

# Grading Student Writing: Tips and Tricks to Save You Time

Students don't have to write **A LOT** to make it meaningful

1. Make assignments short
2. Give writing assignments focused on solving a problem
3. Turn in assignments for a group grade

Prep the students **AHEAD OF TIME**

4. Provide examples of good theses, or topic sentences, etc.
5. Share the grading criteria (or rubric)
6. Have a syllabus policy for papers that fail mechanics (just return)
7. Teach THEM how to revise on their own, during class time
8. Provide a list of 'pet peeves' and point to online explanations

Someone **OTHER THAN YOU** can "grade" some things

9. Peer review
10. Peer edit sheets (specific questions)
11. Group critiquing
12. Discussion board online for peer edits
13. Use the writing center for global issues
14. Use the program "Editor" (kept in the writing center) for mechanics

You don't have to research **POTENTIAL PLAGIARISM**

15. Use Turnitin.com (free for students and teachers)
16. Craft highly unique writing assignments
17. Change assignments every semester
18. Create good writing prompts, and show how to find and manage sources

You don't have to grade **EVERY ASSIGNMENT**

19. Journal, diary, "personal writing", address a controversy, sum up a lecture, contemporary issues, reading logs, write dialogues, thought letters, emails, imagined interview with author, student-generated quiz questions, "translate" a difficult passage
20. Specify they should write for a defined amount of time, or a set number of words
21. In-class freewriting, one minute papers
22. Do not announce if this assignment will be graded until it is turned in
23. "Four in a semester, and you never know when it's your turn"
24. Make some rewrites optional
25. Portfolio approach: student decides which 4 of 5 assignments will be graded (but all five must have been written)
26. Grade mechanics only once, on a short assignment early in the semester

You don't have to grade **EVERY PART OF THE ESSAY**

27. Sometimes, only grade for 'effort' (or that it's done at all)
28. When turning in a draft, students specify which ONE element (organization, thesis, etc) they want you to evaluate, and you base the whole grade on this
29. Grade everything for content, but only grade one paragraph (or maybe one page) for writing skills and mechanics, to isolate the patterns
30. Revise early drafts, edit late drafts, grade final copies
31. Students resubmit first drafts (the portfolio model) and teachers only grade the changes
32. Students write a statement of what they changed (metacognition)

Grade **QUICKLY**

33. Refuse to grade essays with too many errors or not meeting length requirements
34. Scan the paper instead of reading intently. Require subheadings?
35. Scan several essays quickly without grading, before picking up a pen
36. Grade everyone quickly without commentary, sort into piles, then adjust as needed and add (minimal) commentary
37. Divide the work over time: read only 5 or 10 essays per day
38. Find a distraction-free area to work in
39. Grade blindly (with a cover page you flip over)
40. Use the minus/check/plus system (add them up for the semester for a grade)
41. For short-answer essay tests, grade all responses to question #1 for the whole class at one time, rather than finishing one student's test, and then move on to question #2
42. Don't proofread; grade for content rather than to fix surface errors

**DON'T WRITE** a lot of commentary

43. Over-commentary is confusing, discouraging, not helpful. Keep comments short.
44. Comment on drafts, but not final copies
45. Use rubrics: photocopy rubric, then underline & circle
46. Rubric shorthand (simply write the 'cell' number) or a "common mistakes" handout
47. Offer mp3 feedback rather than written
48. Type commentary rather than handwrite (or use Word's "track changes" feature)
49. Start (and end?) with positive commentary
50. Provide only revision-oriented comments, not editing-oriented
51. Colored highlighters: one color for strengths, one for weaknesses (or use colors for the rubric elements)
52. Hold a face-to-face writing conference rather than write a lot of comments
53. Hold an in-class norming session before the due date, so they know what to expect
54. Make students initial a checklist as they hand in essay: "I started work on this paper three days ago," "I spent at least five hours on this paper", etc.
55. Use a "key" for the shorthand you write instead of commentary
56. Don't explain grammar. Make students buy a style guide / writing guide
57. Provide plenary commentary. As you read/grade, take notes for plenary, not for individual feedback
58. Do not fix punctuation / grammar (but do mark it, and remove points). Just underline it.
59. Pick your battles: do not comment critically on more than one thing at a time
60. Assign points to value certain parts (organization = 30%, content = 30%, etc)