ENGAGING STUDENTS IN THE MARGINS:

A MIXED-METHODS CASE STUDY EXPLORING STUDENT AND INSTRUCTOR

RESPONSE TO FEEDBACK IN THE FIRST-YEAR WRITING CLASSROOM

by

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DEDICATION

To my students, especially those who inspired this study. Your impact on my pedagogy and
research has been profound, and I am grateful to have had the opportunity
to learn from each of you.

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ABSTRACT

Providing feedback is one of the most time-consuming aspects of writing instruction. However, its effects are not well understood. Though divergences between instructors' goals and commenting practices and variations in students' responses are well documented, instructor and student perspectives are underrepresented in the existing literature, leaving it unclear why such divergences and variations occur. Furthermore, the terms used to describe feedback are generally left undefined and untheorized. This dissertation introduces a definition of feedback for the writing classroom and theorizes the role that feedback plays in this context. Using findings from a series of interviews and a corpus analysis of instructors' written comments and students' revision plans and revisions, this study explores how nine students with low levels of self-efficacy and motivation and two instructors of required first-year writing described their experiences with feedback and considers how they responded to the feedback they received. This mixed-methods study theorizes feedback as a continuous cycle of communication, interpretation, and negotiation through which instructors and students develop understandings of one another's feedback. Students' responses function as feedback because they directly inform the subsequent decisions instructors make when commenting on their writing. This study also foregrounds the role that instructors' and students' goals and beliefs play in the feedback cycle. These goals and beliefs offer one explanation for the divergences and variations noted. For instance, tensions became apparent in the goals and beliefs that the instructors articulated, making it difficult for them to realize some goals in their written comments, even when they aligned with those frequently recommended by composition scholars. Additionally, students' responses more closely corresponded with their goals and beliefs than with their instructor's goals or commenting practices, suggesting that instead of supporting students' purposes for writing, as scholars recommend, instructors should help students set writing-focused goals. Together, these findings demonstrate a need to reconsider the best practices for commenting on student writing, both in terms of what instructors can accomplish in written comments and what can best support students' development as writers.

CHAPTER 1

What *is* Feedback?

Of all the notes I wrote in my notebook during the 2014 meeting of the Conference on College Composition and Communication, the most important by far are questions that one audience member raised during a session devoted to feedback and student writing. I had been excited to travel to Indianapolis to connect with other scholars and teachers who share my interests in the assessment of student writing and promoting student engagement in the first-year writing classroom, and this session was perfectly suited to those interests. During the session, I listened attentively as each of the speakers addressed issues related to assessment, ranging from a study of graduate students' affective responses to the feedback they received from their advisors to a well-developed argument against machine scoring. As the panel progressed, I jotted down references that sounded useful for my research on the function of feedback in the first-year writing classroom and noted themes from each of the talks that resonated with my own developing ideas.

At the conclusion of the panel, the floor opened up for a brief question and answer session. Audience members responded to the panel in typical fashion, complimenting the speakers, asking for citations, and requesting more details about particular resources mentioned in the talks. One attendee, however, disrupted this rhythm by asking the final speaker to define *feedback* as he had used the term in his presentation. I noted the question, recognizing it as one I would likely get in response to my own work, and listened carefully to the speaker's answer. Feedback, the speaker explained, consists of the comments that instructors give students to help them reach particular goals. Satisfied with his answer, I expected–as is the norm in Q&A sessions–for the focus of the room to shift to the next question.

"On *what*?" the audience member pressed, clearly searching for a more concrete articulation of what feedback meant in the context of this scholar's talk. "What are you giving students comments on and what purpose do they serve in helping them reach particular goals?" The speaker looked perplexed by the follow-up question, added a few brief words about the

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importance of course objectives and context, and redirected the conversation to the next audience member with a question.

Like the speaker, I was initially surprised that the audience member wasn't satisfied by the straightforward definition of feedback provided. The definition offered aligns with much of what has been published about feedback in the field of composition studies in that it positions feedback in terms of the comments that instructors use to support student learning. This audience member's reaction, however, in both his persistence in questioning and his lack of satisfaction with the definition of feedback he received, suggests that the feedback process may be much more complex than definitions like this one can capture, highlighting the need to think about feedback in a more sustained and systematic manner. This is a particularly pressing issue for those invested in composition theory and pedagogy, as the resources currently available frame feedback much as the speaker did here, with little indication of the complexities involved in the feedback process.

In what follows, I seek to address this issue by reviewing and building upon existing definitions of feedback and theorizing its role in the writing classroom. Consequently, I begin this chapter by exploring how feedback has been defined in the field of composition studies in order to situate the anecdote above within the context of the larger scholarly conversation and to establish the need for thinking about feedback more critically. Next, I consider how feedback has been defined and theorized in the field of educational studies, highlighting the ways in which this research can complicate the notions of feedback that circulate in the writing classroom. I build on each of these bodies of work by introducing a new definition of feedback for the first-year writing classroom and theorizing the role that feedback plays in this context. The chapter ends by outlining how the present study will contribute to the research on instructor feedback. It is my hope that in doing so, this chapter can complicate the ways that composition scholars and writing instructors think about feedback in the writing classroom and draw attention to important issues that should be addressed as instructors prepare to give feedback to their students.

The Search for Definition: Feedback in Composition Studies

When compared to the definitions that circulate in the literature in the field of composition studies, the definition of feedback offered by the speaker at CCCC stands out as surprisingly well-developed. Too often, the term is either vaguely defined or not defined at all, if

it is even present in the body of work devoted to the assessment of student writing. Early scholarship often omits the term *feedback,* instead focusing on instructor *response* to student writing. Though response generally appears to be used synonymously with feedback, it is unclear precisely what individual scholars mean by this term. For instance, Lil Brannon and C. H. Knoblauch (1982) address the process of *responding* to, *negotiating* with, and *evaluating* student writing, but offer little in terms of concrete definitions of these concepts or the relationship they have to broader notions of feedback. Similarly, Nancy Sommers (1982) addresses *responding* to and *commenting* on writing–notably as two separate acts–but again, does not define either of these concepts, their relationship to one another, or the role that they play in the feedback process. Consequently, in one case we might equate *responding* with *commenting,* while in another this connection would ultimately break down, leaving it generally unclear what aspects of feedback are being addressed in each study and how these notions ultimately relate to one another.

More recently, Underwood and Tregidgo (2005) surveyed 21 experimental studies, finding that a range of terms is present in the conversations surrounding feedback in the composition classroom. They found that scholars varyingly use the terms *commentary*, *response*, and *comments* in ways that could not be systematically distinguished from *feedback* across the literature they reviewed. Instead of problematizing this inconsistency, however, they took up each term, reporting their choice to use all of them "interchangeably" (p. 74). Though there was no rationale offered for this decision, the conflation of these terms suggests that they are all of equivalent standing, something Sommers' distinction between "commentary" and "response" would seem to contradict. These patterns generally hold across the scholarship devoted to instructor feedback. Even Russell S. Sprinkle (2004), who sought to establish "a systematic method for examining and evaluating written commentary" (p. 273) never pauses to define this type of feedback or to theorize how it functions in relation to other types of feedback that students may encounter in the writing classroom. The lack of clear distinction between the terms noted here suggests the need to think much more critically about how feedback is defined in the writing classroom.

The inconsistent use of terminology across the literature related to instructor feedback makes the important work of synthesizing this research even more difficult. These inconsistencies make it less clear what is actually being compared across studies and could be one reason that Sommers' concern in 1982 that "we do not know in any definitive way what

constitutes thoughtful commentary or what effect, if any, our comments have on helping our students become more effective writers" (p.148) remains a pressing issue for writing instructors more than 30 years after the publication of her seminal work. At the start of her recent instructor handbook, *Responding to Student Writers* (2013)*,* Sommers explains:

> If teaching involves leaps of faith, responding is one of the greatest leaps because we have so little direct evidence of what students actually do with our comments, of why they find some useful and others not. Responding consumes so much time and energy, and yet, paradoxically, it is the element of our work that we least understand. If, for instance, you asked me why my students choose to use some comments and ignore others, I would have to say that *I just don't know.* Of course, I hope that I haven't overwhelmed them with too many questions or directives or written anything perplexing or discouraging. And I hope they take my comments to heart in the same spirit with which I have written them. (p. x, emphasis original)

That decades of research have brought us no closer to understanding what students do with the comments their instructors give them on their writing is alarming. Of further concern is the fact that an experienced writing instructor and prominent researcher of instructor feedback is not confident about what makes for useful written feedback. What is most concerning, however, is that this confession prefaces a handbook designed to help instructors effectively comment on student writing. More than anything else, then, Sommers demonstrates the need to think more systematically about feedback, not only in how the term is defined and theorized in the writing classroom, but also in how students and instructors experience the process of giving and receiving feedback in this context.

In part, the concerns raised by Sommers are the result of a general trend in the research devoted to instructor feedback. Since this work first gained significant ground in the early 1980s, many composition scholars have devoted their energy to exploring the best practices for commenting on student writing. Across this body of scholarship, clear patterns have emerged that encourage instructors to make their feedback dialogic, reflecting an engaged conversation with students rooted in classroom contexts and instructor voices (Sommers, 1982, 2013; Connors and Lunsford, 1993), that suggest control over writing should be placed–as much as possible–in the hands of the student (Sprinkle, 2004), and that emphasize that the purposes students have for writing should be prioritized, asking instructors to work both to understand those purposes and to help students realize them in their writing (Brannon and Knoblauch, 1982; Sommers, 1982, 2013). Though these goals are widely agreed upon by scholars in the field of composition studies,

research suggests that they often go unrealized in instructors' commenting practices (Sommers, 1982; Connors & Lunsford, 1993), even when instructors express beliefs about their feedback that align with these goals (Montgomery & Baker, 2007; Ferris, 2014; Lee, 2009).

Discrepancies between instructors' beliefs and commenting practices are well documented; however, it is not yet apparent why these discrepancies occur or how they might be mitigated by instructors as they provide feedback to their students. Consequently, this literature demonstrates a need to further explore instructors' experiences with feedback in the writing classroom. In addition, it demonstrates a need to consider instructors' experiences in conversation with the experiences of students. As Brian Still and Amy Koerber (2010) argue, "although they offer a wider variety of solutions, all of these studies have framed the problem of instructor commenting from essentially the same perspective… That is, they have sought to determine how instructors can comment on student writing in ways that they perceive as most beneficial to their students' long-term success as writers" (p. 207). What is missing here, according to Still and Koerber, is the "students' perspectives on commenting" (p. 207).

When students' perspectives are taken into consideration by researchers, however, two distinct problems emerge. First, these perspectives do not actually inform the notions of feedback that shape studies of student response.[1] Few studies have asked students what they identify as feedback in the writing classroom. Instead, researchers often ask students to complete surveys or questionnaires ranking or evaluating predetermined examples of instructor feedback (Lynch and Klemans, 1978; Reed and Burton, 1985; Burkland and Grimm, 1986; Straub, 1997). This feedback is most often made up of written comments selected by researchers. In some cases, these selections are based on researchers' general impressions of instructor commenting practices. For instance, Lynch and Klemans (1978) explain, "We chose these particular marks because they were the ones we and our colleagues felt we used most frequently" (p.175). In other cases, researchers develop their selections from written comments actually made by a sample of writing instructors, though these comments are often generated outside the context of the writing classroom and directed towards imagined students, as Straub (1997) reported in his study. In

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[1] Response, in this body of literature, is used broadly to address the following: 1. Students' perceptions of feedback, often in terms of what is *useful* or *not useful*; 2. Students' behaviors, in terms of their choices to take up or not take up particular comments or in terms of their affective responses; and 3. Students' writing performance, in terms of the quality of subsequent writing.

each case, feedback remains instructor-focused and narrowly defined, with little room for student perspectives to expand the notions of feedback that circulate in the writing classroom.

Second, students in these studies are often treated as a collective and undistinguished group. Because the goal of most research on student response is to make recommendations to help instructors effectively comment on student writing, researchers tend to focus on the most prominent patterns in student response, overlooking variations that might occur with less frequency in a given student population. While this approach is certainly logical, especially given the methods used in most of the research that has examined instructor feedback and the high demands that are placed on writing instructors, this treatment of students creates the false impression that all students respond to instructor feedback in the same way, an impression that is clearly countered by looking across the findings of individual studies.

Across the body of work exploring student response to instructor feedback, little consistency has been established to explain students' experiences when they receive feedback on their writing. Where some studies have suggested that students prefer to receive primarily positive comments on their writing (Gee, 1972; Beason, 1993; McGee, 1999), others have claimed just the opposite, suggesting that students prefer a greater number of critiques (Burkland & Grimm, 1986; Straub 1997). Similar discrepancies can be found when comparing studies exploring student preferences for types of feedback, with variations in students' preference for surface level or global comments and facilitative or directive comments (Underwood & Tregidgo, 2005). Even grading is subject to debate, with some scholars arguing that grades are an important motivator for encouraging students to work on their writing (Reed & Burton, 1985) and others claiming just the opposite (Burkland & Grimm, 1986). The discrepancies found across these studies have led scholars like Underwood and Tregidgo (2005) to definitively conclude, "there is no common ground in what students prefer in writing feedback" (p. 77).

While these discrepancies could be explained by any number of variables–such as differences between populations studied, institutional contexts, or study designs, among others– similar discrepancies occur just as frequently *within* studies exploring students' responses to instructor feedback. Although few studies reach 100 percent agreement, the variation of student responses in these studies merits careful consideration, as it holds important implications for how feedback functions in the writing classroom. Instead of considering these differences, however, the trend in the research on student response has been to overlook them and argue for best

practices for commenting on student writing based on the preferences most frequently expressed by students in the study. This decision, however, has clear consequences for students whose experiences differ from that of the "typical" student.

Notable examples of these consequences can be found by examining any study on student response that quantifies its findings. For instance, in their study of first-year writers' perceptions of feedback, Reed and Burton (1985) present the results of a series of three surveys that they distributed to two first-year writing classes. The surveys asked students questions about their preferences for particular methods of providing feedback, such as circled errors or written comments with explicit directions for addressing feedback.[2] Of the students surveyed, 80 percent expressed that if their instructor circled errors in their writing, it would be a disadvantage as it would not help them understand what was wrong with the circled text. In addition, 75 percent expressed a preference for directive feedback, as it had the advantage of giving them a sense of how they should revise. Reed and Burton also found that students prefer to receive grades on their writing, with 21 percent desiring all of their writing to be graded and another 67 percent desiring both graded and ungraded writing (p. 281). Based on these results, Reed and Burton conclude that students in the study showed a preference for receiving feedback that gave them clear direction and indicated that grades can be a highly motivating factor for improving their writing. Consequently, they argue that instructors should provide directive feedback to students and avoid simply circling errors in their work. Additionally, they emphasize the importance of grading student writing in order to motivate students.

In arguing that instructors tailor the feedback that they give students to suit these preferences, however, Reed and Burton overlook the responses of a significant portion of students included in the study. For 20 percent of the students surveyed, directive feedback was categorized as a disadvantage. From the perspective of these students, "these directions restricted the writer's individual ways to correct the error" (p. 274). Instead of giving students control over

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[2] In identifying particular types of feedback, Reed and Burton (1985) make clear distinctions between grammar and content, directive and non-directive feedback, and graded and ungraded writing, among others. This choice reflects a general pattern in the larger body of research, where scholars varyingly label feedback according to binary categories. Other scholars, such as Richard Straub (1997), have critiqued such distinctions, claiming that "researchers have not gone to sufficient length in shaping their classifications of comments," typically categorizing them in "broad or undefined ways" that aren't theoretically based (p. 96). Here, the way in which Reed and Burton distinguish comments is potentially problematic. By separating grammar and usage from content, for instance, they raise a distinction that does not reflect the nature of language or the relationship between meaning and form and may not adequately reflect the complexity of the feedback that students receive on their writing.

their writing, these responses indicate that directive feedback might be viewed as an appropriation of student writing, something that many scholars, like Sommers (1982, 2013) and Brannon and Knoblauch (1982), have argued adamantly against. Similarly, 25 percent of students surveyed expressed that they actually desired to have errors in their writing circled. These students explained that they find this method helpful because "the error stands out" when it is circled (p. 274). For these students, a desire to recognize all the problems in their essays was clearly more important than understanding exactly what their instructor wanted them to do with the circled text. And, for the 12 percent of students who expressed a desire to not have any of their writing graded, it seems much less likely that they found grades to be a motivating factor; instead, the presence of a grade might actually negatively impact these students' motivation to write. Although Reed and Burton acknowledge these variations in student response, they recommend practices for giving feedback that may suit many students, but will ultimately leave some students feeling like they have little control over their writing or feeling little motivation to write. These consequences should not be underestimated. In a class of 20 students receiving feedback following the recommendations Reed and Burton provide, at least two and as many as five students would feel that their needs were not being met.

The discrepancies that Reed and Burton found in student preferences are typical of patterns found across studies examining students' responses to instructor feedback. In a similar study, Burkland and Grimm (1986) compared students from six classes, finding that students who received grades on their writing expressed "much more hostility and closure" than those who did not receive grades (p. 240), leading the team to argue that instructors should resist placing grades on student writing if they hope to motivate their students. Though this discrepancy between studies is interesting, what is more interesting is the range of responses that students showed within Burkland and Grimm's study. According to these scholars, "students expressed a strong preference for criticism and an ambivalence about praise" (p. 242). In their study, 71 percent of students expressed a preference for critical comments on their writing, even on final drafts. In addition, when students were asked how instructor comments made them feel, 82 percent responded "no feeling in particular" (p. 244). Like Reed and Burton, Burkland and Grimm use these results to argue that instructors tailor their feedback to meet the preferences expressed by the majority of students in the study. In this case, they suggest that instructors should increase the amount of critical commentary they give to students on their writing. In

considering the preference that many students showed for this critical commentary, Burkland and Grimm argue that "we have mistakenly assumed that students have a strong emotional stake in their writing and that their fragile egos would be incurably wounded by criticism" (p. 243).

By arguing for this approach to providing feedback, however, Burkland and Grimm disregard the experiences of a substantial portion of the students who participated in their study. In this case, following these recommendations would mean that the 29 percent of students who did not express a preference for criticism–six students in a class of 20–would likely feel they did not receive an adequate amount of praise on their writing. Furthermore, the 18 percent of students who expressed that they do have emotions invested in their writing–or four students in a class of 20–could wind up feeling alienated or "wounded" by the criticism they receive. This seems particularly likely for the nine percent of students–two in a class of 20–who expressed that instructor comments give them negative feelings. Even more than for other students, increasing the amount of critical commentary would be particularly detrimental for students who may already be prone to experiencing negative feelings in response to instructor feedback.

What discrepancies like those observed here make clear is that little consensus on how students respond to instructor feedback has been reached. Scholars contrastingly argue that grades motivate students and that grades shut down the writing process. They paint a picture of student response that is varied, yet they overlook these differences in making recommendations for the best practices for commenting on student writing. While these oversights are concerning in and of themselves, there are larger implications that must also be considered. According to Reed and Burton (1985), feedback on writing has a "cyclical effect," where "past success or failure at a specific type of task affects willingness and performance at similar tasks in the future" (p. 271). This suggests that if the feedback that students receive does not help them improve their writing, they will be less likely to engage with that feedback in the future. Instead of overlooking discrepancies in students' responses, then, it becomes clear that more research needs to be done in order to understand why students are responding to instructor feedback in different ways.

Undoubtedly, there is a need for more systematic exploration of how feedback functions in the writing classroom that accounts for how students and instructors experience feedback in this context. In the next section, then, I begin this work by exploring prominent theories that can ground an approach to feedback specifically tailored to the context of the writing classroom.

Feedback and Its Function in Educational Studies

In contrast to the general lack of attention that has been devoted to defining feedback in the field of composition studies, clear trends have emerged in the scholarship in educational studies defining feedback and theorizing its function in a range of learning contexts. Because these definitions and theories emerge from differing contexts, they are well-developed and broadly applicable, though not reflective of the specific context of the writing classroom. Consequently, here I offer an overview of the ways that feedback has been defined and theorized in the field of educational studies. In later sections, this overview will serve as the framework for a new theorization of feedback specific to the focus of this dissertation study, the first-year writing classroom.

Exploring Existing Definitions

Among the research in educational studies, one of the most systematic attempts to theorize feedback and its effects was Kluger and DeNisi's (1996) meta-analysis, which considered 2,500 papers and over 500 technical reports. From their analysis, Kluger and DeNisi developed Feedback Intervention Theory (FIT), which synthesizes concepts from control theory, goal setting theory, and action theory among other approaches to integrate "the varying theoretical and paradigmatic perspectives" on feedback interventions (p. 254). According to FIT, feedback interventions are defined as "*actions taken by (an) external agent(s) to provide information regarding some aspect(s) of one's task performance*" (p. 255, emphasis original). While Kluger and DeNisi emphasize that this definition includes information about performance on a "wide spectrum of tasks," they notably exclude feedback that is generated without "intentional intervention by an external agent," such as *self-initiated* feedback, or feedback sought out by a learner, and *self-generated* feedback, or observations about one's own task performance (p. 255).

This definition is one that has been shared by many scholars researching feedback in educational studies, both before and after the publication of FIT. Sadler (1989), for instance, makes the same distinction between feedback and self-generated information. As he explains, feedback is externally provided "information about how successfully something has been or is being done" (p. 120). When information is self-generated, Sadler claims, it is not feedback but an act of *self-monitoring*. While this definition generally aligns with the definition offered by

Kluger and DeNisi (1996), it also differs in important ways. For example, where Kluger and DeNisi qualify that a feedback intervention is an intentional act, Sadler does not. In addition, Sadler goes on to suggest that in order for information to be considered feedback, it has to lead a learner closer to the goal or objective being sought, a point not articulated by FIT.

More recently, Duijnhouwer, Prins, and Stokking (2010) directly quote Kluger and DeNisi (1996) to define feedback at the start of their article examining the effects of progress feedback on students' motivation, self-efficacy, and writing performance. In their 2012 publication on a related topic, they develop the definition, retaining the notion that feedback is information provided by an external agent, but adding that this information is "intended to modify the learner's cognition, motivation, and/or behavior" (p. 171). In this definition, Duijnhouwer, Prins, and Stokking (2012) foreground the intentional nature of feedback, as Kluger and DeNisi do, but also add an emphasis on the specific goals of feedback, highlighting its potential to influence a learner's thought process, motivations, and actions.

Others have explicitly argued for more expansive definitions of feedback. In their review of the literature relating to formative assessment, Black and Wiliam (1998) critique Kluger and DeNisi's decision to restrict feedback to information provided by an external agent, and propose that "the term feedback be used in its least restrictive sense, to refer to any information that is provided to the performer of any action about performance" (p. 53). Hattie and Timperley (2007) follow suit, conceptualizing feedback as "information provided by an agent (e.g., teacher, peer, book, parent, self, experience) regarding aspects of one's performance or understanding" (p. 81). In both of these cases, self-generated feedback–otherwise known as self-assessment–not only becomes included in the definition of feedback, but moreover becomes an essential component of feedback that leads to learning. Citing Sadler (1989), Black and Wiliam (1998) explain that "a student who automatically follows the diagnostic prescription of a teacher without understanding of its purpose or orientation will not learn" (p. 54). For feedback to be effective, they use Sadler's work to suggest, students need to self-assess their own understanding of the goals or objectives of a task, evaluate their current position in relation to those goals or objectives, and seek out means through which each goal or objective can be accomplished. In addition to this focus on the self, Hattie and Timperley suggest a further expansion of the definition of feedback, noting that experiences and even inanimate objects like books can serve as important sources of

feedback, which is at times given to learners, at times sought by learners, and at times "detected by a learner without it being intentionally sought" (p. 82).

Across these sources, clear similarities and differences emerge in the ways that feedback is defined. These scholars agree that feedback is information provided to a learner; however, they disagree on whether that information is intentionally provided, self-generated, or simply detected. They agree that this information comes from an agent, though definitions of the term *agent* range from exclusively external sources to essentially any source. They agree that feedback must address some aspect of one's performance, but they disagree on whether performance must actually improve as a result of the information received. From this review, a preliminary definition can be forwarded, suggesting that feedback is *information provided by an agent regarding some aspect of performance.* Though this generalization does not acknowledge the complexities noted above, it leaves room for them to be sorted out based on the specific parameters of a particular educational context. Consequently, this definition provides a useful starting point for considering how feedback should be defined in the writing classroom, which I will return to in the following sections. The remainder of this section is devoted to exploring how these theories account for learners' engagement with feedback and the more general role that feedback plays in the learning process.

The Role of Goals and Beliefs in Learners' Engagement with Feedback

As one of the largest meta-analyses devoted to theorizing feedback, the work of Kluger and DeNisi (1996) presents a logical starting point for exploring the role that feedback plays in the learning process. In their description of FIT, Kluger and DeNisi argue that feedback regulates behavior through the comparisons that individuals make between the information that they receive and their personal goals or standards. In making these comparisons, they explain, individuals evaluate their performance relative to a goal and then opt to "attain the goal, change the goal, reject the feedback, or abandon commitment to the goal" and alter their behavior accordingly (p. 260). Consequently, in response to feedback, a learner might choose to invest effort in attaining a goal, to modify the amount of effort required by changing a goal, or to reduce the amount of effort required by rejecting the feedback received or rejecting the goal. Whereas Kluger and DeNisi emphasize the manipulation of goals in response to feedback, Hattie and Timperley (2007) suggest that feedback itself is also subject to manipulation. They argue

that on its own, feedback "may not have the power to initiate further action" because it "can be accepted, modified, or rejected" (p. 82). In each of these cases, what is clearly foregrounded is that learners will engage with feedback in a range of ways that include manipulating their goals in response to feedback and manipulating feedback (presumably in response to their goals). Both of these possibilities suggest that a learner's goals play a particularly important role in shaping how feedback functions in a particular context.

This literature also suggests that students' beliefs have a strong impact on how they engage with feedback. For instance, Kluger and DeNisi (1996) argue that individuals will typically aim to attain goals, in which case, feedback that indicates that they have fallen short of a goal, or *negative feedback*, will result in increased effort and feedback that indicates they have exceeded a goal, or *positive feedback*, will result in decreased or sustained effort. According to these scholars, negative feedback is most likely to result in increased effort "when the goal is clear, when high commitment is secured for it, and when belief in eventual success is high" (p. 260). In contrast, they suggest that negative feedback is more likely to result in abandonment of the goal when that goal is understood as having a low likelihood of being attained. In this way, Kluger and DeNisi suggest that an individual's beliefs about learning have a strong impact on his or her response to feedback, not only shaping the way that a learner engages with feedback, but also the goals that he or she strives to achieve.

Others have also acknowledged the important role that learners' beliefs play in the feedback process. According to Black and Wiliam (1998), a learner's "beliefs about the goals of learning, about one's capacity to respond, about the risks involved in responding in various ways, and about what learning should be like" ultimately "affect the motivation to take action, the selection of a line of action and the nature of one's commitment to it" (p. 21). Like Kluger and DeNisi (1996), here Black and Wiliam suggest that learners' beliefs and goals ultimately inform one another, together shaping their engagement with and response to feedback. This is particularly true, they argue, for students who either aim to minimize the effort they invest in learning or who respond with particular sensitivity to the learning process. These students, Black and Wiliam suggest, may be more likely to avoid difficult tasks, to search for the "right answer" from their teacher, and to attempt to combat insecurity by seeking their teacher's esteem. In addition, they may be less likely to exhibit help seeking behavior, as they may interpret additional assistance "as evidence of their low ability" (p. 22). What this suggests is that just as

some sets of beliefs can promote learners' engagement with feedback, others can make it much more difficult for them to do so. This is particularly true, Kluger and DeNisi suggest, for learners–often those with low self-esteem and high anxiety–who set a goal of "avoiding negative stimuli" (p. 269). Consequently, learners' beliefs, like their goals, are an important factor impacting their engagement with feedback.

The Impact of Orientation: Feedback Focusing on the Learner, Task, Skills, or Self-Regulation

Some factors that inform an individual's engagement with feedback are external to that feedback, as learners' goals and beliefs clearly play an important role in the feedback process. Other factors that inform engagement, in contrast, emerge from the feedback itself. For instance, scholars in the field of educational studies suggest that the orientation of feedback is particularly influential, as feedback that varyingly focuses on the learner, the task that the learner has completed, the skills necessary to complete the task, or the steps the learner can take to complete the task on his or her own has different effects. In what follows, I address each of these orientations, specifically highlighting the ways that scholars suggest they inform learners' engagement with feedback.

Scholars generally agree that feedback directed at the learner reduces performance (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Duijnhouwer, Prins, and Stokking, 2010, 2012; Hattie and Timperley, 2007; Kluger and DeNisi, 1996). This self-oriented feedback, as scholars term it, typically addresses the character or effort of the learner and is most often positive. According to Hattie and Timperley, self-oriented feedback "usually contains little task-related information and is rarely converted into more engagement, commitment to the learning goals, enhanced self-efficacy, or understanding about the task"[3] (p. 96). As Kluger and DeNisi argue, when feedback is directed (or directs attention) towards the self, an affective reaction is likely to result that could "influence the way in which the available resources are used" (p. 266). This is particularly true when attention to the self is understood as a threat, as individuals are likely to internalize perceived failures. According to Kluger and DeNisi, this internalization depletes cognitive resources and results in decreased task performance. Learners with a goal of avoiding negative stimuli are less likely to internalize a failure, and instead might reject goals or feedback in order to resolve any

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[3] Self-efficacy, which is addressed in detail in Chapter 2, is generally defined as an individual's beliefs in his or her capabilities.

discrepancies between the feedback received and their self-perceptions. In each case, self-orientated feedback can make it difficult for students to engage with feedback or with the task they are being asked to complete. This is true even of praise, Black and Wiliam suggest, when that praise "draw[s] attention to self-esteem and away from the task" (p. 49).

In contrast to self-oriented feedback, feedback that directs attention towards the task is thought to be generally effective. As Hattie and Timperley (2007) describe, task-oriented feedback includes information "about how well a task is being accomplished or performed" and is powerful when it provides learners with corrective information (p. 91). According to Kluger and DeNisi (1996), learners can use task-oriented feedback to understand the discrepancy between their performance and the objectives of a task and then apply that feedback in an effort to reach those objectives. If engaging in this process does not resolve the initial discrepancy between performance and objectives, they explain, individuals may respond by redirecting their attention inward, internalizing perceived failures, or they may turn their attention to focus on the skills needed to complete the task.

Kluger and DeNisi suggest that a learner's attention is primarily directed at the task, as individuals tend to prefer not to direct attention to the self, and as many of the skills required to complete tasks are automated and therefore do not require attention. Similarly, Hattie and Timperley suggest that most feedback is also task-oriented. Though these scholars among others claim that task-oriented feedback can be very effective, Hattie and Timperley argue that this information may prove less effective when diluted by self-oriented feedback or when it cannot be generalized to other tasks. Too often, they explain, task-oriented feedback fails to promote strategy processing and self-regulation in learners. The consequence of providing too much task-oriented feedback is that students may be encouraged "to focus on the immediate goal and not other strategies to attain the goal" (p. 91). For example, a student receiving repeated written comments identifying areas where her essay would benefit from the addition of more evidence might go through the essay and add evidence to each area identified; however, simply addressing this task-oriented feedback would not help her to understand why additional evidence was needed in the areas identified or how she might identify similar areas in her writing in the future. Instead, in subsequent essays she might repeat the strategies she used to draft her previous essay, adding additional evidence in a few places but generally relying on her instructor to once again point out the areas in need of further evidence. In cases such as this, task-oriented feedback can

result in decreasing learners' efforts to engage with both instruction and feedback, promoting trial-and-error strategies over learning outcomes (p. 91).

Task-oriented feedback can also be less effective for learners who have a difficult time engaging in the writing process. In their meta-analysis, Kluger and DeNisi (1996) found that feedback interventions "induce strong affective reactions, which in turn were shown to have automatic and pervasive effects on performance even on tasks other than the one that induced the affect" (p. 261). In extreme cases, they found that individuals who received exceptionally negative feedback on a regular basis began to exhibit "classical learned helplessness" (p. 260), which could cause some of the avoidance behavior previously noted. For those who have already internalized perceived failures and adopted strategies to avoid negative stimuli, Kluger and DeNisi explain, receiving feedback can be a difficult and personally threatening process, one in which negative feedback oriented toward a task is likely to be understood as self-oriented feedback. Individuals without a salient goal of avoiding negative stimuli, in contrast, are more likely to remain focused on the task, not on their self-perception as learners, consequently changing their behavior or focusing on learning as a result of negative feedback. In this way, even though the orientation of feedback clearly affects how that feedback functions, its function is equally informed by learners' goals and beliefs.

Even more effective, Hattie and Timperley (2007) suggest, is skill-oriented (or as they term it, process-level) feedback, which concerns "the processes underlying tasks or relating and extending tasks" (p. 93). This type of feedback, they explain, is more effective because it promotes the development of strategies that lead to deep processing and mastery in ways that task-oriented feedback alone cannot. This, of course, is not to suggest that skill-oriented and task-oriented feedback function independently of one another. According to these scholars, task-oriented feedback can promote task-confidence and increase self-efficacy, which may lead students to seek out more effective strategies in the long run. Skill-oriented feedback, however, specifically promotes the application of strategies learned from past experiences, the employment of universal strategies that are generally effective, the utilization of task-specific strategies, and the development of new strategies (Kluger & DeNisi, 1996). This type of feedback, Kluger and DeNisi explain, facilitates the development of standards that individuals can use to evaluate their own performance. When responding to skill-oriented feedback, a learner will continue to work until it appears that a standard has either been met or he or she decides to

give up on that standard. If a standard is discarded, the learner will either shift focus towards the task or disengage from the task altogether, once again depending on his or her goals for and beliefs about learning.

