-4 student samples ready for publication.
- Respond on the *Analysis Data Sheet* to identify areas of strength and areas for improvement.

Step 3: Complete the analysis reflection.

Review the completed *Portfolio Analysis Data Sheet*. Complete the *Portfolio Analysis Reflection Sheet* based on the data you collected. You will identify the overall areas of strength and areas of concern. You'll also reflect on how your findings might inform the school's writing and communications program.

Group Discussion

Step 4: Work in small teams to share your findings/reflection.

- Share your findings with your table team.
- As a table, **identify and chart** the overall strengths of your school's writing and communications program as reflected in the student portfolios.
- **Identify and chart** the overall needs as shown by your data.
- Next, make a **collective recommendation** for improvement based on what your team feels the data shows is the most critical area of need. **Chart** your recommendation.

Step 5: Share strengths, needs and recommendations with whole group.

- Share strengths and recommendations.
- Discuss recommendations for the school's writing & communications program. Determine which recommendations the reviewers feel would make the most impact on student learning.



Revising the School's Writing & Communications Program

Once the writing portfolio analysis has been completed by faculty, leadership teams can review the recommendations made by staff and plan revisions to the school's writing and communications program.

The following questions may guide you.

- Which recommendation(s) will make the most impact on student learning?
- What are the implications of the revision to time, planning, instruction, support and professional learning?
- Who will develop an implementation plan for revisions to the writing and communications program?
- How will the plan be implemented and monitored?

A Longitudinal Look

Once the faculty is comfortable with a school level analysis, administrators may choose to expand the analysis to include a longitudinal look at student work. Put simply, this means reviewing data across grade levels to see if students are progressing as they should to meet grade level expectations. A longitudinal look can help answer questions such as the following.

- ✓ Are students' writing and communication skills progressing as they should be to meet grade level standards?
- ✓ Are there gaps that need to be addressed schoolwide?
- ✓ Can areas of strength be identified upon which teachers scaffold instruction?
- ✓ How can we ensure that all students are progressing to meet grade level standards?

A longitudinal review means modifying the schoolwide analysis as described in the previous section. Although schools would determine what data they most want to collect, one way is to collect longitudinal data at the highest grade level, specifically looking at how students' skills progressed over the years. If this is a large number of students, a sampling could provide the data necessary to inform the school's program.



The power of ongoing feedback and analysis is in identifying how to move students forward in their learning. All three levels of analysis described in this publication are important steps in developing a system of ongoing improvement to a school's program and for creating a schoolwide culture of learning for students and faculty alike.

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Writing Portfolio Analysis Reflection
Complete the following based on the data you collected.

Portfolio Collection Overview

1. What are the areas of strength you noticed in the portfolio collections?

2. Do you have areas for concern as reflected in the portfolio collections?

Writing/Communications Skills Analysis

3. What are the most significant areas of strength in overall student skill development?

4. What are the most significant areas for improvement in student skill development?

Implications of your findings

5. How might your findings inform the school's writing and communications program to improve student learning?