**EWP Statement on Assessment of and Feedback on Grammar Correctness**

**Context**

English Language Learners (ELLs) are a vibrant addition to our composition classrooms, contributing to our campus’ linguistic and cultural diversity and enriching the perspectives students bring to the work of reading and writing in our classes.  Like all admitted UW students, ELL students have met and exceeded admissions requirements and are highly qualified. Like many UW students, some of these ELL students will also need additional support as they continue to develop their English language proficiency.  While the Expository Writing Program is working to offer sufficient support for our instructors to ensure both they and their students have access to the resources and best practices they need to foster success in the writing classroom (to learn more about these resources and best practices, please consult the EWP website), this statement is meant to clarify instructor responsibilities as well as EWP expectations for assessing and giving feedback on grammar correctness in student writing.

Assessing and giving feedback on papers seems to be of particular concern for many instructors, primarily because many of us are unclear about the level of attention we should be paying to grammar errors. When responding to early drafts of ELL student writing, research and experience have taught us to “read through” grammar errors (in other words, to prioritize and selectively mark but “read through” grammar errors) in order to attend to the “higher order” content-based issues such as argument, analysis, use of evidence, and organization which. These "higher order" skills, as evidenced by the first three EWP Outcomes, are the most important skills taught in a writing class, and research has shown they are also the skills most likely to improve over the course of a quarter. This does not mean, however, that we should ignore "lower order" concerns such as grammar, particularly repeated errors that interfere with comprehension, and ELL students miss an opportunity to learn when we ignore their grammar mistakes. Rather, the goal should be to help empower students—ELLs and native speakers alike—to become self-editors of their own work and to research their grammar errors as a means to learn through self-correction.

**Expectations**

While we cannot realistically expect ELL students to achieve native speaker accuracy in a span of eleven weeks, or even four years for that matter, we can and should expect ELL students to self-edit their work, a skill at which students can become more proficient in eleven weeks with the support of feedback from composition instructors, writing centers and peers, and access to effective resources (such as handbooks) related to grammar, usage, and style.  Indeed, students’ ability to self-edit their writing is an important part of the EWP’s Outcome Four, which requires that a student’s portfolio demonstrate the ability to revise, edit, and proofread his or her writing. *In fulfillment of this outcome, we can and should expect students to produce at least one “presentation draft”**(a paper that demonstrates students’ ability to edit their writing) in the graded portion of their portfolios*.

**Practical Applications**

*Self Editing*

Studies have shown that students are able to self-edit their work when teachers circle or mark a check next to grammar errors.  This approach has proven just as effective as when instructors correct or code (using a coding system such as VT for verb tense) the grammar issue for the student. So in most cases cueing students to the presence of an error (without fixing the error or marking what type of error it is) and ensuring that they are aware of the available resources is sufficient for self-editing. In those few cases in which errors prove overwhelming to reading comprehension, an instructor should invite the student to have a conversation with him or her or an ELL consultant as soon as possible as a means to provide greater individualized support.

*Pathways for Cueing and Timing*

When and how we cue our students to error is important, and depends in part on our students’ needs, the number of drafts we have assigned, the degree to which the error interferes with our ability to assess our assignment’s targeted outcomes, and our philosophy as instructors. Timing and context are important. Too much attention to grammar errors on early drafts can cause students to fixate on correcting marked errors rather than developing ideas. Too little attention to grammar errors until the portfolio sequence can leave students feeling overwhelmed trying to make final revisions while also identifying errors and demonstrating the ability to self-edit. To help instructors decide when and how to respond to error, we haveidentified three pathways instructors can take (please see example courses and calendars designed around the three pathways on the EWP website):

* **First Pathway: *Revision Throughout: Fewer Assignments, Multiple Drafts of Each***

This pathway allows students the opportunity to produce more than one draft of each shorter and major assignment throughout the quarter, with grammar feedback on later drafts. In this approach, instructors focus on higher order concerns in early drafts before prioritizing and selectively marking errors on later drafts, which students then edit during the portfolio sequence. This pathway means assigning fewer short assignments during the first two sequences in order to allow students an opportunity to first address higher order concerns before receiving error markings on a second draft, which they can edit during the portfolio sequence. This pathway can be a good option for instructors who have a high percentage of ELL students, as it provides students with a head start on editing for their portfolios.

* **Second Pathway: *“Higher Order” Feedback and “Lower Order” Cueing for Self-Editing Throughout the Quarter***

This pathway allows students the opportunity to edit drafts throughout the quarter. In this approach, instructors read through but mark student errors selectively from the beginning of the course, taking care to emphasize higher order concerns, and students have the chance to edit their writing along the way. One effective and time saving strategy would be to mark error in only one paragraph and ask students to edit that paragraph on their second draft, which instructors then quickly review. Later during the portfolio sequence, students can then edit the rest of each paper they select for the portfolio. This pathway can be a good option for instructors who only need to target error feedback to the needs of a few students prior to the portfolio sequence.

* **Third Pathway: *Focus on “Higher Order” Feedback all Quarter, Defer Cueing for Grammar Until the Final Portfolio***

This pathway allows for reading through error until the portfolio sequence of the course. In this approach, instructors focus mainly on higher order concerns throughout the first two sequences before attending to grammar concerns during the portfolio sequence. Please keep in mind that for some ELL students this approach can require a lot of grammar and self-editing instruction during the last two weeks of the course, and some students may feel overwhelmed trying to make final portfolio revisions while also identifying errors and demonstrating the ability to self-edit. As such, this option requires that instructors provide the full two weeks allotted for the portfolio sequence.

Assessing students’ needs early on and providing them opportunities to articulate their goals will help instructors decide which pathway to choose. Ideally, no matter which pathway you choose, rather than marking every error, prioritize the most common and severe errors, identify them in a student’s paper, and point the student to grammar resource handbooks and websites, such as *Writer’s Help*.