In addition to these three categories, Hattie and Timperley (2007) emphasize the importance of feedback that is directed towards developing strategies for self-regulation. As they explain, this kind of feedback addresses the way that learners "monitor, direct, and regulate actions" towards a particular learning goal (p. 93). Like skill-oriented or process-level feedback, they suggest that feedback promoting self-regulation is a powerful tool for deep processing and learning mastery, as a learner's self-regulation strategies "can lead to seeking, accepting, and accommodating feedback information" (p. 94). For example, whereas effective learners "create internal feedback and cognitive routines while they are engaged in academic tasks," less effective learners tend to rely on external sources of feedback and have fewer help-seeking strategies (p. 94). Some students, often those who avoid threats to self-esteem or fear social embarrassment, will seek executive help, "asking for answers or direct help that avoids work," while others will seek instrumental help, "asking for hints rather than answers" (p. 96). Only the latter learners, seeking help at this higher level, Hattie and Timperley suggest, will receive feedback directed towards self-regulation. Those who seek executive help are much more likely to receive task-oriented or skill-oriented feedback, and much less likely to develop effective self-regulation strategies. In this case, learners' goals to receive directive or facilitative feedback not only inform how feedback functions, but inform what kinds of feedback they even receive, once again demonstrating the crucial role that learners' goals and beliefs play in the feedback process.

The Function of Feedback: Key Aspects for Consideration in the Composition Classroom

From this consideration of feedback, it is clear that learners' goals for and beliefs about learning play a significant role in the ways that they engage with feedback. In the writing classroom, this means that students' beliefs about writing and about instructor feedback would likely influence the actions that they take in relation to the goals they strive towards and the goals they avoid and in relation to the specific feedback that they choose to accept, modify, or reject. These decisions would also likely be influenced by the types of feedback that students receive. When feedback is directed to the self, students may be more likely to disengage from the writing process and practice avoidance techniques, particularly if their beliefs about writing or

about feedback are negative. When feedback is directed to the task, learners may be better able to use feedback, but also might inadvertently internalize feedback or have difficulty transferring feedback from one task to another. When feedback is directed towards developing skills, learning processes, and self-regulation, students would likely benefit the most, as they would be able to engage with deeper learning and mastery that is more readily transferrable across contexts.

The primary considerations that emerge from this review, then, are the need to think about students' goals for and beliefs about writing and the ways that different types of feedback intersect with these goals and beliefs in the context of the writing classroom. In the next two sections, I turn to each of these considerations, first establishing contextual details necessary for understanding the learning environment of the required first-year writing classroom, and then adapting the definitions and theories from educational studies to better suit this context.

Towards a Deeper Understanding of Feedback in the First-Year Writing Classroom

Because beliefs play such a prominent role in the feedback process, I begin my consideration of the first-year writing classroom by exploring what is known about the beliefs that both students and instructors bring into this context. These beliefs are shaped by the nature of first-year writing courses and by the nature of writing as it is realized in these courses. In what follows, I provide a sketch of the first-year writing course and the conceptions of writing that circulate within these courses. I then consider how these sketches can begin to inform a theorization of feedback specific to the first-year writing classroom.

One of the primary influences on the function of feedback in the first-year writing classroom is the institutional nature of this course. At most institutions, first-year writing is a required course or series of courses that students must complete in order to obtain a degree. In some cases, the first-year writing requirement can be met by passing a test or submitting a successful writing portfolio, releasing a select group of students from the requirement altogether; in other cases, however, students may actually be placed (or in even fewer cases, place themselves) in additional preparatory courses before enrolling in a first-year writing course, making the requirement even more cumbersome. These courses often carry a grade threshold that students must surpass in order to fulfill the writing requirement. Consequently, many students who enroll in first-year writing do so only because they are required to and as a result, they may be much more invested in achieving a passing grade than in improving their writing.

Some scholars have specifically considered the role that grades play in the writing classroom. For instance, Burkland and Grimm (1986) developed a survey to examine how grades influence "students' attitudes toward writing, revision, and teachers' suggestions" (p. 239). They found that students in their study who received grades generally showed much more interest in understanding their scores than in learning from the written comments that accompanied those scores, and they often had hostile reactions to their instructor's comments. In contrast, those who received written comments without grades expressed much more openness towards the feedback they were given. Burkland and Grimm use these findings to argue that "a 'marked' paper shut off communication" between instructor and student (p. 241), leading them to recommend that "if teachers want final draft responses to teach and motivate, they should discontinue placing grades on papers and continue to offer suggestions for revision even if it is unlikely that students will have the time or option to revise" (p. 240).

In contrast to Burkland and Grimm, in a similar study Reed and Burton (1985) found that students overwhelmingly prefer to receive grades on their writing. When asked whether they would rather have a writing class involving only ungraded writing, only graded writing, or a combination of both graded and ungraded writing, 21 percent of surveyed students expressed that they wanted only graded writing and an additional 67 percent wanted both graded and ungraded writing (p. 281). These figures suggest that students in writing classes may be far more motivated by grades than by learning to write. Only 12 percent of surveyed students were interested in taking a writing course without the incentive of grades. These findings led Reed and Burton to conclude that "despite the degree of comfort that writers felt with ungraded writing, grades still prove to be an incentive to write as well as possible" (p. 281).

The results of these two studies speak to one another in interesting ways. Reed and Burton's results might be used to suggest that Burkland and Grimm's ungraded students only chose to engage with feedback because the comments they received were the sole indication of their instructor's evaluation of their writing. If this were the case, then graded students would have no need to engage with comments, as the evaluation of their writing was communicated to them in the form of a grade. The hostile responses that graded students in the study expressed, however, raise the possibility that even though students seem motivated by the possibility of a grade, as Reed and Burton argue, the experience of actually receiving a grade could make the simultaneous processing of other forms of feedback more difficult.

This latter possibility is supported by Feedback Intervention Theory (FIT). According to FIT, grades cause learners to divert attention from the task at hand to the self (Kluger & DeNisi, 1996). As previously noted, feedback that directs attention to the self is likely to result in an affective response. In the writing classroom, this response could lead students to avoid a particular assignment or aspects of an assignment or even to disengage from the writing process altogether. The likelihood of this response is increased by the required nature of first-year writing. Because first-year writing students are aware that they need to receive a passing grade in order to meet an institutional requirement, they may be even more prone to internalize the grades they receive and experience affective responses to instructor feedback. For some students–particularly those who struggle to achieve a desired grade–it seems quite likely that even task-oriented feedback could be interpreted as self-oriented feedback, as FIT suggests. A theorization of feedback in the first-year writing classroom, then, must acknowledge the role of grades as both a motivator and deterrent for student achievement, and consider the differing ways in which students might be influenced by the grades that they receive on their writing.

The required nature of the first-year writing course encourages students to focus on grades, diverting attention from their writing tasks to their self-perceptions as writers. This attention to the self is likely amplified by the relatively small size of most first-year writing classes.[4] In 2004, the average first-year writing course served between 21 and 22 students[5] (qtd. in Horning, 2007, p. 20). Writing programs continue to push for these small class sizes. For example, the University of the Midwest (where this study took place) currently stipulates that no more than 18 students can enroll in any first-year writing course, a cap that the Writing Program at the university strictly enforces. According to Alice Horning (2007), the benefit of these small class sizes is that they allow students to get more attention from their instructors, to engage more deeply in their coursework, and to better develop their writing skills. As she writes, for students,

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[4] What counts as small, of course, varies by institution. The IDEA Center, a non-profit institution devoted to learning, teaching, and leadership performance in higher education, categorizes small class size as 10-14 students, medium class size as 15-34, large class size as 35-49 students, and very large class size as 50 or more students (Benton & Pallett, 2013). According to this standard, first-year writing courses would generally be considered medium-sized classes, though in contrast to the other primarily lecture-based introductory courses that students often take in their first year, the smaller size of this class is likely significant.

[5] This average of 21.49 students was calculated by Richard Haswell, who compiled a list of class sizes from 183 institutions including community colleges, state colleges and universities, and Ivy League schools among others. His work was originally published on Comppile.org in June of 2004, but is no longer accessible at this site.

small class sizes can "make a difference in their performance and persistence to degree completion" (p. 28).

While the advantages of small writing classes are without question, it is important to also consider how the more personal nature of the interactions they enable might impact students' experiences of receiving feedback in the first-year writing classroom. As Horning suggests, students do get more attention from instructors when classes have lower enrollments. However, research shows that the individual attention they receive may differ in significant ways. For example, in their consideration of office hour conversations between a writing instructor and four of her students, Freedman and Calfee (1984) found that higher-achieving students received considerably more praise from their instructor than lower-achieving students. As they explain, "the higher-achieving students from the first day of instruction, in effect elicited praise from the teacher by admitting their insecurity with their writing" (p. 478). In contrast, the lower-achieving students, who Freedman and Calfee identify as "not teacher-wise," did not express insecurities with writing and received much less praise.

In addition to receiving varying degrees of praise, students in this study also received different kinds of invitations for further help from their writing instructor. At the conclusion of their first conferences, the two higher-achieving students received lengthy invitations from their instructor to seek help outside of class, with one student being invited four times to come to his instructor's office, to set up an appointment to come to the office, or to ask a question, and the other student being invited three times to do the same. The lower-achieving students, in contrast, received fewer invitations; one student elicited her own invitation early in the conference, but received no reinforcement of that invitation at the end, and the other received two invitations that were considerably briefer than those issued to the higher-achieving students.

In part, the differential treatment that these students received extended from the small size of their writing class. Because the instructor had time to meet with students one-on-one (a valuable and important pedagogical moment, to be sure), she had time to develop understandings of each student that ultimately influenced the interactions that took place in the conferences. These understandings, Freedman and Calfee argue, were likely based on the attitudes that students expressed during their conferences. For example, while the higher-achieving students expressed positive attitudes towards writing in their conferences, one lower-achieving student shared her skepticism towards the learning process and her perception that teachers' evaluations

are primarily based on their opinion of a student. During her conference, this student explained that one of her friends got a bad grade in a course, and then later learned "if the teacher doesn't like you she'll give you a bad grade" (p. 477). This experience, the student explained, left her feeling "depressed and lost" because:

> There are not a lot of people who who would give you confidence and would help you even though a teacher might say oh I'm always there to help you. But when you go to them they have this attitude of I don't want to help you. That happened to my business teacher. She always came to the classroom and just um two students she liked. She always said hi to them directly and then the other students she would just ignore. (p. 477)

Freedman and Calfee identify the attitudes expressed by this student as "counterproductive" and suggest that these kinds of attitudes likely "perpetuate the problems experienced by lower-achieving students" (p. 478). Instructors, they argue, ultimately develop understandings of students that are informed by such attitudes, understandings which likely result in the kinds of differential treatment noted here.

This example in particular demonstrates both the affordances and limitations of being able to engage on a more personal level with students in the writing classroom. In some cases, the chance for students to work one-on-one with their instructor and share their insecurities about writing results in a supportive collaboration that facilitates writing development. Students in this scenario would likely feel supported by their instructor, which would increase their sense that the course objectives were actually attainable. Consequently, these students would be more likely to use negative feedback to develop their writing, changing their techniques or focusing on writing strategies as a result of the instructor feedback they received, as Kluger and DeNisi (1996) suggest.

For others, however, the understandings that develop between instructors and students can be fraught by a range of tensions. In the previous example, the student shares a different kind of insecurity by explaining how it felt to be disliked by an instructor, a feeling that seems to have emerged from that instructor's choice not to socialize with the student at the start of class. In this case, the student did not just feel ignored by her instructor. Instead, she interpreted her instructor's behavior as an indicator that the instructor did not like her and did not want to help her learn the course content. In this way, the simple act of saying "hello" to a couple of students at the start of class led one student to conclude that if a teacher liked her, she would succeed, and if a teacher did not like her, she would not. As Kluger and DeNisi (1996) suggest, students in this

scenario would be much more likely to perceive negative feedback–even when it is directed towards the writing they produce–as self-oriented. As a result, any failures experienced might be internalized by the student, resulting in an avoidance of writing tasks that generate negative stimuli and eventual disengagement from the writing process.

The small size of the first-year writing classroom makes the interactions that take place between an instructor and student particularly important for a theorization of feedback that is tailored to this context. Students' beliefs about the writing process, their writing instructor, and feedback clearly inform these interactions. Equally important are instructor beliefs. In the two scenarios described above, the instructor's understandings of students and of students' engagement with the writing process informed the interactions that took place during each conference. Freedman and Calfee's work further suggests that just as students look to their instructors for indicators of where and how they should invest their effort, instructors look to students for indicators of where their teaching time may be best spent. In the case of this instructor, these indicators came in the form of the comments students made during their conferences, which ultimately led the instructor to develop understandings of students, and influenced–whether consciously or not–the amount of praise that students received and the invitations for further help that were offered. Of particular concern here is that the students who actually needed their instructor's help the most–the lower-achieving students in this study–received less beneficial feedback than their higher-achieving counterparts.

Clearly, instructors' beliefs are essential to an understanding of how feedback functions in the first-year writing classroom, as these beliefs directly inform the feedback that instructors provide to students. These beliefs can emerge from the interactions that take place between instructor and student, as the previous example demonstrates. They can also stem from instructors' experiences with the writing process. In a study of novice writing instructors' perceptions of first-year writing students, for example, Dryer (2013a) found that the graduate teaching assistants (GTAs) in his study frequently projected their own anxieties and struggles with writing onto students. In a series of interviews, GTAs varyingly described their struggles with developing a framework for their ideas, using appropriate academic language, reaching an acceptable depth of thought, or following an effective writing process, and then proceeded to read those same issues into the sample student essays that they were asked to evaluate. As Dryer

explains, "novice teachers' shallow history of teacher-student interactions may not furnish them with viable alternatives to the immediately available precedent of their own experience" (p. 433).

While this reliance on personal experience indicates a potential predisposition for new instructors to identify with their students, and indeed, some scholars have shown that teachers often see some version of themselves in their students (Rankin, 1994), the GTAs in this study also created strong divisions between themselves and the students they imagined as authoring the essays that they evaluated. In contrast to their active engagement with their own struggles with academic writing, the instructors overwhelmingly characterized students as lacking motivation, initiative, and strategies for writing. According to Dryer, students were constructed "as passively unable, incompetent, aimless, or–crucially–*in need of the GTAs' direction*" (p. 431, emphasis original). In this positioning, students have little agency or authority over their writing, which Dryer argues flattens the experiences of students in surprising ways. Though his study explored the perceptions of new writing instructors, Dryer suggests that more experienced instructors will not necessarily develop entirely accurate understandings of students, arguing that "we likely overestimate how well we actually know our students" (p. 427).

In a study of more experienced instructors, Dana R. Ferris (2014) identified a range of instructor goals that shape feedback practices in first-year writing courses. Instructors in this study generally shared the following course-focused goals: to help students become self-regulated learners, to assist students in becoming more confident writers, and to be a source of encouragement for students. These goals suggest that the instructors in this study value confident, self-regulated students, and they value their own ability to support students in reaching these goals. The instructors also expressed that they value feedback, agreeing that it plays a central role in the teaching of writing. More specifically, they aimed to provide feedback that is: clear, and consequently a model of clarity for students; individualized, in that it is specific to the student's text; conversational, as opposed to a directive for how students should revise; and prioritized, so that students get feedback on what is most important. Finally, instructors also emphasized a more personal goal of managing their time in order to "be fair to oneself while still providing useful feedback to students" (p. 18).

Although these goals were generally shared across the instructors in this study, they were realized differently in each instructor's individual approach to providing feedback on student writing. From the range of approaches observed, Ferris identifies four types of instructors. Each

of these types, she argues, creates a considerably different experience for first-year writing students. The first type of instructor Ferris identifies is *the idealist.* An idealist was most often a new teacher with less than three years of experience teaching writing. These instructors emphasized that they did not want to be directive in the feedback they provided to students, they felt they could meet their students' needs without tailoring their feedback to suit individual differences, and they preferred conferencing with students one-on-one to providing them with written feedback. The second type, *the pragmatist*, was often an instructor who had taught writing for more than ten years and valued efficiency over all other considerations when providing feedback to students. These instructors had typically tried a range of methods for commenting on student writing, but had rejected prior approaches in order to save time. Third, *the outsider,* was also an experienced instructor who came to teach writing from a field outside of composition studies. These instructors, as Ferris explains, "had their own strongly held views about what was right or wrong and were not especially interested in 'best practices,' research, or the ideas of other teachers" (p. 19). They also tended to be very cynical about students, expressing doubt that their students read the written comments they made. As one instructor said, "I'm very jaded and disillusioned at this point in time. I'll be the first one to admit" (p. 19). The fourth and final type, *the dedicated veteran,* had been teaching writing for between ten and 20 years. These instructors found teaching writing valuable and expressed that they enjoyed this work. They were also reflective about teaching and continuously aimed to improve their pedagogy, including their approaches to providing feedback on student writing.

Certainly, the goals held by these instructors would shape the feedback that students receive in their writing courses, as Ferris suggests. In the idealist's class, the feedback that students receive might be very similar, so that one student may be able to productively use that feedback to focus on trying new writing strategies while more sensitive students–or students with more contentious relationships with their instructor–might internalize what they see as an indication of their failure, and disengage from the assignment. In the pragmatist's class, students may struggle to make use of the limited feedback they receive or interpret its brevity as an indication that their instructor is not particularly invested in their success. In the outsider's class, students may sense their instructor's frustration, which would likely show itself in interpersonal interactions or even in the written comments they receive, making them much more likely to interpret all feedback–even that directed at the task–as self-oriented feedback. In contrast, in the

dedicated veteran's class, students might receive written feedback tailored to their specific needs, and thus could secure a higher commitment to developing their writing, believing that they really are capable of accomplishing the goals that their instructor sets out for them.

The goals and beliefs that instructors bring into the first-year writing classroom are particularly important because of the power that instructors hold over students in this context. In their guideline on "NCTE Beliefs about the Teaching of Writing" (2004), the National Council of Teachers of English explains that students in first-year writing courses, like students in all academic settings, "write because someone in authority tells them to." As they explain, "in every writing situation, the writer, the reader, and all relevant others live in a structured social order, where some people's words count more than others, where being heard is more difficult for some people than others, where some people's words come true and others' do not." In part, the power of first-year writing instructors stems from the fact that they are grading students and that those grades hold the potential to fulfill an institutional requirement or to delay a student's progress towards their degree. In part, it comes from students' uncertainty about the expectations for writing at the college level. Because many first-year writing students have not yet learned what defines "good writing" at the college level, their instructor becomes an essential authoritative figure for developing this knowledge. As Thaiss and Zawacki (2006) suggest, this lack of disciplinary knowledge could lead students to use their experiences in their first-year writing course "to build a general picture of 'what all teachers expect'" in the writing they produce (p. 139). If students have no prior knowledge of college-level writing to contrast their first-year writing instructor's goals and beliefs against, they may be less prone to questioning what their instructor communicates to them and simply accept their instructor's feedback on their writing.

This, however, may not be the case for all students. According to Dryer (2013b), by the time that students begin their first-year writing course, their "experience of shifting standards and rationales for the many appraisals they have already received… has likely convinced them of the subjectivity of reader response" (p. 29). Students with this "radically relativistic view," as Thaiss and Zawacki term it, would likely "see teachers as idiosyncratic" and "feel confused and misled as teachers use the same terms to mean different things" (p. 139). For these students, their first-year writing teacher is still the authority figure. However, this figure shifts from a disciplinary expert indoctrinating a student into a way of knowing to an idiosyncratic instructor that the student has to figure out how to please. In the latter case, students may often question the goals

and beliefs that their instructor espouses, though this questioning may not be outwardly expressed due to the authority that the instructor maintains as the grader of student writing. Instead, students may opt to accept their instructor's feedback at the expense of their own personal goals and beliefs; they may attempt to modify their instructor's feedback to meet some goals but not others; or, they may reject that feedback in order to maintain their own previously held goals and beliefs about writing.[6]

The uneven power dynamic between instructors and students is also reflected in the notions of writing that circulate in first-year writing courses. In a study of scoring guides and rubrics collected from 83 writing programs in public institutions across the United States, Dryer (2013b) found that in these documents, students were given little agency in terms of the standards they choose (or choose not) to meet. With the exception of two instances of the word "ignore," students could only "fail" to meet standards across these documents; they could not, for instance, "decline," "refuse," or "resist" them (p. 27). As Dryer explains, "in eliding students' potential agency in 'failing' to meet standards, the documents in this corpus present their criteria and performance categories as uncomplicated means to an ideologically neutral end" (p. 27).

Dryer also notes this effacing of student agency in the foregrounding of "writing" as the subject of many sentences in these rubrics, a choice which he argues overlooks the role of both students and instructors in the production and evaluation of students' texts. The instructor's role in evaluating writing was particularly occluded, as these evaluations were not represented as one reader's experiences, but "intrinsic *qualities* of those texts" (p. 26, emphasis original). One potential cause for this occlusion, Dryer suggests, is that overtly acknowledging that the traits being assessed are actually contingent and subject to individual interpretation "would constitute a validity threat to an 'objective' appraisal of writing" (p. 29). Here, instructor authority is tied to objectivity, objectivity which cannot be questioned on the premise that instructors are not

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[6] Thaiss and Zawacki (2006) also identify a third type of student who has reached a "sense of coherence-within-diversity" (p. 139). These students, who have a considerable amount of experience with writing, can synthesize patterns in all of their experiences within a discipline to create a coherent construct. Like the "radically relativistic" students, these students are likely to varyingly accept, modify, and reject instructor feedback; however, their choice to do so would be informed by a deeper understanding of both an instructor's recommendations and disciplinary values, not by questioning their idiosyncratic nature. It seems unlikely that first-year writing students would reach this stage, as Thaiss and Zawacki suggest not all students will reach it during their entire undergraduate career. Consequently, this student-type has not been integrated in the consideration presented here, but should be kept in mind, particularly in regard to non-traditional students and students who postpone fulfilling the first-year writing requirement until later in their studies.

making evaluations, per se, but simply reflecting to students how their writing realizes (or fails to realize) widely agreed upon standards.

In the consideration offered here, first-year writing is positioned as a required course in which students are motivated and discouraged by the grades they receive on their writing. Because first-year writing classes are generally small in size, the personal interactions that take place between student and instructor are extremely important, particularly for the process of giving and receiving feedback. These interactions are shaped by and shape the power dynamic that exists between instructor and student and the goals and beliefs that each hold. Goals and beliefs are crucial to the feedback process, as they ultimately inform the feedback that an instructor gives a student and that student's subsequent response. This suggests that a theorization of feedback in the first-year writing classroom must account for the interactions that take place between instructors and students and for the goals and beliefs that they bring into and that ultimately emerge from the feedback process, which the next section turns to address.

Theorizing Feedback in the First-Year Writing Classroom

When this understanding of the function of feedback in the first-year writing classroom is considered in relation to the definition of feedback previously offered, several aspects emerge as striking: that feedback is information; that it is provided by an agent; and, that it regards some aspect of performance. Each of these aspects merits further consideration to develop a definition of feedback appropriate for the first-year writing classroom.

Information is generally defined as definite knowledge, facts, or data. In the portrayal of the writing classroom described in the previous section, feedback is not positioned as definite knowledge, but as something that instructors and students come to understand through a process of interpretation. In part, this interpretive process emerges because, as Thaiss and Zawacki (2006) suggest, writing instructors often use the same terms to mean different things. In these situations, students have to work to understand what each instructor is trying to communicate through the key terms that appear in his or her feedback. Additionally, the need for interpretation results from the strong influence that instructors' and students' beliefs have on how they understand feedback. For instance, the student who believed that she could only be successful if her instructor liked her would likely interpret feedback from an instructor she understood as liking her differently than from an instructor she understood as not liking her. If an instructor

wrote a comment on this student's essay inviting her to come by office hours to work on a developing a technique in her writing, in the former case, the student would likely interpret the comment to mean that her instructor wants to help her and that going to her instructor's office would help her to improve her writing. In the latter case, however, the student would likely interpret the comment as insincere and potentially punitive, suggesting less that the visit would benefit her writing, and more that the instructor wanted it to appear as though she desired to help the student. Consequently, feedback in the writing classroom is often difficult to classify as information, and can be more accurately described as an indicator that must be interpreted in order to develop an understanding of the messages being communicated.

Defining feedback as an indicator draws attention to the many different types of understandings that students and instructors develop from their communications with one another. As the previous example demonstrates, instructor feedback served as an indicator of how the student could improve her writing and the degree to which her instructor wanted to help her. In this case, one comment from the instructor was interpreted as an indicator of two different things, both of which would inform the students' engagement in the writing process. For the students who participated in this study, the feedback they received indicated a wide range of things, some of which focused on their writing (e.g., the quality of their writing, why they earned a particular grade), some of which focused on their instructor (e.g., what their instructor wanted, their instructor's focus, their instructor's mood), and some of which focused on themselves (e.g., their writing ability). Clearly, feedback in the writing classroom does not function as information, but as an indicator that can be interpreted in a number of ways.

The specific context of the writing classroom also calls for a deeper consideration of the agent providing feedback. In the literature reviewed in this chapter, feedback is always directed towards students, coming from a variety of agents such as instructors, other external sources, or the students themselves. However, as the work of Freedman and Calfee (1984) demonstrates, students are also agents who provide feedback to instructors, as instructors interpret students' responses to feedback in order to develop understandings of their engagement in the writing process. These understandings, Freedman and Calfee suggest, inform the feedback that instructors subsequently give students. In the same way that students put instructor feedback to use in their writing, then, instructors put student feedback to use as they reflect on their commenting practices and tailor the amount of time and energy they invest in offering feedback.

In identifying students' responses as feedback, I suggest that students and instructors play an equally important role in the feedback process, both *giving* and *receiving* feedback as they communicate with one another and develop understandings of each other's feedback. In order to understand how feedback functions in the writing classroom, it is essential to consider how students *and* instructors generate and respond to feedback.

As Figure 1.1 shows, when instructor feedback and student response are each considered as feedback, the function of feedback shifts from a linear process in which students are the only recipients of information to an on-going cycle of interpretation, negotiation, and communication that takes place between instructor and student. In the feedback cycle, there is no clear start or end point, but a series of interconnected moments that each inform–and are informed by–one another. As the figure shows, instructor feedback is shaped by the instructor's goals and beliefs and communicates those goals and beliefs to students. Students interpret instructor feedback as they develop an understanding of its messages and of the goals and beliefs that shaped those messages. Students then negotiate this understanding with their goals and beliefs, a process that ultimately informs their response to the feedback they receive. Each student's response becomes a message that is communicated to the instructor. The instructor interprets students' responses, develops an understanding of their goals and beliefs, negotiates this understanding with his or
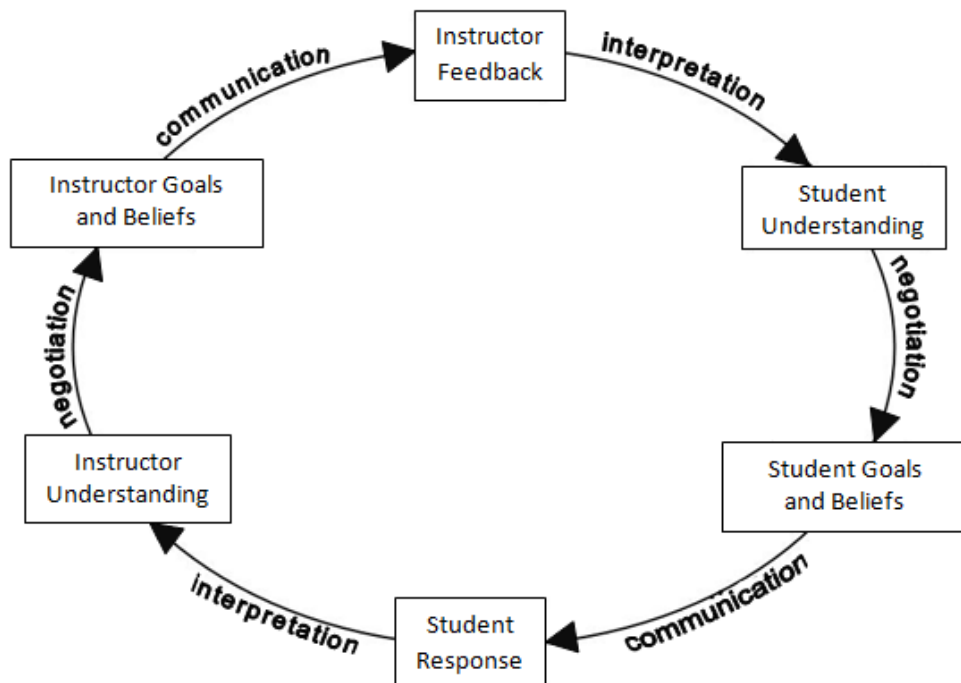
Figure 1.1: The Feedback Cycle in the Writing Classroom

her own goals and beliefs, and once again gives feedback to students. This process can be slow, with a full cycle beginning when an instructor writes comments on a student's first essay and reaching completion when that student either submits a revision or a second essay, only to begin again with another cycle of interpretation, negotiation, and communication between instructor and student.

It can also be instantaneous. In the student conference previously discussed, for instance, the instructor might have communicated her goal to the low-achieving student by saying, "I'm here to help you." The student may have understood that her instructor said she wanted to help, but had to negotiate that statement with her belief that not all instructors really want to help students. Her story about a teacher who would not help her because she did not like her, then, may have been this student's response to feedback offered by her instructor. The instructor then interpreted the student's response, perhaps negotiating it with her beliefs about previous students who expressed similar negative attitudes towards learning. This negotiation may have resulted in an understanding that the student would not put much effort into the course, resulting in additional feedback–the lack of further invitations to help the student. Alternatively, the instructor may have communicated the same goal to one of her high-achieving students by saying, "I'm here to help you." That student may have interpreted this statement to mean that his instructor did want to help him and negotiated this understanding with his belief that he was not a good writer. His expression of insecurity about his writing could have been this student's response to instructor feedback. The instructor may have interpreted the student's expression of insecurity as an indication that the student did not have a lot of confidence in his writing, negotiated that understanding with her goal of helping her students, and consequently provided additional feedback through praise and further invitations to office hours.

These examples each demonstrate how student response can function as feedback for instructors. They also demonstrate the important role that instructors' and students' goals for and beliefs about writing, feedback, and one another play in the feedback cycle. These goals and beliefs are situated between the processes of negotiation and communication in Figure 1.1 because they play a crucial role in shaping the communications that instructors and students offer one another. However, as the examples considered here and throughout this dissertation make clear, though goals and beliefs are particularly influential in this moment, they play an important role at every point in the feedback cycle.

The approach offered here suggests that a definition of feedback that focuses exclusively on the indicators that regard performance cannot accurately convey how feedback functions in the writing classroom. Certainly, an invitation to office hours does not regard a student's performance (as it does not offer an assessment or evaluation), but that invitation can directly impact the decisions a student makes, and, if followed, his or her development as a writer. Furthermore, students' responses to instructor feedback rarely directly regard their instructor's commenting practices (as students do not often offer assessments or evaluations of their instructor's feedback practices); however, these responses can and do inform the decisions that instructors make when offering students subsequent feedback and the ways in which they develop their commenting practices. For instance, if a student does not take up an instructor's invitation to attend office hours, the instructor might interpret that response as an indication that she had not communicated the importance of the visit clearly enough. If so, she might repeat the invitation, this time describing why the student should stop by or using more directive language. If, however, the instructor interpreted the response as an indicator that the student was not engaged in the writing process, she might decide not to reissue the invitation and instead focus more energy on the writing produced by other students. In either case, regardless of whether the student's response was intended to communicate a message to the instructor regarding her feedback, if the response informed the instructor's subsequent comments to the student, it clearly functioned as feedback. Consequently, a definition of feedback that is restricted to information regarding some aspect of performance is too narrow for a full consideration of how feedback functions in the writing classroom. In order to account for how students and instructors experience feedback in this space, it is essential that the definition include indicators that regard performance and that inform future decisions or development.

The distinction between an individual's decisions and their development is particularly important, as it suggests that feedback does not have to be consciously used in order to have an effect. For instance, a student who repeatedly receives comments from his instructor representing opposing viewpoints to his arguments may not intentionally focus on counterarguments in subsequent assignments. However, over time, it is quite possible that the student could start thinking about these viewpoints on his own, an important step in his development as a writer. Similarly, if students consistently ask an instructor to clarify a certain type of comment, over time, the instructor may offer this type of comment less frequently. While this is a decision that

an instructor could certainly make consciously, it could also be an unintentional development in his or her commenting practice. Consequently, this approach accounts for the effects feedback as they are intentionally and unintentionally realized by students and instructors.

I argue, then, that feedback in the first-year writing classroom should be defined as *any indicator that regards performance or informs future decisions or development*. This definition makes room for the dual role that feedback plays in this space: both instructors and students give and receive feedback. In addition, defining feedback in terms of indicators and not information highlights the possibility that instructors and students may understand feedback differently, both as they interpret the goals and beliefs underlying specific feedback and as they attempt to put that feedback to use. This definition corresponds with the feedback cycle depicted in Figure 1.1, particularly in how the figure illustrates the process of interpretation that instructors and students engage in and how that process results in the decisions and development that each subsequently experiences.

Ultimately, this dissertation presents a theorization of feedback that is informed by both instructor and student perspectives. While this approach differs from work in educational studies in how feedback is defined, in principle, it draws heavily on how feedback functions in this research to explain students' and instructors' responses to feedback in the writing classroom. In forwarding this model, I argue that an understanding of how feedback functions in the writing classroom must take students' and instructors' goals and beliefs into consideration, exploring the intersections and divergences between them and considering their impact as instructors and students engage in the process of communication, interpretation, and negotiation introduced here as the feedback cycle. In the final section, I introduce the study from which this understanding of feedback emerged and outline how each of the remaining chapters extend from and build on the theorization presented here.

A Qualitative Case Study Exploring Student and Instructor Response to Feedback

This study approaches feedback as it is defined in this chapter, asserting that feedback is *any indicator that regards performance or informs future decisions or development.* This definition gives agency to students, positioning them as consumers and producers of feedback. Because this definition opens the possibility that instructors and students may interpret and respond to feedback differently, considerable attention has been devoted to exploring how

understandings of feedback align and diverge across the individuals who participated in this study. Particular emphasis has also been placed on the written comments that the instructors provided students. Because written comments represent perhaps the most intentional form of feedback given by writing instructors, they present an important space for considering how instructors communicate their goals and beliefs to students and how students subsequently negotiate their understandings of those goals and beliefs with their own as they respond to their instructor's feedback.

