WORKSHOP SERIES FOR BUSINESS FACULTY

CRAFTING EFFECTIVE WRITTEN FEEDBACK

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The Problem

Faculty in a university's school of business were frustrated that students' writing was not improving despite feedback and revision opportunities. In particular, there was a high dropout rate for students in the most writing-intensive business courses.

The university's instructional design (ID) team was tasked with developing a workshop for business faculty to help them improve their feedback on students' writing.

Step #1: Analysis

As the lead ID for this project, I had a few questions at the outset:

- What do faculty mean exactly when they say student writing is "not improving"?
- Are we sure the quality of faculty feedback is a core reason for this perceived lack of writing improvement?
- How are learners experiencing this issue?

Before moving forward with designing a faculty workshop, I wanted to ensure that this was the appropriate solution to the problem.

To collect more data to inform next steps, I created two **surveys:**

- one for **business students** that asked about their writing process and the challenges they faced when drafting and revising their assignments based on their instructors' feedback, and
- another for **faculty** with questions focused on specific problems they noticed with student writing and the ways they have addressed those concerns in their feedback.

To gather additional insights, I then **interviewed** individual instructors and students to collect more detailed perspectives and stories. Finally, I requested **samples** of assignment prompts and student writing with instructor feedback along with the students' revised drafts. Data collection followed the university's protocols for protecting privacy and confidentiality, and participation was voluntary.

The results of this initial research **confirmed** that a core contributor to students' revision challenges—and their reasons for dropping courses like Advanced Business Writing— was a lack of targeted, actionable feedback on their writing from instructors. The ID team determined that moving forward with a faculty workshop targeting this skill area would be an appropriate intervention to address the problem.

In consultation with the dean, the team set a goal of improving the completion rate for writing-intensive business courses **10%** by the end of the subsequent semester. The team also anticipated an improvement in student evaluations of writing-intensive courses.

Step #2: Design

The survey results, interview data, and assignment samples revealed several key patterns in feedback that informed the content of the workshop:

- **Lack of specificity:** Faculty used vague words or phrases when marking drafts, leaving students confused about what they should change in their writing and why.
- **Overwhelming detail:** There were so many comments on drafts that students were confused about what they should prioritize and unsure about next steps in their revision process.
- **Misalignment in stated vs. actual writing priorities:** Faculty focused on sentence-level errors and problems with APA format when the rubrics they provided communicated that logical organization and use of scholarly sources were more of a priority.

In collaboration with the school's dean and a focus group of business faculty, I confirmed that a **series of weekly lunch-and-learn workshops over the course of one month** would both honor faculty members' time constraints and allow enough space for participants to achieve the performance objectives of the learning experience, which were beyond the scope of a one-off workshop.

After conducting **interviews with subject-matter experts (SMEs)** from both the English and business departments, I created a **blueprint** for the program (see next), which featured four virtual instructor-led trainings (vILTs) facilitated on Zoom by a SME from the university's English department.

Design Rationale

As you can see in the blueprint that follows, I designed an **interactive** workshop series for faculty that centered on activities tied to their actual challenges.

Why? Much like improving one's writing, learning to give more effective feedback requires **hands-on practice.** Therefore, in creating the program, I prioritized exercises related to instructors' concerns so they could practice key skills for giving effective feedback. I also built in opportunities for conversation among participants so they could share their reflections, challenges, and successes with peers and support one another as they worked toward improving their written feedback.

My approach draws on **learning theories** (social constructivism and connectivism), **learning frameworks** (Gagné's Nine Events of Instruction and Merrill's Principles of Instruction), and **ID processes** (backward design and ADDIE).

Blueprint

Giving Written Feedback that Inspires Effective Revision

A four-part lunch-and-learn workshop series designed to take participants from writing feedback that is vague, overwhelming, and misaligned to crafting targeted, actionable, and constructive comments on student writing that empowers learners to revise effectively.

Performance Objectives:

After the workshop series concludes, instructors will be able to

- identify examples of written feedback they have provided on student assignments that lacks specificity, focus, and/or alignment with their rubric, and revise to ensure there is a clear, relevant problem identified along with a proposed solution or next step
- use higher-order and lower-order concerns (HOCs and LOCs) as guidelines when determining what to flag in student writing
- provide reasons for suggested edits that connect back to assignment guidelines and rubrics
- craft a brief note to the student at the top of their draft that highlights one or two successes and one or two issues or patterns of error for the student to focus on when revising, with links to resources as appropriate.

Audience: Business faculty
Materials: PPT decks, facilitator guide, participant workbook
Modality: vILT (Zoom), one-hour weekly sessions over one month
Pre-workshop Assessment: Participants will be given a made-up sample of student writing along with a rubric and asked to provide written feedback on the draft, which they will submit to the facilitator.

