Five Approaches to Conferencing with Students
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Conferencing allows an instructor to build relationships with students that enhance one’s role as writing coach and editor. While conferencing with students, instructors should encourage the student to take on an active role. Some suggestions for structuring a conference include:

List of Questions
Respond to the student’s draft with a list of questions on issues related to content, writing, and argument. By using questions, the instructor privileges the student as the person who has the answers. This conferencing model assumes that the student has the authority over the text and can assert that authority in response to guided questions from a reader.

Reader Response Letter
Rather than using a prescriptive method to respond to student writing, an instructor can demonstrate that he or she takes the student seriously as a writer by responding to a draft as any reader would. Again, this model privileges the student as author but also heightens the student’s awareness of audience. A carefully crafted reader response letter can illustrate for students the connection between rhetorical choices, style, uses of evidence, and how a reader understands one’s text.

Grading Rubric as Guide
Students often complain that they received grades that are disconnected from an instructor’s comments, or that an instructor’s comments created an expectation for a higher grade than the student’s paper receives. Using your rubric during the drafting stage allows students to see specifically how a paper is evaluated against the criteria you have established. By using the rubric in connection with specific examples during the drafting stage can help students see a final grade as directly connected to the work of the entire sequence and not as an arbitrary judgment on one paper.

Intention vs. Message: Bridging the Two
We all have ideas that we are trying to communicate to others, but these messages are often garbled. In reading a student paper, assess what you believe the student’s intention was. Rather than simply mind reading, ask the student what he or she had intended to write about; how they had intended certain passages to be read and understood; how they had hoped the paper would come across to any reader. Describe what the paper communicates, using examples from the text to show how you have interpreted the ideas as you read the paper. You can help the student see where intention and execution have gone awry and how such dissonances can be resolved.

Leaving the Conference with a Plan
Before the student leaves the conference or for a homework assignment due in the next class, ask the student to come up with a specific revision strategy based on the conference.