The emphasis that has been placed on written comments in this study also extends from a need to better understand how this specific form of feedback functions in the writing classroom. In a keynote address delivered at a conference on writing assessment, William Condon (2014) expressed grave concern over instructors' commenting practices, asserting that "the worst of college writing instruction exists in the margins of students' essays." Condon's advice to his audience members was to look to those margins in order to find "the worst of what we do in composition." This study responds to Condon's call, exploring the margins of students' essays, not to seek out the worst of writing instruction, but in order to develop a better understanding of how feedback functions in the writing classroom and how instructors can engage students in the very margins that Condon critiques.

Because written feedback is one of the few ways in which an instructor directly interacts with individual students in the first-year writing classroom, it presents an important space for exploring the interactions that take place between instructors and students. This is especially true for students who are less engaged in the writing process and are unlikely to come to office hours or seek out instructor assistance on their own. As one of the few forms of direct interaction that these students experience with their instructor, the written comments that they receive on their writing hold the potential to encourage them to engage in the writing process, or to discourage them from even continuing to read the comments they receive on their writing in the first place.

As the literature reviewed in this chapter demonstrates, more research is needed to better understand how students and instructors engage with feedback in the context of the writing classroom. In response to this need, this study explores the role that instructors' goals and beliefs played in the feedback cycle, with specific focus on the discrepancies that emerged between the instructors' goals and commenting practices and on the causes of these discrepancies. In addition, this study focuses on the experiences of the students who are least represented in the research

that has been done to date, students who have difficulty engaging in the writing process. In exploring the experiences of these students, who have been identified in this study as those with low levels of motivation or little belief in their capabilities as writers,[7] efforts were made to capture what students did with the feedback they received on their writing and to understand why students responded to their instructor's feedback in varying ways.

The focus on the particular student population considered in this study represents an important contribution to the work that precedes it. In his research, for instance, Duijnhouwer (2010) found that the students who had the least belief in their capabilities as writers were also the most negatively impacted by the feedback they received on their writing. These students were left feeling less capable of writing after reading their instructor's comments, even though those comments were aimed at giving them strategies to be successful. Because Duijnhouwer's primary focus was on tracing the development of self-efficacy, motivation, and writing performance, his study stops short of considering what these students actually experienced when they received this feedback. Consequently, the present study seeks to build on this work, exploring how students with little belief in their capabilities as writers or low levels of motivation for writing responded to instructor feedback through both their interpretations of the feedback they received and their subsequent efforts to implement that feedback as they engaged in the writing process.

This qualitative case study explores the experiences of students and instructors in two sections of a required first-year writing course at a large public university in the Midwest. At its core, this study explores the process of communication, interpretation, and negotiation that instructors and students engaged in as they developed understandings of one another's feedback and as they offered feedback to one another. It also investigates how the interactions that took place between instructor and student ultimately may have influenced the kinds of feedback that the instructors offered and the ways that students subsequently responded to that feedback. In addressing each of these aspects, this study seeks to offer a fuller representation of the experiences that students and instructors have with feedback in the first-year writing classroom. Ultimately, the goal of this approach is to identify ways that feedback can encourage students to engage in the writing process and ways that it may hinder their ability to do so in order to ground

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[7] For a detailed explanation of the selection process for student and instructor participants, see Chapter 2.

recommendations for commenting on student writing in the experiences shared by students and instructors in the required first-year writing classroom.

Along these lines, Chapter 2 outlines the methodological decisions that have shaped this study, explaining the rationale behind the study design (which utilized both qualitative and quantitative methods), site selection, participant selection and recruitment, data collection, and data analysis procedures. This chapter also introduces the specific context for the study by briefly describing the institution and the writing program which served as the site for this research.

Chapter 3 explores the goals and beliefs that the instructors expressed about their feedback in relation to a corpus analysis of the written comments that they offered students. As I compare the instructors' goals and beliefs to their commenting practices, I identify several moments of divergence and explore why each occurred, arguing that in many cases, divergences between instructors' goals and practices were caused by tensions or difficulties that one or both of the instructors identified. These tensions often emerged within or between goals for commenting that are frequently recommended by composition scholars, demonstrating that these best practices are not always readily implemented. In contrast to the prominent suggestion that instructors need to better align their commenting practices with existing recommendations, this chapter argues that the divergences that occur between instructors' goals and commenting practices suggest a need to reevaluate what instructors can and cannot accomplish in their written comments.

Chapter 4 considers the relationship between the instructors' goals and commenting practices explored in Chapter 3 and students' responses to the feedback that they received on their writing. The findings of this chapter suggest that in addition to reevaluating what instructors can and cannot accomplish in their written comments, there is also a need to reconsider which goals they should strive to achieve in the first place. In considering students' responses to their instructor's feedback in light of both students' and instructors' goals and beliefs, this chapter presents a fuller picture of the variations that occur across the literature devoted to student response. Ultimately, the findings of this chapter suggest that students' goals and beliefs offer one explanation of this variation, as they had a strong impact on how students engaged with their instructor's feedback, even when that engagement did not align with the instructors' goals or the types of comments that the students received. Consequently, this chapter argues that instructors

may be better able to engage students in the writing process if they shift their focus from their own goals and commenting practices towards the goals and beliefs that students bring with them into the writing classroom.

Chapter 5 demonstrates what the feedback cycle looked like for each instructor and one of his or her students with particular emphasis on the complicated sets of beliefs that shaped the ways the students engaged with instructor feedback and that informed the instructors' interpretations of students' responses. In looking at the feedback cycle from both instructor and student perspectives, I argue that the interactions that take place between instructor and student as they engage in the process of communication, interpretation, and negotiation directly inform the understandings they develop of one another's feedback. For the instructors in this study, these understandings had such a powerful impact that they interpreted the same indicators–such as a student's visits to office hours or the revisions made from one draft to another–differently depending on whether they believed a particular student was engaged or not engaged in the writing process. Similarly, the understandings that students developed of their instructor and his or her commenting practices directly informed their subsequent responses to instructor feedback, at times making it more difficult for each student to engage in the writing process. The findings presented in this chapter suggest a need to more carefully consider the interpretations that instructors and students make as they engage with the feedback they receive from one another in the context of the writing classroom.

Chapter 6 concludes the dissertation by outlining the specific implications of this study. The chapter begins by highlighting the ways that the study contributes to scholarship in the field of composition studies, identifying key questions that have emerged and that merit further research. Following this consideration, I offer specific recommendations intended to help writing instructors use their feedback to more fully engage students in the writing process. In this way, this chapter aims to suggest how the findings of this study can be implemented in line with both scholarly and pedagogical pursuits.

CHAPTER 2

A Mixed-Methods Approach to Feedback

This study explores how feedback functioned in two sections of a required first-year writing course at a large, public university in the Midwest, with a specific focus on the experiences described by students and their instructors as they engaged in a process of communication, interpretation, and negotiation introduced in Chapter 1 as the feedback cycle. The feedback cycle was developed from literature theorizing feedback in educational studies and from the experiences that students and instructors described as they interacted with one another over the course of one semester in a required first-year writing class. The primary contribution of this theorization is that it challenges understandings of feedback as a linear process through which students passively receive information, offering a fuller representation of the complex ways that students and instructors exchange feedback with one another. In positioning feedback in this way, I suggest that just as an instructor's written and spoken comments can inform the choices that students make in their writing, students' responses to their instructor's feedback become important indicators that not only inform instructors' understandings of students, but can also inform the feedback that instructors subsequently offer students. This understanding of feedback emerged from the research design that shaped this study, which this chapter will elucidate.

In contrast to much of the research in the field of composition studies that has explored instructor feedback to date, this study does not focus exclusively on students or exclusively on instructors, but instead focuses on the intersections between the experiences that each described in a series of discourse-based interviews. This qualitative component is complemented–and complicated–by a corpus of the instructors' written comments and the students' written responses to those comments (in the form of revision plans and actual revisions). In analyzing this corpus, I have used both qualitative and quantitative methods which are described in detail in the following pages. According to Maxwell (2013), by combining methods with "different strengths and limitations," this mixed-methods approach generates "a more secure understanding

of the issues" being investigated and makes it less likely that the findings of the study "reflect the biases of a single method" (p. 102). In addition, the triangulation of data enabled by this approach–incorporating the instructors' descriptions, the students' descriptions, and the actual written practices that each enacted–offers a portrayal of the function of feedback in the writing classroom that has rarely been captured within a single study.

In bringing each of these data sets together, this study does not seek to resolve the discrepancies that prior research has noted between instructors' goals for their feedback and their actual commenting practices, or among students' vastly differing responses to instructor feedback, reviewed in Chapter 1. Instead, this study aims to shed light on *why* some of these discrepancies and differences occur. Along these lines, I hope to offer writing instructors and composition scholars new ways of thinking about feedback that ultimately could help to make instructor feedback a more effective tool in the writing classroom.

The insights offered in this dissertation are very much reflective of the population studied, and consequently, two factors are worth noting here, though they will be addressed in greater detail in what follows. First, in order to address an important gap in the literature, this study does not focus on a typical student sample, but instead focuses on the experiences of students who had the lowest levels of motivation and the lowest levels of self-efficacy (or beliefs in their capabilities as writers) in their section of first-year writing. These students, who are largely unrepresented in the extant literature, were selected as the focus of this study because theories of motivation and self-efficacy (outlined in the next section) suggest that they would likely have more difficulty engaging in the writing process than their peers. Consequently, these students offer an important perspective on how instructor feedback functions in the writing classroom, a perspective that could differ in considerable ways from students with higher levels of motivation or self-efficacy.

Second, in line with the majority of studies exploring student response to instructor feedback, this study was not initially designed to capture the instructors' experiences, but instead, to focus specifically on the feedback that they gave to student participants. However, the experiences that the instructors described in their interviews offered a counter perspective to many of the experiences that students described in ways that were too compelling to overlook. Consequently, the research questions that are addressed in this dissertation are questions that emerged as much from the process of collecting and analyzing data as from the literature

reviewed in Chapter 1. Though they are not the questions that initially shaped the design of the study described here, they are questions that could only have emerged from the intersections of the data sets that this design ultimately captured. The research questions that have emerged from and shape this dissertation study are:

1. What goals do instructors identify for their feedback? How are those goals realized or not realized in the written comments that they offer students? Why?

2. How do students with low levels of motivation and/or self-efficacy respond to their instructor's feedback? Do their responses align with their instructor's goals, practices, or something else? Why?

3. How do these students and instructors understand their interactions with one another in the process of giving and receiving feedback? What factors inform their understandings?

In the next section, I offer a brief overview of the work of select scholars exploring self-efficacy and motivation in order to establish the theoretical framework that shaped this study, and more specifically, that justifies the decision to focus on the particular student population that this study addresses.

A Framework for Understanding Self-Efficacy and Motivation in the Writing Classroom

This study is grounded in the work of those exploring self-efficacy and motivation. This literature suggests that students' levels of self-efficacy and motivation impact their experiences with instructor feedback, which for some students, could make it much more difficult to engage in the writing process. In what follows, I offer an overview of these theories, with a specific focus on how they pertain to the first-year writing classroom.

According to Albert Bandura (1997), self-efficacy refers to "beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the course of action required to produce given attainments" (p. 3). In the context of a first-year writing course, then, self-efficacy refers to a student's belief in his or her capability to produce effective writing by engaging in the writing process. Those with high levels of self-efficacy would feel very capable of planning and producing effective writing, whereas those with low levels of self-efficacy would not feel capable of writing well. Such beliefs have clear consequences. As Bandura explains, self-efficacy beliefs influence an individual's "motivation, thought processes, affective states, and actions" (p. 3). This relationship suggests that students with high levels of self-efficacy would likely be motivated to work on their writing, have positive thoughts about writing, and not experience affective responses while writing or

receiving feedback on their writing. Students who have low self-efficacy for writing, in contrast, could have lower motivation to write, more negative thoughts about writing, and increased affective responses to their experiences both with writing and with getting feedback on their writing. These students would likely need more support from their writing instructors in order to effectively engage in the writing process.

In Bandura's theory, self-efficacy beliefs emerge from four sources: performance, vicarious experiences, persuasion, and affective responses. These sources of self-efficacy suggest that as much as self-efficacy beliefs might influence a student's engagement in a writing class, the writing class itself would also likely influence a student's levels of self-efficacy. For example, Bandura identifies performance as the most significant factor shaping self-efficacy, with a success increasing an individual's belief in his or her capabilities and a failure lowering it. This means that in the writing classroom, the experience of turning in an essay that is evaluated as successful could make a student feel more capable of writing well; whereas, the experience of turning in an essay that is evaluated as unsuccessful could make a student feel less capable as a writer.

This impact, however, is mitigated by a student's level of experience prior to a particular performance. For students who have attained a high level of self-efficacy, Bandura explains, the effect of each performance is reduced, meaning that one unsuccessful experience with writing will not necessarily lower a student's belief in his or her capability to write well. Likewise, one successful experience with writing will not necessarily increase a student's self-efficacy, especially if that student has little belief in his or her capabilities. This fact is particularly important for understanding the beliefs that students bring with them into the first-year writing classroom. Because these students are likely to either have unclear notions about what makes writing "good" at the college level, or believe that all writing instructors are idiosyncratic in their preferences, as Chapter 1 suggests, they may not enter the first-year writing classroom with an established sense of their capabilities in this context. Consequently, they would be particularly influenced by the successes or failures they experience in this context. This may be especially true for those whose writing performance in college does not match their prior experiences. For students who perform better than they had in the past, self-efficacy beliefs may quickly increase, while for those whose performance worsens, those beliefs may decrease dramatically.

According to Bandura, vicarious experiences also play a significant role in establishing self-efficacy beliefs, though they do so to a lesser degree than performance. For example, a student's self-efficacy for completing a particular task might increase from watching his or her peers successfully complete that task. In reviewing a successful draft of a peer's essay, for instance, a student might see that writing a strong essay is possible and consequently develop stronger beliefs that she too can write a strong essay, leading to increased self-efficacy. If her subsequent performance does not match that of her peers, however, her self-efficacy beliefs could decrease considerably. This could be particularly influential for students with low levels of self-efficacy. For instance, if a student is struggling to write an essay, but sees a peer successfully completing the same task, she could easily become discouraged and ultimately feel even less capable of writing well. Contrastingly, if she sees her peers struggling with an essay but goes on to produce a successful draft, her self-efficacy beliefs will likely increase considerably.

Bandura argues that vicarious experience is the second most influential source of self-efficacy. Third is persuasion, which he claims shapes notions of self-efficacy to an even lesser degree, as individuals do not automatically accept the feedback that they receive from others, but will first evaluate it on the basis of both the personal and situational factors they perceive as having impacted their performance. However, in the context of first-year writing courses, persuasion may actually be more influential than vicarious experience. Because instructors ultimately hold power over first-year writing students–in setting the objectives that they are required to meet and in grading how well they have met those objectives–students are positioned to take instructor feedback seriously or risk delaying their progress towards degree if they fail to receive a passing grade in the course. In this sense, though first-year writing students certainly decide to either accept the feedback they receive on their writing or reject it as not reflective of the situational factors that shaped their writing, they are far more likely to see feedback as a standard that must be met, regardless of how it aligns with their own goals or values. This suggests that feedback in particular holds the potential to have a strong influence over first-year writing students' engagement in the writing process.

Finally, Bandura argues, affective responses also hold the potential to shape self-efficacy, as individuals might interpret their physiological state as an indication of their capability to perform a particular task. Students who experience anxiety as they engage in a writing task, for

example, might feel less capable of being successful writers, while students who do not experience affective responses might feel more capable of writing well. As first-year writing students make the transition from high school to college writing, this factor could be increasingly significant, as the shift into an unfamiliar context for writing is often associated with anxiousness and uncertainty.

Self-efficacy beliefs hold considerable potential to influence both the ways in which students engage in the writing process and the ways in which they respond to instructor feedback. Bandura argues that individuals' self-efficacy beliefs are ultimately stronger predictors of behavior than their actual abilities, as "people's level of motivation, affective states, and actions are based more on what they believe than on what is objectively true" (p. 3). Consequently, students with high levels of writing self-efficacy may have little difficulty engaging in the writing process, while those with lower levels could be less motivated to work on their writing, not enjoy writing, and ultimately be less engaged in the writing process. For these students, the experience of reading and responding to instructor feedback would be much more difficult than it is for students with high or even average levels of writing self-efficacy. This is precisely why this study sought to take the experiences of students with low levels of self-efficacy into account, as they were likely to present extreme cases through which to consider instructor feedback practices and the ways that those practices engage students in the writing process.

Additionally, this study is informed by theories of motivation that stem from a social-cognitive perspective. According to Duncan and McKeachie (2005), this perspective positions students as active processors of information. Conceived of in this way, motivation is "dynamic and contextually bound," not a stable trait characteristic of the individual (p. 117). In this sense, a student's motivation will vary for different courses and for different tasks. This variation can result from "students' beliefs that they can accomplish a task" (Pintrich *et al.*, 1993, p. 801). Much like self-efficacy theory, a social-cognitive approach to motivation takes into account students' beliefs in their capabilities to perform particular tasks. As Duncan and McKeachie make clear, however, expectancy theory–as this approach is commonly termed–does not just address students' beliefs in their capabilities, but also how much control they feel they have over their own learning. According to this theory, students who believe that the quality of their writing is dependent on the amount of effort they put into the writing process will likely be more

motivated than students who believe that quality is only determined by external factors such as their teacher or luck.

Variations in students' motivation, expectancy theory suggests, are also informed by the specific sources of that motivation. For instance, as Chapter 1 suggests, grades can be a strong motivator for students, particularly in required first-year writing courses where students may not have specific goals for their writing. While grades can motivate students to work on their writing, this focus would influence how much effort they put into the writing process and where they located that effort. For example, a first-year writing student who was primarily grade-driven might focus more on graded work, deprioritizing or even leaving unfinished any work that was not graded by their instructor. This externally motivated student, Duncan and McKeachie explain, would focus first and foremost "on grades and approval from others" (p. 119).

Alternatively, students may be motivated by intrinsic goals, which "focus on learning or mastery," or task value beliefs, which Duncan and McKeachie explain, are "judgments of how interesting, useful, and important the course content is to the student" (p. 119). A student who is intrinsically motivated might focus on developing writing skills and techniques that he or she would like to master, regardless of the relative grading weight of the assignment. This same student, however, might give less attention to tasks or assignments that do not align with his or her goals. Similarly, a student who values a particular task may focus more on assignments and activities that he or she perceives as directly contributing to that task, giving less attention to work that seems unrelated. According to Pintrich *et al.* (1993), the goals and values that students bring with them into an educational context make up "the reasons why students engage in an academic task" and likely vary considerably from student to student (p. 802). Even students with high levels of motivation are not likely to be equally motivated to engage in every task asked of them. Students with low levels of motivation, in contrast, will have considerably less incentive to engage in the writing process, as they would not have a clear purpose for doing so. In both cases, if students do not value the objectives emphasized in their first-year writing course, they may put little effort towards reaching goals related to those objectives.

Finally, expectancy theory also suggests that variations in students' motivations can extend from students' "worry and concern" over completing a task (p. 119). Like self-efficacy theory, this approach to motivation considers students' affective responses as a key influence on their engagement with a task. In a first-year writing class, a student who experiences positive

feelings as he writes will likely be more motivated to engage in the writing process. In contrast, a student who experiences negative feelings–such as anxiety, stress, or frustration–may be less motivated to work on his writing.

From the perspectives offered here, engagement is contextually bound and shaped by students' beliefs, cognitive processes, goals, and values. Consequently, at its core, this study suggests that students who feel that they are capable of writing well or who feel capable of improving their writing will likely have an easier time engaging in the writing process than those who do not, and that those who are motivated to work on their writing or to complete particular writing assignments will likely engage more fully in the writing process than those who are not. Because students with low-levels of motivation or little belief in their capabilities as writers likely need additional support as they work through the writing process and as they engage with their instructor's feedback, this study was designed to focus specifically on the ways that these students and their instructors experienced one another's feedback over the course of one semester in a required first-year writing course.

Study Design

In each of the choices articulated here, careful effort was made to ensure that the focus of this study remained on the experiences of students and instructors as they evolved over the course of one semester in a required first-year writing class. As much as possible, this study was designed to reflect the experiences of these individuals without altering the classroom context, though some alterations were unavoidable. These alterations are noted in the considerations that follow.

The Research Site

This study took place at the University of the Midwest (UM), a large, public university that requires all undergraduate students to take some form of first-year writing. While some departments offer their own first-year writing courses, most students fulfill this requirement by taking courses offered by the university's writing program, which is housed in a department of English. Students at UM can choose among a variety of courses, the most popular of which (or perhaps more accurately, the most frequently offered) is a writing course that aims to address academic writing across a range of genres and purposes. Between 2009 and 2012, just over half

of the students who enrolled in a first-year writing course chose to take this course. Other courses, such as those based on literature, history, or classical civilizations, had much lower enrollments. Because of its high enrollment, and consequently its ability to better represent the experiences of first-year writing students at UM, the more general first-year writing course was selected as the site for this research.

The decision to select this course–and UM, for that matter–was also informed by the fact that students at UM are able to choose for themselves whether they want to immediately enroll in a course that fulfills their first-year writing requirement, as the general course does, or to first complete an optional preparatory writing course. That *students* make this choice, which they do with the support of the university's Directed Self-Placement (DSP) process, makes UM an ideal setting for this research, as it is one of only a few dozen institutions currently implementing a DSP process. As part of the DSP process at UM, students are informed that starting with a required writing course is the best choice for students who have experience revising their writing and who feel that they will not need extensive out of class support from their instructor. They are also informed that if they desire one-on-one support from their instructor and would like a more gradual introduction to writing academic essays that helps them build their confidence in their writing and reading skills, they should enroll in the preparatory course.

According to a survey of 2,542 students who used the DSP process to select their first-year writing course at UM between 2009 and 2012, the most important factor influencing a student's course selection was "confidence" in his or her "own writing ability." Other factors, of course, also influenced this decision. In response to the same question, students reported that the desire to take a graded or ungraded course played a significant role in their placement decision. Because the preparatory course is ungraded and does not fulfill any institutional requirements, students with less motivation to develop their writing might decide not to take this course, even if they are not confident that they are prepared to write well according to UM's standards. Consequently, the selection that students make holds the potential to say a great deal about their self-efficacy and motivation, as students who enroll in a preparatory course would likely have lower levels of self-efficacy and/or higher levels of motivation, and students who enroll in a required course would likely have higher levels of self-efficacy (unless they had a strong desire to only take graded/required courses) and/or lower levels of motivation. In this way, the required first-year writing course at UM presented an ideal case for the focus of this research, as the

students who enrolled in this course and met the criteria for participation, described in detail below, were more likely than their peers to have difficulty engaging in the writing process.

In order to secure this research site, I applied for and received approval from the Institutional Review Board at UM, which determined that this study did not pose any risk to participants above or beyond standard educational practice. I then submitted a formal study proposal to the director of the writing program and arranged a meeting to discuss the study in detail. During that meeting, which took place in early August of 2013, the director gave me permission to conduct the study, which involved sending a survey to all of the writing instructors who had appointments to teach a section of the general first-year writing course in the Fall 2013 semester and inviting them to participate in this study.

The Instructor Participants

In selecting instructors to participate in this study, I sought to represent typical approaches to writing instruction at UM. As Merriam (2009) makes clear, a typical sample "is selected because it reflects the average person, situation, or instance" (p. 78). Because the primary focus of this study was initially on students, and not their instructors, this sampling strategy was implemented to reflect the type of instruction that most first-year writing students experience. In order to more fully represent students' experiences, a decision was made early-on to select two instructors who were registered to teach at least one section of the general required first-year writing course. This decision was informed, in part, by a desire to ensure that a large enough sample of students could be secured. It was also informed by the variation in approaches to teaching that occur in any writing program. In looking across two sections of the same required first-year writing course, each taught by a different instructor, I aimed to establish patterns that were not solely reflective of the idiosyncratic practices of one instructor. Though a sample of two is small, considering the experiences of instructors and students across contexts helped to shed light on the impact that each instructor's approach had on students' responses to the feedback they received, in line with Edgington's (2004) claim that instructors' values likely inform the ways that students engage with and respond to their feedback.

In order to best approximate a typical sample, a survey was distributed in mid-August of 2013 to all of the instructors who were teaching the general first-year writing course or the optional preparatory course in the Fall 2013 semester (see Appendix A for the complete survey).

This survey was anonymous and voluntary. The goal of the survey was to identify the range of approaches to writing instruction used by instructors at UM, and to get a sense of what role feedback played in potential participants' instructional approaches. At the conclusion of the survey, instructors were invited to self-identify if they were interested in participating in the full study. Financial incentives were offered to the instructors in the form of a raffle for one $20 and one $15 gift card. Instructors were asked to disclose their identity in order to win a gift card, though their responses to the survey were kept anonymous. These incentives were appropriate, as they likely increased instructors' participation and consequently made the responses to this survey more representative of the general population of writing instructors at UM.[8]

Of the 49 instructors that this survey was distributed to, 24 completed it. Five of these instructors were graduate students and 19 were lecturers teaching in the writing program. Collectively, the instructors had an average of six to eight years of teaching experience. Just under half of the instructors who completed the survey expressed interest in participating in this study, which included two graduate students and nine lecturers. Only eight of these prospective participants were slated to teach the general writing course in the fall, which eliminated one graduate student and two lecturers from consideration. All of the remaining instructors indicated that they would provide students with written comments on their final drafts after they had been submitted for evaluation; two identified this final draft feedback as the only moment that they would provide students with written comments. Because this instructional decision aligned with the policies recommended by the writing program at UM, I made the decision to include one of these instructors. Both of the instructors were male. One had been teaching writing for six to ten years, the other for more than ten years. In order to balance the instructor sample, I eliminated the two remaining male instructors. Of the four remaining female instructors, one had been teaching writing for six to ten years and one for more than ten years like the two potential male participants. Consequently, I eliminated the other two female instructors, who had less experience teaching writing.

These decisions identified four instructors who were particularly well suited for this study. I attempted to schedule meetings with each of these instructors in order to discuss the study in

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[8] The funds that were used to pay instructor and student participants in this study were provided by a research grant that the Rackham Graduate School provides to all doctoral candidates at the University of Michigan. I am grateful to have had this support, as the expenses that accompany the kind of qualitative research done in this project are considerable.

person and ensure that they understood what would be involved in their–and their students'– participation. Neither of the instructors who had been teaching writing for more than ten years could schedule this meeting until well into the start of the Fall 2013 semester, which would have compromised the design of the study, as it was crucial that data be collected from students at particular moments in the semester, including the first two weeks of classes. The two instructors who had been teaching writing for six to ten years, in contrast, were able to work within the necessary time constraints. Consequently, given the instructors' continued interest in the study after our initial meeting, I invited them each to participate in the study. In the participant profiles that follow, I introduce Hadley and Jennifer,[9] the two instructors who invited me into their classrooms and made this study possible.

Hadley Corgin and **Jennifer Olde** were each experienced lecturers for the writing program at UM. At the time that they participated in this study, both had been teaching writing for approximately eight years. Like many of the lecturers who taught courses for the writing program, both had graduated from UM's prestigious and well known creative writing program, earning a Master of Fine Arts from the university. Like all MFA students at UM, in their second year of their degrees, Hadley and Jennifer each taught one section of the general first-year writing course in one semester, and a 200-level introduction to creative writing course the other semester. After graduation, each instructor was hired as a lecturer and taught a range of writing courses, which in addition to these two courses, included a 200-level writing course devoted to academic argumentation. Hadley also taught a 300-level creative non-fiction course, and Jennifer taught a literature-based version of required first-year writing. In addition, over the years Jennifer occasionally moonlighted at nearby universities, teaching business writing and creative non-fiction in other institutional contexts.

Though the two instructors had similar backgrounds, they structured their first-year writing courses in considerably different ways. For instance, following program policy, Hadley provided students with written comments on their final essays, but not on drafts they completed leading up to that submission. Instead, he structured peer review sessions so that students could give each other written feedback and revise accordingly. Consequently, students in Hadley's class generally were not expected to respond to his written comments by revising their essays. He did give students the option to revise one of their first three essays in response to his written

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[9] The names used for the instructors are pseudonyms that they requested be used to represent them in this study.

comments, and required that each student meet with him to discuss his or her plans for revision in order to be eligible to do so.

Like Hadley, Jennifer structured peer review sessions so that students could give one another feedback during the drafting process and offered written comments on the drafts that they submitted for evaluation. However, these submissions were not students' final drafts, as she offered them the opportunity to revise each of their essays multiple times. Jennifer's students not only had the option to respond to her written comments by revising each essay, but were required to do so at least once during the semester. These revisions were re-graded, with the higher grade being the grade that the student earned, even if a revision actually received a lower grade than the first submission had. In this way, the structures of Hadley and Jennifer's classes promoted different kinds of engagement with instructor feedback, suggesting that students would likely respond to each instructor's written comments in different ways. In addition, Hadley and Jennifer's first-year writing classes focused on very different kinds of writing, with Hadley's section introducing students to different forms of argumentation and Jennifer's foregrounding a much more narrative approach to writing. The description of each instructor's assignment sequence appears in Table 2.1.

Sequence	Hadley	Jennifer
Assignment 1	*Arguing a Position Essay* An essay asking students to take a position on an issue and support that position with evidence	*Personal Essay* An essay asking students to reflect on the significance of a particular moment in their lives
Assignment 2	*Justifying an Evaluation Essay* An essay asking students to make a claim of value and then justify that claim with evidence	*Satirical Essay* An essay asking students to satirize an aspect of human behavior
Assignment 3	*Proposing a Solution Essay* An essay asking students to identify a problem and then propose a solution	*Definition Essay* An essay describing an ordinary object in unusual ways
Assignment 4	*Speculating about Causes Essay* An essay asking students to identify an issue and speculate about its causes	*Persuasive Essay* An essay utilizing narrative and external sources to support an argument
Assignment 5	*Self-Reflection* An essay asking students to reflect on their development as writers over the course of the semester	

Table 2.1: Assignment Sequence in Hadley and Jennifer's First-Year Writing Courses

The goal of this sampling strategy was to select a typical sample of instructors at UM; however, this sample was biased in ways that must also be acknowledged. The instructors who expressed interest in and who ultimately agreed to participate in this study were a self-selected group that put careful thought into their strategies for providing feedback to students. Hadley, for instance, described spending a considerable amount of time thinking about how students responded to his written comments. During his first interview, for instance, he questioned, "At the end of grading eighteen papers, your hand's cramped up and you're like, 'What did I just do? I spilled a lot of ink, but for what good?'." As he explained, "That's something that I've thought about, you know. Are the students using these comments? Am I writing a lot–and as I said, I do write a lot–but is it effective? You know, am I getting through to the students? And I'm not clear on that." For Hadley, his interest in this study ultimately extended from his interest in the function of his feedback, which was likely not entirely representative of the majority of instructors at UM.

Jennifer also suggested that her approach to feedback was not likely representative of other instructors. "I think I have, sometimes, like higher standards than other teachers, for better or worse," she said. In participating in the study, she noted, "I am nervous to see how I measure up to my own, like, ridiculously high standards." For Jennifer, this study offered an opportunity to reconsider her approach to teaching. "This is a snapshot of my teaching practice," she said. This snapshot was valuable, Jennifer explained, because she was "constantly thinking about my teaching philosophy," which involved reflecting on "why it's that and being, like, open to changing it."

In addition, regardless of whether Hadley and Jennifer provided exemplary feedback to their students, they were likely much more self-conscious about their commenting practices during the Fall 2013 semester, as they knew their written comments would be carefully examined in this study. Consequently, though the instructors who participated in this study, in the end, were not entirely "typical," their experiences clearly demonstrate what happens when two invested and experienced instructors make their best efforts to provide feedback on students' writing.

The Student Participants

The goal of this study was to work with students who had a particularly difficult time engaging in the writing process in order to better understand their experiences with instructor feedback and the role that feedback played in their writing process. These students were identified as those with low levels of self-efficacy, low levels of motivation, or low levels of both self-efficacy and motivation based on the theoretical framework previously outlined. In order to identify students in Hadley and Jennifer's classes who met these criteria, I visited Hadley's one section of first-year writing and all three of Jennifer's sections during the first week of classes. Each instructor gave me approximately ten minutes of class time to introduce myself, explain this study, distribute a flyer describing the study and inviting students to express interest in being either a classroom participant or an interview participant (Appendix B), and to distribute and collect a signed consent form from students who agreed to be classroom participants (Appendix C). Students were informed that they were in no way required to participate in the study and that if they chose to do so, their identity would remain anonymous and they would be compensated for their time.

Students were informed that being a classroom participant meant that they were allowing me to include the results of two surveys (assessing their motivation and self-efficacy for writing) and the written comments that their instructor wrote on their major essays in my research. No time out of class was required for a student to be a classroom participant, and students were offered compensation in the form of an end of semester pizza party. They were also informed that being an interview participant meant that in addition to allowing me to report on their survey results and their instructor's comments, they would be asked to complete four interviews of approximately one hour in length (two during the fall semester, one at the end of the semester, and one at the start of the next term) and to complete brief revision plans in response to their instructor's written comments on each major essay. These students were offered $100 compensation for their time outside of class.

