

Some EASY Ideas for Teaching with *A Writer's Reference*

(See also: the new *Teaching with Hacker Handbooks* resource)

Grammar HOTLINE

On your class's eLearning site, set up a GRAMMAR HOTLINE as a discussion prompt. This prompt will be devoted to dealing with grammar questions for the entire semester.

Ask your students to post their grammar questions in response to the prompt. Their classmates will be responsible for using their Hacker handbook (including page references to the text) to answer their peer's question.

If you wanted to include this as part of a participation or daily grade, you could ask students to respond to x-number of peer grammar questions per semester.

Setting up the HOTLINE in this way actively involves your students in their own learning. They become more familiar with their handbook. This fosters peer-to-peer collaboration. It also relieves you of having to answer all the grammar questions, while giving students a forum to get help round the clock.

Peer Workshop SURPRISE

On the day a paper is due, ask students to bring their polished final draft to class along with their *A Writer's Reference* text. This SURPRISE workshop shouldn't take an entire class period—perhaps only 20-30 minutes, depending on what you ask them to do.

Assign them to groups of 3-4 students and tell them they are going to be doing a SURPRISE peer workshop. The rules are: peers must use the handbook; peers should point out writing problems by writing a handbook reference in the margin beside the problem they see; peers must not correct a problem themselves (only point it out). You can shape the workshops by suggesting specific rubric areas (for instance, "Today, look for a thesis statement; clear organization; adequate, clear, and specific details; and any grammar or mechanical problems.") Since the workshop is being done on a paper that the student had already deemed proofread and polished and ready to turn in, it would also be appropriate to ask them to focus only on surface-level (or grammar/mechanical) problems.

Students then get to take their papers home and polish them further, based on the peer feedback they received in the SURPRISE workshop.

YELLOW BOX Peer Workshops

Select a concept or topic featured in one of the YELLOW BOXES that appear throughout *A Writer's Ref*. Go over the material briefly in class and then divide the class into peer groups and ask them to read over a draft of a portion of a paper and apply the lesson in the box. (You might have assigned the section as homework reading prior to class, or—for short sections—you can go over it in class for an impromptu lesson.) For instance:

- **Using Signal Phrases (MLA 3-b, 365)** – ask students to look over a paragraph that contains quotations to see if it might be improved by revising any of the signal phrases.
- **Understanding your assignment (C1-b, 4) and/or Checklist for assessing the writing situation (C1-b, 5)** – ask students, in small groups, to review your assignment handout using the box on page 4. Ask one group to be prepared to explain the purpose of the assignment; ask other groups to talk about the assignment's questions or implied questions. After sharing what they understand of the assignment with the large group, put them back in small groups to assess the writing situation. Ask them to analyze the assignment handout and report back to the class. In this way, you can make sure everyone understands the assignment without having to lecture about it. (NOTE: you can extend the lesson by looking at "Approaching assignments in the disciplines" at A4-e, pp. 89-90.)
- **Point of view and verb tense in academic writing (A4-e, 88)** – for an assignment that requires a more academic tone, ask students to analyze peer drafts looking for how they have handled point of view and verb tense conventions.
- **Countering opposing arguments (A2-f, 72)** – Ask students to evaluate a peer's research paper looking for how they anticipate objections.

Online exercises IN CLASS

The online component of *A Writer's Ref* (dianahacker.com/writersref) contains hundreds of exercises. Of course, you can assign some to be done outside of class.

But, you can also use them IN CLASS (individually, if you teach in a computer classroom or lab; or, as a large group, in a multimedia classroom). Ask students to raise their hands when they don't understand why an answer is wrong. Address the explanation to the entire class. This is particularly useful for the MLA exercises (avoiding plagiarism, in-text citations, etc.). This kind of intervention allows you to quickly and promptly clear up a lot of misunderstandings before a student makes a critical mistake on a final draft.

Working with SENTENCE DRAFTS

Occasionally, ask students to bring a rough draft in “sentence-draft” format. This means that they begin each sentence on a new line and they number each sentence. They might also double space between paragraphs so that paragraph breaks are clear.

With a sentence draft, your students can more easily look for style issues like sentence variety. It’s much easier to see repetition of sentence beginnings or overuse of certain sentence patterns when the sentences are lined up in rows, rather than in paragraph format. Use *A Writer’s Ref* tab S for ideas on improving style at the sentence level.

With a sentence draft, students can also more easily look for sentence boundary problems. Have them read their sentences from the bottom up to see if they can spot run-ons or fragments. (See yellow box G6-b, 213, and surrounding lessons on run-ons; see yellow box G5-a, 206, and surrounding lessons for fragments.)

With a sentence draft, students can also locate thesis statements and topic sentences. They can evaluate their inclusion of adequate support for a topic sentence. They can look for adequate use of transition or for cohesiveness. They can look for correct insertion of quotations or for overuse of quotations. They can look for overuse or repetition of certain words or phrases. They can look for overuse of be verbs. They can check for shifting verb tenses. Many writing problems might be detected by looking at sentence drafts and using the writing handbook to develop ways to improve the writing.