Workshop	Purpose	Overview of Activities & Assessments
Week 1 *What Does Motivating, Actionable Feedback Look Like?*	Demonstrate the key features of effective written feedback. Introduce the framework of higher-order and lower-	- Icebreaker to engage participants and create a supportive atmosphere to explore the topic—invite everyone to type in the chat one word they associate with giving written feedback on student writing; facilitator highlights/comments on any trends that emerge and segues to brief lecture (save the list of words to

	order concerns (HOCs and LOCs) to provide focus for feedback.	make a word cloud that will be used in the final session) - Brief lecture on what makes written feedback effective, highlighting a variety of examples; intro to the framework of HOCs and LOCs - Whole group activity: Facilitator models strategies for giving effective written feedback and keeping HOCs and LOCs in mind, and invites participation from volunteers and reflection from group - Pair activity: Participants look through a sample paper with feedback and identify examples of effective and ineffective feedback, providing reasons for their decisions - Whole group debrief/reflection on what emerged in the pair activity - Facilitator assesses comprehension through observation of conversations in the whole group and pair activities, providing feedback as appropriate - Closing reflection question to think about to prepare for next week's session: What's a goal you have for improving the written feedback you give on students' writing? Why? - Homework: They'll need to bring at least one example of a student paper they have marked for a self-reflection activity - Assessment: Exit slips—What are the HOCs and LOCs for your assignments, generally? Why? Are they reflected in your assignment guidelines and rubrics?
Week 2 *Give Yourself Feedback on Your Feedback*	Engage participants in self-assessment and reflection and challenge them to identify strengths and areas for growth in their approach to providing written feedback.	- Warm-up: Participants pair up in breakout rooms to reflect on their past challenges and successes with giving written feedback on student writing - Whole-group debrief on warm-up activity; facilitator looks for trends/patterns to highlight and segues to brief lecture - Brief lecture incorporating live, worked examples of giving effective feedback on

		- student writing, inviting participation from the whole group
		- Individual activity: Participants are given a rubric to help them assess written feedback they have given a student (they will need to refer to the student paper they identified for homework to complete the activity)
		- Pair activity: Pairs meet to share their reflections on the self-assessment activity (not share students' writing, but rather their assessment of their feedback on the writing)
		- Whole group debrief and reflection: What surprised you? What will you do differently going forward?
		- Facilitator assesses comprehension through observation of conversations in the whole group and pair activities, providing feedback as appropriate
		- Homework: They'll need to identify and bring a brief sample of their own writing to the next session, preferably recent
		- Assessment: Reflective writing, 3-2-1 (three things they learned, two they still want to learn, one question that remains)
Week 3 *Provide Written Feedback on a Peer's Draft*	Create an opportunity for participants to both give and receive written feedback in a peer exchange that challenges them to apply the skills introduced in the first two weeks. Experience the feedback process through the lens of the writer to cultivate empathy.	- Warm-up: Participants pair up in breakout rooms and share the most memorable piece of feedback they have received on their own writing and how it shaped them as a writer - Whole-group debrief on warm-up activity; facilitator looks for trends/patterns to highlight and segues to brief lecture - Brief lecture about best practices for conducting a peer review that sets up the main activity (next) - Pair activity: Participants meet in breakout rooms and swap writing samples, giving written feedback on each other's drafts and taking turns reviewing and talking through their comments once finished; participants discuss with each

		- other what feedback felt effective/constructive and what was confusing or unhelpful and why - Whole group debrief and reflection: What was it like to be the writer receiving feedback? What helped you the most? What was least helpful? How might these insights impact the written feedback you give moving forward, if at all? - Facilitator assesses comprehension through observation of conversations in the whole group and pair activities, providing feedback as appropriate - Homework: Review past feedback given on at least one piece of student writing and jot down any trends/patterns that might emerge around constructive vs. less constructive comments - Assessment: Brief poll to surface any areas of confusion or concern ahead of the final session
Week 4 *Provide Written Feedback on a Student's Draft*	Practice the skills and strategies from prior sessions and give written feedback on student writing that demonstrates improved competency in the areas of specificity, focus, and alignment.	- Warm-up: Whole group activity to create a word cloud of descriptors participants associate with giving written feedback; group reflection on the resulting word cloud / what seems to be a priority; then, display word cloud made from the first session's opening activity and compare/contrast the differences in words highlighted. Invite group to reflect on how their views/sentiments and priorities might have shifted - Brief lecture to recap/review key strategies for providing effective written feedback discussed throughout program - Individual activity: Participants are given the same made-up sample of student writing and rubric that they received in the pre-workshop assessment and are asked to provide written feedback on the draft, applying the skills and strategies learned throughout the workshop series