The decision to offer financial incentives to interview participants was made in order to entice students who might be particularly resistant to talking about their writing and their instructor's feedback to be part of this study. As Dohrer (1991) found in a similar study of students in one upper-level speech and one upper-level history course, "students were reluctant to volunteer for the study, in spite of the teachers' announcements in their classes and assurances

of anonymity" (p. 49). The cause of this lack of participation, he explained, was that "most students said they did not have time to take part in the study" (p. 49). Because UM students have intense course loads and first-year students often report feeling particularly overwhelmed, I speculated that they would also likely be reluctant to participate in this study. This seemed particularly likely for the population that I intended to study, as students who feel that they are not capable of writing well might not want to subject themselves to the scrutiny of a researcher and students who are not motivated to work on their writing would not likely feel the need to spend extra time participating in a study that asked them to think about the writing process even more. In offering these students $100 for what in the end amounted to between 5 and 7 hours of their time, I was able to provide students more income than what they could earn working the same number of hours at a typical part time job on campus. This compensation was appropriate because students were asked to complete tasks above and beyond the requirements of their first-year writing course and likely needed extra incentive in order to do so.

In response to these visits, 6 students in Hadley's class expressed interest in being an interview participant, as Table 2.2 shows. In the section of Jennifer's class that I selected for inclusion in this study, 15 students expressed interest in being an interview participant.

Following my visit, Hadley and Jennifer asked students to complete two surveys–the Writing Self-Efficacy Instrument[10] developed by Shell, Murphy, and Bruning (1989) and the Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire (MSLQ)[11] developed by Pintrich et. al (1993)–as part of their participation grade for the course. For each survey, as it was distributed to students, see Appendix D. These surveys were selected because they have been extensively tested and validated as indicators of students' levels of self-efficacy and/or motivation. In asking students to complete them, I sought to identify the students who had the lowest levels of self-efficacy and motivation in their respective classes in order to invite them to participate in the study.

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[10] This instrument was tested and found to have high rates of reliability. In response to similar task-related questions, students reported consistent answers at a rate of .92. In response to similar skill-related questions, their consistency was rated .95. In addition, Shell, Murphy, and Bruning (1989) found that "all items discriminated well among subjects and were satisfactory for retention in the scales for final analysis" (p. 93). Though the full instrument includes measures for reading and writing across a range of aspects, only measures for writing self-efficacy were included in the survey distributed to students.

[11] Each of the motivational subscales in this survey, including self-efficacy measures, was tested and found to "represent a coherent conceptual and empirically validated framework for assessing student motivation… in the college classroom" (Pintrich et. al, 1993, p. 812).

Section	Interview Participant	Classroom Participant	Non-Participant
Hadley	6	9	2
Jennifer	15	3	0

Table 2.2: Student Participant Interest in Hadley and Jennifer's First-Year Writing Classes

I had originally requested that students be given time to complete these surveys in class during my visit, but each instructor expressed reluctance to give up the amount of class time that it would have taken to do so. Consequently, I created a Google form for each survey and sent the links to the forms to the instructors, which meant that they could distribute the surveys to their students but could not access students' responses. These responses came directly to me. I informed the instructors which students had completed the survey and which had not so that they could follow up as needed and give students participation credit. I also followed up with students who had agreed to be classroom participants but had not completed their surveys, resending the links and offering to answer any questions that they might have.

Though having students complete these surveys outside of class ultimately resulted in decreased participation, this did not significantly impact the representativeness of the student sample included in this study. In Hadley's class, only one student (out of a total of 17) did not complete the surveys. This student added the course late and consequently was not in class on the day that I visited. I made multiple attempts to contact the student and offered to meet with him to talk about the study; however, he never responded to my emails. In Jennifer's classes, all 18 students in one section completed their surveys. In contrast, of the 18 students in the other two sections, three and four students did not. I made repeated attempts to contact students who had agreed to participate in the study but had not completed their surveys, but had little success in getting students to do so. Because these non-responses meant that a considerable portion of the class was not represented in the survey results, I selected Jennifer's first section as the focus of this study. Consequently, out of 35 potential student participants, only one was not represented in the survey results.

The Writing Self-Efficacy Instrument was developed from Bandura's theory of self-efficacy and asks individuals to report their belief in their capability to successfully complete a variety of writing tasks–like writing a letter to a friend, composing a one or two page essay, or authoring a 400 page novel–and to utilize a range of writing skills, such as correctly spelling all the words in a passage or organizing sentences in a paragraph to express a theme. Because of the broad measure of writing self-efficacy that this survey produces, which in many ways extends

beyond the parameters of a first-year writing course, this survey was not used to select student participants, but provided important context for better understanding students' self-efficacy for writing at the start of the Fall 2013 semester.

The MSLQ, in contrast, was used to ask students questions about their motivation and self-efficacy within the context of their first-year writing course. The first portion of this scale consists of "31 items that assess students' goals and value beliefs for a course, their beliefs about their skills to succeed in a course, and their anxieties about tests in a course" (Duncan & McKeachie, p. 118-19). In the survey that I distributed, students were asked questions from each of the six scales that make up this first part:

> **Intrinsic goal orientation**: Questions relating to goals that are internal to the tasks that students are asked to complete in their first-year writing course, such as a desire to work through challenging material in order to learn a new skill or technique.
>
> **Extrinsic goal orientation**: Questions relating to goals that extend beyond the task itself, such as a desire to earn a particular grade on the task or in the course.
>
> **Task value**: Questions identifying the degree to which students value the tasks they will complete in their first-year writing course, such as whether they believe they will be able to use the material they learn in other courses.
>
> **Control of learning beliefs**: Questions identifying the degree to which students believe that outcomes are contingent upon their effort, "rather than external factors such as the teacher or luck" (p. 119).
>
> **Self-efficacy for learning and performance**: Questions identifying the degree to which students believe that they are capable of performing such tasks as understanding the material covered in their first-year writing course, producing quality work for the course, and successfully completing the course.
>
> **Writing anxiety**: Questions that measure a student's apprehension for writing, such as experiencing physical responses like an increased heart rate.

Across each of these scales, I identified the students who fell in the bottom third of their class in terms of their level of motivation or self-efficacy and in the highest third in terms of writing anxiety. Ideally, this meant that six students were identified for potential inclusion according to each scale; however, in cases where two or more students had a matching score that placed them in the sixth position, each of these students was identified, increasing the actual proportion of students considered for each scale.

The scores for students in Hadley and Jennifer's classes are included in Tables 2.3 and 2.4 respectively on the following pages. Scores that fell in the bottom third for each scale (or in

Student	Intrinsic Goal Orientation	Extrinsic Goal Orientation	Task Value	Control of Learning Beliefs	Self-efficacy for Learning and Performance	Writing Anxiety	Total
Non-Participant[12]	N/R*	N/R	N/R *	N/R *	N/R	N/R	3
Classroom Participant	5.25	5.50	5.67	6.25	6.38	1.40	0
Nathan	**3.00***	**4.75***	**3.83***	**5.50***	**4.63***	**3.60**	**5**
Classroom Participant	6.25	6.50	6.33	6.25	6.00	3.80	0
Classroom Participant	6.00	5.00*	6.00	6.00	5.88	2.60	1
Classroom Participant	4.00*	5.50	5.67	4.25*	6.50	2.80	2
Recruited	*4.00*	*5.75*	*6.00*	*5.50*	*4.50*	*4.80*	*4*
Classroom Participant	5.25	6.50	7.00	6.00	5.50	4.80*	1
Megan	**2.75***	**4.75***	**4.00***	**5.50***	**3.25***	**2.80**	**5**
Taeyoun	**3.25***	**6.25**	**5.50**	**4.00***	**2.88***	**4.40***	**4**
Non-Participant	N/R	N/R*	N/R	N/R	N/R	N/R	1
Classroom Participant	4.50	4.50*	5.00*	6.25	5.38	4.00*	3
Patrick	**3.50***	**5.00***	**3.50***	**3.75***	**4.13***	**5.00***	**6**
Classroom Participant	5.00	5.75	5.83	5.50*	5.63	4.80*	2
Classroom Participant	6.25	4.00*	7.00	5.50*	5.50	3.20	2
Recruited	*5.00*	*5.00*	*4.67*	*4.75*	*4.88*	*3.80*	*4*
Class Average	**4.52**	**5.39**	**5.40**	**5.38**	**5.21**	**3.63**	

Table 2.3: MSLQ Results and Recruitment Decisions for Students in Hadley's Class

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[12] Because I received survey results from the two students in Hadley's class who chose not to participate in the study, I factored them into my recruitment decision, but have not reported (N/R) those numbers in the scores presented in Table 2.2.

Student	Intrinsic Goal Orientation	Extrinsic Goal Orientation	Task Value	Control of Learning Beliefs	Self-efficacy for Learning and Performance	Writing Anxiety	Total
Classroom Participant	6.50	4.50*	6.83	5.75	4.88	6.40*	2
Classroom Participant	5.75	4.00*	6.33	5.75	5.13	2.20	1
Classroom Participant	5.50	4.75	5.50*	5.00*	5.25	2.40	2
Abigail	**5.75**	**5.00**	**6.17**	**5.00***	**3.63***	**5.80***	**3**
Ding	**4.75***	**6.25**	**5.33***	**4.25***	**5.50**	**4.20**	**3**
Classroom Participant	5.25	4.50*	6.17	5.75	4.13*	5.80*	3
Classroom Participant	6.25	4.25*	6.33	5.25	6.00	5.40*	2
Classroom Participant	6.00	6.50	6.83	6.25	6.00	2.80	0
Classroom Participant	3.75*	5.75	5.83	6.00	4.75	5.20	1
Classroom Participant	5.75	5.75	6.33	6.75	6.50	4.20	0
Ronnie	**4.00***	**5.50**	**4.33***	**3.75***	**4.50***	**4.60**	**4**
Stephanie	**4.50***	**4.00***	**5.33***	**5.25**	**4.13***	**6.00***	**5**
Classroom Participant	5.25	6.00	5.50*	5.50	6.13	1.80	1
Classroom Participant	5.25	5.25	5.00*	5.75	4.63	5.20	1
John Hancock	**4.50***	**4.00***	**5.67**	**5.00***	**4.25***	**4.80**	**4**
Recruited	*4.75*	*6.75*	*6.17*	*3.75*	*3.38*	*6.20*	*4*
Classroom Participant	6.50	4.75	6.33	7.00	4.63	5.40*	1
Classroom Participant	5.00	5.75	4.50*	5.50	4.63	4.40	1
Class Average	**5.28**	**5.18**	**5.80**	**5.40**	**4.89**	**4.60**	

Table 2.4: MSLQ Results and Recruitment Decisions for Students in Jennifer's Class

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one instance, the top) are marked with an asterisk (*). The far right column of each table shows how many times students were identified in the bottom (or top) third of a scale. This number was used to determine which students most frequently had the lowest levels of self-efficacy and/or motivation for writing in Jennifer and Hadley's classes. The students who were recruited and participated in the study are identified by the names that they requested and their scores are bolded in the tables. The students who were recruited but did not participate are italicized.

In order to capture the experiences of students who were likely to have the most difficulty engaging in the writing process, I made the decision to restrict my sample to the six students (roughly one-third of each class) who had the lowest levels of self-efficacy and/or motivation in their first-year writing class. In Hadley's section, six students were easily identified by the survey results, as they each fell into the bottom third on four, five, or all six scales. In Jennifer's class, the decision was not as straightforward. Four students in her class fell into the bottom third on four or five of the scales, and so were included in the study. Three additional students, however, each fell into the bottom third of three scales. In order to keep participation balanced across Jennifer and Hadley's sections, I decided not to recruit all seven students, and instead to choose two of these three students.

As a first step, I compared these students' MSLQ scores, and found that Ding scored the lowest on three scales and Abigail and the other student each scored the lowest on one scale and tied each other for the highest level of writing apprehension. This suggested that Ding should be included in the study, but it still did not help me distinguish between Abigail and the other student. Consequently, I reviewed all three students' scores from the Writing Self-Efficacy Instrument. Ding scored the lowest of all of her classmates in terms of her belief in her ability to complete particular writing tasks and to utilize specific skills, with a combined self-efficacy score of 45 out of a possible 100. Abigail was the fourth lowest in the class, with a score of 57.5, which meant that each of these students fell into the bottom third of their classmates in terms of their general beliefs in their capabilities as writers. The other student, in contrast, was the 11th lowest (or 8th highest) with a score of 66.5, meaning that he had higher self-efficacy beliefs than well over half of his classmates. Based on these results, I made the decision to recruit Abigail and Ding for participation in the study, and to not recruit the other student.

Once the potential participants were identified, I contacted them via email and invited them to participate in the study. Some of the students that I contacted had expressed interest in

being classroom participants, but not interview participants. In their emails, I acknowledged that I was aware that they likely would not want to participate, but that I was extending the invitation because their perspective was particularly valuable. Two of the students who were recruited but did not participate–one in Hadley's class and one in Jennifer's class–fell into this category, which likely explains why they ultimately did not participate in the study. The third student indicated willingness to be an interview participant, but did not respond to my multiple invitations. As Tables 2.3 and 2.4 show, four students in Hadley's class and five students in Jennifer's class agreed to be interview participants. In the profiles that are included on the following pages, I introduce each of these students by the names that they chose for this study.

> **Abigail** was a first-semester freshman who had a considerable amount of writing preparation prior to enrolling in Jennifer's first-year writing course. In her senior year of high school, she took a course called *Reading and Writing for the College Bound* that required her to write, among other things, a 15 page research report. Though Abigail found it difficult to write this report, she also explained that doing so increased her confidence in her ability to write about research. Creative writing, however, was much more difficult for her, as she did not self-identify as a particularly creative person. This sometimes made it difficult for her to generate ideas for the essays she wrote in her first-year writing course, which emphasized creative expression. Perhaps because of this, Abigail was an avid reviser, revising and resubmitting her writing to Jennifer more often than any other student who participated in the study.

> **Ding** was a junior who transferred to UM from Northeast State University (NSU). Prior to coming to the United States, Ding had spent most of her life in China. In high school, she explained, all of the writing that she did was in Chinese. In her coursework at NSU, she enrolled in a first-year writing course that was designed for English Language Learners, which she was able to pass without much difficulty. At UM, Ding did not immediately enroll in a first-year writing course because she hoped that the course she took at NSU would transfer. Instead, she took a course that fulfilled the upper-level writing requirement, again passing without much difficulty. When Ding learned that her previous first-year writing course did not transfer to UM, she enrolled in Jennifer's section and took the class pass/fail. Ding's decision to take the course pass/fail, which required her to earn at least a C- in order to pass the class, directly informed the amount of effort that she invested in her writing. Ding completed fewer revisions than her classmates who participated in this study, resubmitting two of her essays in contrast to others who did so four or five times.

> **John Hancock** was a first-semester freshman who attended high school at an American school in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. English was his most (or one of his most) proficient academic languages, as he had been speaking the language his entire life and had completed schooling in the United States prior to high school. John reported that he was valedictorian of his high school and that he felt well prepared for all of the courses that he would have to take at UM except his English courses. When it came to writing, John expressed very little confidence in his abilities, and described comparing himself to his

classmates in Jennifer's first-year writing course and determining that his writing did not measure up. By the end of the semester, John explained that the effort he put into his first-year writing course was the hardest he had ever worked academically, though he would have rather not put in so much effort to earn the A that he ultimately received.

Megan was a first-semester freshman and self-proclaimed master of the five paragraph essay when she enrolled in Hadley's section of first-year writing. She also described using a list of the most common comments (typically addressing issues related to grammar and mechanics) that she had received from instructors in the past in order to revise her essays before she turned them in. Her reliance on this list and on the five paragraph essay at the start of the term was very much reflective of the way that Megan described her role in the classroom. From Megan's perspective, being a student was a job that involved simply doing what her teacher told her to do. Because of this mindset, she expressed very little affect about writing or about receiving feedback on her writing, even when Hadley pushed students away from the five paragraph essay and other techniques upon which Megan had frequently relied. Megan was the only participant from Hadley's class to use the revision option, revising and resubmitting her second essay in response to Hadley's written comments. She was also the only student to request Hadley's comments on her final essays.

Nathan was a sophomore transfer student who was in his first semester at UM when he enrolled in Hadley's section of first-year writing. Nathan had already completed and received an A in a first-year writing course at Midwest Tech (Tech), a research university several hours north of UM. Nathan explained that he went to Tech because it was close to home and because he did not get admitted to UM his freshman year. UM did, however, offer him a sophomore transfer option where he could transfer in his second year if he met specific admission requirements. After beginning at UM, Nathan struggled with a belief that others–including Hadley–were judging him because he was from a rural part of the state and with a belief that everyone at UM was smarter than him (commonly referred to at UM as the imposter syndrome). Nathan also expressed a much stronger investment in his writing than other students who participated in this study, as he often talked about his writing and his sense of identity interchangeably. Nathan's investment is reflected by the fact that he was one of two students to request that his real name be used to represent him in this study. This investment made it difficult for Nathan to engage with the feedback that he received on his writing, particularly when that feedback was accompanied by a low grade. It also meant that the success that he experienced at the end of the semester, in contrast to his earlier struggles, left him feeling extremely confident about both his ability to overcome obstacles and his ability to write well.

Patrick was a first-semester freshman who expressed more confidence about his writing ability than any other student who participated in this study, though he also suggested that he did not feel entirely comfortable with writing. In large part, Patrick's confidence came from his experiences competing in academic decathlon for his high school. As part of academic decathlon, Patrick worked very closely with the senior AP English teacher in his high school, frequently drafting five page essays (handwritten in a blue book) and getting extensive feedback from that teacher in preparation for the timed essays that he had to write in competitions. For Patrick, this competitive experience led him to see writing as something that could always be improved, if he was willing to put in the effort.

Over the course of the semester in Hadley's first-year writing class, Patrick often expressed that he was capable of producing better writing for his assignments, but that he did not think it would be worth investing the amount of time that it would take in order to achieve what he saw as small gains. Patrick was generally satisfied with his performance in his first-year writing course, and expressed that the B+ he earned at the end of the semester aligned with his expectations.

Ronnie was a first-semester freshman and native speaker of English, though he was also fluent in Russian, which was the first-language of his parents who emigrated from Belarus before he was born. Prior to attending UM and enrolling in Jennifer's section of first-year writing, Ronnie had gone to a nearby charter school for high school, which he described as an ivy school that ranked first in the country. Students at this school, Ronnie explained, were particularly high achieving, which likely informed the high educational standards that he set for himself. Though he had high standards for his writing, Ronnie described his writing ability as "sporadic" and his writing as filled with "moments of brilliance and moments of dullness." He expressed a great deal of investment in his writing during his first-year writing course and often talked about fulfilling his own goals, not just those that Jennifer asked him to meet. Ronnie's investment is reflected by the fact that he was one of two students to request that his real name be used to represent him in this study.

Stephanie was a first-semester freshman who enrolled in Jennifer's section of first-year writing. Although she took two AP English courses in high school–one on literature and one on language–she described writing as a scary and overwhelming thing. In high school, Stephanie wrote a ten page research report; however, this experience did not make her feel better prepared to take on a project of that size. Stephanie described herself as a "disorganized" writer, noting that her ideas were "all over the place," which she found frustrating. She also expressed that she was particularly sensitive to critical feedback, which often made her sad because she invested a lot of time in her writing. Though she was nervous to take her first-year writing course, after she completed it, she expressed that she felt "accomplished" because she did better than she had initially expected.

Taeyoun was a transfer student who had previously attended a university in Japan that offered lectures in Japanese and English. She briefly attended a first-year writing course at that institution, but dropped it–along with all of her other courses–when she made the decision to transfer to UM. She enrolled in Hadley's section of first-year writing during her first semester in the United States. Immediately enrolling in a writing course was difficult for Taeyoun, as she described being able to comprehend between 60 and 70 percent of the discussions that took place in her classes. In contrast to her math classes, which generally repeated knowledge that she had already learned, Taeyoun found it much harder to follow what was going on in her first-year writing class. The lack of confidence that Taeyoun expressed for her writing was much more reflective of her developing knowledge of the English language than of her general beliefs about writing. When she described writing in her native language of Korean, Taeyoun expressed much more confidence about her abilities. Taeyoun was the only student in the study who did not complete her first-year writing course. After conferencing with Hadley about an early draft of her second essay, she decided to drop the course, in part because she earned a D+ on her first essay and so was afraid she would not pass (even though she was taking the

course pass/fail, and needed a C- or higher to get credit for the course), and, in part because Hadley recommended she do so. She said that she planned to fulfill the first-year writing requirement after spending more time in the U.S.

These nine students represent a diverse cross section of the student population at UM. The 2014 entering freshman class, for instance, was made up of roughly 13 percent transfer students and 87 percent first time students. The student population in this study, in contrast, included six first-semester freshmen and three transfer students, reflecting a higher proportion of transfer students than overall population at UM. Two of the first-semester freshmen were multilingual students who were fluent in English and spoke other languages at home. Two of the transfer students had completed high school or attended a university outside of the United States and identified as English Language Learners, and one had transferred from a university in a rural setting. These students had lower levels of self-efficacy and/or motivation than their classmates. In identifying this particular student population as the focus of this study, I sought to learn more about how they experienced instructor feedback in the first-year writing classroom in order to suggest ways that instructors might facilitate similar students' engagement in the writing process.

Data Collection

In addition to the surveys that both instructors and students completed as part of the recruitment process, detailed in the previous section, data was collected from instructors and students in two sections of a required first-year writing course during and shortly after the Fall 2013 semester. This data was qualitative, in the form of a series of interviews with each participant and a corpus of documents that included the instructors' written comments to the student participants and the revision plans and revisions that students developed in response to those comments. This corpus was both qualitative and quantifiable, as the section on data analysis demonstrates. As Merriam (2009) suggests, the "*information-rich* cases" that emerged from looking across these data sets provided valuable insight into the questions being addressed in this study (p. 77).

Instructor Interviews

Jennifer and Hadley each completed two interviews as part of their participation in this study. At the outset of the study, these interviews were intended to provide context through

which students' responses to their instructor's feedback could be better understood. Consequently, the first interview was held in late August, prior to the start of the Fall 2013 semester and followed a semi-structured protocol focused on developing a fuller sense of the instructors' past experiences teaching writing and their practices of providing feedback on student writing. For the complete protocol that structured this interview, see Appendix E.

This interview was discourse-based, asking each instructor to work through a sample student essay that I provided, writing comments on the essay following the pedagogical practices that he or she typically employed. After the instructors had time to comment on the essay, I asked them to walk me through their feedback, focusing on comments that seemed especially important, encouraging, or problematic from their perspectives. Though this rhetorical situation was artificial, it presented an opportunity for Hadley and Jennifer to not only generalize about their commenting practices, but to also focus on and explain specific moments where they tried to accomplish something with their feedback. According to Weiss (1994), this kind of questioning elicits concrete descriptions that are rooted in a specific time and place, in contrast to general descriptions that express "a kind of theory about what is most typical or most nearly essential" (p. 72-73). In asking both general questions and questions rooted in specific discursive moments, I was able to collect data on how the instructors theorized the experience of commenting on student writing and how they put those theories into action.

The second interview was held in February 2014 and asked Hadley and Jennifer to describe their experiences of providing feedback on student writing over the course of the Fall 2013 semester (Appendix E). The instructors were prompted to reflect on the specific interactions that they had with the students who participated in the study. During this interview, the instructors described their goals for providing students with feedback (in both specific and general terms), recounted meaningful interactions (both positive and negative) that they had with particular students (interview participants and others), and responded to the preliminary findings from the students' interviews. This interview collected rich data on how the instructors experienced the process of commenting on student writing and on how they understood some of their interactions with study participants as they evolved over the course of the semester.

Both of these interviews were conducted in face-to-face meetings, and all except one occurred in the instructors' offices. For Jennifer's final interview, I traveled to the east coast–where she had relocated after the Fall 2013 semester–and conducted the interview in her

apartment. I reviewed the consent form at the start of each interview and gave the instructors their compensation, which was $50 at the time of their first and second interviews. Collectively, the instructors completed four interviews totaling roughly 428 minutes of recorded conversation.

The data that emerged from Jennifer and Hadley's interviews ultimately shifted the focus of this study towards the goals and beliefs that they each expressed. As much as this shift was a strength of this study, demonstrating that the findings presented here were not restricted by a predetermined agenda, but genuinely emerged from the experiences that the instructors and students described, the restricted number of interviews is also a limitation that must be acknowledged. In only interviewing the instructors two times, I was not able to capture as much of their experiences as I would have liked, given the focus on their goals and beliefs that emerged. While the data collected from the two interviews that each instructor completed was extremely rich and offered important insights into the instructors' experiences, I did not have the opportunity to repeatedly revisit particular experiences or notions with the instructors in order to validate what they said and determine how their recollections might have shifted or evolved, as I was able to do across the four interviews I conducted with student participants. Though I would argue that the data that emerged from the instructor interviews offered plenty of rich material, I must also acknowledge that it would have been more ideal to talk with the instructors at the same intervals that I talked with students. In future research, such an approach would likely offer even more interesting and myriad insights into the intersections between instructors' and students' experiences.

Student Interviews

The students who participated in this study completed a total of four semi-structured interviews. The complete protocol for each of these interviews is included in Appendix F. The decision to interview students four times was informed by Seidman's (1998) protocol for "in-depth interviews" (p. 49). Following this protocol, the first interview took place during the second and third weeks of the Fall 2013 semester, and sought to develop a sense of what students' experiences with writing had been like prior to enrolling in their first-year writing course. In essence, this interview explored each student's "life history" (p. 49) in relation to writing and receiving feedback on their writing. Additionally, the interview was used to establish a sense of students' expectations for their first-year writing class. The goal of this interview was to consider

how students' beliefs about writing may have been shaped by their past experiences, establishing a baseline through which students' responses to the feedback that they received in their first-year writing course could be better understood. It also provided a point of comparison for considering the ways in which students' responses fluctuated over the course of the semester. The second and third interviews were each discourse-based interviews that asked students to walk through the written comments they received from their instructor (identifying the most significant and most encouraging comments, and identifying any feedback that they found to be problematic), to explain any revisions they either would make or did make in response to those comments (elaborating on why they chose to take up some comments but not others in their revision plans or revisions), and to describe any significant experiences or interactions that they wanted to share. The data generated in these interviews conveyed students' experiences and understandings of those experiences in both general and specific terms, as they moved between theorizing their understandings of feedback to reacting to their instructor's written comments across the pages of their essays. The second interview took place shortly after students received their instructor's written comments (and a grade) on their first essay, which occurred in mid-October for students in both Hadley and Jennifer's classes. The third interview took place in early December, after students had submitted their final essay for evaluation but before they received a grade on it or in the course.

The fourth and final student interview took place in mid-January 2014, early in the term immediately following students' completion of their first-year writing course. This interview generally asked students to reflect on their experiences in their first-year writing course and revisited many of the questions that students were asked in their first interview in an effort to establish how students' beliefs about writing and about their first-year writing course may have evolved or changed over time. The repetition that occurred in this and in the second and third interviews also served as an important form of member checking, as students often answered the same questions or described the same experiences in ways that enabled me to check for consistency or variations in the descriptions that they offered. Member checking also frequently occurred within interviews–both with students and instructors–as I often repeated back what participants had said in order to ensure that I was understanding them in the ways that they intended, or asked for clarification when what they were saying felt unclear.

All of the interviews with students were conducted face-to-face, either in an office or a conference room in the writing program at UM. This location was selected because it was convenient for students and it provided a quiet, confidential space for our conversations. At the start of each interview, students reviewed the consent form and were given compensation for their time. Students were compensated $15 per interview. Eight of the nine students who participated in this study completed the full schedule of interviews, and so received a total of $60 in compensation. One student, Taeyoun, also completed all of her interviews, but because she dropped Hadley's first-year writing course early in the process of drafting her second essay, did not do so following the schedule outlined above. Because she had only received Hadley's written comments on one essay at the time that she dropped the course, the third interview could not be conducted. In addition, because I was concerned that she might not complete her final interview if I waited until the following semester, which would be long after Taeyoun stopped attending her first-year writing course, I gave her the option to either follow the original schedule for the second and fourth interviews or to combine them into one long interview. She chose the latter option, and so I combined the protocol from the second and fourth interviews, and consequently, only interviewed Taeyoun twice. Even so, I was still able to address the same general questions with Taeyoun that I addressed with the other participants, and consequently decided to give her the same total compensation. This meant that she received $15 for her first interview and $85 for her second interview.[13] Collectively, the student participants completed 34 interviews totaling roughly 2,004 minutes of recorded conversation.

The Corpus of Instructor Feedback and Student Response

This study included a large corpus made up of several components: students' essays, instructors' written comments on those essays, and students' revision plans and the revisions that they made in response to their instructor's feedback. The goal of collecting each of these components was to provide concrete points of reference that helped to structure students' and instructors' interviews and to triangulate the data that was captured in these interviews. In what

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[13] Other students received their remaining $40 from the revision plans that they completed in response to their instructor's written comments. Taeyoun did not write out a revision plan in response to Hadley's written comments on her first essay, and could not have done so for later essays. I felt given her circumstances that talking through potential revisions would suffice and did not push her beyond my initial request. Instead, I focused my efforts on incentivizing her to complete her final interview, and so offered her the full study compensation amount. This decision seemed appropriate, as I did not want to penalize her for dropping the course, and I was concerned she might be reluctant to discuss the experiences that led her to do so.

follows, I outline the methods used to collect this corpus data in Hadley and Jennifer's sections of first-year writing.

Prior to the start of the semester, I made arrangements with each instructor for getting copies of students' essays and the instructors' comments on those essays. I initially requested that I get these materials directly from the instructors before they returned them to their students. Hadley agreed and contacted me after he had finished grading each of the five major essays that students completed so that I could pick them up early in the morning, make electronic and hard copies of all students' essays (except those that belonged to the two students who declined participation), and return them to him before he went to class and distributed them to students.

This method was extremely effective in ensuring that I received a copy of every essay that interview participants and classroom participants wrote over the course of the semester, as well as all of the handwritten comments that Hadley made on those essays. Although Hadley gave me access to the materials produced by and for all of the students in his class, I made the decision to restrict the corpus included in this study to only the papers written by interview participants and only Hadley's comments on those papers. As Table 2.5 shows, this meant that the corpus from Hadley's section included 16 student papers and 4,931 words of Hadley's written comments.

These written comments include those that Hadley wrote on students' final two essays, which they submitted at the end of the term. Although Hadley asked students to provide him with a self-addressed, stamped envelope if they wanted to receive his feedback, he still wrote comments on every student's essay. I have included these comments in the corpus in order to capture potential variations between Hadley's commenting practices in each circumstance. This corpus also includes Megan's revision of her second essay and Hadley's comments on that essay, as she was the only student to complete a revision at the end of the semester.

There was one error in compiling the corpus of instructor comments from Hadley's class, as I did not notice that Hadley's end note on Patrick's third essay carried over to the back side of a page. Consequently, half of Hadley's end note on this essay was not captured. Unfortunately, Patrick was not able to locate his copy of the essay after the semester had ended (when the copying error was discovered), so those comments were not able to be included in the corpus.

The final component of this corpus was the revision plans that students completed in response to Hadley's feedback. As Table 2.5 shows, students from Hadley's section completed

Student	Student Papers	# Words in Written Comments from Hadley	Student Revisions	Student Revision Plans
Megan	5	1,502	1	3
Nathan	5	248	0	3
Patrick	5	1,519	0	3
Taeyoun	1	1,662	0	0
TOTAL	**16**	**4,931**	**1**	**9**

Table 2.5: Composition of Corpus from Hadley's Section of First-Year Writing

nine revision plans over the course of the semester. These plans asked them to: 1. Identify the comments that they would engage with if they were going to revise their essay; 2. Prioritize those comments from most important to least important; 3. Make notes about each comment; 4. Develop a step-by-step plan for revising their essay in light of the comments selected; and 5. Reflect on how making the changes they outlined would affect their writing. For a sample student revision plan, see Appendix G.

I gave students an electronic and a paper copy of a sample revision plan and a template for them to fill out during their first interview, and asked them to complete a plan for each of their major essays. Almost every student sent their revision plans to me electronically prior to their second and third interviews. For students who did not submit their plans electronically, I scanned them so that all of the revision plans were stored in the same location.

In order to encourage students to take on the extra task of completing these revision plans, I compensated them for each plan that they completed. Because most of the students who participated in this study chose not to receive their instructor's feedback on their final essay(s), (and consequently could not complete a fourth revision plan), I paid them $10 for their first plan and $15 for their second and third plans. None of the students who participated in the study completed more than three revision plans, and all of the students were compensated exactly $100 by the conclusion of the study.

In contrast to Hadley, Jennifer was reluctant to risk delaying getting her feedback to students, and so requested that I make arrangements with the interview participants in order to collect their papers with her written comments. She did agree, however, to send me the end notes that she wrote on students' first submissions because she typed those, and so sent them to me as PDF or Word files.

Consequently, I made arrangements with students in Jennifer's section to make print and electronic copies of their first essay at the time of our second interview, to make copies of their

Student	Student Papers[14]	# Words in Written Comments from Jennifer	Student Revisions	Student Revision Plans
Abigail	3	1,662	5	3
Ding	3	1,603	2	3
John	4	1,936	4	3
Ronnie	4	2,373	4	3
Stephanie	3	1,329	3	3
TOTAL	**17**	**8,903**	**18**	**15**

Table 2.6: Composition of Corpus from Jennifer's Section of First-Year Writing

second and third essays at the time of our third interview, and to make copies of their fourth essays–if they had provided Jennifer with a self-addressed, stamped envelope in order to receive her feedback–at the time of our fourth interview. I also collected students' revision plans and the revisions that they had submitted and received Jennifer's feedback on during these interviews.

This method of collecting materials from students worked fairly well, with one exception. Ding had a particularly strong affective response to Jennifer's feedback on her second essay, and so threw away the draft with her instructor's comments on it prior to our interview. Although I received the end note to that essay from Jennifer, I was not able to include the instructor's handwritten comments in the corpus from Jennifer's class.

In addition, there was also one error in compiling this corpus, as I did not notice that Jennifer's handwritten end note on Ronnie's first revision of his second essay was on the back of the cover letter the student submitted with his essay. Like Patrick, Ronnie could not locate his essay once this error was discovered, and so unfortunately, these comments could not be included in the corpus. As Table 2.6 shows, the corpus included 17 student papers, 18 student revisions, and 8,903 words of written comments from Jennifer in response to those papers and revisions. Every student completed revision plans in response to Jennifer's feedback on their first three essays, which were also included in the corpus.

