FTH Ariel Helfer In-Person Grading Transcript

Upbeat music starts playing. (Ariel's voice) (Upbeat music playing underneath) I'm Ariel Helfer. I'm an associate professor of political science at Wayne State and I'm here to share a format for grading, essay grading, that I've come up with, which I call in-person grading.

(Man's voice) All right, what is in-person grading?

(Ariel's voice) So, the undergraduate courses I teach are courses in the history of political philosophy where students especially read primary text from the history of political thought. And I have them write an essay that is an interpretive essay and an analysis of the text that they've been reading where I'm trying to get them to work out their own understanding in their own words of, of the text we've been reading all semester and discussing in class about 1300 words, four or five pages.

In-person grading is an idea for how to give feedback to students on these essays more effectively. I think this method of grading really helps the students absorb and internalize and learn from the feedback that I'm giving them. When I would grade their essays, normally I would write a lot of comments in the margin between the lines, spend a lot of time correcting their writing, giving feedback on issues with their understanding of the material. And it's to this day not clear to me how much of that time and effort I spent writing all those marginal comments actually turned into lessons learned by the student. Did they read my comments Did they understand them? Could they read my handwriting? Hard to say.

But this way, even if maybe there's fewer comments that I share altogether, I think that they get communicated much more effectively because the students right there. We're having a conversation. If I'm not clear in the way I express it, they can ask for clarification. (We) can talk about it and go back and forth about it a little bit. I just think it's a much more effective way for the student to receive the feedback. The reading aloud part, which may be one of the things they're most nervous about, is, I think, a really helpful tool for them. It's a it's a good experience to hear their own writing being read aloud to another person can help them to understand where their writing sometimes needs help, where their arguments sometimes are shaky.

(Man's voice) So how do you structure this assignment?

(Ariel's voice) I have them turn in a hard copy of their essay on the due date. I also have them turn in an electronic copy through Canvas just so I can run it through the plagiarism checker. Then I have students sign up for a 30 minute meeting with me and my office hours where they come in with their own second copy of the essay, digital or hard copy is fine, and they read the essay to me aloud while I look at the hard copy they gave me and grade it. They'll read a paragraph at a time. After each paragraph, they'll pause. While they're reading, I'm giving written feedback in the margins on their paper - style, grammar, substantive issues with their argument - all the normal stuff that I would write on their paper if I was grading it by myself at home.

Once they're through the paragraph, they pause and I talked to them about what I've been writing, what I've been noticing, and so I give them that feedback directly orally. We can talk about it a little bit, and then they move on to the next paragraph.
We do the same, and we work our way through the essay that way.

Once I've gone through the whole essay with them in this manner, I give them my overall thoughts on the essay.

I tell them roughly what I'm thinking about assigning as a grade according to the grading rubric that they've had since the beginning of the course, and I tell them roughly what I think the overall grade or final grade for the essay is going to be.

(Man's voice) Can students use AI on their papers? And if not, how does in person grading guard against students using it?

(Ariel's voice) For the kind of essays I assigned where I'm really trying to get the student to work through and refine and deepen and clarify their own arctic...their own interpretation and their own analysis and understanding of the text. The process of writing, the process of articulating their ideas is a, is a core element. It's an essential element of, of the, the process I want them to engage in. So, I really don't want them using AI at all to write any part of the essay for them. But I do think there is this helpful side effect, this, this additional benefit from this form, this, this method of grading. And that is, the student has to come into your office and look you in the eye, read their essay aloud, and tell you, "I wrote this." But I do think that a student feeling a crunch to get an essay in on time, who might be tempted to cut corners by having some large language model write a significant portion of their essay for them, may just be discouraged from doing so. From cutting those corners by the knowledge that they are going to have to come and stand behind this work and say that they wrote it. There's also, of course, always the possibility that a student will come in and read their essay aloud and be stumbling and fumbling, not know how to pronounce words that are in their essay, seem to be kind of encountering some of this for the first time. And when that happens, that might help to corroborate a hunch that you have that this is not something that they wrote themselves.

(Man's voice) So how does this help you manage your time?

(Ariel's voice) I think it's a good it's good for time management more than time saving. There's a tendency when you have a stack of papers to grade, to do a few within the first week that you have them and then suddenly find that you now have to get through the rest of the stack in one or two more nights and you're sort of just there at the end, pulling your hair out, grading a whole stack of papers, staying up late. This ensures that the time you spent is judiciously sort of distributed over the course of your week. You don't lose those nights with kind of whole stack of papers that you have to grade. And so for time management, I think it's very helpful.

(Man's voice) Lastly, what are some of the lessons that you learned implementing in-person grading?

(Ariel's voice) The very first student who came in with their essay, I had them start reading aloud and all of a sudden it felt I was just doing so many things at once and I hadn't anticipated how difficult that was going to be. The students reading aloud. You're trying to listen to the student you're trying to read along as, as, as they read on the, on the hard copy. You're also taking comments. You're asking them to pause when they get to the end of the paragraph. You're then, you know, have trying to say something helpful and figure out what it is that you want to share with that student among the comments that you've kind of written. There's just a lot going on in the moment and I wasn't, I wasn't initially ready for just the sort of spot challenge of, of actually doing this. I did find that it got easier quickly. There was a

learning curve, but once you get the rhythm of it and get the hang of it, I felt I was in control. But other faculty trying to implement this might just want to be forewarned that it's it's, it's in, it's, it's new, it's new, it's different, it's a new challenge and you'll you'll have to get used to it a little bit, but there is a lot going on.

The other thing that I'd say is that I think students are likely to express concern that it just makes them nervous to think about coming in and just and reading their paper aloud to you in your office. Sometimes students haven't ever gone to a professor's office hours before or had a one-on-one meeting with the professor. But I think you should do everything you can to allay those concerns. Make sure they know that their grade is not based on their performance presentation, and just assure them that this is meant as a way to give them more helpful feedback than maybe they have gotten before.

My experience so far has been that as much as there are those nerves for students the first time, they really appreciate it once they've done it. They, once they see what it is that I'm trying to share with them, what the purpose of my feedback is, how, how I'm trying to help them become better writers and better thinkers. I think it, it's, there's a kind of light bulb moment for a lot of students of what it is as a teacher that I'm trying to teach.

That's it. That's in-person grading. It's evolving. I'm learning more about what works about it and what's helpful about it as I, the more I do it. And I imagine that there's all kinds of different ways to tweak it. I can imagine a lot of faculty will like to do it over Zoom as opposed to in person in in the office; shorter meetings; longer meetings; longer essays; shorter essays. And if anyone else out there thinks this is interesting and would like to try it, I'll be very interested to know and to learn from what other people (music starts playing underneath) wind up doing with it. And if anyone wants to get in touch with me, ariel.helfer@wayne.edu. Be very interested to hear from you.

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