

Ideas for Grading from Maxine Hairston

1. Sit on your hands and read the students' papers through the first time without error at the front of your mind. Read for content. The second time you won't notice as many errors. Your students will not write anything they cannot spell, punctuate, or arrange correctly if they think you are error-hunting.
2. Create a positive, supportive atmosphere in the classroom. Write yourself and share your writing with your students. Be enthusiastic about writing, not about rules.
3. Stress positive results in your classroom. Duplicate good student answers and essays and analyze them with your students so they can see why they are good.
4. Show your students how the writing process works, guiding them through drafts of a paper and emphasizing the generative and tentative nature of the process. Don't shut off communication with premature judgments.
5. During the drafting stage, act as a coach, not a judge. Try to make nonthreatening, facilitative comments that suggest options rather than prescribe solutions.
6. Arrange for students to help each other as much as possible; set up groups in which they help each other generate ideas, plan papers, and do guided revisions of each other's work. Shift some of the burden of evaluation to peers.
7. Set priorities about errors. Focus on those that are the most damaging and mark only them, although you may comment that other errors are present. Remember you are not a copy editor for student papers. Neither are you your students' coauthor. Don't rewrite their papers.
8. Make students responsible for their own learning. Stress that if they want to improve their grammar and mechanics for their own benefit, they have to take the initiative and follow through on the task.
9. Turn your class into a writing lab at intervals and have students work on their papers while you help them. Also have them help each other. Point out that professionals consult their colleagues--so can they.
10. Spend class time teaching students how to revise. When you make a comment on a paper, think about how the student can use that comment to improve his or her writing.
11. Always say something positive about student writing and give only as much negative criticism as you think that student can handle.
12. Suggest one major thing the student can do to improve his or her writing.