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[14] If students did not request Jennifer's written comments on their final essay, Jennifer did not write comments on that essay and so I did not request the essay from the student. In Jennifer's section, only Ronnie and John provided Jennifer with a self-addressed, stamped envelope in order to receive her feedback, which is why four of their papers are included in the corpus, in contrast to three papers from other students.

Data Analysis

In what follows, I outline the specific procedures that were used to analyze each set of data that was collected as part of this study, beginning with the instructor and student interviews and then moving on to the corpus of instructor feedback and student response.

Analyzing the Interview Data

Although the process of interviewing is itself an analytic act, as I constantly made decisions about which statements to probe further, which questions to add, and what order to address questions as various topics naturally arose, I did not begin formal analysis of the data that I collected for this study until all of the interviews had been completed. I made this decision because, as Seidman suggests, I wanted "to avoid imposing meaning from one participant's interviews on the next" (p. 116). I felt this approach was particularly important to this study, as my goal was to represent voices that have generally been neglected in the extant literature, and as much as possible, I wanted those voices to emerge on their own.

Consequently, my first step in the formal analysis of this data was to have the interviews transcribed. I was able to send 36 of the interviews to a transcription service,[15] and transcribed two of the interviews myself. When I received the transcriptions of the interviews, I listened to each and checked to make sure that they had been transcribed accurately and verbatim. Though I have not included nonverbal signals (such as laughing and pauses) in the transcriptions offered in this dissertation, I paid careful attention to the ways that participants' words were represented, as even punctuating the transcript involved an interpretive and analytic process (Kvale, 1996).

In the early stages of analyzing the interviews, I engaged in a process of open coding, making comments in the margins of each transcript and being open to anything that seemed interesting or relevant to my consideration of feedback (Merriam, 2009). After commenting on each transcript, I went back through my comments and identified any patterns or similarities that emerged. I made notes on each of these patterns, and after analyzing a considerable number of transcripts in this way, I started to recognize moments of intersection and moments of conflict between the goals that Jennifer and Hadley described for giving students feedback and the goals

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[15] The money to pay for transcribing the interviews conducted as part of this study came in part from the grant that I received from the Rackham graduate school, previously noted. The Joint Program in English and Education also established an additional source of funding to help students doing qualitative work pay for transcription expenses above and beyond what could be covered by the Rackham grant.

that students described for using that feedback. These goals recurred across many of the interviews and seemed particularly significant for developing an understanding of how feedback functions in the first-year writing classroom. In this moment, I shifted from open coding to what Merriam describes as "analytic coding,"[16] and began to focus my attention specifically on the categories that emerged from the goals that instructors and students repeatedly articulated, consequently moving from simply describing the interview data to interpreting it (p. 180).

Once I decided to focus specifically on instructors' and students' goals, I reanalyzed each transcript, coding only the moments that I identified as relating to the categories that emerged from the instructors' and students' most salient goals. These categories were:

1. How students and instructors understood the **function** of instructor feedback
   a. As something that could only be used within a specific context, or
   b. As something that could be applied across contexts.
2. How students and instructors described the amount of **control** instructor feedback took over students' writing
   a. As something that could support students' purposes for writing,
   b. As something that could help students see their writing in a new way,
   c. As something that took control over student writing, or
   d. As something that told students what their instructor wanted.
3. How students and instructors described the **dialogic** nature of instructor feedback
   a. As something that was conversational, or
   b. As something that was directive.
4. How students and instructors described **positive** feedback
   a. As something that mitigated affective responses, or
   b. As something that could be implemented in students' writing.

Though these categories in many ways align with the focus of much of the research on instructor feedback that has been conducted in the field of composition studies to date, they were not borrowed from this research–an approach that Glaser and Strauss (1967) caution against as the researcher's focus shifts from generating new categories to selecting data to suit existing categories–but inductively emerged from the data that was collected. In addition, the focus here on the intersection of data sets (not only between instructor and student interviews, but also including instructor comments, student revisions, and student revision plans) offers a new way of approaching these categories, and consequently a new understanding of what they can mean. These understandings ultimately shaped the structure of this dissertation and the arguments presented in Chapters 3 and 4, which focus on the instructors' understandings of these categories and the students' understandings of these categories respectively.

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[16] As Merriam notes, others, like Corbin and Strauss (2007) refer to this kind of coding as "axial coding."

In looking closely across the intersections in instructors' and students' descriptions of feedback, I realized an additional need to not only identify these broad trends, but also to examine what happens over the course of a series of interactions between an instructor and an individual student. Consequently, I made the decision to analyze Hadley's interactions with Nathan and Jennifer's interactions with Ronnie. I selected these two students because they each described specific moments of interacting with Hadley or Jennifer and with Hadley or Jennifer's feedback that the instructors also described. This opportunity allowed me to move beyond general patterns to explore what specific moments of giving and receiving feedback looked like from instructor and student perspectives, which are addressed in Chapter 5.

Along these lines, I went back through Hadley and Jennifer's transcripts, identifying every moment each instructor talked about Nathan or Ronnie. I then went back through Nathan and Ronnie's transcripts, identifying every moment that corresponded with the instructors' descriptions and every moment that conveyed information that could further elucidate those moments. In addition to categories that corresponded to prior research, new categories also emerged, as I traced how the instructors and students **communicated**, **interpreted**, and **negotiated** the feedback they exchanged in their interactions with one another. This consideration resulted in the development of the feedback cycle (introduced in Chapter 1 and considered specifically in relation to these participants' experiences in Chapter 5) which theorizes how instructor feedback functions in the writing classroom.

Analyzing the Corpora of Instructors' Feedback and Students' Responses

The rich interview data that was collected and analyzed in this study was complemented, and often complicated, by an equally rich set of corpus data. Because of the quantity of data collected in this corpus, I made a decision early on not to systematically analyze students' essays, their revision plans, or their revisions, but instead to utilize specific documents if and when the interview data called for their consideration. In this way, these documents helped to validate the findings presented in this dissertation.

The 13,834 word corpus of instructors' written comments, in contrast, was systematically analyzed through a process that began in January 2014. My first step in this process was to transcribe all of the instructors' written comments, as they were primarily handwritten over the text, in the margins, and on the backs of students' essays. Jennifer's endnotes on students' first

submissions of each essay, which were sent to me electronically in PDF files or word documents, were generally able to be copied and pasted instead of transcribed.

Once the comments were transcribed, I divided them into t-units, which as Hunt (1965) explains, includes "one main clause plus all the subordinate clauses attached to or embedded within it" (qtd. in Schleppegrell, 2008, p. 675). This decision was made because in many cases, what visually appeared to be one comment on a student's essay actually conveyed multiple messages. For instance, in one of Hadley's marginal comments on Patrick's first essay, the instructor wrote, "I thought you were going to say he was part of your youth group–How does the wrestling team example support your idea in topic sentence?" In this example, Hadley essentially offers Patrick two comments, the first sharing the instructor's response as a reader and the second asking the student to think about the relationship between the focus of a paragraph and a specific example that he included. Consequently, this comment was divided into two t-units.

Not all t-units were complete sentences, however, as the example above might suggest. The instructors often included multiple t-units within a single sentence. For instance, in Jennifer's endnote on Ronnie's first essay, she wrote, "It has to be in the Cs given the significant content-related issue of the Big/analysis, but it's clear that this can be a fantastic paper, and that it's well within your abilities to get it there." Although each part of this sentence offers evaluation, in my analysis, I divided this comment into three t-units, as Jennifer's evaluation shifts from the essay's content, to the essay's potential, to the student's potential. In coding this as three separate comments, I was able to better capture the complexity of what Jennifer communicated to the student.

Initial decisions about where to divide the instructors' comments were made during the transcription process. These decisions were revisited during the coding process, with comments being divided into smaller segments as needed so that each comment received only one code per category of analysis. Non-verbal comments such as underlining, circling, or crossing out words in the students' text were each marked as one t-unit. At the end of the coding process, as Tables 2.7 and 2.8 demonstrate, this meant that Hadley's written comments had been divided into 752 t-units and Jennifer's written comments had been divided into 2,731 t-units.

The codes for the instructor comments were developed from a range of sources, including research on feedback in the fields of educational studies and composition studies, interview data,

Student	# Written Comments from Hadley
Megan	248
Nathan	280
Patrick	189
Taeyoun	35
TOTAL	**752**

Table 2.7. Hadley's Written Comments

Student	# Written Comments from Jennifer
Abigail	540
Ding	522
John	543
Ronnie	682
Stephanie	444
TOTAL	**2,731**

Table 2.8. Jennifer's Written Comments

and my own intuitions as both a researcher and writing instructor. The complete codebook, as it was developed for this study, is presented in Appendix H. This codebook includes some categories that were analyzed in the instructor corpus but that ultimately did not get reported in the findings presented in this dissertation. Consequently, in what follows, I focus specifically on the development of the categories and codes that were reported in this study: orientation, degrees of control, and valence.

The category **orientation** was used to identify where the instructors' written comments directed students' attention. This category was directly informed by the work of Hattie and Timperley (2007), reviewed in Chapter 1. According to Hattie and Timperley, feedback functions on four levels:

1. The task level, which addresses "how well tasks are understood/performed,"
2. The process level, which addresses "the main process needed to understand/perform tasks,"
3. The self-regulation level, which addresses "self-monitoring, directing, and regulating of actions," and
4. The self level, which addresses "personal evaluations and affect (usually positive) about the learner" (p. 87).

In their work, Hattie and Timperley suggest that feedback directed at the task can be beneficial to students; however, they caution that too much feedback at this level can make it difficult for students to develop skills or strategies that they can apply across contexts. Because one of the primary goals of a required first-year writing course is to prepare students for writing in their future courses, I decided that it would be beneficial to explore the function of the instructors' comments specifically in relation to the orientations that Hattie and Timperley describe. Because the work of these scholars is not situated within a specific learning context, I refined their definitions of these four levels (making only slight changes to the wording used in order to more

fully reflect the context of the writing classroom) as I developed the specific codes that I applied to the corpus of instructor comments. This refined coding scheme is included in Appendix H.

The category **degrees of control** was used to identify the amount of imposition that the instructors' written comments exerted by taking firm control, moderate control, or mild control over students' writing. This category and many of the codes within it was developed by Sprinkle (2004) as part of a systematic method designed to help writing instructors assess their own commenting practices.[17] Sprinkle's codes were particularly relevant to this study, as they correspond with the practices most often recommended for commenting on student writing by scholars in composition studies. In applying these codes to the corpus of instructor comments, I was able to see how the instructors' comments aligned with scholars' recommendations. When the instructors' commenting practices aligned with and diverged from scholars' recommendations, I was able to determine if students responded to particular commenting practices in the ways that scholars often suggest.

In applying Sprinkle's codes to the corpus of instructors' written comments, I identified several types of comments that were not captured by his scheme. In order to more fully represent the instructors' comments, I made the additions and adjustments documented in Table 2.9. The decision to add evaluation as a code was necessary because in his scheme, Sprinkle only included qualified evaluation. The majority of the instructors' evaluations, however, were unqualified. Because the complete certainty the instructors expressed in their unqualified evaluations positioned those comments as representative, I coded them as taking more control over students' writing than their qualified (and consequently less representative) evaluations did.

CATEGORY	Sprinkle's Codes	My Additional Codes
Firm Control	Correction	Evaluation
	Command	
Moderate Control	Qualified Evaluation	Directive Question
	Advice/Suggestion	
Mild Control	Question *Adapted to Non-Directive Question*	Explanation
	Reader Response	Description

Table 2.9. Revisions to Sprinkle's Degrees of Control Coding Scheme

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[17] In future research, these codes could benefit from further refinement. Commands, for instance, were identified as a form a firm control over student writing. While the majority of the commands that the instructors issued to students did take firm control over their writing, it is important to note that not all commands exert an equal degree of imposition. Commands that ask students to "remember" or "consider," for instance, could be understood as taking moderate control over students' writing. This would be particularly true in different course contexts, where students may feel they have more ownership over their writing than the students who participated in this study expressed.

In addition, as I applied Sprinkle's coding scheme to Jennifer and Hadley's comments, it became clear that while some questions took mild control over students' writing, asking them to engage in a process of *thinking,* others could have just as easily have been written as commands. To capture this distinction, I divided Sprinkle's category into directive and non-directive questions. Additionally, I added codes for explanation and description, as Sprinkle's scheme had no way to capture the moments that the instructors described what a particular comment meant or what a student could accomplish by implementing it, nor did it capture moments where the instructors articulated what they thought a student was doing in his or her writing. The definitions of each of these codes, with examples from Jennifer and Hadley's written comments, are included in Appendix H.

Finally, the category **valence** was used to identify the degree to which the instructors' written comments explicitly expressed value judgments about the choices, techniques, or strategies used by students, about the students' writing more generally, or about the students themselves. This category emerged primarily from the interview data, as instructors and students frequently described the importance of positive feedback and students in particular articulated a range of responses to both positive and critical feedback. In order to ground the experiences that instructors and students described in their interviews, I developed codes to capture the instructors' uses of positive, neutral, and critical feedback.

The inclusion of the code neutral presents a deviation from much of the scholarship in composition studies that has explored students' responses to the valence of instructor feedback. This scholarship has generally addressed feedback in only positive or negative terms, and tends to leave these types of feedback undefined. One exception is the work of Gee (1972), who specifically studied how students responded to feedback when they received only criticism, which included "specific errors in grammar, spelling, organization, and usage" and suggestions "to improve content and style" or only praise, which included compliments on students' "good points," including "originality, sound and thoroughly developed ideas," and "good grammar" (p. 215). According to the scheme developed for this study, Gee's suggestions for improvement would only be coded as negative if they contained an explicitly negative value judgment. Otherwise, they would be coded as neutral.

Jennifer and Hadley's comments were coded using the scheme presented here and the additional categories and codes defined in Appendix H. All of the coding of instructor comments

was done in an excel document that contained separate sheets for Hadley and Jennifer's comments. Within these sheets, contextual information was collected with each comment in order to track the student who received it, which essay it addressed, the order in which it appeared on the essay, whether it was included in a students' revision plan, and if so, the rank it received (most important, second most important, etc.), and the number of words in the comment. In addition to this information, each comment received one code per category, as the codes in each category were mutually exclusive.

Over the course of coding the instructor comments, the definitions for each category and code became more clear. In some cases, I found inconsistencies in my application of codes that led me to reexamine and revise the definitions that I was using. Throughout this coding process, I was very aware of the interpretive nature of labeling the instructors' comments in this way. This was particularly true in my coding of directive and non-directive questions. At times, it was difficult to decide which code would be more appropriate, as I could sometimes read a question in multiple ways. In these cases, I used my best judgment to determine which code to apply. Although this suggests a potential weakness in the coding scheme, I also think it demonstrates how complicated the questions that instructors ask in their feedback really are. At times, the distinctions that these two codes aimed to capture were so clear that collapsing them into one code would not have adequately represented the instructors' comments. At other times, the questions were much harder to parse. This suggests a need for further research specifically exploring the role that questions play in written comments, particularly as this is a widely recommended and commonly utilized practice in writing instruction.

After the definitions to the codes were solidified, I took a second pass across all of the instructors' comments, checking to ensure that I had applied the codes consistently, accurately, and in line with my refined definitions. Corrections were made as needed.

In order to test the reliability of this coding scheme, I trained a second coder to follow the same procedures and code ten percent of the instructors' written comments. The decision to second code ten percent of the corpus was made because it was a substantial enough portion to establish interrater reliability without overburdening the second coder.

The second coder read the codebook and studied the examples that accompanied each code. We discussed each definition, particularly those that were confusing or unclear to the second coder. I made notes on these codes and revisited the definitions to further refine and

clarify them. Together, we looked at a sample student essay (Ronnie's first essay) and applied one code from each of the five categories to every written comment that Jennifer made. As disagreements or confusion emerged, we discussed the codes and definitions, ultimately coming to agreement about each code that the second coder applied.

I then randomly selected two essays–one from Hadley's class and one from Jennifer's–to be used for calibration, and seven additional essays–three from Hadley's class and four from Jennifer's class–to be independently coded in order to test the reliability of the coding scheme. In order to select these essays, I first divided them by instructor to ensure that a proportional amount of each instructor's comments were coded. The students were listed in alphabetical order (according to their study names), and the essays were listed in numeric order by student. Each essay was assigned a random number (between 1 and 17 for Hadley's students and between 1 and 35 for Jennifer's students) using a random number generator (http://www.random.org/), ensuring that no number was repeated across the sample. The random number generator was then used to select two essays for calibration, one from Hadley's class and one from Jennifer's class. These essays contained a total of 147 written comments, 44 of which Hadley offered to Patrick on his first essay and 103 of which Jennifer offered to John on his first essay.

Next, I continued selecting essays for independent coding until the number of comments selected met or exceeded ten percent of each instructor's total number of comments. When the random number generator selected an essay from a student who was already included in either the calibration or independent coding sample, that essay was discarded and another number was generated to ensure as much variety in the sample as possible. Out of the 752 comments that Hadley made on students' writing, a total of 91 comments (12.1 percent) across three student essays were selected for independent second coding. And, out of the 2,731 comments that Jennifer made, 291 comments (10.7 percent) across four essays were selected. For additional information about the essays selected for second coding, see Appendix I.

After the second coder had coded each of the calibration essays, I identified all coding disagreements and we met to discuss those comments. In our discussions, we reviewed the definitions for the codes that we had each applied and decided together whether I was in error, the second coder was in error, or whether the disagreement could not be resolved. Unresolved disagreements occurred when we either both felt that the code we had applied was correct or we felt that either code could be applied if the comment was read in a particular way, but were not

frequent. Overall, agreement appeared to be strong, as we agreed on 90.5 percent of the codes for orientation, 83.7 percent for degrees of control, and 89.1 percent for valence.

Because the agreements between my analysis and the second coder's analysis could have occurred by chance, in addition to calculating the percentage of agreement, I also used Cohen's kappa "to indicate the percentage of agreement that remains after agreement by chance has been removed" (Lauer and Asher, 1988, p. 261). Consequently, kappa was calculated for each category using free online software (http://graphpad.com/quickcalcs/kappa2/). This produced a "fair" kappa score of 0.366 for orientation, a "good" score of 0.788 for degrees of control, and a "very good" score of 0.832 for valence. Although it would have been ideal to achieve "good" or "very good" scores for each category before moving on to the independent coding, after talking with the second coder about the orientation codes, I made the decision to move forward in the process, largely because the differences in our codes were systematic and the coder attributed them to often forgetting to consider codes other than task, which occurred much more frequently than the other codes in this category. This decision likely reduced the reliability that we were able to achieve in the independent portion of the coding process; however, given the pressures and constraints associated with completing this study, it was a necessary decision. Future research would likely benefit from investing more time in the calibration process.

Appendix J highlights the agreements and disagreements that were factored into the kappa calculations for the calibration and independent coding processes.[18] The independent coding process involved coding and comparing a total of 382 comments. As the tables in the appendix show, the overall agreement for these comments was "moderate" for the category of orientation, with a kappa of 0.553, "good" for degrees of control, with a kappa of 0.689, and "good" for valence, with a kappa of 0.712. Though these numbers are somewhat lower than I had hoped, given the circumstances, it seems likely that they may say more about the calibration process than about the reliability of the codes. As these numbers stand, it can be concluded that the categories of degrees of control and valence are reliable, and that the category of orientation is acceptable, as Lauer and Asher (1988) suggest that reliability scores of less than 0.7 are "quite acceptable for basic research purposes" (p. 139).

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[18] Agreements are bolded to distinguish them from disagreements in each table.

Ethical Considerations

Research is in every way a subjective enterprise. I have woven descriptions of my efforts to counter this subjectivity throughout this chapter, outlining the cautions that I took to validate the findings of this dissertation study, particularly through triangulating the data that I collected, confirming my understandings and impressions of participants' experiences during our interviews, and establishing interrater reliability by training a second coder to analyze Jennifer and Hadley's written comments using the coding scheme developed for this study. I have also openly acknowledged the limitations of this study so that the results that are presented here can be read as much for what the study was not able to capture as for what it did capture. In each of these ways, I have sought to demonstrate that these findings are valid and reliable, a crucial aspect of any scholarly work.

I end this chapter by sharing my own investment in this project, as it ultimately shaped the way that I designed this study, interacted with participants, collected and analyzed data, and reported my findings in the pages of this dissertation. In explicitly acknowledging my subjectivities as a researcher, I hope to offer another means of validating this work, as readers can critically engage not only with the findings presented here, but also with the motives that shaped them.

I came to this project first and foremost as a teacher of writing. I am most passionate about teaching required first-year writing courses, as these courses are often the only place where college students receive explicit writing instruction. I approach my first-year writing course as an introduction to writing and to the university at large, and I greatly enjoy supporting students as they transition into unfamiliar and at times overwhelming spaces. I know that students take these courses not because they want to, but because they have to. For me, that is ultimately part of the charm and challenge of first-year writing–providing students with skills and strategies that they do not want, and convincing them that, in fact, those skills and strategies are worth developing.

In the seven years since I first started teaching writing, I have grown increasingly interested in the experiences of students who seem disengaged from both my course and their writing. This interest emerged, in large part, from my interactions with students. Early on, my approach to teaching–and more specifically, to students–was generally to reciprocate the ways that they interacted with me. In response to students who joked with me, I joked. In response to students who made small talk, I made small talk. In response to students who were quiet, I was

quiet. In my inexperience, I thought that this approach meant that I was offering each student the relationship that he or she wanted to have with me. *If they wanted to communicate with me,* I thought, *they would, right?*

It did not take long for me to realize that this approach was highly problematic. More than halfway through my first semester of teaching, I went on ratemyprofessor.com and saw that a student had posted a comment suggesting that I clearly favored certain students in the class. I was devastated. I genuinely did not have favorite students, but I immediately understood why some students would feel that way. The next day in class, I apologized to my students, explained how I had been approaching my interactions with them, and expressed my desire to build a relationship with each and every one of them. I thanked the student who had anonymously posted the comment and brought this issue to my attention, though I had no idea which of my "quiet" students it was. As much as I tried to fix the dynamic I had created, however, it was too late. The students who I had developed a rapport with were even more engaged as the semester concluded. Those who I had not, I began noticing more than ever, appeared bored on their best days and irritated or disgruntled on others.

Looking back on that semester now, I am saddened by the feeling that I failed a number of students. I have thought about those students often as I conducted this study, wondering if, like Nathan, students in my courses felt that I was making judgments about them that made it difficult for them to process my feedback, or if, like Ronnie, some students tried to increase their effort, but were discouraged by an impression that I had deprioritized them and their writing. Since that first semester, I have had one or two students in every required course that I have taught who I simply could not find a way to engage. The memory of these students has stayed with me, though if I am honest, the names and faces have faded. I was not able to get to know these students when they filled the back row of chairs in my classroom. In their silence, I had no way to learn about their experiences.

This study, then, has provided names and faces for students who have long since moved on from my first-year writing courses. It has also given them voices. Though the students who participated in this study are undoubtedly different from the students whom I once taught, my efforts to learn about their experiences were fueled by a desire to better understand why I was never able to engage certain students in my writing courses and to understand how I might be better able to do so in the future. In sharing the experiences that Abigail, Ding, John, Megan,

Nathan, Patrick, Ronnie, Stephanie, and Taeyoun had in their first-year writing course, I aim to bring the back row to the center of the room. And, in considering how these students' experiences intersect with those of their instructors, I offer a much more complex treatment of feedback in the writing classroom than is typically addressed.

In the next chapter, I approach feedback from Hadley and Jennifer's perspectives, exploring the goals that the instructors set for their feedback and how those goals were realized (or not) in the written comments that they offered students in their first-year writing courses.

Instructor Goals and Feedback Practices: A Corpus-Based
Consideration of the Best Practices for Commenting on Student Writing

> I believe individualized feedback is one of the most important things I can offer as a teacher, and thus I believe that one of the most important parts of a student's writing process is working with that feedback. That doesn't mean that a student does everything I say, but that s/he learns that writing takes a long time, with multiple versions.
>
> *Jennifer*

> My comments provide students with a sense of how a critical, open-minded audience member reacts to their writing, with the larger aim of encouraging students to think about how to effectively construct and effectively develop academic arguments. The comments I provide are typically directed toward helping students consider how they might improve their approach in subsequent writing situations. I hope that students read through the comments I provide and apply them, along with their own critical thinking on their strengths and weaknesses as writers, to make adjustments in their drafting and revising process as they tackle their next writing situation.
>
> *Hadley*

In these statements,[19] the two instructors who participated in this study express that the feedback they provide students is not intended to be directive, but is meant to help students think about their writing. Along these lines, Jennifer makes a clear distinction between what it means for students to work with her feedback and what it means for them to do "everything I say," suggesting that her feedback was not intended to simply be followed by students in her writing classes, but was meant to promote thinking that could extend the writing process and encourage revision. Similarly, Hadley's use of the verb "consider" suggests that he aimed to use his feedback to engage students in a process of thinking, as opposed to a process of doing. Additionally, his use of the modal "might" qualifies students' potential uses of his feedback,

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[19]These quotes were taken from a survey that was distributed in the summer of 2013 to all writing instructors registered to teach one or more sections of a required first-year writing course during the fall semester. The question that the instructors were responding to was, "In your own words, briefly describe the role that you feel your feedback plays in your students' writing process."

positioning Hadley's comments as suggestions and not directives that must be followed. Each statement consequently places control over writing in the hands of students, in line with the best practices for commenting on student writing that Sprinkle (2004) and other composition scholars have advocated.

The specific goals articulated in these statements informed Jennifer and Hadley's approaches to commenting on the writing produced by students in their first-year writing courses. According to Pintrich (2003), goals–or "goal orientations," as he terms them–"are defined as the reasons and purposes for approaching and engaging in achievement tasks" (p. 676). In the instructors' statements, the reasons and purposes for commenting on student writing that Jennifer and Hadley articulate focus on goals they hope their comments can help students accomplish. For instance, they each express a desire to engage students in a process of thinking, as opposed to a process of doing. They also express additional goals, which for Jennifer involved using her comments to facilitate students' revisions and for Hadley concerned informing students' subsequent approaches to writing. In every case, the goals that these instructors sought to accomplish through their feedback were clearly mastery goals, which "orient the student towards learning and understanding, developing new skills, and a focus on self-improvement using self-referenced standards" (Pintrich, p. 677).[20]

Many of the goals that Jennifer and Hadley described over the course of this study align with goals that are frequently recommended by composition scholars. As the review in Chapter 1 demonstrates, the best practices for commenting on student writing foreground students' agency, asking instructors to give students dialogic feedback that is reflective of the classroom context and leaves control over writing in the hands of students, ultimately helping them to fulfill their own purposes (Brannon & Knoblauch, 1982; Connors & Lunsford, 1993; Sommers, 1982, 2013; Sprinkle, 2004; Straub, 1996, 2000). While these recommendations for what feedback should do are widely agreed upon by composition scholars, research suggests that they are often not realized in instructors' commenting practices (Connors & Lunsford, 1993; Sommers, 1982), even when instructors express goals that align with scholars' recommendations (Ferris, 2014; Lee, 2009; Montgomery & Baker, 2007).

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[20] In contrast to mastery goals, performance goals "represent a concern with demonstrating ability, obtaining recognition of high ability, protecting self-worth, and a focus on comparative standards relative to other students and attempting to best or surpass others" (Pintrich, 2003, p. 677). Though the instructors did not identify performance goals for students, students often did, as Chapter 4 demonstrates.

In response to such discrepancies, scholars like Connors and Lunsford (1993) have argued that writing instructors must "start putting into programmatic practice what we've learned about effective teacher commentary from scholars" (p. 219) and others, like Sprinkle (2004), have developed tools that instructors can use to analyze their written comments in order to better align those comments with the best practices established in the field. However, these calls have not resolved the discrepancies that emerge between instructors' goals and commenting practices, as Ferris's (2014) recent work and the findings of this dissertation demonstrate. This suggests a need to not only consider *how* instructors' goals and commenting practices align and diverge, but also to explore *why* these divergences occur.

In this chapter, I consider the divergences that emerged between the goals that Jennifer and Hadley articulated and the practices that shaped their written comments, with a focus on identifying the factors that contributed to these divergences. This consideration demonstrates that the process of implementing the best practices for commenting on student writing may not be as straightforward as scholarship suggests. Consequently, in addition to assessing instructors' commenting practices, as composition scholars recommend, the findings of this dissertation suggest that the goals that inform those practices also need further examination.

Along these lines, this chapter begins by exploring what it means when goals and practices diverge, particularly in relation to students' responses to instructor feedback. I then turn to explore the factors that contributed to divergences between the goals that Hadley and Jennifer expressed for their feedback and their commenting practices. This consideration focuses specifically on the tensions that emerged between goals, as the instructors identified some goals that were in direct competition with one another, and on the tensions within individual goals, as Jennifer and Hadley expressed beliefs that made it difficult for them to put particular goals into practice. These findings suggest that in contrast to the prominent impulse to align instructor commenting practices with existing recommendations, it is just as important, and perhaps more fruitful, to reconsider which goals can actually be realized through the practice of commenting on students' writing.

Instructor Goals vs. Commenting Practices: What is the Meaning of Divergence?

Divergences between instructors' goals and commenting practices are well documented, as the review in Chapter 1 demonstrates. For instance, Montgomery and Baker (2007) found that

writing instructors at one university gave students considerably more feedback on grammar and mechanics than they reported in a survey about their feedback practices, despite the fact that they had been trained to emphasize global issues in students' writing. Additionally, in a study of first-year writing instructors across eight postsecondary institutions, Ferris (2014) found that for some instructors, "there was discontinuity between their stated philosophies and actual responding practices as observed in the sample texts they provided" (p. 20). In some cases, instructors frequently wrote their comments in the form of statements and imperatives in contrast to their reported reliance on questioning techniques. Another instructor expressed that she strove to make her comments a model of clarity for her students, though researchers found several comments that could not be deciphered without the instructor's explanation.[21] Consequently, these studies suggest that even when instructors identify goals that align with the practices recommended by scholars in the field, those goals may not actually be realized in their written comments.

The effect of such divergences, these scholars suggest, is that instructors' goals ultimately go unrealized, consequently decreasing the effectiveness of instructor feedback. For example, Ferris (2014) uses the findings of her study to recommend that instructors evaluate and adjust their commenting practices in order to better realize their goals. As she explains, "A principle of philosophy is only truly valuable if it is actually applied effectively" (p. 22). Similarly, Montgomery and Baker (2007) recommend that future research should focus on "helping teachers match their performance to their beliefs," though they also note that research might additionally help teachers "change their beliefs to match what they feel is instinctively correct" (p. 96). In each case, these scholars assert that when divergences occur between instructors' goals and commenting practices, the solution is inevitably to resolve the divergence in order to make instructor feedback more effective.

This assertion makes good sense if the commenting practices enacted by writing instructors are considered in isolation. As Ferris suggests, if instructors believe they primarily use questioning techniques, a high proportion of statements and imperatives in their written

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[21] In a study exploring the beliefs and practices of secondary writing instructors working with non-native English speakers in Hong Kong, Lee (2009) identified ten mismatches between instructors' beliefs about writing and their commenting practices, finding that instructors: marked errors comprehensively though they expressed that selective marking was preferred; used abbreviations and codes in their comments though they felt students could not decipher them; focused almost exclusively on weaknesses in students' essays although they acknowledged the importance of identifying both strengths and weaknesses in student writing; and, corrected students' work for them in contrast to their belief that students should take greater responsibility for their own learning. This study offers persuasive reinforcement of the findings of the scholars considered here.

comments presents an important divergence that certainly merits exploration. Where the logic begins to break down, however, is in suggesting that these comments are ultimately less effective. In so doing, the assertions made by scholars move beyond instructors' commenting practices towards their effects for students, suggesting that if an instructor does not implement particular commenting practices, then his or her goals for students' responses to those comments cannot possibly be fulfilled. Though certainly possible, this suggestion ultimately removes agency from students, implying that students' responses to instructor feedback are confined within the parameters set by particular commenting practices and that these responses do not vary from student to student. It also implies that written comments function on their own, without the support of other pedagogical strategies. In the remainder of this section, I explore one of the divergences that emerged between the Jennifer and Hadley's goals and commenting practices in order to develop a better understanding of that divergence and what it may have meant in terms of students' responses to the instructors' feedback.

Jennifer and Hadley each identified a goal to use their feedback to engage students in a process of thinking, which for Jennifer focused on helping students think about revising their essays and for Hadley was directed towards improving students' subsequent approaches to writing. Hadley's focus on future-oriented feedback was connected to the fact that students in his course–following departmental expectations and guidelines–were not expected to revise their essays after receiving his feedback.[22] As a result, the most immediate and likely use that students had for Hadley's feedback was implementing it in the next paper they wrote, which asked them to write in a different genre and with a different focus than previous assignments. In line with the context of his classroom, Hadley described his goal for his written comments:

> I don't think the comments should be only evaluative, right, to say that, you know, 'This is everything we talked about before,' that, 'This is the reason you got a C.' I think there needs to be something more useful, like something that the student can apply to the work going forward, something that gives them a sense of like, 'This is how my words are landing with the reader.'

In this moment, Hadley set up a contrast between evaluative comments and comments that students "can apply" in the future, explaining that his evaluative comments primarily function to justify grades. Though Hadley did not suggest that his comments should be entirely non-evaluative, he did identify non-evaluative comments as "more useful" for students. As he

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[22] Students in Hadley's class did have the opportunity to revise one of their major essays at the end of the semester, though it was up to students whether they chose to do so.

explained, "I think the majority of the comments should reflect areas where the student should focus their attention for the next writing project." In line with the context of his course, Hadley articulated a goal to make most of his feedback future-oriented and non-evaluative.

