Q&A: Nadia Moraglio

“Empowering Learners through Feedback in Online Environments”

**Question:** How do you think we can best train our writing tutors/staff to respond in these ways? How do we balance the "time crunch" with best practices?

**Answer:** It depends on the duration of your sessions with the students. Is it 50 minutes, one hour, 30 minutes, or 15 minutes? And based on that, I would ask the students: “what is the one thing you would like to work on if I only have 15 minutes?” From that, we can just narrow it down to, maybe, one or two paragraphs and then from that, it could be a main idea, a structure, topic sentences, or sentence flow. That could be the one item that we can answer, but if there is more time available, then we can prioritize. I don’t time myself; I feel like I have an innate timer in me, but I know when I work with teacher trainers, that was a main issue. So for someone who needs to work on timing, I would actually put up a timer, like the Pomodoro Technique, where you have “writing sprints.” Ask the student, “do you want to spend about 20-25 minutes on X topic and then 10 on the next, because it's secondary importance?” Then when the timer goes out, then there is a decision to make— maybe the students wants to continue working on the same topic or maybe they want to switch to the next topic. I would always include the students on what they want to do because it's their writing. We're there for them, not vice versa— we're not the teacher that needs to run the class in a specific way.

**Question:** I really appreciated the specific examples about how to approach different modes of online tutoring in empowering ways. You note the use of suggesting mode in Google docs as a way to show you are not altering the text. I like the suggesting mode, but also know it can sometimes create a lot of feedback and can sometimes create a bit of a messy document. With this in mind, can you speak to how to balance empowerment and clarity in online writing feedback?

**Answer:** That depends on the frequency with which you meet with the students. We have appointments that are either 15 to 60 minutes for drop ins, and then we get to see some students like over time every couple of weeks. In one hour, I don't think I've seen a document that gets to the level that's not readable because of the comments, but if I work with the same students over time, and the students do not accept or rework all the comments then, yes, it gets messy. Also, when other editors are involved, like their supervisor there can be a lot of comments. I suggest to the students that at the end of each session to make a copy; there is going to be a copy with original comments, and then there is going to be a clean copy, or maybe a copy that where they accept only some of the comments. They start cleaning up the document; sometimes students will just clean up the sentence structure—maybe there were a couple of sentences that took too long. Maybe some organized and so that gets cleaned up because it's not about the content, but they would retain the comments about the bigger picture —the structure, their main idea. And for those, they would reply to themselves to make a plan. During the session, I give them tips for what to do afterwards. The way that we provide feedback is not a way where you just accept the comments, because otherwise, as I said, that's editing and the learning curve is lower there. But they writer should consider, “why do they make that comment? What do I need to do?”, so I actually encourage them to make the comments, as well. If I work with a student at the beginning, I will show them how to make comments, it's more making comments on their work, ut the goal is, eventually, that they make the comments as we talk. That's another way to empower them to say, “okay, this is what I need to do. Oh, you flagged that the other time because it's a really long sentence, it has about 70 words. I'm gonna make a note to myself that I have to split it down in three sentences.” And that usually happens over time, not in just one session. It can happen, but it really depends on the students we work with and what it is that we see, in terms of writing. But again, training them on what to do afterwards and to save multiple copies is usually what works, as does having a specific folder. That might be a “tutoring with Nadia” folder, and they know that we have multiple versions of the same document. We always revise by date and time, so they can see when we had a specific comment., and if it gets cleaned up, you can go into “history” and see what comments were accepted or deleted, so that's something else that sometimes we need to talk about.