

## Correction – Part 3

### Correction procedures

Before reading **Correction procedures** by Donn Byrne, make a list of all the possible ways you could respond to mistakes in your students' written work.

Now read **Correction procedures** and complete the following chart:

Things I had thought of that Donn Byrne includes in this extract.	Things I had thought of that Donn Byrne doesn't include in this extract.	Things I hadn't thought of that Donn Byrne includes in this extract.

## Correction procedures

by Donn Byrne

from *Teaching Writing Skills* (Pearson Education 1988) 10.3.

Various correction procedures are examined below.

### **(a) Correct all the mistakes.**

This is of course the traditional approach to the correction of written work.

It is time-consuming for the teacher and discouraging for the students - at least if they get their work back covered with red ink. Apart from that, there must be some doubt about how effective this form of correction is. Some students learn nothing from it; others are more interested in why something is wrong rather than the correction itself. If you can correct something in class, while the students are still engaged in writing and everything is fresh in their minds, this is likely to be more effective than looking at a mass of corrections several days after the event.

Overall, unless the educational system obliges you to carry out this kind of correction, you should consider alternative approaches.

### **(b) Correct mistakes selectively.**

That is, you do not attempt to correct all the mistakes in a piece of writing, but only those in certain areas, such as tenses or articles, either because this is where the students particularly need help or because you have decided to focus attention on these for a while. Certainly this approach is more positive than total correction - in practice, of course, most teachers exercise some form of selection - but it probably needs to be backed up by some form of remedial teaching (see below).

### **(c) Indicate mistakes so that the students can correct them.**

This is normally done by underlining the mistakes and using some kind of symbol to focus the attention of the students on the kind of mistake they have made. For a possible list of these, see the table on the next page.

SYMBOL	MEANING	EXAMPLE
S	Incorrect spelling	I <sup>S</sup> recieved <sup>S</sup> jour letter.
W. O.	Wrong word order	We know <sup>W. O.</sup> well this city. <sup>W. O.</sup> Always I am happy here.
T	Wrong tense	If he <u>will come</u> , it will be too late.
C	Concord Subject and verb do not agree	Two policemen <sup>C</sup> has come. The <sup>C</sup> news are bad today.
WF	Wrong form	We <sup>WF</sup> want that you come. That table is <sup>WF</sup> our.
S/P	Singular or plural form wrong	We need more <sup>S</sup> informations.
h	Something has been left out	They said <sup>h</sup> /was wrong. He hit me <sup>h</sup> on/shoulder.
[ ]	Something is not necessary	It was too <sup>[ ]</sup> much difficult.
? M	Meaning is not clear	Come and <sup>PM</sup> rest with us for a week. The view from here is very <sup>PM</sup> suggestive.
NA	The usage is not appropriate	He <sup>NA</sup> requested me to sit down.
P	Punctuation wrong	Whats <sup>P</sup> your name <sup>P</sup> He asked me what I wanted? <sup>P</sup>

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### TEACHING WRITING SKILLS

Using a list of this kind, you can get the students, individually, in pairs or in small groups, to identify at least most of the mistakes for themselves. If they cannot, then they should consult you. This approach certainly makes them more aware of the kind of mistakes they are making and is therefore likely to result in something being learned. You do not need of course to indicate all the mistakes. In practice, however, it does not solve all the problems. For example, if students are left to identify mistakes for themselves, they may not bother. Even if they work in groups, some form of confirmation may be needed and this could take up a lot of class time in a large class.

If your teaching situation permits, you could try to implement a staged approach for getting the students to correct their own work.

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|----------------|---|
| <i>Stage 1</i> | Underline the mistake and diagnose it by writing the appropriate symbol in the margin.            |
| <i>Stage 2</i> | Underline the mistake but do not diagnose it.   |
| <i>Stage 3</i> | Diagnose the mistake by writing the symbol in the margin but do not show where it is in the line. |
| <i>Stage 4</i> | Put a cross in the margin (for each mistake).   |
| <i>Stage 5</i> | Put a cross against each line with a mistake but do not indicate how many mistakes there are.     |

**(d) Let the students identify and correct their own mistakes.**

This is not a procedure that you are likely to be able to follow all the time. Occasionally, however, you should be prepared to hand over the whole business of correction to the students - which they will generally do scrupulously and with enjoyment.

Other things you can do to help students when they make mistakes are:

**(a) Explain a mistake.**

For example, you can write a comment in the margin or at the end of a piece of written work. This procedure is especially useful for drawing attention to recurrent mistakes in a particular area and when you are able to look at students' work in class.

**(b) Indicate to the students that they should consult you about a mistake.**

This may be used as an alternative to (b) and (c) above. Very often the students themselves can suggest the correction when their attention has been drawn to a mistake.

**(c) Use the mistake as a basis for remedial teaching.**

This procedure should be followed if a sufficient number of students in the class have made a mistake to warrant general correction. Alternatively, you can set individual remedial work. Remedial teaching may take the form of an explanation, where this is felt to be sufficient, or exercises, oral or written, whichever seems to be appropriate, designed to correct the mistake.

Teachers tend to place their faith in one type of correction procedure rather than another. In particular, many do not accept (or only accept with some misgiving) self-correction procedures. In general, however, although it is important to give the students opportunities to correct written work so that they develop a self-critical attitude, it does not seem that one approach is so intrinsically superior that it can be used all the time and you should therefore draw on the various approaches to suit the needs of your students.