Similarly, Jennifer's focus on students' revision process reflected her classroom context, as students had the opportunity to revise each essay multiple times after receiving her feedback.[23] As she described her goals for her comments, Jennifer emphasized her efforts to make them "detailed and focused" and to highlight students' improvements over time. As she explained:

> Having multiple revisions and always collecting the originals is–I can see that the first time, I said like, 'You have to show more.' And the second time, it was like, 'You are showing better, but let's talk about it.' And then they will come into my office, and they will practice, and then I get to say, 'Wow! You are really doing it! Like, check out the difference between before and after.' And I give them an example. And so, showing them, like, concrete ways that they have done something, and, you know, I think just like, little things start to turn, and being like, excited about them, you know, pays off and goes a long way.

By looking across drafts and across the comments she made on each draft, Jennifer emphasized, she is able to show students specific ways that their writing is developing. This focus on the task, she explained, shows students "that I'm not just paying attention here, but I'm like, invested in your success throughout the term." Jennifer also described using task specific feedback to show students what they could gain from investing in the writing process. "It does no one any favors to say, 'This is nice,' or like, 'This was not nuanced,'" she said. "I actually need to give examples, to give multiple examples to show why it's important and to show what it could look like." In each of these moments, Jennifer described her goal of giving students task-specific feedback in ways that would encourage them to develop multiple drafts of their essays, in line with her class context.

As Jennifer and Hadley described these goals for their feedback, they each identified specific practices that they used to realize them in their written comments, suggesting that both instructors were not only intentional about how they wrote their comments to students, but also that they had a clear sense of what those comments tended to look like. However, in several

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[23] There were some limits on the quantity and frequency of revisions that students could do over the course of the semester. Jennifer divided each class she taught in half, with half of the students having an opportunity to turn in revisions during the first half of the week (e.g., Mondays for a Monday/Wednesday class) and half the students turning in their revisions during the second half of the week (e.g., Wednesdays). There were no restrictions on how many times students could revise an individual paper, but they could only submit one paper at a time, resulting in two to three revision opportunities for each paper, or many opportunities for one paper.

cases, the instructors' goals and practices clearly diverged. For example, in contrast to Hadley's goal to use the majority of his written comments to help students on their next assignment and his belief that a considerable portion of his written comments were future-oriented, the comments that he gave students in his first-year writing course primarily focused on the task that they had just completed. These task-oriented comments, Hattie and Timperley (2007) explain, address "how well tasks are understood/performed" (p. 87) and are often referred to as "corrective feedback" (p. 91). This definition aligns the comments that Hadley most frequently made with those he suggested he tried to move beyond, such as comments that essentially told students, "This is the reason you got a C."

As Chart 3.1 demonstrates, task-oriented comments were by far the most frequent comments that Hadley offered students in his first-year writing course, making up between 82.5 and 93.6 percent of the feedback they received on their first three essays.[24] Interestingly, after commenting on the first essay, the frequency of task-oriented comments that Hadley gave students increased by more than 10 percent and continued to increase until the final essay, demonstrating that as the semester went on, Hadley's commenting practice became increasingly

Orientation: Hadley's Comments

	Task	Process	Self-Regulation	Personal
■ Essay 1	0.8248	0.0957	0.0739	0.0057
□ Essay 2	0.9331	0.0356	0.0313	0.0000
▨ Essay 3	0.9362	0.0317	0.0245	0.0076
▨ Essay 4	0.9727	0.0185	0.0000	0.0088
▨ Essay 5	0.9286	0.0476	0.0000	0.0238
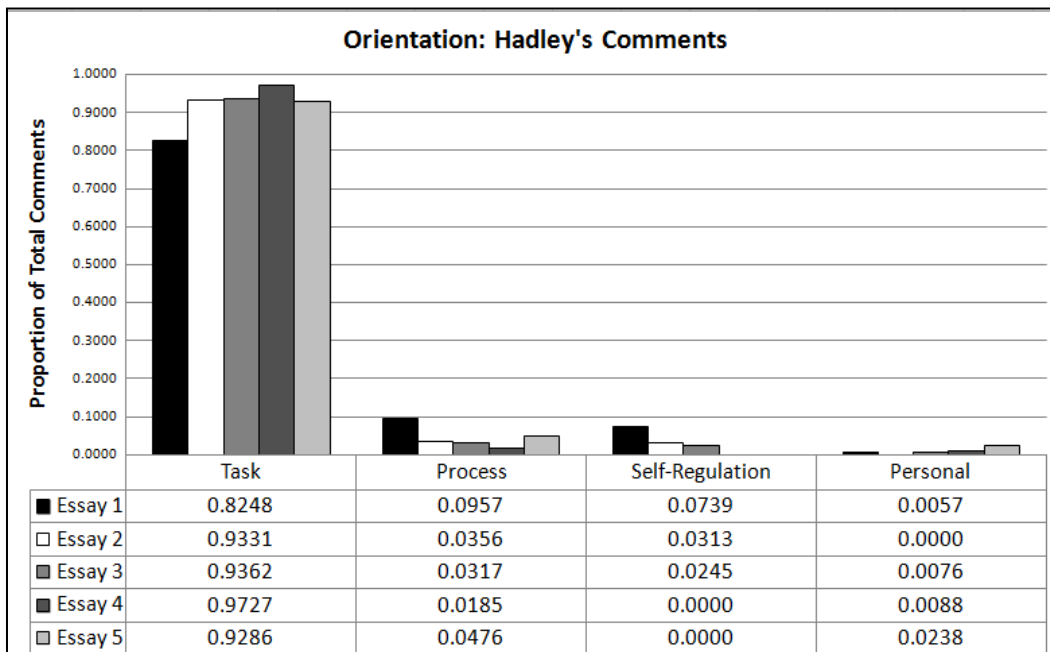
Chart 3.1: Average Orientation of Hadley's Written Comments to Students in FYW

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[24] All of the averages reported for Hadley's comments are restricted to the first three essays, as the comments he wrote on Essay 4 and Essay 5 were generally not returned to students. These comments are included in the charts presented in this chapter, but not calculated in the averages I discuss, as they would skew the results in ways that are not representative of Hadley's actual communications to students.

CODE	DEFINITION	EXAMPLE(S)
Task	Comments that address the task or essay the student was asked to complete, including how well the task is being accomplished or performed; Comments that ask the student to acquire more or different information relevant to the task; or that help students build more surface knowledge by explaining the task	*Hadley:* Can you set up this reference more clearly? *Jennifer:* Can you give an example?
Process	Comments that address the processes used to create a project or complete a task; Comments aimed at the processing of information or learning processes required for understanding or completing the task; Comments that show relationships between tasks	*Hadley:* Maybe use this to focus your thesis? *Jennifer:* But ultimately, you want to pick a single focus [Abigail, 1.1]
Self-Regulation	Comments that address the student's self-regulation in monitoring, directing, or taking action towards a learning goal, that address or promote the development of self-evaluation skills, or that address the student's confidence to engage further on a task	*Hadley:* Keep working on intro/conclusion strategies [Patrick, 1.1] *Jennifer:* Ask me, or Google, about quotations and punctuation.
Personal	Comments that are directed towards the student, as opposed to their text, often evaluating or express affect about the student	*Hadley:* I know your thinking has been evolving on this topic [Megan, 3.1] *Jennifer:* This is a testament to your humility as a narrator [Ding, 1.1]
Other	Comments that are either unclear in their orientation or do not fit within the other categories	*Jennifer:* I'll stop marking this.

Table 3.1: Orientation of Comments, Definitions with Examples from Each Instructor

divergent from his goals. Though Hadley did not specifically acknowledge shifts such as this one as he described his commenting practices, the increasing divergence between this goal and practice suggests that Hadley may have made more concentrated efforts to align his commenting practices with his goals in the feedback he offered students on their first essays.

In addition to task-oriented feedback, Hadley also gave students feedback oriented towards the process level, self-regulation level, and personal level, as Chart 3.1 shows, though he did so in considerably smaller proportions. The definitions for each of these codes, as I adapted them to more fully reflect the context of the first-year writing classroom, are included in Table 3.1.[25] This table also includes examples of each type of comment as they were made by Jennifer

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[25] Hattie and Timperley's (2007) work was not situated within one learning context; therefore I refined their definitions in order to reflect the specific context of the writing classroom. For a complete rationale of this and other coding decisions, see Chapter 2.

and Hadley.[26] According to Hattie and Timperley (2007), process-oriented comments, which address "the main processes needed to understand/perform tasks" and self-regulation-oriented comments, which address the student's "self-monitoring, directing, and regulating of action" (p. 87), direct students' attention towards the underlying structures that shape writing, promoting deeper learning and encouraging students to take control over their learning, or in this case, their writing. These comments, scholars argue, are more likely to help students think beyond the specific task at hand, in line with Hadley's goal. However, as he moved from commenting on the first essay to commenting on the second essay, Hadley decreased both the process-oriented and self-regulation-oriented comments that he gave students by more than half, reflecting the increase in task-oriented comments that he gave students on their second essay.

Like Hadley, the majority of comments that Jennifer offered students in her first-year writing course were task-oriented, as Chart 3.2 shows. This, however, aligned with her goal to focus on specific moments in students' essays. Even so, Jennifer's commenting practices share an interesting pattern with Hadley's, as she offered considerably more process-oriented and self-regulation-oriented comments on students' first essays than on their subsequent essays. These

Orientation: Jennifer's Comments

	Task	Process	Self-Regulation	Personal	Other
■ PAPER 1.1	0.8582	0.0931	0.0279	0.0115	0.0094
□ PAPER 2.1	0.9549	0.0285	0.0146	0.0000	0.0020
■ PAPER 3.1	0.9057	0.0474	0.0260	0.0080	0.0129
□ PAPER 4.1	0.8908	0.0256	0.0202	0.0432	0.0202
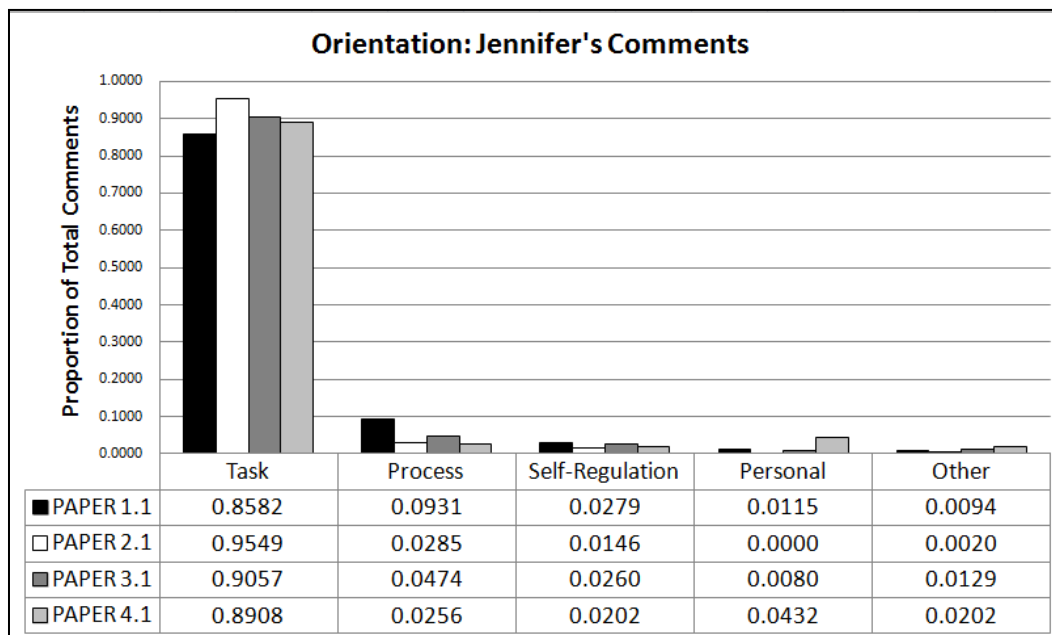
Chart 3.2: Average Orientation of Jennifer's Written Comments to Students in FYW

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[26] Many of the comments in the charts in this chapter came from a sample student essay that both instructors commented on during their initial interviews, making these comments (those that are not labeled in the charts) the only point of direct comparison between them. The comments that are labeled, in contrast, were written on students' essays. For example, [Abigail, 1.1] means that Abigail received this comment in response to her first draft of the first essay. No example for Hadley is listed under the code "other," as he did not offer any comments on the sample essay or to study participants that received this code.

comments, like Hadley's, dropped considerably from the first to second essay, with students in Jennifer's class receiving roughly one-third the amount of process-oriented comments and just over one half the number of self-regulation-oriented comments they had previously received.

Though in Jennifer's case this shift was not necessarily out of alignment with the instructor's goal, the parallel to Hadley's comments demonstrates that both instructors commented differently on students' first essays than they did on their subsequent writing, a shift that, Chapters 4 and 5 suggest, could have important implications for students' engagement with instructor feedback as many of the students who participated in this study formed expectations for their instructor's written comments that were based on patterns they noted in the early sets of comments that they received. In addition to considering divergences between instructors' goals and practices, then, future research might also explore shifts in instructors' commenting practices over time, with an eye towards explaining why these shifts take place and what effect they have for students.

In any case, in the examples considered here, one instructor's goal matched her practice, and one instructor's did not. Moments of divergence like Hadley's are typically treated by scholars in negative terms, as issues that need to be resolved. Though it is certainly important for instructors to be aware of moments of divergence between their goals and practices, arguing that instructors need to align their practices with established goals suggests two things: first, that instructors can resolve these divergences, and second, that doing so is necessary in order for instructors to realize their goals.

In contrast to this latter understanding, it seems unlikely that Hadley's commenting practice in and of itself meant that he was not able to accomplish his goal that students engage in a process of thinking about their future writing. Because written comments are one of many pedagogical tools used by instructors, it seems just as likely that Hadley could have articulated his goals or taught a lesson in class that asked students to apply his feedback from one assignment to the next. In either of these cases, students could take a task-specific comment like, "Can you set up this reference more clearly" (included in Table 3.1), and apply it to their next essay, assessing the way that they introduced each of their references. Even if Hadley did not explicitly address this goal in class, students certainly could, and some likely would, engage with his feedback in this way.

Consequently, this consideration raises important questions that can only be answered by exploring students' responses to Hadley and Jennifer's feedback:

1. Does an instructor's commenting practice convey his or her goals to students?
2. If a practice and a goal diverge, do students use instructor feedback in ways that align with the practice, the goal, or perhaps neither?

These questions are addressed in Chapter 4, which examines students' responses to Hadley and Jennifer's feedback. In the remainder of this chapter, I explore questions that can be answered by the instructors themselves, all of which are intended to develop an understanding of why instructors' goals and commenting practices diverge.

Divergence as Intentional Choice: Competing Goals and Emerging Tensions

The most interesting divergences between the instructors' goals and practices emerged as Hadley and Jennifer articulated their efforts to use their written comments to support students' purposes for writing, a goal which is central among the best practices recommended by scholars in the field. As Sommers (1982) argues, for instance, students should be provided written comments "which will help them think about their purposes and goals in writing a specific text" (p. 154). In order to accomplish this, others, like Brannon and Knoblauch (1982), have suggested that a crucial step in providing feedback is to seek out students' intentions before commenting on or evaluating their writing. As they explain, "if we preempt the writer's control by ignoring intended meanings in favor of formal and technical flaws, we also remove incentive to write and the motivation to improve skills" (p. 165). In both of these cases, emphasis is clearly placed on what students are trying to accomplish in their writing, not on what instructors expect students to achieve. When emphasis is placed on an instructor's expectations, Brannon and Knoblauch go on to explain, students feel little control over the development of their writing and may lose their motivation to engage in the writing process. Others, such as Sprinkle (2004) agree, suggesting that when instructors resist taking control over student texts, they "allow students to retain a greater responsibility over their writing," which ultimately results in increased engagement in the writing process (p. 277).

In order to help students retain control over their texts, composition scholars recommend that feedback should encourage students to pursue their own purposes and should offer students support in this pursuit. For instance, Sprinkle argues that "written comments promoting student

responsibility ought to make up the majority of the comments instructors make on student essays" (p. 276). According to Brannon and Knoblauch, such an approach "can create a rich ground for nurturing skills because the writer's motive for developing them lies in the realization that an intended reader is willing to take the writer's meaning seriously" (p. 165). In linking this student-centered approach to students' subsequent motivation, Brannon and Knoblauch suggest that a student's sense of authority–and authorship–plays a key role in his or her motivation to engage in a writing task, and consequently should be supported as instructors comment on student writing.

In line with these recommendations, Hadley explained that his goal for his feedback "isn't corrective, per se. It's about trying to recognize the potential in a draft. So, you're trying to acknowledge what the writer is doing. You're trying to meet them halfway. And then you're trying to give them advice that would best help them get to that point." The distinction that Hadley made here, between "corrective" feedback–which presumably aims to help students reach goals that are imposed on their writing–and "advice" oriented towards helping students realize their own goals, places control in the hands of students, as they can consider for themselves how they might use instructor feedback to realize "the potential" in their drafts.

Jennifer also framed the feedback that she offered students as "advice," emphasizing that though she expected her students "to engage with what I am saying… that doesn't mean that they have to do what I say." Like Hadley, Jennifer placed control in the hands of students, leaving it up to them to determine whether and how they implemented her feedback in their writing. As she explained, "The hope is that they see it really as like, 'Here's advice from someone who's trying to help me,' and to balance that with their own voices as writers and their own desire." In positioning her feedback as one factor influencing the choices that students make in their writing, Jennifer highlighted the important role that students' purposes for writing play in the writing process and emphasized her goal to support students as they aim to fulfill those purposes.

This goal to support students' purposes, however, was complicated by each instructor's goal to help students see their writing in a new way. In part, this goal involved sharing with students how readers experienced their writing. As Jennifer explained, "I really try to capture what I think is like the reader's experience, trying to think as an objective reader versus just myself as an individual." Hadley similarly noted, "Feedback should give them a sense of how a reader is responding to their argument–how it's been framed, how it's been applied, the evidence that they have chosen. So, by looking at essentially a record of my reading experience, if you

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will, the writer can get a sense of what's effective and what's not." In each of these cases, the instructors foreground their role as readers, as Sommers (1982, 2013) recommends. Jennifer, however, distanced this reader from her own perspective, suggesting that the feedback she offers students presents them with an objective reading of their work. Hadley, in contrast, did not emphasize objectivity and instead took ownership over the reading experience that he offered students. Even so, the instructors both positioned their feedback as representative, suggesting that students could use that feedback to form definitive conclusions about the effectiveness of their writing.

The representativeness that Hadley and Jennifer foreground here for their written comments created tension between their goal to support students' purposes for writing and their goal to help students see their writing in a new way. For each instructor, getting students to see their writing in a new way was not just a goal, but was actually a requirement if students were to produce effective writing. As Hadley explained:

> When my comments go right, there is a sort of meeting of–you have to be met halfway on them, I guess. And the students who succeed are the ones who are willing to say, 'Alright. I've got some things to learn still. I'm going to let go of these previous notions, and I'm going to try to grow a little bit as a writer.' So I think that's when my comments go well, when students can see my perspective.

In this moment, Hadley suggested that for his feedback to be effective, he not only needed to meet students halfway by working to recognize what they were doing in their writing, but also that *students* needed to meet *him* halfway by reapproaching their writing through his perspective. In contrast to his desire to support students' purposes, tension emerges here, as Hadley positioned those purposes as something students ultimately need to move beyond. In identifying this approach as one used by "the students who succeed," Hadley increased this tension, suggesting that students must approach their writing in new ways in order to do well in his course. The contrast between these two goals offers a potential explanation for why Hadley's goals and commenting practices might ultimately diverge, as Hadley did not identify his desire to support students' purposes for writing as an essential step in helping them to produce effective writing. Consequently, Hadley would more likely prioritize his goal to help students see their writing in a new way in order to fulfill his objectives for the course.

Jennifer also made a distinction between her goals for students' writing and the specific purposes that students sometimes aimed to achieve:

I'd say like once or twice a term, I have a student come in, and they're like, 'I really disagree with this. I know this line is a cliché, but I like it.' And I'm always like, 'Okay, so leave it.' I'm one reader. I'm a good reader. I'm trained to be a reader. They hired me because I'm a good reader. But it's my opinion. You use yours. And if you have 50 clichés throughout your paper, that's not good. If you have one, if you've already established yourself, you can get away with it.

Unlike Hadley, Jennifer noted here that students are not obligated to approach their writing in line with her specific goals, in this case, to help students avoid clichés in their writing. However, she clearly marked her perspective as preferred. Though her self-positioning in this moment was subjective,[27] as she identified herself as *one* reader sharing her *opinion* with a student, Jennifer increased the credence of her opinion by repeatedly describing herself as "a good reader" and emphasizing that she was "trained" and "hired" to be a reader. The credence of the student's opinion, in contrast, was undermined by being restricted within certain parameters. In this case, using a cliché–which Jennifer definitely evaluated as a "not good" strategy–can be done only if the writer has "already established" him- or herself in some way. Even then, the instructor positioned this choice as one the student "can get away with," equating the student's choice to implement his or her opinion (instead of Jennifer's opinion) with breaking a rule or breaking the law. Like the instructor feedback that Sommers (1982) explored in her study, avoiding clichés would likely be interpreted by students as one of the "rules for composing" (p. 153) in Jennifer's class, suggesting that like Hadley, Jennifer might prioritize her goal to help students see their writing in a new way over her goal to help them develop their own voices and desires.

Clearly, Hadley and Jennifer's goal to support students' purposes for writing held potential to conflict with their goal to help students see their writing in a new way. In moments such as those described here, the instructors' competing goals for providing feedback easily could result in commenting practices that did not fully align with their goals. The likelihood of this possibility was increased by the fact that few of the commenting practices used by the instructors were able to realize both goals simultaneously, according to the prominent recommendations in the field. In supporting students' purposes for writing, composition scholars suggest, the instructors would offer comments that leave control over writing in the hands of students. In helping students to see their writing in a new way, in contrast, the instructors would be much more likely to offer comments that take control over students' writing. An additional

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[27] The subjectivity of Jennifer's self-positioning here presents an interesting contrast to her references to the objectivity of her readings, noted previously.

explanation for the divergence between the instructors' goals and beliefs is that the types of comments that were most likely to realize each goal differed in fundamental ways, again increasing the likelihood that the instructors might prioritize one goal of the other.

The tension between the commenting practices that the instructors could use to realize these two goals is further complicated by the very nature of commenting on student writing. According to Sprinkle (2004), "all comments exercise some form of control over students' writing," regardless of whether that control is "mild," "moderate," or "firm" (p. 277-78). Though the degree of control certainly varies depending on the type of comment offered, even when the instructors were striving to support students' purposes for writing, they were still to some degree taking control over students' writing. In order to support students' purposes, Sprinkle argues that instructors should strive to primarily exert moderate to mild control over student writing and refrain from making a high number of corrections or commands, both of which exert firm control. To determine the degree of control that Jennifer and Hadley exerted over students' writing, I adapted Sprinkle's model to include each of the codes and definitions presented in Table 3.2 and analyzed the instructors' comments accordingly.[28]

There were some moments where Jennifer and Hadley used their written comments in ways that held potential to resolve some of the tensions between these two goals. For instance, the instructors each described using written comments to convey their experiences as readers without taking a high degree of control over students' writing. As Jennifer reported, "Sometimes in the margin I'll write like, 'That's really funny,' or, you know, like, 'I'm not sure I follow this.'" Hadley similarly explained, "Especially in the margin comments, if it's like a smiley face, or a little note on something I think is funny, or whatever it is, I think it's important for them to have a sense that there is a human being grading this paper, on top of everything else." As Jennifer and Hadley described them, these reader response comments were one way that the instructors

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[28] Sprinkle (2004) developed the categories of firm control, moderate control, and mild control for analyzing instructor comments. Within those categories, he identified: 1. Corrections and commands as types of comments that take firm control over student writing, to which I added evaluation (notably, unqualified); 2. Qualified evaluations and advice/suggestions as types of comments that take moderate control over student writing, to which I added directive questions; and, 3. Questions and reader response as types of comments that take mild control over student writing, to which I added explanation and description, and adapted questions to non-directive questions. These additions and adaptations emerged from the process of analyzing Hadley and Jennifer's comments in order to more fully capture the complexity of their feedback. For a detailed explanation of this and other coding decisions, see Chapter 2.

CATEGORY	CODE	DEFINITION	EXAMPLE(S)
FIRM CONTROL	**Correction**	Comments that change the student's essay	*Hadley:* feedbacks. ... *Jennifer:* Gladwell want his
	Command	Comments that tell the student exactly what to do or write, often (but not always) using imperatives	*Hadley:* states: "there *Jennifer:* Try a new ending
	Evaluation	Comments that make value judgments with a high degree of certainty, including strong modals (should)	*Hadley:* Awkward as stated *Jennifer:* Too cheesy
MODERATE CONTROL	**Qualified Evaluation**	Comments that make value judgments that are tempered by the use of qualifiers such as weak modals (could, might) or hedge words (feels, seems like) that decrease the degree of certainty	*Hadley:* Conclusion seems repetitive *Jennifer:* This section feels so wonderfully intimate [Ding, 3.1]
	Suggestion	Comments that offer potential changes a student *could* make, without obligation or offer a strategy or specific resource that the student *could* use to revise the essay	*Hadley:* This might serve as a decent thesis [Megan, 1.1] *Jennifer:* Perhaps zoom in.
	Directive Question	Comments that pose a question asking the student to make specific changes; These questions foster *action*	*Hadley:* Maybe use this to focus your thesis? *Jennifer:* Can you give an example?
MILD CONTROL	**Non-Directive Question**	Comments that pose a question asking the student to think about his or her writing; These questions foster *reflection*	*Hadley:* Why the exclamation point? *Jennifer:* How do you feel about all of this?
	Explanation	Comments that outline the logistics of an assignment, articulate why a particular comment or mark has been made, or explicate what a particular change or writing technique could accomplish	*Hadley:* [Can this be condensed] to more succinctly express your position? *Jennifer:* Stretch is a writing technique in which you take a small idea and extend it by going into great detail. [Ronnie, 1.1]
	Description	Comments that outline what a student is doing in his or her essay without value judgments	*Hadley:* summary *Jennifer:* What is above is 1 page w/out smoke detectors. [Abigail, 3.1]
	Reader Response	Comments that reflect a reader's reaction, whether that reader is framed as a general one or the instructor his- or herself	*Hadley:* ? I thought you were going to say he was part of… [Patrick, 1.1] *Jennifer:* I so admire your openness toward the end [Stephanie, 1.1]

Table 3.2: Degrees of Control of Comments, Definitions with Examples from Each Instructor

conveyed the experiences of readers to students, a practice that held potential to help students see their writing in a new way, without exerting firm control over that writing.

The reading experiences that Jennifer and Hadley shared in these comments, however, were not necessarily intended to help students see their writing in a new way. Instead, Hadley suggested that his comments highlight the "human" aspect of grading, personalizing students' process of receiving feedback. Similarly, Jennifer presented very personalized readings of students' writing, in contrast to the objective and representative readings that she previously described. Though these comments certainly could help students see their writing in a new way, the presence of the instructor in these comments (i.e. "*I'm* not sure *I* follow this," "a little note on something *I* think is funny") just as easily could have led students to see their *instructor* in a new way, a possibility that students' focus on figuring out their instructor's expectations, explored in Chapter 4, reinforces. Consequently, even reader response comments, which primarily leave control over writing in the hands of students, may not have resolved the tensions between the instructors' goals.

This was likely true for many of the reader response comments that Jennifer gave students over the course of the semester. Jennifer's reader response comments were most often one word, with "ha," "hee," "lol," "☺," and "hmm" frequently appearing in the margins of students' essays. Like Hadley's description, these comments tended to emphasize the "human" aspect of grading, offering Jennifer's individual reactions to students' writing. Other comments, however, were more likely to simultaneously meet the instructors' goals. Though less frequent, Jennifer also used reader response comments that were distanced from her perspective. For example, in the end note that John Hancock received on his first draft of his first essay, Jennifer wrote, "And the reader spends a lot of time wondering about what is happening instead of just enjoying it." In distancing this reader from her perspective, Jennifer aligns this comment with those that present an objective and representative reading to students, decreasing the likelihood that John would focus on his *instructor* in this moment, and increasing the potential that he would respond to this comment by seeing his *writing* in a new way. Because, this comment ultimately left it up to John to determine how he might clarify "what is happening" for his readers, reader response comments like this, though rare, were able to simultaneously support

Degrees of Control: Jennifer's Comments on First Drafts

	Correction	Command	Evaluation	Qualified Evaluation	Suggestion	Directive Question	Non-Directive Question	Explanation	Description	Reader Response	Other
Essay 1.1	0.1371	0.1113	0.4401	0.0252	0.0326	0.0619	0.0471	0.0578	0.0268	0.0570	0.0031
Essay 2.1	0.0456	0.0397	0.5716	0.0451	0.0215	0.0685	0.0212	0.0706	0.0141	0.0943	0.0078
Essay 3.1	0.0693	0.0922	0.5425	0.0189	0.0272	0.0243	0.0473	0.0467	0.0377	0.0847	0.0093
Essay 4.1	0.0064	0.0321	0.7532	0.0294	0.0211	0.0064	0.0000	0.0202	0.0000	0.0909	0.0403

Chart 3.3: Average Degrees of Control of Jennifer's Written Comments to Students in FYW[29]

students' purposes and to help them see their writing in a new way. As Chart 3.3 shows, these comments made up, on average, only 8.2 percent of Jennifer's comments.

In contrast to his goal to support students' purposes for writing, reader response comments made up an even smaller proportion of the comments that Hadley gave to students. Chart 3.4 demonstrates that on average, only 2.1 percent of Hadley's total comments on the first three essays were reader response, making these the least frequent of all the comments that he gave students in his first-year writing course. Hadley did offer other comments, however, that exerted a similarly low degree of control over students' writing and consequently better

Degrees of Control: Hadley's Comments

	Correction	Command	Evaluation	Qualified Evaluation	Suggestion	Directive Question	Non-Directive Question	Explanation	Description	Reader Response
Essay 1	0.0403	0.1865	0.2853	0.0513	0.0296	0.1520	0.0747	0.1042	0.0401	0.0304
Essay 2	0.1239	0.1845	0.3511	0.0601	0.0326	0.0979	0.0670	0.0656	0.0119	0.0053
Essay 3	0.1028	0.1274	0.3603	0.0774	0.0471	0.0942	0.0893	0.0613	0.0140	0.0262
Essay 4	0.1075	0.3218	0.3030	0.0175	0.0263	0.1146	0.0361	0.0088	0.0643	0.0000
Essay 5	0.0417	0.0417	0.7976	0.0000	0.0238	0.0238	0.0238	0.0238	0.0238	0.0000

Chart 3.4: Average Degrees of Control of Hadley's Written Comments to Students in FYW

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[29] Comments in the other category include those that did not fall into categories in the degrees of control reflective model. For example, on the sample student essay that both Jennifer and Hadley commented on, Jennifer wrote, "I'll stop marking this." While this was an explanation of her commenting practice, this comment did not fall under the category of explanation because it did not outline the logistics of the assignment, explain the comment, or explain what the student would gain from making a change, as the definition in Table 3.2 specifies.

aligned with this goal. According to the coding scheme presented in Table 3.2, comments that ask non-directive questions, offer explanations, or describe what a student did in his or her writing–like reader response comments–take mild control over students' writing. Though these comments align with Jennifer and Hadley's goal to support students' purposes for writing, as Charts 3.3 and 3.4 demonstrate, they did not make up a substantial proportion of the written comments the instructors offered students in their first-year writing courses, suggesting they ultimately may not have prioritized this goal.

Although Hadley gave students more comments that offered explanation or asked non-directive questions, these comments represented a relatively small proportion of his feedback, each making up, on average, 7.7 percent of the written comments that students received on the first three essays. When they were present, however, these comments were more likely to support students' purposes for writing, as they could engage students in a process of thinking without necessarily requiring them to directly implement the feedback they received. For instance, on Patrick's second essay, Hadley wrote, "Move this up to organize paragraph and provide a clear strategy." Though the first half of this comment took firm control over the student's writing, commanding him to move a point up earlier in the paragraph, in explaining what could be gained by moving the point (i.e., that the paragraph would become organized and would have a clear strategy), Hadley gave Patrick more control by providing information that could inform the student's decision to follow the recommendation, to make different changes in line with his own goals for the paragraph, or to determine that the comment was not particularly important, possibly resulting in a decision to reject the comment altogether.

Other comments that offered explanation left even more control in the hands of students. For instance, in his end note to Patrick's third essay, Hadley asked, "Are tech. classes part of the definition of a UM education?" Immediately following this question, Hadley explained:

> The implication when UM requires writing, psych. + econ. classes as part of its core curriculum is that the knowledge in these classes is, first, broadly applicable to all undergrads and relevant no matter what one's major is, and, second, part of what the U. defines an educated person to be, part of its definition of a well-rounded student.

