

# **Stop Correcting Papers: Show Students How to Be Their Own First Readers**

**Marylyn E. Calabrese  
Independent Writing Consultant**

## **Abstract**

Students' mastery of the revision process is central to their writing improvement. And their mastery of revision is dependent upon their skill in reading their own writing from the reader's perspective. Teachers' responses as readers—rather than as editors or judges—are instrumental in helping students become successful revisers. Following Donald Murray's dictum in his landmark article, "Teaching the Other Self: The Writer's First Reader" (1982), the present study tells how one teacher took Murray's challenge into the classroom and later investigated supporting research. The following account traces this journey: learning why revision is so complex for inexperienced writers and the kind of help they need in managing it; identifying the step-by-step process by which students can learn to revise and, in the process, become their own first readers; discovering the specifics of the teacher's role in that endeavor; and finally, realizing the limitations of teachers as "correctors."

## **Introduction**

At one time in my high school teaching career, three "forces" came together: my endless correcting of students' papers, my students' resistance to revising, and my reading of Donald Murray's article "Teaching the Other Self: The Writer's First Reader" (1982).

At first, I didn't even know what that term, "the writer's first reader," meant, either to my students or to me. But I knew that I wanted to find out. I knew that I wanted to create the kind of classroom in which students learned to revise by becoming their own first readers, and I also knew that I had to discover the kinds of teacher behaviors that would facilitate that process.

But I'm getting ahead of my story.

At the same time that I was trying to implement changes in my classroom, I decided to enroll in the University of Pennsylvania's doctoral program in the Teaching of Writing. There I found all the research I needed to study the background of this problem. My own dissertation research took the form of five students learning how to read their own writing for the purpose of revision. For the present article, I have framed my discussion around the following questions: why do inexperienced writers have such difficulty with revision; how can teachers help them through this complex process; how can students be taught to revise and become their own first readers; what exactly can teachers do to make that happen; and what are the limitations when teachers "correct papers."

Let's begin.

## **Why Do Inexperienced Writers Have Such Difficulty With Revision?**

Revision is difficult. One major reason why students resist revising is that it is a very complex process, even for experienced writers. Revision involves several mental processes and the simultaneous juggling of multiple constraints.

The fundamental question is, “Does my text say what I want it to say?”

The writer—student or expert—juggles these tasks: figuring out intention, reading one’s text, diagnosing a possible mismatch between text and intention, identifying the specific language that will solve the mismatch, and managing the entire process—knowing what to do when. All of these tasks have to be held in the short-term memory *simultaneously* while making decisions for rewriting.

Researchers tell us that the short-term memory can hold at best only 5-7 different items.

Citing the cognitive overload that the process of revising demands of any writer, researcher Collette Daiute (1983) claims that expert writers do not have any better memories than inexperienced writers but that they have simply developed strategies to make more efficient use of their limited capacity. In short, expert writers have developed techniques which have become automatic through extended practice. Student writers do not have these strategies unless taught.

If the short-term memory is overcrowded, the long-term memory also presents problems for the inexperienced writer. Although it contains everything the writer could want—i.e., all the writing lessons the student has been taught—it is hard to access. The writer has to know what she’s looking for in order to find it.

## **Student Revisers Have Limited Skills, Especially in Reading Their Texts**

Reader’s point of view is missing. One of the common failings of inexperienced writers is their difficulty in accommodating their readers’ needs because they lack skill in viewing their texts from the reader’s perspective. Writing that ignores the reader is evidenced by vague topic conceptualizations, lack of development, texts that are filled with gaps and skips in meaning, awkward sentences, and distracting errors (Sommers, 2012).

There is a lack of general reading experience. Inexperienced student writers are also quite often inexperienced readers who have never become so immersed in the printed word that they have developed a reader’s ear for the right word, for the flow of a good sentence, or for the logic of a sound argument. In other words, these students do not take the role of the reader in the writing process—a step essential to effective revising—because they lack experiences in the transactions that readers make, such as setting up expectations, making predictions, and testing hypotheses (Calabrese, 1991).

Topics and texts are poorly defined. Many students have problems in actually knowing what they want to say; their intention may be vague. And they may have difficulty in knowing precisely what they have written. Obviously, if either intention or text is unclear, comparing them is difficult, perhaps even impossible.

