

Tips for Correcting Students' Essays

(Based on comments by CSM ESL Professor Amy Sobel)

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- 1) Look at a paragraph or essay's content and structure before you look at its grammar. If you know that your student is turning in multiple drafts, don't check grammar until the final or next-to-final draft.

- 2) When correcting grammar, focus on the grammar points being discussed in class. If you don't know what those are, ask your student or ask to see the syllabus.

- 3) When correcting grammar, try to focus on one or two errors that the student makes multiple times; then circle several examples of the error (but not all examples.) Work with the student to help the student identify the error (rather than telling the student what the error is.) One way to do this is to give the student an example of two sentences that use the grammar construct: one correctly and one incorrectly. Then ask the student to choose the correct sentence and tell you why. Once your student has corrected the circled errors, ask them to find other instances of the error that you haven't circled.

- 4) Ask your student to see assignments that their professor has returned. Reviewing those will give you a sense of what the professor views as important. Also, students frequently don't take the time to carefully review the corrections their professor makes, so you may want to review the corrections together.

- 5) If your student emails you a copy of an essay to review, avoid the temptation to correct the errors and send it back. Rather, follow the advice above: Find a few similar errors, circle them, and send back the draft to the student. ESL professors expect essays to have some errors.