The explanation that Hadley offered Patrick in this comment held potential to simultaneously support the student's purposes for writing and to help him see his writing in a new way, as he could have responded to this comment by demonstrating that the knowledge gained in

Degrees of Control of Instructor Comments

Hadley's Comments: Firm Control 59%, Moderate Control 21%, Mild Control 20%

Jennifer's Comments: Firm Control 71%, Moderate Control 10%, Mild Control 19%

Legend: Firm Control, Moderate Control, Mild Control
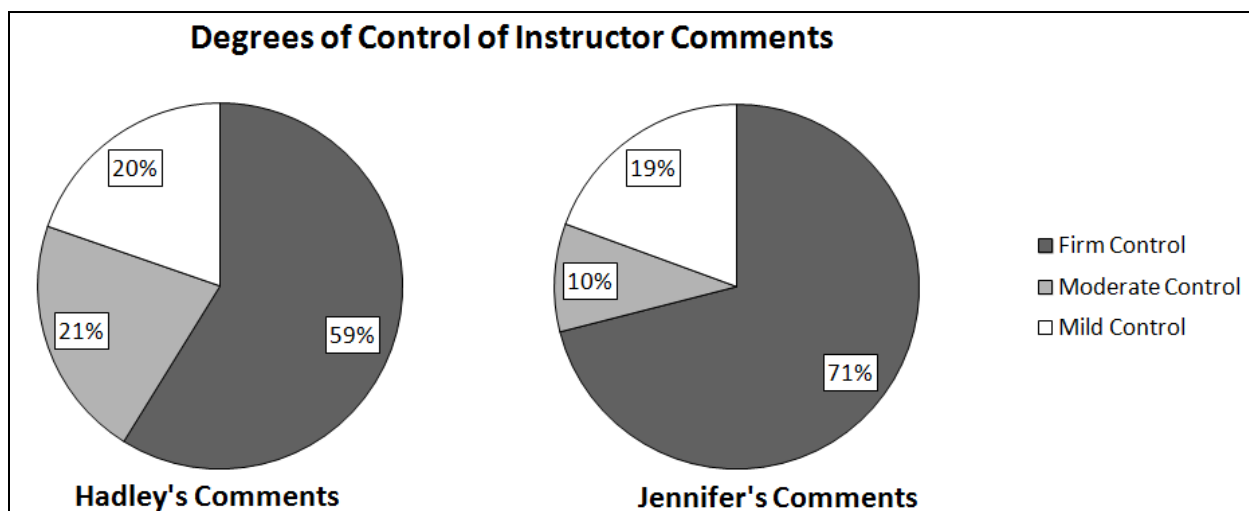
Chart 3.5: Average Degrees of Control of Instructors' Written Comments, by Category

technology education courses is broadly applicable, relevant, and aligns with the university's definition of education or by reconsidering his argument. In this way, the explanations that the instructors wrote in their comments put more control in the hands of students, potentially resolving the tensions between their competing goals.

Comments such as these, however, were not frequent in the feedback that Jennifer and Hadley offered students in their first-year writing courses. As Chart 3.5 shows, on average, comments that took mild control over student writing–according to Sprinkle's (2004) standards (as they were modified for this study)–made up only one-fifth of Hadley and Jennifer's total comments. For Hadley, this was the least frequent category of feedback he offered, as comments that exerted moderate control occurred slightly more frequently. For Jennifer, comments that exerted moderate control were considerably less frequent, making up only 10 percent of her total written comments. In contrast to their goal to leave control over writing in the hands of students, well over half of Hadley's written comments and close to three-quarters of Jennifer's written comments took firm control over students' writing, suggesting that both instructors likely prioritized their goal to help students see their writing in a new way.

Comments that offered unqualified evaluations were not only the most frequent among the comments that took firm control over students' writing, but also the most frequent among all of the instructors' comments, making up an average of 33.2 percent and 57.7 percent of Hadley and Jennifer's written comments respectively. In these comments, Hadley and Jennifer positioned their evaluations as definitive and representative assessments of the quality or effectiveness of students' writing. Particularly for first-year writing students, who as Thaiss and

Zawacki (2006) suggest, are likely to use their instructor's feedback "to build a general picture of 'what all teachers expect'" (p. 139), the lack of qualification in these comments increases the likelihood that students would understand them as taking control over their writing, as the comments definitively assert what is effective and not effective in students' writing without room for question. For instance, in the written comments that she gave Abigail on her first draft of her first essay, Jennifer varyingly wrote, "cliché," "unclear," and "well said" in the margins of the student's essay. In presenting these evaluations without qualification, Jennifer assesses the style and clarity of Abigail's writing with a high degree of certainty, identifying it as either ineffective or effective in each of these moments. This high degree of certainty corresponds to the certainty that Jennifer and Hadley expressed when describing their ability to convey a representative reading experience to students, suggesting that the instructors may have used these evaluations to help students see their writing in a new way.

In some cases, however, the instructors' unqualified evaluations could have reinforced the ways that students initially saw their writing. For example, on Ding's first draft of her first essay, Jennifer underlined a total of 262 words in the student's essay, spread across 41 separate moments in the text. Only three of these moments were accompanied by a verbal comment, which in this case included "oh," "great," and "oof." Though the comments "oh" and "oof" are reader responses, and not evaluations, Jennifer emphasized that when she underlined text in students' essays, she was positively evaluating that writing. As she explained, "Generally, I like to underline things that are going really well, or kind of, like, put vertical lines next to it in the margin." In this way, each segment of text that Jennifer underlined received the unqualified evaluation that the student was doing something "really well," though the instructor generally did not specify what that something was. These comments, then, could help students see their writing in a new way, if they had not previously identified the writing that Jennifer underlined as effective. Even so, Jennifer ultimately left it up to students to determine what was working well in the text that she underlined, simultaneously reinforcing their understandings of their writing.

Other types of evaluation, though considerably less frequent, were able to help students see their writing in a new way without taking as much control over their writing. Qualified evaluations, for instance, which made up only 6.3 percent of Hadley's and 3.0 percent of Jennifer's written comments, set conditions for the evaluations offered, and in so doing, increased students' control over their writing. For example, on John's first draft of his first essay,

Jennifer wrote, "This feels a little plunked in," and later, "As Qs, this feels weak." Though both of these comments critically evaluated choices that John made in his writing, the inclusion of the hedge word *feels*, in contrast to the more definitive *is*, reduced the certainty of the evaluations offered, creating space for the student to consider if the evaluation was accurate–e.g., whether a word was, in fact, plunked in or whether framing a point as a question actually weakened it–or if some other issue might be interfering with the effectiveness of a particular choice. In addition, Jennifer's qualification of "a little" in the first example decreased the scope of the critique offered, again creating space for John to decide whether the problem identified was really an issue, and if so, whether it was an issue worth addressing. Similarly, in the second example, Jennifer's qualification of "as Qs" suggests that it was not the points that seem weak but the form through which they were presented, again opening space for John to decide whether this was an issue, or perhaps an issue worth addressing. Consequently, though qualified evaluations could lead students to see their writing in a new way–assuming these comments addressed issues or offered solutions that the student was not already aware of–they also opened space for students to draw their own conclusions about what was effective and not effective in their writing, supporting students' purposes for writing.

As the tensions explored here demonstrate, very few of the written comments that Jennifer and Hadley actually offered first-year writing students allowed them to simultaneously realize their goals of supporting students' purposes for writing and helping students see their writing in a new way. Of all of the instructors' comments, those that offered explanations and made qualified evaluations held the most potential to do so. However, the fact that these comments made up such a small proportion of those that the instructors offered students suggests that Jennifer and Hadley responded to the tensions between these goals by prioritizing comments that helped students see their writing in a new way, ultimately at the expense of comments that were more likely to support students' purposes for writing. The reasons for this decision, as the findings presented here suggest, were that the instructors identified their goal of helping students see their writing in a new way as a necessary step in producing effective writing and because the commenting practices most likely to realize this goal could not accomplish both goals at once. Consequently, Jennifer and Hadley's decisions to offer more comments that exerted firm control over students' writing could have been an intentional choice directed towards realizing the learning objectives for their first-year writing courses.

What this consideration demonstrates is that from the perspective of writing instructors, the goal of supporting students' purposes is particularly complicated. Though the scholarship makes a clear argument for which commenting practices best support students' purposes for writing, Jennifer and Hadley much more frequently took firm control over students' writing, in line with their competing goal to help students see their writing in a new way. Even so, it would be preemptive to say that this divergence meant that the instructors' comments did not support students' purposes for writing, particularly as those purposes remain unclear. Consequently, Chapter 4 takes up the questions that could not be answered here:

1. What are students' purposes for writing and what does it mean to support those purposes?
2. How do instructors' comments support students' purposes for writing and help them see their writing in a new way?

In the final section, I explore a different kind of tension that at times made it difficult for the instructors to align their commenting practices with their goals.

Divergence as Inevitable Choice: Conflicting Beliefs and Inherent Tensions

In addition to the tensions that emerged between goals, tensions were also inherent within individual goals. In some cases, these tensions extended from the instructors' beliefs about a goal, such as whether they were able to align their commenting practices with that goal. At other times, tensions extended from the instructors' beliefs about a commenting practice, such as whether that practice could actually help students improve their writing. In this final section, I explore each of these tensions, which were inherent within Jennifer and Hadley's goals to engage in a dialogue with students and to provide students with positive feedback.

Engaging in Dialogue: When Written Comments Are Not the Best Pedagogical Method

Jennifer and Hadley each identified a goal to use their feedback to engage in a dialogue with students, in line with the best practices for commenting on student writing. According to Sommers (1982), it is essential that written comments function as "an extension of the teacher's voice," presenting "the teacher as reader" rather than an authoritative evaluator (p. 155). In making this recommendation, Sommers suggests that instructors need to not only grant students authority over their writing, but also to comment on students' writing in ways that they recognize as reflective of the classroom context and their teacher's voice. Similarly, other scholars have

argued the importance of making feedback a dialogue with students, reflecting a very specific aspect of the classroom context. According to Brannon and Knoblauch (1982), one way instructors can help students retain control over their writing is by "negotiating," rather than "dictating" in the comments they give to students (p. 166). Along these lines, Sprinkle (2004) explains that "when students see themselves as engaged in two-way dialogue with an interested and encouraging responder (as opposed to a harsh grader), they become more receptive to written commentary" (p. 279). In order to accomplish this goal, Straub (2000) recommends that instructors ask open-ended questions in their written comments and offer students comments on specific moments in their essays. Consequently, each of these scholars argues for a dialogic approach to written comments that reflects the classroom context and ultimately places authority and authorship in the hands of students.

As the instructors described their efforts to make their written comments dialogic, however, they noted the limitations of what they could actually accomplish when communicating with students through writing. Because of this, Jennifer explained, she often used her written comments to request that students come to her office and talk with her in person:

> If it's a paper that needs a lot of content work and organization, I'll almost always have students come into my office. We'll reverse outline together, and we'll talk about it. And I feel like that's really good, to have human contact, eye contact, have, like, the lightness of being able to laugh together as opposed to just a black-and-white letter, which is helpful, but it's still, like, in print.

In this moment, Jennifer placed the dialogue that she has with students in her office in opposition to the "black-and-white" letters that she writes. Though she did not describe these letters in detail, the contrast that she made here suggests that her written feedback is inherently much less conversational and collaborative than her in-person meetings with students. Consequently, though Jennifer aimed to give students dialogic feedback, the tension she identified between that goal and what she could actually accomplish in her written comments ultimately led her to utilize other forms of feedback to realize this goal.

Hadley identified a similar tension regarding the dialogue he could have with students through his written comments, specifically in relation to the kinds of questions that he could ask and the ways that students could engage with those questions. Like Jennifer, he described utilizing other forms of feedback to engage in dialogue with students. When talking with students in person, he explained, "I tend to ask a lot of questions, and just sort of direct those

questions and then get them to try to do some of the critical thinking." In this description, Hadley framed face-to-face conversations as co-constructed, with "some of the critical thinking" coming from students and some presumably coming from him. This approach, he noted, is "harder to do with comments." As a result, "the comments tend to be a little more prescriptive," Hadley explained. Like Jennifer, Hadley suggested that one explanation for a divergence between this goal and his commenting practices was that the instructor found it difficult to make his written feedback dialogic, and so aimed to realize this goal in his spoken feedback instead.

This was particularly true for the questions that Hadley asked students in his written comments. "There might be some crossover," he said, "but I think the questions that I would ask a student in a conference would be a little more directed toward leading to another question, another question. Whereas, the questions that I'm putting on the page, I think, are more general, like, trying to get them to re-examine some aspect of the paper." In this way, Hadley identified the questions he asked students in conferences as dialogic, with students likely providing answers to each question he asked in turn. The questions he asked in his written comments, he suggested, elicited action from students, not dialogue, as those questions asked students to turn their attention to reworking specific moments in their essays. Consequently, Hadley described his feedback in face-to-face conversations as "more interactive for the student," noting that "the student does more work sitting across the desk than the student does just reading the comments." Like Jennifer, though Hadley aimed to engage in dialogue with students, he found it much easier to accomplish this goal through the questions he asked them in person, as opposed to those he asked in his written comments.

Hadley's understanding of the questions that he asked students in his written comments aligns with patterns in the frequency and type of questions that appeared in those comments over the course of the semester. By far, the most frequent type of question that Hadley asked in his written comments was directive.[30] This was most notable in the feedback that he gave students on their first essay. On this essay, 22.7 percent of Hadley's total written comments were questions. According to Sprinkle's (2004) model, this proportion is high enough to conclude that

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[30] Sprinkle's (2004) degrees of control model does not distinguish between directive and non-directive questions. As I applied his coding scheme to Jennifer and Hadley's comments, however, it became clear that while some questions took mild control over students' writing, asking them to engage in a process of *thinking,* others could have just as easily have been written as commands. To capture this distinction, I divided Sprinkle's category into directive and non-directive questions, as Table 3.2 shows.

Assignment	Directive Questions	Non-Directive Questions	Total Questions
Essay 1	0.1520	0.0747	0.2267
Essay 2	0.0979	0.0670	0.1649
Essay 3	0.0942	0.0893	0.1835
Average	**0.1147**	**0.0770**	**0.1917**

Table 3.3: Average Proportion of Questions in Hadley's Written Comments, by Type

Hadley's comments were dialogic, in line with scholars' recommendations.[31] However, two-thirds of these questions were directive, as Table 3.3 shows. In contrast to asking students to engage in a process of *thinking*, these directive questions asked them to engage in a process of *doing* by making specific changes in their writing. Consequently, they just as easily could have been written as commands. For instance, Hadley's question to Nathan, "How might you rephrase this to put the statement in a positive form and state it more directly?," essentially commands the student to *rephrase this* and gives him specific guidelines for doing so. Even questions which were framed more suggestively could easily be interpreted by students as directions for action, not thinking, such as Hadley's comment to Megan, "What if you began with a story or description?" This comment would likely be read by the student as telling her to *begin with a story or description.* Even if the student read this comment as suggesting that her current introduction was not working and she should consider choosing another strategy, Megan would not be engaging in dialogue with her instructor, but in a process of doing as she revised the introduction to her essay.

Non-directive questions, though less frequent, better aligned with Hadley's goal to engage in a dialogue with students. These comments, as the definition and examples in Table 3.2 suggest, also left more control over writing in the hands of students. Unlike directive questions, non-directive questions like Hadley's comment, "Is comic relief 'realistic' as you note in your thesis? Or is it something else?," did not ask students to engage in a process of *doing*, but instead asked them to engage in a process of *thinking* in order to reflect on the choices they made in their writing. In this comment, for example, Hadley does not tell the student what comic relief is or give him specific directions for complicating its meaning. Instead, he asks him to think about the term, leaving it up to the student to determine what steps he should take in response to his instructor's feedback. Non-directive questions, then, were more likely to engage students in

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[31] The high number of questions that Hadley asked in the written comments that he gave students on the first essay was only surpassed by the number of comments that evaluated students' writing, as Chart 3.4 demonstrates.

dialogue, in line with the instructors' goals, as these comments could not be directly implemented in the same ways that directive questions could be.

The prevalence of directive over non-directive questions likely contributed to Hadley's sense that the questions he asked students in his written comments were more prescriptive than the questions he asked them in person. Though the more directive nature of these comments contrasted with the instructor's goal to engage in a dialogue with students, the fact that he recognized this divergence indicates that it was one the instructor felt either could not–or perhaps should not–be resolved, as he ultimately described realizing this goal in other ways. Consequently, this suggests a need to revisit the recommendation that instructors make their written comments dialogic, both in terms of what this recommendation actually means for instructors' commenting practices and whether it is possible for instructors to do so.

Providing Positive Feedback: When the Outcomes of Goals Come into Question

Much of the existing scholarship in composition studies acknowledges that positive feedback has an affective benefit for students. For instance, in his study of how students responded to feedback when they received only criticism or only praise, Gee (1972) found that students who received positive feedback had more positive attitudes about writing.[32] Others have demonstrated that students who do not receive positive feedback tend to develop negative attitudes towards writing (Brimner, 1982; Hillocks, 1986). Montgomery (2009) uses the findings of these studies, among others, to definitively conclude, "The whole notion of praising what is good stems not necessarily from the belief that praise yields better writing. Rather, that praise and positive feedback provide the appropriate climate to nurture and encourage writers" (p. 25). The belief that Montgomery forwards here–that positive feedback does not necessarily produce better writing–is one that Hadley explicitly articulated and that Jennifer indicated as the instructors described their efforts to offer students positive feedback. For Hadley, this belief

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[32] Gee is one of the few scholars to define critical and positive feedback. In his study, criticism included "specific errors in grammar, spelling, organization, and usage" and suggestions "to improve content and style," and praise included compliments on students' "good points," including "originality, sound and thoroughly developed ideas," and "good grammar" (p. 215). The codes that I present in my analysis of Hadley and Jennifer's comments more fully align with the definitions offered by Hyland and Hyland (2001), in that comments are not exclusively positive or negative, but can also be neutral. According to my coding scheme, Gee's suggestions for improvement would likely be coded as neutral, instead of critical, as long as the comments did not include an explicit positive or negative value judgment.

created tension that made it difficult for him to give students positive feedback, even though he valued its affective benefits.

Both instructors repeatedly identified a goal of providing positive feedback to students. "I tend to think comments should be about like one-third praise, two-thirds constructive criticism," Jennifer noted. Hadley similarly explained, "I think there needs to be some praise in there." Though in this moment he did not quantify the amount of positive feedback that he aimed to offer students through his written comments, Hadley's use of the qualifier *some* suggests that for both of the instructors, positive comments made up a portion–but not a majority–of the feedback they sought to offer students. As previously noted, Jennifer described her efforts to accomplish this goal by underlining "things that are going really well" in students' writing. Hadley similarly explained, "That's always one priority, trying to figure out one thing that the writing is doing well, the student is doing well on the page." In both of these instances, the instructors described a goal to show, through positive feedback, where students' writing was successful.

Though Hadley identified providing positive feedback as a priority, he also indicated that he found it difficult to do, as he had to try to "figure out" what was successful in each student's writing. In this way, Hadley indicated that successful moments were not always readily apparent or easy to identify in student writing. "Sometimes that's harder to find than others," he said. "But, I think it's important, and I tend to lead with that." In contrast to the previous examples, the difficulty that Hadley articulated here did not emerge from a tension between goals, but from a tension between his beliefs about positive feedback. As he explained, positive feedback could have important benefits for students:

> I think that having that, whether it's just one line, means a lot to students. And it's pedagogically sound, too, because you certainly want to send the message that, 'There is room for improvement, but you're doing some things well. And let's focus on the things you're doing well, but at the same time being open to making some changes.' Anyway, so yes, I think that it is important to offer some positive feedback.

The beliefs that Hadley articulated here–that positive feedback is important to students and that it is "pedagogically sound"–clearly informed his goal to offer students this type of feedback. However, the instructor also expressed beliefs that positive feedback was not particularly beneficial for students' writing. "If a student is getting discouraged," he said, "I try to offer a few more positives. But at the same time, again, I don't want to–I want to give them commentary that's going to help their writing. And so, that's a sort of fine balance. I would say I'm less

inclined to do that, but I have done that before." From Hadley's perspective, positive feedback could function to encourage a student. However, in setting this feedback in opposition to "commentary that's going to help their writing," he suggested that positive comments could not help students improve their writing in the ways that critical comments could.

The tension that emerges here stems from Hadley's belief that positive feedback, though encouraging, could not help students improve their writing. Consequently, Hadley described often prioritizing his goal to help students improve their writing over his goal to provide them with positive feedback. This decision, he explained, was not intended to send students a message about the quality of their writing. "I think when my comments go wrong," Hadley said, "I'm sending the unintentional message of being too critical and students feel like they don't know, you know, how to handle it. They feel like I'm being too harsh on them." For Hadley, the tensions between his beliefs about positive feedback ultimately made it more difficult for him to realize his goal.

Jennifer, in contrast, did not identify tensions in her efforts to give students positive feedback. Like Hadley, she also talked about beginning her feedback with positive comments. Where Hadley described a *tendency* to lead with positive comments, however, Jennifer identified this practice as a consistent and intentional choice. "I always start with praise, every single time," she said. "And it's, like, thorough and specific. And so, I think that's really, really important that they always hear that first." In this description, Jennifer expressed that she not only aimed to provide students with positive feedback, but also that it was important for positive comments to be the first thing they encountered in the feedback they received. The certainty with which Jennifer described this practice is interesting, particularly given the difficulty that Hadley noted in his own efforts to provide students with positive comments. As Jennifer explained, she did not simply "start with praise," but "always" did so, "every single time." This was especially true, she emphasized, in the end notes that she wrote in response to students' essays. "At the end," she said, "I type up a comment and it's going to be like, maybe half-a-page to a page typed. And it always starts out with a nice hefty paragraph of what the student is doing well, and why it's enjoyable, and why that's important." In this way, Jennifer reinforced her certainty that she began with positive comments and suggested that those comments represented a substantial portion of her feedback.

Like Hadley, Jennifer's goal to begin with positive comments was informed in large part by her beliefs about this type of feedback and by her beliefs about students' responses to instructor feedback. As she explained, "That's partially so they, like, they don't feel like I think they are terrible people, you know? Like, I remember from workshop, you know, no matter how many times I did it, I was always afraid that everyone would think I am, like, a terrible person. And I don't know if anyone else is that neurotic, but to like, calm that down." Here, Jennifer explained that her positive feedback functioned, in part, to ease students' anxieties. She also expressed a belief that beginning with positive comments could help students to engage with her feedback. "I think if you start on a negative footing," she said, "it doesn't matter how, you know, like smart the comments are. They're just going to fall off." In this moment, Jennifer added that positive feedback also played a central role in helping students take in her "negative" comments. In each case, the beliefs that Jennifer articulated about positive feedback are clearly not in tension with one another, though like Hadley, the benefits that she described did not involve students actually implementing positive comments in their writing.

Hadley and Jennifer each gave students positive comments, in line with their goal to offer students this type of feedback. As Table 3.4 on the following page demonstrates, these comments explicitly conveyed positive value judgments to students. For example, in the sample student essay that the instructors commented on during their first interview, the first comment that each instructor wrote in the margins was a positive comment, with Jennifer writing, "great opening," and Hadley writing a checkmark followed by, "intro captures reader's attention w/ specifics." In these comments, Jennifer and Hadley each made a holistic evaluation of the essay's first paragraph and presented that evaluation without qualification, increasing the degree of certainty of the positive comment.[33] Jennifer's evaluation was explicitly positive, as she labeled the opening of the essay as "great" (not only expressing a high degree of certainty, but also a high degree of positivity in contrast to less positive options like *good* or *nice*). Hadley's comment, in contrast, only became explicitly positive as a result of the checkmark at the beginning of the comment. As Hadley explained, he instructed students to use a "checkmark if you like something" when they gave each other feedback, suggesting that when he wrote checkmarks on students'

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[33] These comments represent one of the several points of overlap in the comments the instructors wrote on the sample essay. Seven of Hadley's 23 comments and Jennifer's 28 comments on the sample essay addressed the exact same issue or concern, resulting in 30.4 percent of the comments made by Hadley also being made by Jennifer, and 25.0 percent of the comments made by Jennifer also being made by Hadley.

CODE	DEFINITION	EXAMPLE(S)
Positive	Comments that explicitly convey a positive value judgment, most often about choices made or techniques used by a student, such as those that identify a choice or technique used as successful	*Hadley:* **√** Intro captures reader's attention with specifics *Jennifer:* Great opening
Neutral	Comments that do not explicitly convey a positive or negative value judgment, most often about the choices made or techniques used by a student, such as those that ask students to try a choice or technique not used in the student's essay or to think about a particular choice. These comments may include implicit value judgments that are not specifically stated.	*Hadley:* I wonder if you have experiences you can draw on? *Jennifer:* Why not?
Critical	Comments that explicitly convey a negative value judgment, most often about choices made or techniques used by a student, such as those that explicitly identify a choice or technique used as unsuccessful	*Hadley:* usage *Jennifer:* You still haven't SHOWN this.

Table 3.4: Valence of Comments, Definitions with Examples from Each Instructor

writing, he was offering an explicit positive evaluation. The presence of this positive feedback indicates that the rest of the evaluation–that the introduction "captures the reader's attention"–is also positive.

Jennifer identified the positive comments that she wrote on the sample student essay as the most important comments that she gave the student, in line with the value she placed on this type of feedback. She noted, however, that the importance of these comments was dependent on whether this was one of the first pieces of writing she received from the student or one of the last. If it was an early essay, she explained, "I think the most important thing, then, is parts where I acknowledge that I am excited by what the person is doing. So like, the 'great opening,' the underlining, the places where I point out what the person is doing well." In this moment, Jennifer described her positive comments as indicators of her excitement, not as feedback that the student could use to improve his or her writing. In suggesting that these comments are more important in early sets of feedback, Jennifer indicated that positive comments function to build a relationship between instructor and student, reinforcing the notion that students do not actually use positive comments in their writing process.

The positive comments that Jennifer and Hadley made on the sample essay exemplify the kinds of feedback that each instructor gave students in their first-year writing courses. For instance, Jennifer wrote the comment "great" 88 times over the course of the semester, often on

its own in the margins of students' essays or with an additional word, like "great heart!," which she wrote to Stephanie on the student's second essay. Jennifer also began every end note that she wrote to students with a substantial positive comment, as her end note on John's first essay exemplifies:

> That paragraph of analysis at the end is so gorgeous. It's humble ("Maybe that's all you get."), accessible ("…it's surprising the extents that you'd go to"), and thoughtful ("So maybe you're just not special. And maybe that's okay, because neither is anybody else."). This is the ultimate combination for writers, as it builds that reader-writer relationship in which the reader comes to trust the writer. It's also nice to read because of the elegant language, and because it sheds some light on what has come before it.

In this comment, Jennifer identifies strong moments in one paragraph from John's essay, explaining the positive effects of the particular choices the student made in line with her goal to offer students positive feedback that is thorough and specific.

Jennifer offered students in her first-year writing course more positive comments than neutral and critical comments combined, reflecting her certainty about consistently offering students positive feedback. The only exception to this pattern was on the first essay. As Chart 3.6 on the following page shows, Jennifer's comments on the first essay closely matched her goal of making one-third of her feedback positive. Close to two-thirds of her comments, or 62.5 percent, were either neutral or critical, again closely aligning with her goal.[34] As the semester went on, the amount of positive feedback that Jennifer gave students increased substantially, with these comments making up more than half of the feedback that students received on their second, third, and fourth essays. The vast majority of this feedback, however, did not include the detail that Jennifer's end note to John exemplifies. Much more often, the instructor underlined phrases or sentences in students' essays, which as she noted, identified the underlined text as effective. This underlining made up 70.7 percent of Jennifer's positive comments to students and most often occurred without additional comment. In just under 15 percent of these comments, Jennifer's underlining was accompanied by a word or short phrase like, "great," "yes," "nice

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[34] The instructors only described their feedback in positive and negative terms. In many cases, they may have considered their neutral comments to be critical, as these comments often presented students with strategies or steps for improving their writing. In distinguishing these comments as neutral, I aim to highlight the presence or absence of explicit value judgments in the feedback that each instructor gave his or her students, though this distinction may not align with the instructors' understandings of their feedback. Students, in contrast, identified many of the comments they received as neutral. Though I have not systematically tracked agreements and disagreements between my coding of the instructors' comments and students' designations, the inclusion of the neutral category better reflects the ways that many students talked about their instructor's comments.

	Positive	Neutral	Critical
■ Essay 1.1	0.3755	0.2297	0.3948
□ Essay 2.1	0.5805	0.1458	0.2737
■ Essay 3.1	0.5309	0.2247	0.2445
■ Essay 4.1	0.8377	0.0880	0.0743
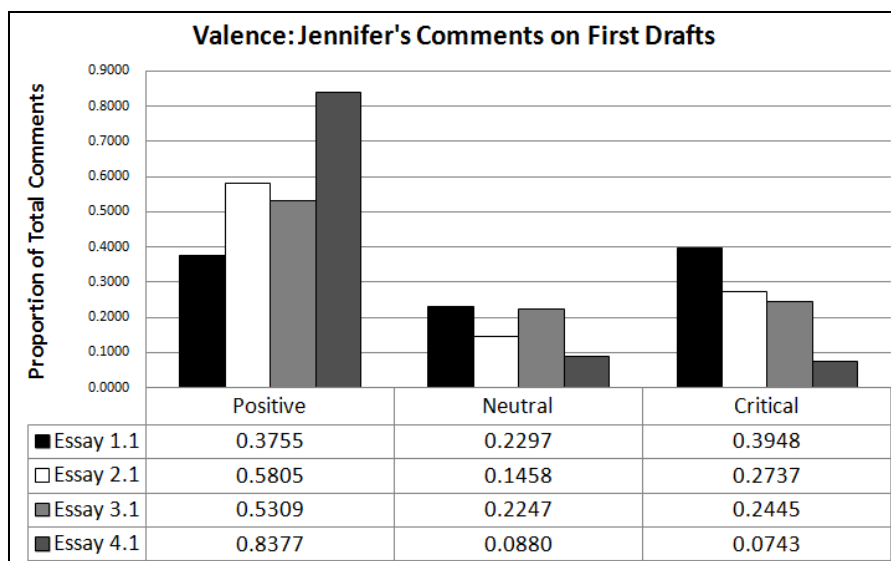
Chart 3.6: Average Valence of Jennifer's Written Comments to Students in FYW

detail," or "beautiful." The frequency with which Jennifer offered this type of positive feedback suggests that it was merely the presence of positive feedback–much more than the content of those comments–that the instructor understood as beneficial for students, indicating that Jennifer's beliefs about positive feedback influenced both the frequency and type of comments that she offered students.

In contrast to Jennifer, positive comments were the least frequent that Hadley offered students on their first four essays, reflecting his belief that students do not need a considerable amount of positive feedback. On average, however, Hadley offered students a generally increasing amount of positive feedback, as Chart 3.7 on the following page demonstrates. Though the number of positive comments he wrote on the third essay nearly doubled what he had given students on the first and second essays, it still made up a much smaller proportion of students' total comments than the neutral or critical comments that he gave them.

The only exception to this pattern was the fifth essay that students turned in–a self-reflection on their development as writers–where positive comments made up 42.2 percent of Hadley's feedback. However, this essay, like the fourth essay, was generally not returned to students.[35] Consequently, the fact that Hadley wrote far more positive comments on the fifth

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[35] In order to get his feedback on these essays, which students submitted during the week of final exams, Hadley asked students to submit a self-addressed, stamped envelope with their essays. Of all the students who participated in the study, Megan was the only one to take this step and get her instructor's feedback. Though the analysis of her feedback on this essay is included in the data presented in Chart 3.7, these numbers generally reflect patterns in the comments that Hadley did not return to students, and so can serve as an indicator of what Hadley noted in students' writing, not what he aimed to communicate to them about that writing.

	Positive	Neutral	Critical
■ Essay 1	0.1301	0.4358	0.4341
□ Essay 2	0.1191	0.2900	0.5908
■ Essay 3	0.2284	0.2835	0.4882
■ Essay 4	0.1614	0.1884	0.6502
□ Essay 5	0.4220	0.4339	0.1442
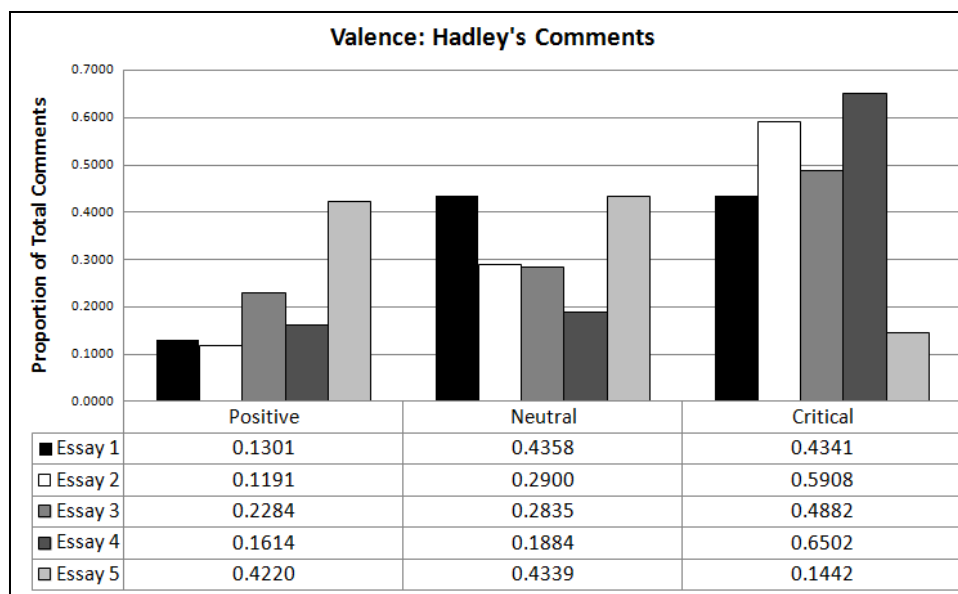
Chart 3.7: Average Valence of Hadley's Written Comments to Students in FYW

essay suggests that, in line with his belief, he did have more positive things that he could write to students, but ultimately chose not to do so, likely because he did not see those comments as actually helping students improve their writing.

Much like Jennifer, the most frequent positive comments that Hadley gave students were checkmarks in the margins of their essays, which were often accompanied by a word or short phrase such as "good connection," "important difference," "good examples," or "clear thesis," but to a lesser extent also appeared alone. These comments made up 43.2 percent of the positive comments that Hadley made on essays that were returned to students and 91.7 percent of his positive comments on essays that were not returned to students. Interestingly, the positive comments on the essays that Hadley did not return to students very closely reflected the most frequent types of positive comments that he did return to them. All but one of these comments, which Nathan and Patrick did not receive on their fourth and fifth essays, included a checkmark that was most often accompanied by the word "example" (or "examples"), and less frequently by the words "context," "intro," or "yes." These checkmarks also appeared without explanation one-third of the time, which though slightly higher, is similar to their frequency in the comments that were returned to students.[36] The fact that Hadley's positive comments on these essays so closely reflect the types of positive comments that students actually received suggests that he must have

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[36] Of the positive comments containing checkmarks that Hadley returned to students, one-fifth appeared without explanation.