Appropriate language resources lacking. Often, if one questions a student writer as to whether or not his text says what he intended, he is not sure. In order to compare what he wants to say with what he has said, obviously, he has to understand both. Often, when asked if there is a mismatch, he may sense a problem but doesn’t know what it is and might say, “Something’s wrong here.” Research has indicated

that the place where most students need help is not in identifying a *general* need for revision, but in identifying the *specific* problem and then having the language resources to fix the problem (Scardamalia & Bereiter, 1983; Calabrese, 1987). In short, the student may recognize that the first and second paragraphs are not clearly focused on the same topic, but he may not know what his options are in fixing that problem.

Let's say a teacher suggests to a student to use a transitional sentence between two unrelated paragraphs. That student may exclaim, "Oh, so that's what I need there!" The student has been taught the concept of transitional sentences and has that knowledge in his long-term memory, but he didn't recognize that that was a place to use one.

Revision guide needed. The student may have a vague idea of both his intention and his text, some sense of a mismatch, but may not understand what to do next. He may not realize, for example, that in order to revise, he needs to recall from his long-term memory the techniques for opening paragraphs and linking sentences *which he has been taught previously*. So, in many respects, the inexperienced writer needs a revision coordinator, a guide to prompt him during the rewriting process.

This is exactly what the teacher—*as reader and coach*—can do, repeatedly over a period of time. Or, what peers *as readers* can do. And later, what the writer himself *as his own reader* will do.

Strategies are lacking. Many students simply don't have the strategies they need for a successful revision. Inexperienced writers may not know how to handle an overcrowded short-term memory, easy to access, but small. They may also have difficulty in using their long-term memory, unlimited, but hard to find what they need. The inherent complexity of revision and the simultaneous juggling of different tasks can be so overwhelming to many students that they just skip the whole process.

Misperception of the process. Many students resist revising because they really don't understand what it is all about. And so when they are instructed to revise, they may do a surface review, look for mechanical errors, and stop. Nancy Sommers has documented the many difficulties students have with revision (1980).

For all of these reasons, students need a great deal of guidance as they revise. It is important for teachers to understand how difficult the process is for students. How well teachers understand these difficulties has implications for their own responding behaviors.

How can teachers help students when they revise, and what specific knowledge do students need in order to revise successfully? The following discussion addresses these questions.

### **How Can Teachers Help Students When They Revise?**

Teachers can help students get the knowledge they need for a successful revision.

In examining students' difficulties at different stages of the revision process, researchers such as Flower and Hayes (1986), Fitzgerald (1988), and Scardamalia and Bereiter (1983) have suggested key points when intervention may be most helpful. If teachers focus on the kinds of responses students need to get them past these common hurdles, and repeat them over time, students will then be able to internalize these responses and make them a part of their revising routines.

Common breakdown #1: The writer has only a vague idea of what he wants to say; i.e., his intention is unclear

Common breakdown #2: The writer's understanding of her text is not precise

Common breakdown #3: The writer doesn't see any discrepancy between his text and his intention

Common breakdown #4: The writer sees a mismatch but doesn't know how to fix it; i.e., she lacks the necessary rhetorical devices

Common breakdown #5: The writer has difficulty in managing the whole process and is uncertain as to what to do when

How the teacher and student can respond to each possible breakdown is described below.

**'Revising knowledge' for students and teachers**

What students need to know in order to respond to the common breakdowns:

- What do I want to say? ...clarity of intention
- What have I said?... ...understanding of text
- Is there a mismatch between the two? ...awareness of dissonance
- If so, what's causing the mismatch? ...skill in diagnosing the problem, e.g.,  
lack of details, gaps in meaning,  
vague topic, etc.
- If I know the cause, can I fix it? ...knowledge of rhetorical devices
- Can I coordinate all these tasks? ...what to do, when

The chart below explains in more detail how teachers can help students at each stage of the revision process.

**Expanded Implications for Teachers and Students: Step-by-Step Process for a Successful Revision**

What students need to know

What teachers can do

=====

What they want to say (intention)

ask questions as a reader;

*"What do you want to say?"*

*"What is your main point?"*

Model and teach paraphrasing:

*"This is what I heard you say"*

*"As your reader, I understand you will write about..."*

Teach thesis statement: concept with examples

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What they have said (textual meaning)

feed back what they have

written; paraphrase (*"Say it again in a different way"*)

*"As your reader, I understand your topic is..."*

The difference between intention and text is critical. Although the teacher's questions on each may appear similar, the purpose of paraphrasing the text is to help students find mismatches between what they have actually written and what they want to say.

