Goals

- To explore recent scholarship on assessment.
- To examine how assessment and grading relate to our course objectives.
- To prepare for the General Studies direct assessment of English 110.

Supporting an Instructional Goal
An on-going instructional goal is to connect activities and assignments to the course objectives throughout the semester. We can extend this connection through the grading process by prioritizing criteria related to the course objectives and offering feedback grounded in the language of the objectives.

Assessment and Grading as Critical Practices

1. **What the Assessment Gurus Say:**

   - “Responding to writing does not begin when you start to read student essays; it starts much earlier, at the point when the assignment is made.”

   - “As teachers, we know that most students find it difficult to imagine a reader’s response in advance, and to use such responses as a guide in composing. Thus, we comment on student writing to dramatize the presence of a reader, to help our students to become that questioning reader themselves, because, ultimately, we believe that becoming such a reader will help them to evaluate what they have written and develop control over their writing.”
     (Nancy Sommers, “Responding to Student Writing,” p. 148)

   - Nancy Sommers cautions teachers to keep the goal of the assignment in mind when responding to student writing. She notes, “teachers’ comments can take students’ attention away from their own purposes in writing a particular text and focus that attention on the teachers’ purposes in commenting” (“Responding” 149). Sommers suggests striving for continual reinforcement between comments on students’ writing and classroom instruction and activities.

   - Multiple studies reaffirm the importance of addressing surface-level errors within the context of students’ authentic writing, but research also cautions that students are more likely to apply comments about lower order concerns to their future writing if teachers engage in “minimal marking.” In other words, identifying a few (two or three) categories of errors (i.e., articles, commas after introductory clauses, comma splices, etc.) in each project and prioritizing those that interfere
with meaning will have more impact on future writing than identifying all errors in the project. (See Haswell for one example of a minimal marking strategy.)

2. **Resources**
   Several previous College Writing workshops have focused on assessment and grading. Resources from these workshops are available on Blackboard:

   - Designing Rubrics that Enhance Pedagogy & Clarify Evaluation (Sept 2003)
   - Responding to In-Process Student Writing (Oct 2003)
   - Assessing Student Writing (March 2006)
   - Portfolio Assessment (Nov 2006)
   - Responding to Student Writing (Sept 2007)

**Assessment Practices in English 110**

1. **Survey Results – A Reminder**

   - College Writing/English 110 faculty present evaluation criteria to students in a variety of ways. Most use rubrics, but some also/instead list criteria on their assignment sheets and introduce them during or following peer response. Some faculty list criteria in weighted order.

   - Faculty typically provide feedback in multiple ways. The majority of College Writing faculty use a combination of comments in the margins, terminal/end comments, and a rubric. Some faculty craft a response letter or memo to the writer or give oral feedback during conferences. A few faculty also integrate technology, using comment bubbles in MS Word to anchor their comments to the writers’ texts.

2. **Objectives-Driven Assessment**
   Students must earn a C- or higher in English 110 to satisfy the College Writing graduation requirement, and our objectives state —

   All sections of College Writing aim to develop the following:
   - A more sophisticated writing process—including invention, peer responding, revising and editing—that results in a clear, effective, well edited public piece.
   - A more sophisticated understanding of the relationship of purpose, audience, and voice, and an awareness that writing expectations and conventions vary within the academy and in professional and public discourse.
   - An appreciation for the capacity of writing to change oneself and the world.

   Ideally, if our grades reinforce class discussions and the course objectives (as Sommers promotes), we’ll identify correspondence between what we value and prioritize in our grading and these student learning outcomes.
3. Grading English 110 Projects

- What grades would you assign the sample student projects, given the criteria distributed with the assignment?
- How do your grades reflect the assignment criteria? The course objectives? Other personal beliefs about student writing?
- How do your grades compare to colleagues’ grades for these assignments?
- If your grades differ, can you reach agreement through discussion? If you continue to disagree in your assessment, what is the source of your disagreement?

4. Assessing English 110 Projects for General Studies

- How would you assess these same projects, using the assessment criteria developed for the General Studies assessment of English 110?
- Do you and your colleagues agree on your assessments of the student writing?
- If your assessments differ, can you reach agreement through discussion? If you continue to disagree in your assessment, what is the source of your disagreement?

Upcoming English 110 Events – Mark Your Calendars

- College Writing Showcase Applications due to Faculty, March 21
- Faculty Showcase Nominations due to Jessie, March 31
- Faculty Development Workshop, April 9, 12:15 – 1:15 PM, McEwen 213
- College Writing Showcase, April 28, 5:30 – 7:00