**Conferencing with Students (online or otherwise)**

In this week’s workshop we discussed one-on-one conferencing best practices, which requires an understanding of the *genre* of the one-on-one conference and what is expected of the professor and the student. Conferences can be daunting because it involves talking about students’ writing with them and scheduling a *lot* of meetings, but students benefit from connecting with professors one-on-one, from getting instantaneous feedback that they can ask questions about, and from having a chance to brainstorm with you. Check out the following tips for conducting conferences with students—online or otherwise.

1. **The Conference Genre**

There are a number of things that make a conference a conference as opposed to a class, an aside, or comments on a paper. A conference should ideally:

* **Be ten minutes or less.** This is helpful to the professor, as it makes it feasible to engage with all of your students. It also maximizes productivity because the professor and the student have to jump right into the content.
* **Have a clear purpose.** This could be a Q&A, a progress check-in, or a review. However, no matter the purpose, a one-on-one conference should—
* **Take place when the student can apply the feedback.**A conference should leave the student with actionable feedback and enough time to incorporate it into their work.
* **Be prefaced by an exchange between the student and the professor.** Be sure to tell students what they are responsible for in a conference and to touch base on what will be discussed.
* **Have some record of what was discussed during the conference.** Ideally, a student will take notes during a conference and both the professor and student will discuss what the student’s next steps are following the conference. For more on this, see the sample conference review sheet below.

1. **The Professor’s Responsibilities**

A one-on-one conference is an opportunity for the instructor to engage with students individually, allowing them to discuss the student’s abilities, where they could improve, and other circumstances relevant to the class. Prepare your feedback ahead of time so that you have a starting point for conversation and there is enough time for the student to ask you questions about your feedback. Ideally, you and the student will make a game plan for how the student will incorporate your feedback before they leave. For this feedback to be most helpful, you should:

* **Offer praise as well as constructive criticism.** Acknowledging students abilities increases their confidence and can improve their performance in the class. Providing clear, constructive criticism shows students where they can improve. Having a balance between both gives the student a holistic understanding of their abilities and their standing in the class.
* **Limit feedback to one or two achievable goals.** These can be simple commands/requests (ie. “provide more context for your research methods”) or in the form of a question (ie. “what additional context is needed for your audience to understand your research methods?”).
* **Listen, and give students time to think and/or write.** As a professor, it can be tempting to approach a conference as if it is a once-in-a-semester opportunity to give students as much feedback as possible. However, for students to get the most out of a conference, they need the space to participate. Make sure to make space for them to think, ask questions, and voice concerns.

1. **The Student’s Responsibilities**

In an ideal conference, students will be equally as engaged as instructors. Unfortunately, this isn’t always the case, but it may have to do with students not fully understanding why they’re attending a one-on-one conference. Before conferences begin, inform students of the **purpose** of the conference and what they should prepare. **Ask that they bring at least one question** about the work that will be discussed and, of course, ***the work that will be discussed.*** Also encourage students to take notes during the conference.

1. **Tips for Conferencing Online**

The above advice applies to conferences in any setting, but we offer advice specifically on online conferences below.

* **Enable the waiting room feature on Zoom when meeting with students back-to-back.** This ensures students can meet with your privately and other students can let you know they’re waiting.
* **Use the conference to start or maintain a dialogue with individual students.** This is an opportunity to connect with students during remote teaching.
* **Consider how conferencing can be used in place of or in addition to synchronous class time.**Brevity is a virtue when it comes to remote teaching. Conferences may be more impactful than providing general feedback to a whole class.
* **Conferences should be synchronous, but they don’t have to be over video.** Consider making one-on-one conferences more accessible by offering to meet over the phone, or, if need be, by agreeing to an email exchange during a certain time frame, or to a chat over Canvas. It’s not quite the same as an in-person meeting, but it will get the job done.

1. **Conference Review Sheet**

Creating a review sheet to share with students can jump-start conferences by ensuring the student and professor are on the same page. Review sheets are also a physical reminder of what was discussed in the conference, making it more likely that students will incorporate your feedback. The focus of the conference can be decided on beforehand. Discuss with the student their proficiencies and on what they can improve while in the conference. Finally, ask the student to set a reasonable goal based on the conversation.

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| Name: |  |
| Meeting time: |  |
| Project/focus: |  |
| Proficiencies: |  |
| To work on: |  |
| Goal: |  |