

Effective Conferences¹
Mary Beth Beazley
Moritz College of Law
The Ohio State University
Workshop for Beginning Legal Writing Teachers
June 20-21, 2009

I. Types of Conferences

- Pre-draft drop-in
- Pre-draft formal
- Interim draft formal
- Post-mortem
- Optional v. mandatory

II. Timing Considerations

- Length of conference
- Return paper in time to allow student review *before* conference
- Keep an eye on the next due date when scheduling/allowing conferences

III. Teacher preparation for the conference

- Effective critique
- Final comment provides agenda
- On-the-spot review
- Other

IV. Student preparation for the conference

- Review of critique
- Self-critique
- Assigned preparation

V. The conference itself

- Establish an appropriate environment
- Phases of the conference (Wellford-Slocum)
 - Build rapport
 - Provide an overview of the problem(s) to be discussed (student and/or teacher)
 - Work toward resolving the problem(s)
 - Provide closure
- Communicate effectively
- Encourage student participation and note-taking
- Follow an agenda as needed

¹With thanks to Lorraine Bannai, who shared a PowerPoint prepared by herself and Connie Krantz, both of Seattle University School of Law.

VI. Strategies for addressing the problems (Bannai & Kroontz)

Reader-based reactions

Quasi-Socratic

“Link back” to what the student knows

Work on a section to illustrate a point

Validate what the student has done well

VII. Challenges

Guiding substance without telling too much: use a sliding scale depending on the student and the approaching due date

Not just a river in Egypt: students who deny that there is a problem

Students who have learned English as a second language

Students with learning disabilities or other academic difficulties

Students with personal problems

VIII. Ending the Conference

Staying on schedule

Addressing the future

Bibliography²

- Maureen Arrigo-Ward, *How to Please Most of the People Most of the Time: Directing (or Teaching in) a First-Year Legal Writing Program*, 29 Val. U. L. Rev. 557 (1995).
- Mary Beth Beazley, *The Self-Graded Draft: Teaching Students to Revise using Guided Self-Critique*, 3 Legal Writing: J. Legal Writing Inst. 175 (1997).
- Jennifer Brendel, *Tools for Teaching the Rewriting Process*, 12 Persp. Teaching Legal Res. & Writing 123 (Winter 2004).
- Christy DeSanctis and Kristen Murray, *The Art of the Writing Conference: Letting Students Set the Agenda Without Ceding Control*, 17 Persp. Teaching Legal Res. & Writing 35 (Fall 2008).
- Mary Dunnewold, *"Feed-Forward" Tutorials, Not "Feedback" Reviews*, 6 Persp. Teaching Leg. Res. & Writing 105 (Spring 1998).
- Eric Easton et al., Am. Bar Assoc., *Sourcebook on Legal Writing Programs* (2d ed. 2006).
- Anne M. Enquist, *Unlocking the Secrets of Highly Successful Legal Writing Students*, 82 St. John's L. Rev. 609 (2008).
- Jane Kent Gionfriddo, *The "Reasonable Zone of Right Answers": Analytical Feedback on Student Writing*, 40 Gonz. L. Rev. 427 (2005).
- Mary Kate Kearney & Mary Beth Beazley, *Teaching Students to "Think Like Lawyers": Integrating Socratic Method with the Writing Process*, 64 Temp. L. Rev. 885, 904-06 (1991).
- Phillip C. Kissam, *Conferring with Students*, 65 UMKC L. Rev. 917 (1997).
- Ellie Margolis, Susan L. DeJarnatt, *Moving Beyond Product to Process: Building a Better LRW Program*, 46 Santa Clara L. Rev. 93 (2005)
- Andrea McArdle, *Teaching Writing in Clinical, Lawyering, and Legal Writing Courses: Negotiating Professional and Personal Voice*, 12 Clinical L. Rev. 501(2006).
- Patricia Grande Montana, *Better Revision: Encouraging Student Writers to See Through the Eyes of the Reader*, 14 Legal Writing: J. Legal Writing Inst. 291 (2008).
- Laurel Currie Oates, Anne Enquist, & Kelly Kunsch, *The Legal Writing Handbook* (4th ed. 2006).

²With thanks to Lorraine Bannai for sharing her bibliography on this same topic.

Terrill Pollman, *Building a Tower of Babel or Building a Discipline? Talking About Legal Writing*, 85 Marq. L. Rev. 887, 892 (2002).

Jessica E. Price, *Teaching Students About the Legal Reader: The Reader Who Won't Be Taken for a Ride*, 12 Persp. Teaching Legal Res. & Writing 168 (Spring 2004).

Susan E. Provenzano, Lesley S. Kagan, *Teaching in Reverse: A Positive Approach to Analytical Errors in 1L Writing*, 39 Loy. U. Chi. L.J. 123 (2007).

Mary Barnard Ray & Claudia M. Carlos, *Close Encounters of the Work Kind: Focus and Flexibility in Student Conferences*, The Second Draft, Vol. 10, No. 1, 21-22 (Nov. 1995).

Sarah E. Ricks, *Some Strategies to Teach Reluctant Talkers to Talk About Law*, 54 J. Legal Educ. 570 (2004).

Sheila Rodriguez, *Using Feedback Theory to Help Novice Legal Writers Develop Expertise*, 86 U. Det. Mercy L. Rev. 207 (2009).

Videotape: *Effective Writing Conferences* (Anne Enquist, Seattle University School of Law 1998) (on file with Anne Enquist), and accompanying handout.

Videotape: *Text, Sighs, and Videotape: Sample Conferences That Present Special Challenges to Teachers* (Mary Barnard Ray, University of Wisconsin School of Law 1992) (on file with Mary Barnard Ray).

Robin S. Wellford-Slocum, *The Law School Student-Faculty Conference: Towards a Transformative Learning Experience*, 45 S. Tex. L. Rev. 255 (2004).

Melissa H. Weresh, *Form and Substance: Standards for Promotion and Retention of Legal Writing Faculty on Clinical Tenure Track*, 37 Golden Gate U. L. Rev. 281 (2007).