Grading and Responding to Student Writing

Questions to consider

Where does this paper fall in the sequence of this particular assignment and in the semester as a whole? How should that timing shape my commenting strategy?

What language have I developed with my students that they will/should recognize when it is redeployed in comment form?

How can I best use my limited time? What strategies will help me both give appropriate feedback and return work to students so they can use my comments moving forward?

What should I address on an individual basis and what can be done with the group as a whole in class?

What are the two or three things that the student should be most concerned with in their *next* piece of writing, and how can I call attention to those things?

How can I make sure that the student maintains ownership of the writing process?

How can I comment in an intentional way that syncs up with other components of my teaching?

How should I divide my attention between content and style for this particular assignment?

Principles to keep in mind

If we can help students focus on two or three elements of their writing that need improvement, we can expect that they should be able to improve in those areas. If we give them ten areas for improvement, we jeopardize their ability to focus on anything.

We should be more engaged and concerned with the student writer than with any individual text they produce.

We want to help students become effective writers in a range of situations, not just in our own classrooms.

We are not responsible, at any stage of writing, for identifying or correcting everything that is "wrong" with a piece of student writing.

We are not obligated to respond to every draft or piece of student writing. Students are ultimately responsible for thinking about and revising their own work.

The language of your grading and response to student work must echo the language of your teaching.