Grading English Language Learners
Summary of insights from a CFDE panel on April 10, 2017

Panelists:
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Research says things often fall apart at the sentence level when writers of all experience levels move to a new genre such as a lab report, a research paper or, short essay, because the brain is focusing so intensely on the bigger picture issues of the new genre.

1. ACADEMIC WRITING IS A GENRE

Just as science fiction, romance novels, and fantasy are all genres of writing with their own conventions, so too is academic writing. One can think of a genre as a way of "grouping texts together, representing how writers typically use language" in a particular setting (Hyland 2013). Academic genres include essays, laboratory reports, case studies, book reviews, research proposals etc. Different disciplines also have their own expectations and conventions.

Tips
When working with students' writing, make clear the conventions of your discipline, and of the specific writing project students are being asked to undertake. This will help students learning to use English in an academic writing setting.

- Look at the genre and help students understand the conventions of the genre i.e. a research paper; a book review; a grant proposal
- ALIGN writing practice with the purpose of the paper
- Provide models and opportunities for students to discuss language choices with respect to the genre
- Leverage students' analytical skills to help them develop their skills as writers.

Create style sheets with clear expectations
 These guidelines are good for many forms of academic writing:

- **Guideline 1. Choose single verb over two words**

- Original: "Researchers looked at the way ground pressure builds up in an earthquake.
- Revision: "Researchers observed the way ground pressure accumulates in an earthquake."

- **Guideline 2. Choose action verbs rather than "get" or "do"**
  - Original: "Researchers did calculations for building stress using varying…"
  - Revision: "Researchers calculated for building stress using varying…"

- **Guideline 3. Eliminate casual informal terms "a lot of;" 'a bunch"**
  - Original: "There were a lot of findings…"
  - Revision: "There were extensive findings…."

- **Guideline 4. Use active voice**
  - Original: DiseaseX was discovered by teams of researchers…"
  - Revision: "Teams of researchers discovered…."

Create check lists that students can use to review their own writing.

SAMPLE CHECKLIST SHEET

Guideline	Your responsibility
1.	Change two or more word verbs to one
2.	Replace weak verbs (get, do, did) with action verbs "ie "did…" to "conducted"
3.	Replace informal terminology
4.	Replace passive voice with active voice.

Use data to help students see patterns:

For example, the table below summarizes the findings of over 80 different academic journals revealing the most frequent verbs used for citation (Hyland, 1999). Data like this can assist students in selecting words when attempting to meet the expectations of their discipline.

Disciplines	Verb Frequency Low	Verb frequency Medium	Verb frequency High
Biology	describe	report	observe
Nursing	find	identify	show
Philosophy	say	claim	think

Sociology	argue	describe	discuss
Psychology	Find	Suggest	focus

2. APPROACHES TO ASSESSING STUDENT WRITING

Rubrics create contexts for students so that they understand the expectation for the assignment. Some professors like to provide rubrics, others feel that students need to learn independently.

Sample rubric:

MLA (Total 13 points)	Score	Instructor's Notes
Layout of paper (2 points)		
Documentation of Sources (11 points)		
LANGUAGE USE (Total 37 points)		
Mechanics (2 points)		
Grammar and Sentence Structure (30 points)		
Vocabulary (5 points)		
CONTENT (Total 50 points)		
Introduction (15 points)		
Body Paragraphs (25 points)		
Conclusion (10 points)		
SATISFIES ASSIGNMENT GUIDELINES		

Correcting errors

There are different approaches to the degree to which a teacher should be involved in correcting errors. Some experts favor close attention to word choice, and edit a lot. Others prefer a more holistic approach.

