

other instrument that can be used throughout the writing process as an anchor for standards, gathers force when students refer to the rubric during the writing process to match their writing with the criteria specified by the rubric, surges forth when students evaluate each other's writing using a rubric or some other technique, and spills over when the professor uses the rubric to evaluate students' writing either in concert with each student's self-assessment using the rubric or in relation to the process that preceded professorial evaluation. Continuous and interlinked evaluation of a writing assignment is, of course, an ideal, and a worthy ideal. How well it can be sustained over many years of teaching without appropriate administrative support in the form of funds for faculty development, appropriate class sizes, and teaching loads that allow professors to promote writing in their classes is an open question, but as an ideal, continuous and interlinked evaluation of a writing assignment is worth pursuing.

#### **Teach students to conduct peer and self-evaluations**

Some readers may have raised questions when I talked earlier about student peer evaluations, wondering, perhaps, whether peer evaluations are useful (particularly in light of research that says more expert evaluation by professors may not be very useful) and whether students have the necessary skills to evaluate their peers' writing. The queries are related. Peers can provide useful observations about how to improve a peer's writing (just as professors can provide useful observations), but one factor related to the usefulness of peers' comments is professorial management of the peer critiquing process, including training students to be effective peer evaluators (Bean, 1979; Carlson & Roelich, 1983; McKendy, 1990; Stewart, 1980; Thompson, 1981; Zhu, 1995). In other words, professors cannot assume that by putting students in groups and giving them a critique sheet of some sort that the students will make useful comments on a peer's writing. Nor can professors assume that a student writer will recognize useful comments on his or her writing and follow them when revising the draft. Nevertheless, these two problems do not negate professorial responsibility to manage peer critiques by providing instruction on how to critique, modeling peer critique before the entire class, assigning students to critique groups, ensuring that students have time to com-

plete critiques, and insisting that students discuss their critiques with the person whose writing they evaluated.

Self-assessments are even trickier than peer assessments, as can be seen by the following story about self-assessment at a major research university in this country. The faculty at the university were asked to rank their performance as teachers in the top 25% of teachers on the campus, the next 25%, and so on. The results? Seventy-five percent of the professors ranked their teaching performance in the top 25% of the teachers on campus. The *self* in self-assessment may find it hard to evaluate one's own performance in relation to criteria. This finding is not surprising, particularly when professors realize that some students have learned to give themselves high evaluations because the professor will use that evaluation as the basis for a course grade, that honest and accurate self-criticism is hindered by blind spots a person may not even recognize as blind spots, and that some of the best students give themselves evaluations that demonstrate they have been overly severe in assessing their performance. Self-evaluation, therefore, should be anchored to criteria and should be checked against peers' and the teacher's evaluations so that students receive a composite picture of their performance from various angles (Beach, 1982; Beck, 1982; Chiseri-Strater, 1993; Kirby, 1987; Sandman, 1993).

Students' evaluations of themselves have two purposes. First, students can check their observations about their writing during the writing process with others' observations. Doing so can help students adjust their perceptions of what they are writing and provide information for revising their writing. Second, students can join with others at the end of the grading process to make a final decision about quality. Again, the student has the opportunity to compare his or her decision about quality with peers' and the professor's decisions.

A student can use the same evaluative technique, such as a rubric, as peers and professor use to evaluate his or her final performance. In fact, a rubric can have three columns that allow for evaluations by peers, self, and the professor and use the same criteria so that a student can see similarities and differences among the evaluators. These three evaluations do not have to have the same weight. A peer evaluation can count for 25% of the final grade, a self-evaluation can count for 25%, and the professor's evaluation can count

for 50%. Such a distribution allows the professor to make corrections for whatever misperceptions he or she believes students have made in their final evaluations on which the grade will be based.

Although the grading process does have a terminus point, generally the grade, professors can extend the process by talking to students individually to explain any points of difference raised by the various evaluations. Professors might be uncomfortable about talking with students, especially those students who received a lower grade than they believe they deserve, but students do deserve the opportunity to find out why a professor rendered a particular judgment, especially when that judgment is out of sync with peers' evaluations and self-assessments. Professors can turn a student's disappointment with a grade into a writing task by asking the student to provide acceptable reasons in writing why the grade should be adjusted, if the student believes adjusting the grade is necessary. Professors also can submit the student's written work to another professor and ask that professor to adjudicate the grade. Doing so would require the other professor to evaluate the student's work without the benefit of the colleague's evaluation but with the benefit of the peer and self-assessments. If the other professor provides a higher evaluation than the one his or her colleague provided, the student is the beneficiary of the higher evaluation or can receive the mean of the two evaluations. If a penalty is attached to reevaluation by an outside expert, students who have a worthy complaint may not be willing to submit to outside reevaluation, so professors should note that the purpose of outside reevaluation is not to penalize students but to provide a means of redress for students who believe they have been evaluated unfairly. Of course, professors will want to limit this use of external evaluators for students who have widely different notions of what grade a paper should receive from the professor and peers. Otherwise, professors might find themselves out of favor with overworked colleagues.

#### **Conduct student-professor conferences**

Another way professors can encourage students to be engaged in the evaluative process is by conducting student-professor conferences. Student-professor conferences, in the formal sense, are one-on-one meetings between the student

and professor outside the classroom. For instance, students sign up for 10- or 15-minute appointments to discuss their writing. Some professors simply convert class time into conference time so that during scheduled class time students sign up for a student-professor conference. This approach may not be practical in all circumstances, but a week of classes might profitably be used as conference time for one semester.

During conference time, the professor asks questions about the present state of a student's writing, generally a specific writing project the student is working on, and listens to students answer those questions. The professor's purpose is to give the student suggestions for revision, encourage the student to take responsibility for his or her writing, and provide the student with one person's reading of the student's writing.

*Teacher/student talk is a powerful means by which we can make students aware of our willingness to assist them in becoming better writers. And by using talk to promote that social awareness that writers need, we are adding a powerful dimension to the writer's awareness of writing for others. Teacher/student talk is, then, that comfortable setting where writer and helper talk about—and work together on—a piece of writing.* (Harris, 1990, p. 160)

Literature on student-professor conferences notes that the purpose of the conference really is to create a conversation, not to give the professor an opportunity to talk on and on but to engage the student in a conversation about the student's writing.\*

Informal student-professor evaluation includes conferring with a student briefly during class, listening to peer group activities and making comments about issues a particular paper raises, and talking with students after class to respond to questions they raise. Such informal evaluation sessions can be quite useful to students as they seek expert advice about their progress in writing.

\*For specific instructions on how to conduct student-professor conferences, see Arbur, 1977; Beach, 1989; Carnicelli, 1980; Fassler, 1978; Harris, 1986; Memering, 1973; Rose, 1982).