

Correcting English Learner Writing

When providing feedback on written work by English learners, following are some principles to keep in mind.

1. Focus on errors at or below the learner's level. In other words, don't rewrite a beginning learner's piece to include an advanced structure (e.g., past perfect). Remember that one word type can have different degrees of complexity. So, for a beginning learner, you might correct the article error in "He is boy" but not in "Most important thing is love."
2. Always begin by eliciting the student's own corrections. Develop a correction symbol list (see example on the following page), and teach students what the symbols mean. Elicit corrections in different ways for different levels, always endeavoring to build learner autonomy.

Beginners:	Provide the correction
High Beginners:	Underline the error and provide the symbol
Low Intermediate:	Underline the error
Intermediate:	Put a check mark in the margin of the line that contains an error

This is just one way to progressively lead students to doing more of their own editing.

3. After the initial feedback, allow students time to correct. If they are unable to make the correction, move up one step in giving feedback. For example, if a student can't correct with just the underlining of the error, then move up to providing the correction symbol.
4. If written work has many errors, consider correcting only one type of error—for example, verb usage. Alternatively, if written work doesn't have many errors, consider the possibility that this may mean students are not attempting to use newly learned language forms. If that is the case, point out some of these forms and ask the student to try inserting them in their writing.
5. Only correct the number of errors that you think your learner can adequately attend to in the time-frame allotted for rewriting. This may be somewhere between 10–20 errors per written page. More than that will probably not be absorbed and will not be helpful.
6. When possible, create end goals for writing that are real and authentic. The end goal could be sending an email to someone in another country, publishing a book or story within the class or school, or writing text on a poster that will be displayed. Even personal journaling and collecting documents for a portfolio can be authentic, if the student can come to see them as real expressions of their lives, thoughts, and progress.
7. Most important, help students see the connection between writing and their overall development of English competency. Writing allows us to focus on language use, and this focus can then have a very positive effect on all the other skill areas.

Correction Key

Symbol	Meaning	Example
vt	verb tense	I <i>buy</i> a hat yesterday.
wo	word order	She is a <i>girl beautiful</i> .
wc	word choice	I <i>wish</i> I can become a teacher.
wf	word form	The boy ran <i>quick</i> .
ag	agreement	The <i>children studies</i> hard.
num	number (singular and plural)	I took many <i>test</i> when I was in university.
sp	spelling	I like to study <i>writting</i> .
P	punctuation	I can't study, I don't have time.
/	a word is not needed	It was so <i>much</i> nice to work there.
^	an additional word is needed	I applied to hundreds ^ companies
()	major changes are needed	I like (<i>have good every time life together</i>).