

## Responding to Low-Stakes Writing

### **Zero Response- lowest stakes**

Be clear and honest with students about needing to require more writing from them than you can comment on to avoid feelings of deprivation or resentment. Most students come to appreciate the chance to write with the knowledge that they will be heard but will not have to deal with your response.

### **Minimal Response- nonverbal, noncritical response**

We can note effective or strong or correct passages by simply putting a straight line underneath particular words or phrases or alongside longer sections. The advantages of this type of response are: it's quick and it gives feedback at the same time that it offers encouragement; students benefit from having good ideas pointed out.

### **Supportive Response- no criticism**

Simple underlining is not enough, e.g., “You chose a good approach to your topic,” or, “You write with a clear and lively voice.” This kind of response does the most good with the least effort because you're not asking them to do something new, but to keep doing what they're already doing well.

### **Minimal Response- nonverbal critical response**

You can also create a sense of reader presence by putting wavy or wiggly lines underneath words or alongside passages that are unclear or problematic or wrong.

### **Critical Response- diagnosis, advice**

The higher we go on the continuum, the more we need to ask the crucial pragmatic questions: Is this comment worth it? How much response do I need? How much criticism will be useful? What is the likelihood of my effort doing good or harm?

Based on:

Elbow, Peter. “High Stakes and Low Stakes in Assigning and Responding to Writing.” *New Directions in Teaching and Learning*. 69 (Spring 1997). 5-13.