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Any disparity or dissonance between text and intention

*"What are we expecting next?"*  
predict as a reader

help the student see that his text may or may not match his intention; through the teacher-as reader's questioning, as extensive as needed, the student can identify areas for revision: i.e., if an opening paragraph notes several features of effective PowerPoint slides, and the second paragraph discusses the use of the Internet in presentations, then the writer needs to address that potential dissonance

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Source of the problem

help with diagnosis

(disparity between text and intention)

*“Let’s look at the second P”*

repeatedly match text and intention

*“If your first P deals with effective*

*PowerPoint slides, what are we expecting*

*the second P to be about?”*

*“What are your options?”*

*“Do you want to expand your thesis to*

*include the Internet, or would you rather*

*cut that part and begin your discussion of*

*how PowerPoint slides can be effective?”*

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Language resources to

be a language resource

correct the problem

person; teach specific

items, e.g., linking

sentences and when to use them

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How to manage the entire

stop occasionally and

process

verbalize what’s going on:

*“We just linked this paragraph, now we*

*need to...”* teacher helps in managing the

process

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In summary, although all of these separate steps are important in helping students understand their specific needs for revision, the most important and difficult subtasks are identifying the exact problems in the text and having the appropriate language resources to solve the problems (Scardamalia & Bereiter, 1983 and Calabrese, 1987).

## **How Can Teachers Help Students Become Their Own First Readers?**

Teachers' responses are critical. In the most general terms, "The teacher brings the other self into existence, and then works with that other self so that, after the student has graduated, the other self can take over the function of the teacher" (Murray, 1982, p.143).

More specifically, teachers can model and simplify the revision process for their students. In one comprehensive survey, most teachers reported that they found it helpful to respond to students during the process of writing and revising, rather than after the final draft had been completed. The most helpful responses teachers can give students are short, oral, frequent, and purposeful—just enough to get the student to the next step in the writing/revising process (Freedman, 1982).

### **A Brief Vignette Describes How One Writer Became His Own First Reader.**

Jerry, a former business writing client, was recommended by his boss because no one could understand his writing. Similar to the writing of many of my students, Jerry's e-mails and reports were difficult to read; his main points were hidden or assumed, and his sentences were overly long and confusing. A very knowledgeable individual, he was highly regarded by his peers. But his writing frustrated his colleagues, and his promotions were held up by his poor writing.

After we worked together for several months, going over his real-life documents--e-mails, reports, letters, and proposals--one day when I arrived for our coaching session, he approached and said, "Marylyn, I can't get your voice out of my head! Every time I sit down to write, I hear your voice." Even though I could see a twinkle in his eye, he seemed serious and slightly annoyed.

"Well, what is my voice saying?" I couldn't resist asking.

"You're constantly asking me questions: 'what do I want to say; is that the simplest the opening sentence can be; where's the main idea, what does your opening paragraph mean, how does it connect to the rest of your document'...stuff like that."

"It's constant, every time I write. When am I going to get your voice out of my head?" He asked again.

"Well, I don't know, but I think *you* may have the answer to that question." I replied and waited.

Hesitantly at first, but then warming up, he said, "What do you mean?" He paused. "Are you saying that I'll get *your* voice out of my head... when... it... becomes... *my* voice?"

"Yes," I replied. "When my voice becomes your voice."

Many writers of all ages don't know they have an inner reader; teachers and writing coaches can bring it to life by teaching the transactions readers make, such as paraphrasing meaning, making predictions, and testing hypotheses.

### **How Teachers Talk To Writers Is Important.**

When we—as teachers—talk to writers, we are showing them how to later talk to themselves. No matter how we respond to students' papers, we are all "talking to writers." And what we "say" will affect how they will later talk to themselves in responding to their own writing. If all we do is edit and

judge, then so will they. But if we teach them how to read their writing for revision, then we have helped to expand their rewriting strategies.

Only by understanding a reader's specific reactions to one's writing—which the teacher-as-reader can model—can the student make effective revisions. Writers cannot communicate without anticipating readers' needs and then satisfying them. What does the reader need to know in order to fully comprehend what the writer is saying? That should always be the #1 task for the writer. When teachers introduce writers to their own inner reader, they are helping writers turn what they want to say into what readers need to know.

### **The Teacher-As-Reader Can Bring the Writer's "Other Self" Into Conscious Existence.**

How does one help writers see their writing from the reader's perspective? Students need to develop their own inner voices—or readers—asking questions and giving themselves feedback. Most students have no idea how to do this. But teachers have an important role in helping to make that happen. Murray (1982, p. 147) details all the possible tasks of the other self during the writing process.