		- Small group discussion: Participants meet with peers when finished to discuss challenges and successes they experienced while working on the exercise; they are invited to reflect on how their experience marking the paper shifted, if at all, from when they initially completed the activity - Whole group debrief: Each small group shares the main ideas they discussed in their reflections; facilitator notes any themes, patterns, and trends that emerge - Facilitator assesses comprehension through observation of conversations in the whole group and pair activities, providing feedback as appropriate - Assessment: Facilitator collects the marked-up student samples from participants, reviews the feedback given, and compares against the samples marked at the beginning of the workshop series to determine whether there were improvements made in the specificity, focus, and/or alignment of the feedback; participants receive feedback from the facilitator via email indicating areas where they have improved and areas to focus on for continued growth, along with links to resources as appropriate

Style Guide

The project needed to adhere to the university's **style guide** and brand colors. Below is the style guide I created for the participant workbook, and versions of this guide were adapted for the presentation decks and facilitator guide (changes mainly centered on font sizes).

COLOR PALETTE

#0071c9 #051d40 #145da0 #56aeff #4bd1fb

ACTIVITY ICONS

LOGO   TYPOGRAPHY

HEADING 1, NOW 80.2 BOLD

Heading 2, Now 47.4 bold

Body Text, DM Sans 44.2 Regular

Step #3: Development

The ID team used Trello for **project management**, including task delegation and deadline tracking. The **QA process** involved multiple rounds of revision with key players offering feedback on each version.

I used Canva, PowerPoint, and Word to create the presentation decks, facilitator guide, and participant workbook.

Accessibility Considerations

The facilitator guide provided a script for briefly reviewing key features of Zoom at the start of each workshop session and reminded the facilitator to read comments in the chat out loud and describe any key visual components on screen. The participant workbook was formatted for screen readers and all images included alt text. The ID team noted that transcripts of each workshop would be uploaded to SharePoint along with the video recordings.

Sample of Deliverables

Below are excerpts from the first week's workshop facilitator guide, which includes images of slides from the presentation deck, scripted notes, and suggested timing.

Facilitator Guide: Week 1 (Excerpt)

1

GIVING WRITTEN FEEDBACK THAT INSPIRES EFFECTIVE REVISION

[Setup note: Prep the breakout rooms and play music as people arrive]

[5 min.]

Do:

Welcome participants as they arrive on Zoom and facilitate small talk.

Say:

Welcome everyone! We're so happy you're joining us for the kickoff of a hands-on workshop that we've designed with your needs in mind. You'll leave with actionable strategies that you can start using right away to take your written feedback to the next level and effectively guide students through the revision process.

2
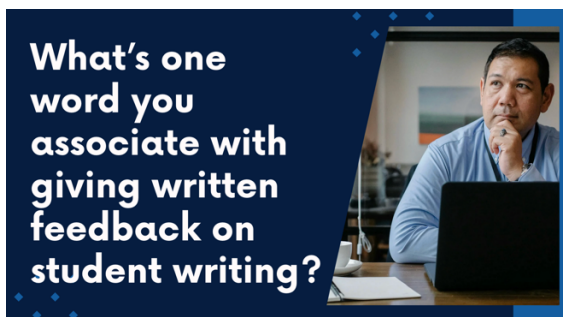
[2 min.]

Say:

Before we dig in, I want to get a sense of where everyone currently is with this topic. In the chat, please write one word you associate with giving written feedback on student writing.

Do:

Monitor the chat and call out the responses you see, noting any trends in what people write.

Be sure to screenshot or get a copy of the Zoom chat after the meeting to keep a record of the words people shared. This will be referenced in the final session of the workshop.

3

[3 min.]

Say:

Thanks for sharing your word associations! We'll be returning to your responses to that warm-up exercise later, but first I want to tap your collective wisdom: Based on your experiences as writers and instructors, what do you think motivating, actionable feedback looks like?

Do:

Facilitate a whole group discussion, highlighting any trends you notice in participants' answers.

4

[5 min.]

Do:

If someone mentioned specificity or a similar idea, use that as a segue to the first key feature.

Say:

You all pointed out some important features of effective written feedback, and we'll be touching on some of those in more detail now.

The first feature I want to highlight: Specificity. Effective written feedback is specific. No vague phrases like "awk" or a global note to "revise." Students want to know exactly what the problem is, where it is, and why it's an issue.

5

The CEO set quarter 1 goals as improving revenue 17%, hire more, and avoiding the mistakes from last year.

[2 min.]

Say:

Let's look at an example. This sentence from a student paper was marked "awk" by the professor in the margin. The professor was frustrated to see the same sentence in the final paper.

