

## Correction – Part 3

### Responding

Before you read **Responding** by Ron White and Valerie Arndt, consider the following question:

What is the difference between correcting a student's written work and 'responding' to it, do you think?

Now read **Responding**. Do the authors agree with you?

## Responding

By Ron White and Valerie Arndt

from Process Writing (Pearson Education 1991) 6.2.

### Responding

In a process approach, reading students' work involves responding to the text as a *reader*, rather than simply as a *marker*. Even if, eventually, the linguistic, stylistic or formal features of the text are evaluated, the first reading should be concerned with meaning and purpose. Doing this requires the exercise of some self-control on the part of teachers more used to reacting to a text as a piece of language.

Obviously, some tact and sensitivity is needed when entering into this new relationship with the writer. So, the teacher-cum-reader must be supportive and helpful in the kinds of comments that are made, accentuating the positive rather than focusing on the negative aspects of what the student has presented.

The activities outlined in 6.1 *Assessing the draft* (pp.117-123) make clear our belief that *students* should also read and respond to each other's work. For it is important that they acquire the habit of judging a text in terms of its meaning for them, and of considering what the writer would need to do to make the text as comprehensible as possible for them as readers. By turning the tables in this way, students will be helped to understand the crucial point that writers write for readers, and that effective writing is influenced by this knowledge. Even when writers are writing for themselves, they are still writing for a reader, in this case the same person as the writer. We all have the experience of having written something for ourselves which, on subsequent reading, is ambiguous or opaque.

Writing which is to be published has to meet even more stringent demands, even when students are writing for each other. 'Publishing' student work, in the sense of 'making it public', whilst not necessarily involving printing and distributing as in the case of a newspaper or book, can help to motivate students by giving them an audience; at the same time, the reading and discussion of each others' work entailed also helps to foster a sense of judgement.

The activities which follow involve three kinds of responding. The first is a personal and individual response by the teacher to the student writer. The second is a public response by the teacher to the work of one student as a whole class activity. The third involves students responding to each other's work.

#### 6.2.1 Reading and responding: Teacher to student

As readers, we have to respond to rather than merely assess our students' writing. And though we may not ostensibly be concerned with the language at this point, one of the virtues of the 'draft-respond-redraft respond-redraft' sequence is that often the language of the product as well as its overall coherence and effectiveness improves as the students try to express their thoughts more clearly and appropriately. A good illustration of this can be found in Mitsuo Toki's texts in the *Introduction* (Figure 2). Some examples of teachers' responses to students' texts will illustrate what is involved in the responding process.

#### Materials Procedure

- Students' own texts.

Read the texts in question, and record your responses to them in writing. The students then use these comments as a basis for redrafting, or you can use them as a starting point for an individual conference with each student (see 6.3.1 Continuing and improving the draft (p.131)).

We find the notes of Frank Diffley and Ronald Lapp (1988) on written feedback a useful guideline for teacher response to students' work. They are as follows:

- Respond in pencil or black ink. Red pens can be threatening.
- Write comments and notes in the margins and avoid comments which correct spelling, grammar and mechanics.
- All comments should be specific and content-related. Avoid comments which can apply to any text.
- Reread your responses and ask yourself if they make sense.
- Ask students for feedback on the responses given to them.
- Respond as a genuine and interested reader rather than as a judge and evaluator ('We should respond not so much to student writing but to student writers.' (Vivian Zamel 1985))

#### *Example 1*

In this example, the task was 'divergent' or open-ended, in that the students had been encouraged to write about the topic - *Family New Year celebrations in your country* (a Cambridge First Certificate topic) - from their own point of view rather than attempting to 'converge' towards any prescribed model in terms of ideas and organisation.

On receiving the students' first drafts, the teacher wrote individual comments in the form of a letter. Here is one student's draft, and the teacher's response to it.

#### **Gabrielle's first draft**

Family celebrations in my country at New Year is very important. They usually, on 31st of December stay until 12:00 o'clock in midnight to wait for New Year and then they visit friends. The meaning of that day for me is that you start a new year with new expectations for the future. You hope that it could be the best year for yourself.

Apart from that, you hope to have a great success in your work or in your studies.

On the other hand, people in Uruguay, use to send greeting cards to their friends and relative (parents, cousins, uncles, nephew, etc.)

However some families get together for that day, I mean grandparents, parents, brothers, sisters, and children. There are some that don't get the custom to join together.

Uruguayans usually have a special dinner. They eat things like pig, like barbecue, veal and kind of salad for example, mixed salad (lettuce and tomatoes) or a Russia salad (potatoes, carrots, peas). they drink any kind of drinks, from coke to wine. There are lot of Uruguayans that get drunk on New Year, specially young people.

