

Step 9: Understanding Comments on a Graded Paper



The Writing Center

Comments on a graded paper are one of the best ways to improve writing skills. The instructor uses comments to explain why a student received a certain grade, and more importantly to suggest how to improve. It is important to read these comments, try to understand and learn from them, and then apply them to the old paper and future ones.

Steps to Complete

1. Get in the right frame of mind. It is hard sometimes not to take grades personally, but try to remember that it is your writing that is being critiqued, not you. The instructor is trying to help you learn, and most learning involves some mistakes. If you can think of it that way, the comments will be much less intimidating and more helpful.
2. Read ALL the comments on the paper.
3. Highlight or make a list of any comments you do not understand and learn how to fix them. You should ask your teacher, the Writing Center, or a classmate for help with these.
4. Reread the comments that are clear to you and make two lists: (1) mistakes you made; (2) what you need to do to improve.
5. Once you understand all the comments and know how to correct them, use the old paper as practice. Correct the paper, rewrite sentences, etc.
6. Before you write another paper, decide what you need to do differently and use the new skills you practiced.

Areas of Concern

Many comments will be directed toward some of the areas below. If you are weak in a certain area, you can use the questions below to help you decide what you need to do better.

Content: Were the directions followed? Is there adequate, reputable evidence? Is that evidence explained? Are the ideas fully developed?

Organization: Is the thesis and organization identifiable? Are the paragraphs structured? Are there transitions? Are the introduction and conclusion effective?

Style/Tone: Are the tone, word choice, and style appropriate for the paper and the audience? Is the sentence structure interesting? How effectively are style and tone used?

Mechanics: Are there many grammar, sentence, or spelling errors?

Format: Is the heading correct? Are there page numbers; is there an appropriate title? Are the citations and works cited page done accurately?

Use the worksheet on the reverse side to make your lists.

Graded Paper Worksheet

Use this sheet to make lists about the comments and your ideas for improvement. Then learn about items you do not understand and apply this new knowledge to your old paper for practice.

In this box, list comments you do not understand.

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Mistakes made

How to fix

Mistakes made	How to fix

In this box, list how you can improve each area.

Content
Organization
Style/Tone
Mechanics
Format

Editing Symbols and Abbreviations

The tables below might help you to decipher some of the comments on your paper. If you can't read a comment on your paper, be sure to ask your instructor.

Tables from: "Proofreading Symbols and Abbreviations." The Learning Center Website at Capital Community College n.d. 9 June 2005

<<http://webster.commnet.edu/writing/symbols.htm>>.

Common Proofreading Symbols

Symbol	Meaning	Example
	insert a comma	The mayor's brother, I tell you, is a crook.
	apostrophe or single quotation mark	I wouldn't know where to put this vase.
	insert something	I know it, in fact, everyone knows it. }
	use double quotation marks	My favorite poem is "Design."
	use a period here	This is a declarative sentence .
	delete	The elephant's trunk is is really its nose.
	transpose elements	He only picked the one he likes.
	close up this space	Jordan lost his favorite basket ball.
	a space needed here	I have only three# friends: Ted, Raoul, and Alice.
	begin new paragraph	"I knew it," I said. # "I thought so," she replied.
	no paragraph	"I knew it, she said. # # "He's no good."

Common Proofreading Abbreviations

(The abbreviation would appear in the margin, probably with a line or arrow pointing to the offending element.)

Abbreviation	Meaning	Example
Ab	a faulty abbreviation	She had earned a Phd along with her M.D.
Agr See also P/A and S/V	agreement problem: subject/verb <i>or</i> pronoun/antecedent	The piano as well as the guitar need tuning. The student lost their book.
Awk	awkward expression or construction	The storm had the effect of causing millions of dollars in damage.
Cap	faulty capitalization	We spent the Fall in Southern Spain.
CS	comma splice	Raoul tried his best, this time that wasn't good enough
DICT	faulty diction	Due to the fact that we were wondering as to whether it would rain, we stayed home.
Dgl	dangling construction	Working harder than ever, this job proved to be too much for him to handle.
- ed	problem with final <i>-ed</i>	Last summer he walk all the way to Birmingham.
Frag	fragment	Depending on the amount of snow we get this winter and whether the towns buy new trucks.
 	problem in parallel form	My income is bigger than my wife.
P/A	pronoun/antecedent agreement	A student in accounting would be wise to see their advisor this month.
Pron	problem with pronoun	My aunt and my mother have wrecked her car The committee has lost their chance to change things. You'll have to do this on one's own time.
Rep	unnecessary repetition	The car was blue in color.
R-O	run-on sentence	Raoul tried his best this time that wasn't good enough.
Sp	spelling error	This sentence is flaude with two misspellings.
- s	problem with final <i>-s</i>	He wonder what these teacher think of him.
STET	Let it stand	The proofreader uses this Latin term to indicate that proofreading marks calling for a change should be ignored and the text as originally written should be "let stand."
S/V	subject/verb agreement	The problem with these cities are leadership.
T	verb tense problem	He comes into the room, and he pulled his gun.
Wdy	wordy	Seldom have we perused a document so verbose, so ostentatious in phrasing, so burdened with too many words.
WW	wrong word	What affect did the movie have on Sheila? She tried to hard to analyze its conclusion.