How might the comment be revised to be more specific and helpful to the student?

Do:

Invite volunteers to write suggestions in the chat or unmute and share their ideas out loud. Note any commonalities in the strategies people used to make feedback more specific.

6

CONCISE & ORGANIZED

[5 min.]

Say:

Have you ever had the experience of getting a piece of writing returned with feedback and feeling completely overwhelmed by the sheer number of comments to process? While we want to be specific, it's crucial to also be strategic about what we focus our feedback on.

I have a framework I'd like to share that will help you make decisions about what warrants a comment or not. But I'd like to hear what you currently value in student writing—what are your priorities? For example, is it APA format, overall organization, use of outside sources, grammatical correctness, something else?

Do:

Invite volunteers to unmute and share out loud or type their responses in the chat. Share what you're seeing in the chat and note any commonalities or differences in what participants name as top priorities.

Step #4: Implementation

The university's communications team assisted with developing an **email marketing campaign** to build excitement and buy-in from business faculty, highlighting the benefits of attending the workshop series (both for instructors' teaching practice and student retention and satisfaction).

The workshop facilitator from the English department met with me for a **train-the-trainer session** in which we discussed key components of the workshop and reviewed the facilitator guide, presentation decks, and participant workbook.

The one-hour workshops were **recorded** and the videos and transcripts were posted on the business department's SharePoint so (1) instructors who could not attend were able to access the material and (2) workshop attendees could review key sections as needed.

Step #5: Evaluation

I met with the facilitator for a **check-in** after each workshop session to learn of any concerns as well as successes that could help improve the workshop series for potential future offerings.

Both formative and summative **assessments** were used to evaluate participant learning during the workshop series. Review of formative assessments occurred during each of the post-session check-in meetings, when the facilitator and I reflected on their observations of participant discussions during the workshop and analyzed exit slips, reflective writing submissions, and poll results.

For the summative assessment, we analyzed participants' submissions from the final feedback activity using a rubric that reflected the priorities articulated in the program's performance objectives. For each participant, we then compared their feedback to that given on the same paper in the pre-assessment.

Beyond determining the impact of the learning materials and workshop series, the ID team also returned to the **broader goals** of improving the completion rate for writing-intensive business courses 10% by the end of the subsequent semester and tracking an improvement in student evaluations of writing-intensive courses. The ID team collected reports from the department three months after the delivery of the workshop series along with student evaluation data. The team also distributed a brief survey to business faculty to learn whether they had observed any improvements in students' writing and students' ability to revise their drafts.

Project Reflection

For this pilot run of the workshop series, the results that emerged from the evaluation stage indicated the overall design approach for the learning experience was sound. The modality was an appropriate fit for the subject matter, as the series of live sessions allowed participants to interact with one another, share feedback, and offer support while working on relevant challenges. There was clear alignment of materials and activities with performance objectives, and the formative assessments and facilitator observations indicated that participants left each session with practical takeaways.

Moreover, the summative assessment showed that the workshop experience ultimately improved instructors' ability to provide more effective written feedback on their students' writing (i.e., the feedback became more specific, focused, and aligned with assignment guidelines and stated priorities). Rubric scores from the pre- and post-workshop assessment showed the effectiveness of written feedback improved an average of 30%.

While the completion rate for writing-intensive courses fell slightly short of the 10% improvement goal, student feedback on course evaluations at the end of the semester indicated a positive shift in learners' experiences in the courses. In particular, students reported increased clarity around expectations for course assignments and grading methods. Business faculty also noted improvements in students' ability to revise their writing after receiving feedback.

The business school requested another offering of the workshop series in fall 2025, and faculty from other disciplines also expressed interest in participating. The ID team had an initial planning meeting to discuss ways of scaling the offering, including creating a video series based on the lecture portion of each workshop. The series would be housed in the resource library curated by the university's Center for Teaching Excellence. In collaboration with various schools and departments within the university, the ID team also started exploring ways to create a portable package of the workshop materials that would allow any group of interested instructors to host a peer-led version of the workshop.

The facilitator noted some areas for improvement in the workshop design, which will be implemented ahead of the next offering of the series. Some participants finished activities earlier than anticipated, and there were no prepared materials to support their learning while they waited. Some participants also resisted the extra work involved in the workshop series, as it was hands-on and involved a not insignificant time commitment over the course of the month. In particular, several did not want to take the time to mark the sample paper in the pre- and post-assessment. While they ultimately did complete the work, it is unclear whether their written feedback on the sample could be considered representative of feedback that they would give on an actual student paper. Future iterations of the workshop might consider an approach to the pre- and post-assessments that uses samples of actual papers with instructors' written feedback.