Teachers represent all the readers the writer will ever meet. The writing teacher, in fact, is *the reader writ large*. Most importantly, the writing teacher is the reader that the student writer hasn't met yet within himself. Here are a few of the actions the writing teacher can take to help the writer:

- When the teacher speaks in the reader's voice, that is a first step for the student to find the reader inside herself
- Paraphrasing..."As your reader, I understand that this essay deals with..."; "As your reader, I don't understand whether you're talking about X or Y"
- Predicting..."As your reader, I'm expecting the next paragraph to tell more about..."
- Modeling this behavior over a long period of time, the teacher helps the student practice the same actions and hopefully internalize them, building their own inner reader

No matter the skill or experience level of the student, the teacher can play the role of the student's reader. For example, the student might be writing a paper on a subject with which the teacher is not familiar. Nevertheless, the teacher can still mirror the reader with questions, such as "What is your main point? Does your opening paragraph express all that you want to say about your main point? What is the reader expecting after the opening paragraph? Have you met the reader's expectations? What does the reader need to know next?" In asking these questions, the teacher is addressing the student's experiences, not the teacher's.

Through repeated demonstrations of the *writer-as-reader*—teachers can show students how to read their own writing, help them navigate the complexities of revising and teach them the strategies necessary for a successful revision.

### **What Are Teachers' Specific Behaviors That Help Students Function As Readers Of Their Own Writing?**

Two different contexts are possible: the student-teacher conference, or a large group instructional setting.

Let's start with the basics. Reader and writer, or teacher and student, or student and student, should sit side by side so that both have a good view of the text. The writer reads her paper aloud while the reader follows along and listens. If the context is a large group instruction, the student's text is visible on an

overhead projector or on a Smart Board and computer screen. For the purpose of this immediate discussion, however, let's imagine a student-teacher conference.

The teacher announces, "I am your reader: pretend you didn't write this and that you too are reading this for the first time." If the paper is covered and hidden from sight, then the student will be forced to act as a reader and not be distracted by what she wrote as a writer. The teacher/reader can ask questions such as, "What is the main point you want to get across in this essay"? Or, a reader might put into his own words what the writer said, "I am hearing you talk about such and such in your first paragraph; is that what you wanted to say?"

Paraphrasing the writer's text and feeding it back is probably one of the most important services that a teacher/reader can perform. Or, a reader can help the writer make predictions, "Now that you've determined the point of the first paragraph, what are we expecting the second paragraph to be about?" Since the second paragraph is covered, the writer, once again, will be forced to become his own reader.

In addition, a teacher/reader can give reactions, for example, saying, "I'm confused when your first paragraph says you're going to talk about Homer's portrayal of Helen, and your last paragraph focuses on Homer's view of Hector." Or, a reader might say, "Based on your opening paragraph, it seems that your paper could explore several different directions; I'm curious to see which path you're going to take."

Depending on how much revision the essay needs, the teacher can proceed sentence by sentence, or paragraph by paragraph, *uncovering* only the next group of words to be discussed. Usually, when the student sees paragraphs having nothing to do with her thesis, the student will often say, "I know what I have to do to revise" and end the conference.

Similarly, in a large group instructional setting, the teacher directs the discussion of a student's paper with identical steps and questions, sentence by sentence, paragraph by paragraph, whatever is needed. The technology of the old-fashioned overhead projector, if available, is ideal for this process. Or, as mentioned above, a Smart Board and computer screen can fulfill the same purpose: having all the students in the class being able to view a student's paper projected on a screen in the front of the classroom with the teacher controlling how much of the text the students see at any one time. Often, in that context, students whose papers have *not* been projected and discussed will learn from the deficiencies in other students' examples and will request permission to revise their own essays even before they have been analyzed in class. Thus, class time is efficient, and the teacher need not spend time in responding to all the individual drafts.

Of all the tasks that the reader and writer complete, the two that are especially noteworthy are paraphrasing and predicting. Both paraphrasing and predicting help students compare text with intention, a task that can cause serious difficulties for many writers. Paraphrasing can aid students in clarifying their topics and in comprehending their texts. For example, "Is this what you wanted to say?" or, "Say in different words the main point in this paragraph." Predicting can help the student hear the reader's unspoken questions in critical assessment. Both of these activities can simplify the complexities of the revision process for the inexperienced writer. Through modeling, the teacher/reader can help the student clarify the thesis and understand the text. For the writer to successfully compare the text with intention, it is necessary to build mental representations of the thesis and the text. This task may require paraphrasing, as well as other strategies.