On the other hand, the people use to buy bombas and fireworks and all those sort of things. So then, they through the bombas and the fuegos artificiales at the midnight of 31st December. And it is like a explosion everywhere and you look to the dark sky and it seems like a special party. Everywhere there are lights and some things like that.

People go to bed late in the night on 31st December because as you know here in Uruguay is sumer in New Year and so everyone go outside and dance in the streets. Everyone is happy.

### Teacher's response

Dear Gabrielle,

I really enjoyed reading your draft. You have some good expressions, e.g.

*...you look to the dark sky and it seems like a special party* Why don't you begin with that sentence?

e.g.

*I looked up at the dark sky and it seemed like a special party. It was like an explosion everywhere. People were throwing fireworks into the sky and everywhere there were lights.*

Now, at this point you can tell your reader what night it is:

*It was New Year's Eve, and everyone was celebrating.*

Then you can explain what New Year's Eve means in Uruguay, how families and friends come together and how everyone has hopes for the future. You can end by coming back to the idea of fireworks. You can organise your essay to have two times:

Past	<i>I looked up... it seemed ...</i>	Introduction
General present	<i>Family celebrations in Uruguay are very important People usually send greetings to each other...</i>	Body
Past	???	Conclusion

### Example 2

This example is a composition written by an Indonesian student in a teachers' college on the topic

#### **My most unforgettable character.**

What may have started out for most of the students in the group as another tedious writing assignment seemed, for many, to become an essay in self-knowledge and self-disclosure. That it did so points to the need for trust between teacher and learner, and for tact on the part of the teacher in responding to the text.

Virtually all of the writing was, by conventional standards, somewhat sentimental, but it is this very characteristic which engages the reader; the writers had become caught up by and committed to their subject.

Here is the student's essay, and some of the responses made by the teacher to the writer, beginning with an enthusiastic reaction to the story.

#### **My most unforgettable character**

In our life, of course we have experiences or impressions. Whether they are good or bad. Sometimes they are caused of someone's action or come from ourselves so that we cannot forget them forever. As human being who live in society I also have an experience that makes me difficult to forget it. An impressive experience that gave by a girl that I knew as a nurse at

public hospital in this town.

At the end of the year 1982 I had an traffic accident on Jalan Veteran. The accident made my leg broken so that I had to stay for a few months at the hospital. Here, in the hospital was the first time I met the girl.

In a morning when I woke up, a girl with white dress stood beside my bed while greeting me 'good morning'. Being aware that there was somebody greeted me, I then looked to the coming sound. The fact was that the sound came from the girl that I knew her name was 'Nellimurni' the nurse. She was 20 years old, 160 centimetres tall. She has round face and beautiful and wore glasses. Her white and tidy arranged teeth added her beauty when she smiled. These gave me impression that she as a friendly girl. The fact was like that. Because as I stayed at the hospital she always help me whether in the morning or in the afternoon. Even if she did not work she also visit me in my room. Sometimes she brings me fruits, bread, milk, etc. when I noticed her admiringly, she broke my imagination by asking me whether I want to take a bath or wash the face. After thinking about it then I made up my mind just to wash my face and clean my body. Fastly, she prepared everything to help me. After she take care of me she also clean my bed. Before she leave my room I asked her whether she likes to help me next time. In fact, she made up her mind that she was ready to help me as long as I stayed at the hospital. I felt happy that there somebody who like helping me, although I knew that her duty as nurse was taking care of patient. But, for me, her helps was a special attention, because at a public hospital it was rare to find a nurse who want to take care her patient as given to me except if we stayed at V.I.P. room with good facilities.

But, since this last one year I never meet her. I heard from her friends that she moved to Bandung to continue her study. I felt disappointed that she did not tell me when she will move. I lost a friend who had unforgettable characters. Although she had weaknesses, I always remember her. Once, one day I refused her gift. She became angry with me. She did not want to talk with me for a few days. After I explained what happened with me she began understand me. However, she was my most unforgettable character in my life.

#### Teacher's notes

1 I really appreciate your sharing this experience with me. I found your story to be a touching piece of writing.

2 The first two paragraphs could be made more interesting for the reader. How?

3 Try changing the order of events and paragraphs. For instance, you could begin like this:

*In the morning, when I woke up, she stood by my bed. Wearing a white dress, she greeted me, 'Good morning.' I looked around to find the person who was speaking to me. It was Nellimurni, the nurse.*

Or you could begin with your second paragraph.

4 Why is such an opening more interesting for the reader?

5 What other changes will you make if you begin like this?