Direct: (instructor provides the correct form)
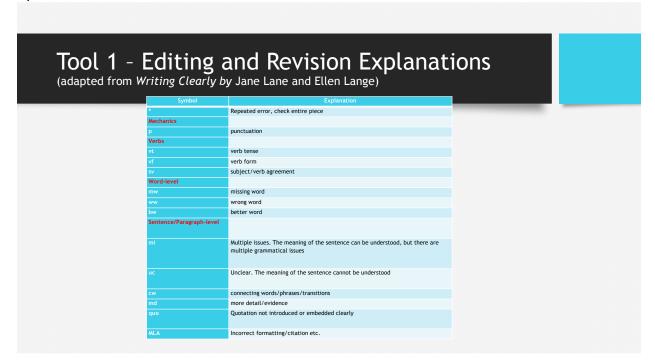*Indirect* (instructor indicates where the error is BUT not what it is)
Direct Indirect (Instructor indicates where AND what type of error has been made)

Example of Indirect feedback
Michelle Cox, multilingual writing expert says:

a. Read the whole draft before making any comments, so as to get the sense of what the student is trying to say
b. Give feedback appropriate to the stage of the draft: more holistic feedback early, more detailed local feedback in more finished drafts
c. Highlight areas needing editing, do not edit for the student.
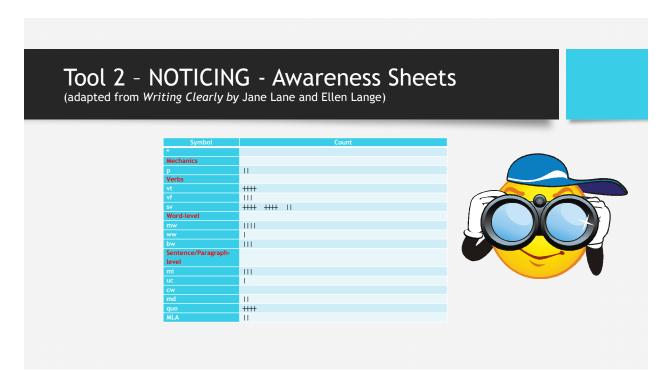
Example of Direct Indirect feedback

Tool 1 provides the student with areas to be careful about, and which will be responded to by the teacher.

Tool 1 – Editing and Revision Explanations
(adapted from *Writing Clearly* by Jane Lane and Ellen Lange)

Symbol	Explanation
*	Repeated error, check entire piece
Mechanics	
p	punctuation
Verbs	
vt	verb tense
vf	verb form
sv	subject/verb agreement
Word-level	
mw	missing word
ww	wrong word
bw	better word
Sentence/Paragraph-level	
mi	Multiple issues. The meaning of the sentence can be understood, but there are multiple grammatical issues
uc	Unclear. The meaning of the sentence cannot be understood
cw	connecting words/phrases/transitions
md	more detail/evidence
quo	Quotation not introduced or embedded clearly
MLA	Incorrect formatting/citation etc.

The slide below shows how the teacher uses the terms in grading.

Use in Student Work

The *Mayflower* settled down in Plymouth, which was not their intended destination.

Comment [JC01]: ww

Starvation was one of the hardships that early colonists went through.

Comment [JC02]: it

Due to the economical benefits involved, it was very reasonable for him to pay for lawyers in order to get Shee into America.

Comment [JC03]: wf

Fortunately, they finally got a good life. "

Comment [JC04]: bw
Comment [JC05]: bw

Tool 2 helps the students reflect on the comments received. They fill in the sheet after seeing the teacher's assessment. This helps create awareness and leads to greater attention to grammar and word choice when writing.

Tool 2 – NOTICING - Awareness Sheets
(adapted from *Writing Clearly by* Jane Lane and Ellen Lange)

Symbol	Count
•	
Mechanics	
p	II
Verbs	
vt	++++
vf	III
sv	++++ ++++ II
Word-level	
mw	IIII
ww	I
bw	III
Sentence/Paragraph-level	
mi	III
uc	I
cw	
md	II
quo	++++
MLA	II

3. HELPFUL LINKS AND ARTICLES
- http://awelu.srv.lu.se/genres-and-text-types/writing-in-academic-genres/

- http://sokogskriv.no/en/reading/academic-genres/
- Presentation by Mackenzie Bristow
- Presentation by Mandy Suhr-Sytsma
- Presentation by Jane O'Connor
- Hyland, K. (1999). "Academic attribution: Citation and the construction of disciplinary knowledge." *Applied linguistics*, *20*(3), 341-367.
- Hyland, K. 2013. *Genre and Second Language Writing.* Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2013. *Project MUSE*
- Michelle Cox handouts

Emory offices
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Emory College of Arts and Sciences, Writing Center
Laney Graduate School: English Language Support Program
Rollins School of Public Health, International Students' Support Services