Predicting can help in other ways. The teacher/reader can lead the student into predicting the contents of expected sentences, paragraphs, or entire passages. "What does the reader need to know next?"

“After the first part is presented, what are we expecting to follow?” “If that is the main point of your essay, then what are we expecting in the first section of development?”

Only by understanding the reader’s specific expectations, *which the live reader in the conference is modeling*, can the student learn how to fulfill those expectations. Making correct predictions is the essence of successful experiences in reading and writing. Readers cannot read without first having expectations and then finding out whether or not these expectations have been realized.

Writers cannot communicate without anticipating readers’ needs, then satisfying them.

### **Becoming The Reader: A 12<sup>th</sup> Grade Writer Learns about A Reader’s Expectations**

Once when I was helping a student see his text from the reader’s point of view, an unusual thing happened. The writer divorced himself so completely from his paper that, momentarily, he actually forgot he had written it. I had told him so many times to “pretend that you didn’t write this paper and that you’re reading it for the first time,” that that is just what happened.

In the context of an individual conference, the student had explained the purpose of his essay, and was satisfied that his opening paragraph presented that thesis fairly well. Now I asked him, “Based on your first paragraph, what are we expecting the next paragraph to contain?” Since the rest of the paper was covered, he couldn’t read ahead. Now he really had to answer as a reader who obviously wanted a further explanation or follow-up to the first paragraph. As you might guess, the second paragraph had nothing to do with the first one, and when it was uncovered, the student was speechless. Totally shocked, he announced, “Where did that come from? I never wrote that!”

Guess what happened next. The student grabbed his paper, muttering, “I know what I have to do to revise!”

Throughout the entire process, the teacher/reader is helping the student find options for making substantive changes in content and style. The student is learning how to make choices, to take charge of his text. In addition to questioning, listening, feeding back and reacting, the teacher/reader is also diagnosing the writer’s needs, encouraging the writer in tackling the many complications of revising, and helping him coordinate the whole process. Although the teacher’s role as a reader is both fun and challenging, at no time does the teacher ever need to cut corners and spoon feed the next step to the student. All the teacher needs to do is keep acting as the reader, asking questions about intention, feeding back the student’s text and helping the student predict what should come next.

### **Teachers’ observations after participating in a workshop on “responding to student writing”**

For several years, I gave in-service training workshops for teachers, grades 3-12. Our topics included correcting papers, teaching students how to revise, and helping students read their own writing for the purpose of revision. I’ve included a few excerpts from teachers’ written comments.

*After the workshop, I was reminded about what I felt was wrong with my approach to writing in my classroom. I always seem to be interacting with the children’s papers instead of interacting with the children. I was too concerned with editing their papers, and this was very time consuming for me. I decided that I needed to change my focus from the mechanics of their writing to the ideas they were trying to present.* (3<sup>rd</sup> grade teacher)

*This is my first year teaching a 5<sup>th</sup> grade integrated language approach. In the past, mechanics and correcting everything seemed to be the focus, which can be draining. Now I am trying to use what I learned in the workshop. Recently, I have been sitting side-by-side with my students and their paper in front of us. I begin by first having the student read his paper aloud to me. As the student reads aloud, he begins revising his work without me saying a word. Sometimes the student opts to return to his seat to revise his work. However, most of the time, I start by saying, "I am your reader, and let's pretend that you too are reading this for the first time." I then cover the work with a blank paper and ask what the main point is in the story. Having read the topic sentence, we talk about it and I proceed to ask if I can expect thus and such in paragraph two.*  
(5<sup>th</sup> grade teacher)

*How can a teacher get through the writing process without discouraging student writing?...The idea that seems most helpful is that of the teacher as reader and consultant as opposed to editor and judge. This approach objectifies the process, making it less personal, and thus, less threatening. The teacher is no longer saying, "I have the knowledge and therefore the power. I am going to tell you what is wrong with your paper and how to fix it"but saying, "As readers, you and I are on equal ground. We both want the same end-product (a well-written paper) and I'll do what I can to help **you** get there." The tools of the "teacher as reader" approach (paraphrasing and predicting and response sheet) allow the students to take control of their writing by teaching them the purpose of it (setting the expectation), how to fulfill the purpose (satisfying the expectation),and how to recognize if they have been successful in this (identifying the mismatch). These tools also teach students how to be largely independent in the process.* (secondary teacher)

*Modeling. Students received a copy of the writing and were asked to cover the paper and read only the first sentence. I then instructed them in the "as your reader..." type of oral response. This method was used sentence by sentence throughout the paper. By the end of the first paragraph, students were beginning to see weaknesses in organization, particularly in staying on the topic. The writer raised her hand at each step of correction. She would quickly read ahead and exclaim, "I know what's wrong with my next sentence! It shouldn't be there because it doesn't meet expectations!" ...Finally, the writer revised her draft and then read the original and revision to the class. Students could appreciate the vast improvement made and felt a sense of satisfaction in having helped to make the paper better...Positive results from this process: some students have asked to rewrite their first draft. They are now alert to the need to stick to the subject, and feel that they know the right questions to ask when in doubt. Because the "as your reader" approach helps them understand why a correction needs to be made, students are more agreeable to revising. Finally, I realize that students need more time to write and revise in class.*  
(7<sup>th</sup> grade teacher)

Although the examples described above focus on teachers in grades 3-12, it is possible to use these same responding techniques in large classes and on the post-secondary level. As mentioned earlier, a teacher could project one student's paper using an overhead projector or a Smart Board and a computer.

### **What Are The Limitations Of Correcting Papers?**

"If I don't correct all their mistakes, I won't be doing my job."

“Students have to know their errors; other people—parents , other teachers--will think I don’t know any better if I don’t correct their errors.”

In my experience, these are two of the most common responses “correctors” make when asked why they correct students’ errors.

Teachers do have options when they respond to students’ papers. Correcting and grading may be appropriate for an end-stage document, but too often this is the only response that some writers receive at various stages of the writing process. Teachers’ options include the following:

- Correct everything
- Make no corrections on any paper that is a rough draft
- Make no corrections on any paper that is a final draft
- Direct and expect students to make their own corrections
- Delay...expect students to make their own corrections *after* purpose, organization, word choice, sentence structure, voice have been addressed

Perhaps Donald Murray (1982) said it best in explaining the hierarchy of concerns: “...As the teacher models an ideal other self...the largest questions of content, meaning, and focus have to be dealt with first. Until there is a clear meaning, the writer cannot order the information that supports the meaning or leads toward it. And until the meaning and its supporting structure are clear, the writer cannot make the decisions about voice or language that clarify and communicate that meaning” (p.145). He also says “Too much instruction is failure-centered. It focuses on error and unintentionally reinforces error” (p. 146).

In my early years of teaching, I spent endless hours making comments and correcting and grading papers. Often, when I returned these papers to the students, I noted that students never looked at any of my comments, just noticing the grade. That is when I stopped grading papers and required students to revise: that is, respond to the comments and corrections. In 1982, when the *English Journal* published my article, “I don’t grade papers anymore,” a teacher in China wrote to me and asked to translate the article into Chinese. He explained how many of his colleagues were obsessed with correcting and grading their students’ papers. So, apparently, a zeal for correcting papers is not limited to this country.

When I started to coach business executives on writing improvement, I was met with many a hostile attitude and the question, “Are you going to use a red pen on my writing?” Many of these individuals had specifically selected a career where they thought they would not have to write, only to learn as they were promoted that writing competently was a basic skill in every job.

### **Conclusion**

Perhaps the greatest limitation that correcting papers fosters in inexperienced writers is a negative attitude toward writing. Additionally, too much correcting, especially without attention to purpose and organization, tells students that mechanical errors are of major importance and that meaning and structure are less important. And then there’s this question: is error-free writing, by definition, effective writing? Why not shift responsibility for making corrections to the student? (Kittredge, 2014).

The best teaching of writing puts error detection in its place: last place. It should come long after purpose, organization, sentence structure, word choice and voice have been addressed. Inexperienced writers get limited benefits when teachers act solely as judges and editors. Much of the research on

teaching writing describes what happens when students focus on surface errors and not meaning (Sommers, 1980). When they interrupt writing to correct spelling and grammar, they cut short the creative process, and in doing so, often ignore their purpose in writing.

Students need teachers and peers to act as readers, asking questions, paraphrasing meaning and making predictions about what comes next. Student writers thrive on this kind of feedback. Students can become effective writers, not so much by avoiding error, as by finding their voices to make meaning.

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**MARYLYN E. CALABRESE**, [writedrmec@aol.com](mailto:writedrmec@aol.com), has authored many journal articles on teaching writing. Her *Quick Skills: Writing in the Workplace* was published by Southwestern in 2000. She has coached business executives in writing improvement, as well as taught writing on both the high school and graduate school levels. Her Ph.D. dissertation from the University of Pennsylvania focused on revision.