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understood them as serving a function beyond providing encouragement to students, as Hadley knew they would not be read by the students who wrote these essays.

Consequently, the checkmarks that Hadley included in his comments were likely as much for his own benefit as they were for the benefit of students, perhaps helping to justify the grade that he gave each essay. This possibility is reinforced by the evaluative function that Hadley identified for his feedback, suggesting that his comments should not be "*only* evaluative" (emphasis mine). It is also reinforced by the relationship between the grades that students earned and the proportion of positive comments they received. As Table 3.5 shows, Hadley offered the highest proportion of positive comments on the essays that earned the highest grades and a considerably lower proportion of positive comments on the essays that earned the lowest grades, with the lowest graded essay not receiving a single positive comment. This pattern suggests that Hadley's positive comments likely functioned more to justify the grades that students earned than to offer them encouragement, as the students who were likely to benefit the most from this form of encouragement ultimately received the least amount of positive feedback.

As this consideration makes clear, Jennifer and Hadley's commenting practices were informed by their beliefs about how students use positive feedback and by their beliefs about feedback more generally. For Hadley, the tensions within his belief that positive feedback could not help students improve their writing made it difficult for him to offer positive comments to students, particularly to the students who might benefit from that feedback the most. In addition, instructors' beliefs about students' responses to positive feedback informed the types of

Student	Essay	Grade	Percent Positive Comments	Percent Neutral Comments	Percent Critical Comments
Patrick	1	94	36.4	45.5	18.2
Patrick	3[37]	89	30.9	26.5	42.6
Nathan	3	86	19.8	24.3	55.9
Patrick	2	85	12.5	28.6	58.9
Megan	3	84	17.8	34.2	47.9
Megan	1	84	13.0	45.7	41.3
Megan	2	80	11.1	19.0	69.8
Nathan	1	80	2.6	46.1	51.3
Nathan	2	76	12.1	39.4	48.5
Taeyoun	1	68	0.0	37.1	62.9

Table 3.5: Valence of Hadley's Comments in Relation to Students' Grades on First Three Essays

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[37] Only half of the end note to this essay was analyzed, due to a transcription error. Consequently, the distribution of positive, neutral, and critical feedback may have been slightly different, depending on what Hadley emphasized in the second half of this note.

comments they made on student writing, leading them to offer very general positive comments in order to illicit affective responses. Clearly, the instructors' beliefs informed the frequency and type of positive comment offered. For Hadley, when these beliefs indicated that a student would benefit more from a different commenting practice, the instructor adjusted his comments accordingly, offering one explanation for this divergence between his goal and commenting practice.

Though the ways that Jennifer and Hadley described positive feedback align with its treatment in much of the existing scholarship, others have demonstrated that positive feedback has benefits beyond mitigating students' affective responses. For instance, in Dragga's (1985) notion of "praiseworthy grading," he argues that instructors should offer exclusively positive comments on students' writing because students are more likely to improve if their attention is directed towards successful moments rather than issues or deficits in their writing. Elbow (1993) similarly argues that writing instructors must work to become better "likers," using positive feedback to identify and reinforce effective moments in students' writing that can serve as models for their future work. Both of these scholars suggest that positive feedback can help students improve their writing, in contrast to the beliefs that Jennifer and Hadley expressed.

Like many of the goals discussed in this chapter, the instructors' beliefs about feedback and about student response directly shaped the type and frequency of comments that they offered students. In addition to considering how instructors' goals align with their practice, I argue that it is equally important to consider how their goals and beliefs align with students' responses. In the next chapter, I explore how students responded to each of the practices considered here, including the positive feedback they received from their instructors.

<center>*   *   *</center>

Like much of the scholarship that precedes this study, the analysis presented in this chapter demonstrates that instructors' goals and commenting practices do not always align. In exploring why these divergences occurred, this chapter contributes to the existing body of literature by identifying moments of tension both between competing goals and within individual goals or practices. These tensions prevented the instructors from aligning their goals and commenting practices in ways that they at times acknowledged and at times did not.

For the instructors who participated in this study, divergences occurred between their goals and commenting practices for several reasons. When goals were in direct competition with one another, the commenting practices that could best help instructors fulfill one goal did not enable them to simultaneously fulfill their other goal. In the case of the instructors' goals to help students see their writing in a new way and to support students' purposes for writing, the instructors appeared to prioritize the goal they described as helping students to improve their writing, at the expense of supporting students' purposes for writing. When the instructors expressed goals that they found easier to realize through other forms of feedback, they described deprioritizing that goal in their written comments. For instance, though the instructors each expressed a goal to engage students in dialogue, they found it much easier to do so in person, and so focused their efforts towards this goal on the conferences and one-on-one meetings that they had with students. Finally, when the instructors believed that a particular commenting practice had some benefit for students, but could not help them improve their writing, the instructors did not always offer comments that aligned with their goals for this type of feedback. For instance, because Hadley believed that positive feedback could not help students improve their writing, he did not always offer this type of feedback, even though he identified it as having important affective benefits. In considering why the instructors' goals and practices diverge, it becomes clear that putting the recommendations made by composition scholars into practice is not a straightforward endeavor.

While these findings suggest a need to more carefully consider the goals that scholars recommend and the practices that can be realized in instructors' written comments, equally important is exploring what effect these divergences have for students. For instance, Hadley identified his goal of writing future-oriented feedback because he believed that students could apply those comments as they worked on future essays. Though diverging from this practice certainly had some effect for students, it would be preemptive to assume that because Hadley offered students primarily task-oriented feedback, his goal of helping them develop their future writing went unrealized. Such a stance takes agency away from students and places control over the writing process firmly in the hands of instructors, suggesting that instructor feedback sets parameters that students are confined within. It also suggests a well developed understanding of students' responses to instructor feedback, which the review in Chapter 1 challenges.

Consequently, the next chapter turns to explore students' responses to the feedback they received from Jennifer and Hadley, with a particular focus on how their responses aligned with and diverged from the goals and beliefs that each instructor expressed here.

CHAPTER 4

From Implementation to Engagement: Goals, Beliefs, and Variations
in Students' Response to Instructor Feedback

This chapter explores how the nine students who participated in this study responded to their instructor's feedback, with a focus on the commenting practices that emerged as significant for these students and the goals and beliefs that informed their engagement with instructor feedback. As Chapter 3 demonstrates, the structure of Hadley and Jennifer's first-year writing courses promoted different kinds of engagement with each instructor's feedback. Because students in Hadley's course were not required to revise their writing after receiving his comments, for instance, the most likely use they had for his feedback was to apply it to their next writing situation. In Jennifer's course, where students were expected to revise each essay after receiving her written comments, students utilized her feedback much more directly, implementing or engaging with it as they repeatedly revised each of their essays.

Despite this difference, students in Hadley and Jennifer's courses responded to their instructor's feedback in remarkably similar ways, with some students in each class engaging in a process of thinking that involved modifying instructor feedback and applying feedback across drafts–in line with the instructors' goals–and others directly implementing that feedback, often without understanding what the changes they made actually accomplished in their writing or without agreeing that those changes actually made their writing more effective. These variations in students' responses, which in each class included students who directly implemented their instructor's feedback and students who more thoughtfully engaged with that feedback, emerged even though the instructors generally utilized the same commenting practices with each of their students. Though students did identify two of their instructor's commenting practices as informing their response to the feedback they received, the findings of this study by and large suggest that these commenting practices were not the only–and perhaps not the most influential– factor that informed students' responses.

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As Kluger and DeNisi (1996) explain, feedback regulates behavior through the comparisons that individuals make between the information that they receive and their personal goals and standards. In line with these scholars' findings, students frequently articulated goals for and beliefs about writing and instructor feedback that informed their responses to the comments they received on their writing. This chapter explores students' goals for and beliefs about writing in an effort to explain why so much variation exists in students' responses to instructor feedback, including the variations noted here.

In what follows, I offer an examination of students' responses to instructor feedback as they described them over the course of one semester in a required first-year writing class, first in relation to the commenting practices that students identified as particularly influential and second in line with the goals and beliefs that ultimately informed students' decisions to engage with or to implement their instructor's feedback.

Students' Responses to Instructor Commenting Practices

Much of the research that has been devoted to student response has focused on how students respond to particular commenting practices in order to identify which of those practices can best engage students in the writing process. However, as the students who participated in this study described the rationales behind their responses to instructor feedback, they rarely acknowledged their instructor's commenting practices as informing their decisions to accept, modify, or reject their instructor's feedback. There were, however, two notable exceptions, as several students described comments that repeatedly identified the same issue in their writing and positive comments as directly informing their responses to instructor feedback. In what follows, I consider students' responses to each of these commenting practices, with a focus on how they informed students' engagement with the writing process.

Frequency as an Indicator of Significance: Students' Response to Recurring Comments

Interestingly, of the two commenting practices that students identified as informing their engagement with instructor feedback, one was not described by either instructor. For some students, however, comments that repeatedly identified the same issue in their writing, either within one draft or across multiple writing assignments, directly informed the ways that they engaged with those comments. Stephanie, for instance, reported that she did not see the value of

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applying Jennifer's feedback across drafts of different essays. "I definitely could have," she said. "It probably would've been good. But, I think I just didn't think it was, like, worth it, I guess." For Stephanie, Jennifer's comments were useful in guiding her revisions, but had little utility beyond the scope of each essay. As she explained, "If that's, like, the final paper, then it's kind of like 'Oh, okay.' Like, it's nice to see this, but it doesn't really do anything, I guess, because you can't go back and change it then."

This response shifted, however, when Stephanie recognized a pattern in the comments that she received from her instructor. In response to two moments that Jennifer marked as "redundant" in her third essay, Stephanie explained, "That's a consistent issue I have. Like, whenever I write, I like, repeat myself a lot. So, and I'm like, conscious of that. So, I knew that that was just something I should go through and fix, like, first, possibly because it's kind of like a bigger issue than some of the other comments." From Stephanie's perspective, because she recognized redundant moments as a "consistent issue" in her writing, she prioritized addressing those comments over the other comments that she received.

Stephanie's identification of redundancy as a consistent issue in her writing corresponds with the number of times that Jennifer wrote "redundant" in her comments both within and across the student's essays. In addition to the two areas that Jennifer marked in Stephanie's third essay, the student had already received the comment three times in her first essay and once in her second essay. Repeatedly seeing this comment, then, likely contributed to Stephanie's understanding that she should prioritize addressing redundant moments as she revised her third essay. This point is particularly important, as neither instructor described repeating comments as a strategy that they used to indicate the significance of those comments for students. Consequently, it is quite possible that Jennifer would not have identified the "redundant" moments in Stephanie's essay as the most important issue that the student needed to address. However, the frequency with which this comment appeared clearly informed the student's response, suggesting that students are more likely to focus on issues that are repeatedly addressed in their instructor's comments, and to identify those issues as particularly important.

The patterns that Stephanie noticed in Jennifer's comments not only informed her focus as she revised her writing in response to that feedback, but also led her to focus on issues that were repeatedly addressed in her subsequent writing. In the end note to Stephanie's first essay, for instance, Jennifer wrote, "Instead of speaking in generalities (e.g., *There are many*

stereotypes against them; *guilt for all the things that I have and all of the things that I want*; *The Roma people were humble, kind, and grateful*), use exact examples. This is essentially 'show, don't tell'." In response to this comment, Stephanie explained, "I just have, like, a lot of issue with the 'show don't tell' concept. I'm not good at that. And that, like, keeps coming up… I really, like, can't do it, and I don't know why. So it keeps, like, coming up." The frequency of this feedback, which made up just under one-third of Jennifer's end note on Stephanie's first essay and presumably repeatedly appeared in the comments she received on the short assignments that she completed leading up to this essay, led her to increase the amount of attention she paid to this particular issue in her writing. "So, it's definitely, like, drawn my attention to that," she said. "So, when I write, I consciously think about it, which is good… I'll double-check things to see, like, if it's a lot of tell, and then try to fix it. I'm just like paying attention to it more." In contrast to her reported tendency to not apply Jennifer's feedback across essays, here Stephanie describes doing just that, both as she develops an initial draft and as she revises her writing.[38] According to Stephanie, it was the repetition of this task-specific feedback that informed her decision to carry it forward. "So like, just seeing it on one paper would've been like 'Oh, okay,' and just forget about it," she explained. "Seeing it on every piece of written work, like, really makes it stick with you." For Stephanie, the repetition of comments was more influential than any other commenting practice in getting her to apply her instructor's feedback across essays.

Patrick, like Stephanie, identified comments that repeatedly addressed the same issue in his writing as particularly influential. As Patrick explained, when he identified a pattern in his instructor's feedback, those comments became a central focus in his writing process for subsequent essays. "I almost try to, like, over-fix it," he said. "Like, make sure that there's no way I can get, like, counted off for it." As he reflected on Hadley's feedback at the end of the semester, one of the patterns that Patrick noted was that his instructor repeatedly focused on the organization of his essays. On his first essay, for example, Hadley made three comments identifying issues with or steps the student could take in order to develop the essay's organization. In one marginal comment, Hadley suggested, "What if you worked in appeals to

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[38] After the first essay, Stephanie did not receive any comments about *show don't tell* on her major essays. This could mean that she was able to successfully apply this comment, or that it continued to appear in the short assignments that she completed for class and which were not collected as part of this study. This latter possibility may be more likely, as in her final interview (well after she completed her first-year writing course), Stephanie described herself as, "definitely weaker in the 'show, don't tell' area because that was consistent on my papers."

the skeptical audience as ways of organizing/developing ideas?" On Patrick's second essay, Hadley offered even more comments related to the essay's organization. In his end note to Patrick, the instructor wrote, "The essay struggles with organizing this evidence, however, as the thesis is too broad to be effective." In response to this pattern in his instructor's feedback, Patrick explained, he increased his focus on organization. "I just try to make sure every paragraph is really logical," he said. "And, like, topic sentence, concluding sentence, analysis, and it all follows, like, in order."

Patrick's experiences add further support to the finding that students identify the issues that are repeatedly addressed in instructor comments as the most important issues in their writing. For this student, however, patterns in what his instructor *did not* comment on were equally influential. As Patrick reflected back on his semester in first-year writing, he explained:

> A lot of the comments he made in the first paper, and even in the second paper, I haven't really seen, I didn't see in the third paper. And, I haven't really heard from even my classmates or [the writing center] when I would go back and talk to them. There was a lot of stuff, too, that maybe I was just–I knew I needed to work on, and then the first two papers really confirmed it. And so, I guess writing ahead, I would focus on that… So, I guess, to me, showing that I've not only improved my writing overall, but I've fixed the specific parts that we were picking on early in the semester. That, to me, shows great improvement.

In this moment, Patrick interprets comments that did not repeatedly appear across essays as indicators that he "fixed" those issues in his writing. However, just as the instructors did not describe repeating comments in order to denote their significance, neither instructor suggested that they would consistently comment on issues in students' writing until those issues were resolved. In this case, it is possible that Hadley stopped commenting on some issues because Patrick improved them, as the student suggests. It is just as likely, however, that Hadley did not repeatedly address these issues because later essays had more significant issues that the instructor wanted to Patrick to think about. This latter possibility is likely, due to the fact that each essay that Hadley asked students to write was in a different genre, and so carried a different set of conventions and expectations for students to fulfill.

As this consideration demonstrates, students interpreted patterns in their instructor's feedback as indicators for where they should focus their attention. Though the consistency of an instructor's comments is not something that is often addressed in the literature recommending particular commenting practices, it is clear that for students, recurring comments can be

particularly influential in shaping their engagement with instructor feedback and with the writing process.

Affect and Action: Students' Response to Positive Feedback

Even more influential than the consistency of the instructors' comments was the positivity of those comments. By far, the comments that students most frequently described as informing their engagement with instructor feedback were positive. Eight of the nine students who participated in this study identified this commenting practice as playing an influential role in their engagement with instructor feedback.[39] What is most interesting about this pattern, however, is not that students generally found positive comments to be beneficial, but the variety of ways that students described *using* positive feedback. For the students who participated in this study, positive comments not only mitigated their affective responses to feedback, as their instructors believed these comments would, but also directly informed the decisions they made in their writing in ways that neither instructor anticipated. In what follows, I explore the many uses that students described for their instructor's positive feedback, beginning with a brief consideration of the well established affective benefits that this feedback had for students.

In line with Jennifer and Hadley's beliefs, every student who participated in this study described positive feedback as having affective benefits. At the end of the semester, for instance, as John described Jennifer's written comments, he said, "The comments were definitely, like, helpful and building blocks, especially the positives." In positioning positive comments as "especially" helpful, John indicated that he may have understood these comments as even more helpful than the critical comments that he received. As the student reflected on the comments he received on his second essay, he recalled, "So, essay two is my good one. I really like reading this. Like, when she underlines something, like, 'Oh, hey. I did something right,' you know?" Underlining, in particular, was an important form of positive feedback that John received.[40] "See, this is, like, almost all underlined," he said. "And see, 'too funny.' I am too funny now. Like, it

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[39] In contrast to his classmates, Patrick expressed that he saw little use for positive feedback. Though he speculated that it could have affective benefits, and at times engaged with Hadley's positive comments in this way, this commenting practice was much less influential for Patrick than it was for other students.

[40] By the end of the semester of their first-year writing course, every student in Jennifer's class talked about her underlining as an important form of positive feedback. However, after receiving instructor feedback on the first essay, only one student recognized Jennifer's underlining as positive. This example highlights the importance of clarifying commenting strategies for students, particularly as some instructors underline strengths in students' essays, as Jennifer did, and others underline weaknesses, as Hadley did.

gives me confidence in life. It helps me keep going." For John, Jennifer's positive feedback motivated him to work on his writing and gave him confidence, in line with Jennifer's goals.

Two-thirds of the students who participated in this study identified positive feedback as playing an important role in their process of engaging with critical feedback, again in line with Jennifer and Hadley's beliefs. For half of these students, this role was primarily affective, as the instructors suggested. As Ding explained, for instance, she consistently used Jennifer's positive feedback to help her process the critical feedback she received on her writing. "The comments she gives, she always, like, praised a little bit, and then like, say your problem," Ding recalled. "She's very nice, so it kind of make you accept better." If she did not receive positive feedback, Ding speculated, she would not be able to engage with her instructor's critical comments. "I mean, if she just criticize, you will feel pretty bad. And, you will probably never want to look at the comment again. So, that won't be helpful." As she emphasized, "The criticize part still make me feel pretty bad. But overall, when you see, like, the praise and then the criticize, you still like, 'Alright'." For Ding, positive feedback clearly mitigated her affective response to the critical feedback she received from her instructor, in line with the instructors' beliefs about this commenting practice.

This function of positive feedback was particularly important for students who experienced anxiety when engaging in the writing process.[41] As Nathan reflected on Hadley's feedback, he repeatedly expressed being intimidated by its length, particularly in the end notes he received on each of his major essays. However, when those end notes began with positive feedback, Nathan explained, it was easier for him to keep reading. On his third essay, for instance, Hadley began his end note to the student with a considerable amount of positive feedback, writing:

> Good work. This essay shows that you have made great strides in terms of focus, organization & development of ideas compared to Essays #1 & #2. Your proposal demonstrates good attention to paragraph development overall, a strong sense of audience awareness & plenty of specific details in the evidence provided.

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[41] Most of the students who participated in this study did not describe a great deal of anxiety about writing. Megan, for instance, apologized during her last interview for having a generally neutral response to the feedback that she received from Hadley, saying, "I am sorry I have no strong emotions here." Nathan, however, was a notable exception, as he described experiencing a great deal of stress at every stage of the writing process. "Turning in an essay is the scariest thing in life for me," he said. "I'll be, like, sweating, and just like, 'Oh my god. Here's my essay'." Receiving feedback, he explained, was even more stressful. "Whenever I get an essay back and I just see red, that's like, the scariest color. When–that literally just makes my stomach flip, more than even handing in an essay."

These positive comments, Nathan explained, helped him keep reading the remainder of Hadley's end note, which offered critical evaluations of his use of evidence and the clarity of his writing. "When I see this, I'm like, 'Oh, long letter'," he said. "But, when it starts off with, 'Good work,' it's just like, 'Oh.' And you keep going." As Nathan explained, "When you start off with something good, I think it gives them, like, 'Okay, I did something right, at least'." For Nathan, it was important that the comments he received not only begin with positive feedback, but also that they end on a positive note. As he described his own efforts to comment on his classmates' writing, he explained, "I wouldn't want to end on something that's bad, because then, that's– what's stuck in your head is bad and negativity."

Though in this moment, Nathan did not connect his description of his commenting practice to his own experience of receiving feedback, the emphasis he placed on "not ending on something that's bad" was likely informed by the experience he had processing Hadley's feedback on his first essay, which did not include a single comment that the student understood as positive.[42] As Nathan recalled, he read that feedback immediately after receiving it, as he walked from Hadley's class to his psychology exam:

> I had to take an exam right after. And I should have waited to read everything on that until after I took my exam for another class, but I didn't. On my way to the exam, I was reading it. And, I was just like, 'Ahhh.' So then, that's all I thought about during my exam. And, I failed my exam. Well, I got a 66… I'm not blaming him. Like, 'You made me almost fail my psych exam.' But, yeah. It was really hard to focus. Like, the exam was, like, hard to begin with. And just, like, having that in the back of my mind, like, 'Oh, you're gonna fail that class. You might as well fail this one too.' So–But, that's me beating myself up again. So, it's frustrating. It really is.

Here, Nathan indicated that reading written comments that did not include positive feedback left him focused on "bad and negativity," even as he moved into a completely unrelated task. In this way, Nathan's experience reinforces Kluger and DeNisi's (1996) finding that feedback interventions can "induce strong affective reactions, which in turn were shown to have automatic and pervasive effects on performance even on tasks other than the one that induced the affect" (p. 261). For students like Nathan, positive feedback could play a crucial role in mitigating these potential effects, as the student's description of his commenting practices seems to suggest.

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[42] Nathan's experiences with Hadley's feedback on this essay are considered in detail in Chapter 5. The analysis of Hadley's comments on this essay identified one comment that the instructor offered the student as positive. However, because that comment was directly contradicted by a critical comment, Nathan did not understand it as positive.

Like much of the previous scholarship, these findings highlight that positive comments can have a strong impact on students' affective responses to instructor feedback, in both its presence and its absence. What is even more interesting, however, are the ways that positive comments helped some students to develop their writing. One-third of the students who participated in this study identified clear ways that positive comments helped them to implement critical or neutral comments in their writing. On Megan's third essay, for instance, Hadley wrote a checkmark, followed by, "Good example but I wonder if this applies to <u>all</u> disciplines–maybe focus on 1-2 other majors to make proposal stronger & more focused?" According to Megan, this comment stood out from the comments she typically received from Hadley. "I feel like I could take that and develop it myself," she said. "Whereas, another comment, I might have to talk to him and be like, 'I know you said this, but where do you think I should start when I want to redevelop this idea?'" In this moment, Megan suggests that she did not have a clear sense of direction for how she might use Hadley's critical comments. When those comments were paired with positive feedback, however, she felt more capable of developing her writing on her own. "That was kind of like, I was at least headed in the right direction," she said. "I'd probably be able to respond to it better, just because I knew where to come from." For Megan, critical comments and suggestions that asked her to build on a strength in her writing were particularly useful, as they gave her a sense of direction for how she could develop her writing.

According to Hyland and Hyland (2001), the "praise–criticism–suggestion triad" exemplified by the comment that Hadley offered to Megan "serves to both mitigate the potential threat of criticism and to move students towards improving either their current text or their writing processes more generally in the longer term" (p. 196). In some cases, however, combinations of positive and critical feedback did not have these effects. For example, although Nathan also identified comments that combined positive feedback and suggestions or critiques as particularly helpful–such as Hadley's comment on his second essay, "good point, but develop with examples to make your case"–in some instances, combinations of positive and critical feedback were actually more difficult for the student to process.

In the opening of the end note to the same essay, for instance, Hadley wrote, "The thesis works fairly well to set up a specific claim relevant to <u>this</u> film but the development of this claim & expansion of it through connecting to evidence (criteria) is sorely lacking." In contrast to the previous example–which positions the command, "develop with examples," as a way of building

on Nathan's "good point"–here, Hadley's comment does not suggest ways that Nathan can build on his thesis. Instead, it offers an unqualified, critical evaluation of the "development" and "expansion" of the thesis that counters, and consequently undermines, the positivity present in the comment. The qualifications in this comment contribute to this effect, as the positive aspects are hedged, suggesting that the thesis "works *fairly well*," and therefore decreasing the certainty of the positive evaluation offered (emphasis mine). The critical aspects of this comment, in contrast, are not only unqualified, but are actually intensified, as the comment not only suggests that aspects of the essay are "lacking," but that they are "sorely lacking."[43]

The presence of the intensifier "sorely," in particular, made it difficult for Nathan to engage with this comment. As he recalled, "This 'sorely lacking,' that feels like–when I first saw that, it kind of made my stomach turn. I don't know why, probably just because I'm like, 'Well, for this film you have that good, but the connecting to its evidence and criteria is sorely lacking.' I'm just like, 'Well, okay'." In this moment, Nathan did not describe Hadley's critical comment as helping him to develop a strength in his writing, as Megan did, but instead, focused on the contrast between the positive and critical aspects of the comment, and ultimately, on Hadley's critique. "Maybe I'm just really sensitive," he speculated. "And maybe, he wouldn't think that would make a student worry. But, I don't know… 'sorely' kind of, like, it reminds me of an infected wound or something, just sitting there." As this example demonstrates, though positive and critical comments could work together to help students see clear ways that they could develop their writing, when a positive comment was contrasted or undermined by a critical comment, students were less likely to respond in this way.

Other combinations of positive and critical feedback can also be difficult for students to process. In the next sentence of Hadley's end note to Nathan, for instance, the instructor wrote, "It's not enough to have a strong thesis in revision; the thesis revision will shape evidence & development & demand attention to revising the entire essay."[44] Once again, this comment offers

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[43] The positivity of this comment is likely further undermined by Hadley's underlining of "<u>this</u>." In the assignment sheet for this essay, Hadley wrote, "This assignment asks you to think in detail about **movie genres and their purposes**, the visual arts, as well as the art of filmmaking, to develop a thesis that is original and compelling" (emphasis original), indicating that the instructor may have expected students to develop thesis statements that extended beyond the focus of the specific movie they reviewed for this essay. If so, Hadley's comment could have been meant to communicate that Nathan's thesis, which focused on the intersections of historical and contemporary elements in *The Great Gatsby* (2013), did not have broad enough implications to fulfill the goals of the assignment.

[44] As I interpret this comment, Hadley is offering Nathan an embedded positive evaluation of his thesis–telling the student that he has "a strong thesis"–though doing so within a larger point that a strong thesis "is not enough." This interpretation is informed by my knowledge that Nathan emailed Hadley about his thesis during the drafting process

a positive evaluation of Nathan's thesis, this time without qualification. However, in this case, the positive aspect of Hadley's comment is actually embedded within a critical comment telling the student that his "strong thesis" is "not enough." As a result, the positive aspect of this comment was not clear to Nathan. "I didn't really know what that meant," he said. "Did that mean that my thesis was bad?" In response to this embedded positive comment, Nathan actually drew the opposite conclusion of what his instructor was likely aiming to communicate. Like the previous example, this demonstrates that just as positive and critical comments can function more powerfully together, when they appear to be in competition with one another, the positive aspects of the comment can easily be undermined, and thus provide little to no benefit for students. Nathan's uncertainty about the meaning of his instructor's comment, and his conclusion that the comment was entirely critical, also suggests that some students may be more likely to understand their instructor's comments as critical of their writing, even when they do not explicitly make a value judgment about that writing.

Positive feedback was particularly influential for students who began their first-year writing class without a strong sense of the standards that define good writing. At the start of the semester, four students–John, Ronnie, Nathan, and Abigail–explicitly expressed uncertainty about these standards. For instance, Nathan said, "I don't even know, like, what really makes good writing." John described similar uncertainty, which he attributed, at least in part, to variations he noted in other people's assessments of writing. As he reflected on a moment from high school when his English instructor read a student's essay to the class, John explained, "When she read out his essay, she's like, 'This is great. I love the way he did it'." In contrast to his instructor's evaluation, however, John said, "It wasn't good." This divergence, he explained, left him confused. "Some people thought it was really good. Some people were like, 'This is terrible.' I'm just like, I don't know. I don't know what good writing is. I wish there was like a paper that was like, 'This is good writing. This is bad writing'." In this moment, John questions his evaluation of writing in light of the contrasting assessments offered by others, concluding that he did not understand the standards that define good writing. For students who shared similar beliefs, the feedback that they received from their instructor would likely have a strong

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for this essay. In response to his instructor's suggestions in those emails, Nathan revised his thesis. As Hadley appears to conclude here, however, the student did not revise the remainder of his essay to match his new thesis. The explanation that follows, then, seems to be telling Nathan that when he revises his thesis, he needs to revise his entire essay with a particular focus on the evidence he includes and the way that he develops that evidence. As what follows demonstrates, however, this meaning was lost on Nathan.

influence on their beliefs about writing, as they began their first-year writing courses without established standards to compare that feedback against. Consequently, these students would be more likely to directly implement their instructor's feedback, as Kluger and DeNisi (1996) suggest.

This was particularly true of the positive comments that students received. As previously noted, John identified positive comments as important "building blocks" that helped him recognize where his writing was effective–something he presumably could not do without his instructor's feedback. Two-thirds of the students who participated in the study described using their instructor's positive feedback in this way, including all four of the students who at the start of the semester suggested that they were unsure of the standards that define good writing. For these students in particular, positive feedback played an important role in shaping their understandings of writing as they evolved over the course of the semester.

For instance, Nathan described using Hadley's positive comments to determine where his writing was successful. In response to one of Hadley's comments on his second essay, which included a checkmark, followed by "good details + descriptive intro," Nathan said, "Okay, I'm doing good on the intro. I got that down." Nathan responded similarly to each positive comment that Hadley made in the margins of his second essay. "So he says, 'good–doesn't give too much away'," he noted. "So it was just like, 'Oh, okay. I did good on that'." For Nathan, positive comments helped him to see what was working well in his writing, something his responses indicate he may not have been aware of prior to receiving Hadley's feedback.

Like Nathan, Abigail suggested that her instructor's positive feedback helped her to see strengths in her writing that she did not previously recognize. As she reflected back on the feedback she received from Jennifer in her first-year writing course, she concluded, "I think I realized I can be more creative than I thought. So, maybe her pointing out examples helped me realize that." In this moment, Abigail suggests that Jennifer's positive comments helped her to see her writing in a new way, in line with the instructor's goal. "She'd point out things that I didn't realize that were particularly good," Abigail said. "It made me feel like I was doing something good that I didn't even know that I was decent at. So, that was nice." For Abigail and Nathan, because they could not always recognize effective moments in their writing, positive feedback helped them to see their writing in a new way. This effect of positive feedback is particularly important, as these comments did not ask students to change their writing, but

instead reinforced strategies and techniques they were already using. Consequently, this commenting practice–perhaps more than any other–holds the potential to simultaneously realize the instructors' goals to support students' purposes for writing and to help them see their writing in a new way, which as Chapter 3 demonstrates, were often in direct competition in Hadley and Jennifer's comments.

In addition to helping students recognize strengths in their writing, positive feedback also informed where they focused their energy as they engaged in the writing process. According to Kluger and DeNisi (1996), positive feedback is likely to result in decreased or sustained effort, as it indicates to students that they have exceeded a goal. In some cases, students described responding to positive feedback in this way. For instance, as she reflected on the positive feedback that she received from Jennifer over the course of the semester, Stephanie said, "It was like a confidence booster. So, it was like, 'I'm already good at this. Now, I can focus on this area and try harder.' So, I think it made me put more effort in." Like other students, Stephanie described the positive feedback that she received as giving her confidence and motivation to work on her writing. She also indicated that this commenting practice informed her decision to shift her focus towards the areas of her writing that still needed improvement, likely because she had already exceeded (or perhaps more accurately, met) the goals addressed in Jennifer's positive feedback.

However, in contrast to Kluger and DeNisi's findings, students also frequently described using their instructor's positive feedback to increase the attention they devoted to fulfilling a particular goal, taking a technique or a strategy that their instructor positively evaluated and repeating it both within and across assignments. As Stephanie explained, "If it's something that I can apply to other areas of the paper, then it's helpful because I know that that works already." This approach, she noted, informed the revisions she made to her second essay. "In our satire paper," Stephanie recalled, "we had to use, like, satire logic, or whatever, which was an issue for me in the paper. But, there was, like, a time where I did get it right. So, I used that to fix the other ones, as kind of, like, a base." In this example, Stephanie clearly describes responding to positive feedback–in this case, Jennifer's comment next to an underlined sentence, "good logic"– by using that sentence in her writing as a model for her revisions. "I was like, 'Oh, I've already done it once. I can obviously do it again'," she explained. "It definitely helped because, otherwise, I would've been confused on how to do that."

What is particularly interesting about this example is that for Stephanie, the fact that her instructor identified one sentence in her essay as effective was more helpful than the detailed explanation of satire logic that Jennifer included in her end note. In this end note, Jennifer wrote:

> Your biggest efforts in revision will be dealing with 'satire logic.' Satire logic is how the satire's narrator convinces the reader of the argument. In here, you say wonderfully ludicrous things, for example: 'You traipse out of the room leaving all of the lights on and let the door slam behind you.' This goes against our everday logic, of course, as we are consider [sic] of the needs of those around us, and we don't normally slam doors. So you have to offer a reasoning that can convince the reader. You do this in a few places already, for example by telling us that the 'you' stomps out of the library… 'because you really don't want to go to your astrophysics lecture.' It's not arbitrary stomping; it's stomping for a reason. It might be a ridiculous reason, but that's logic we can *temporarily* stand by (the idea being that it sounds reasonable in the moment, but isn't actually a strong argument…) So I've marked many places in here with 'why?' and these are the places that especially *need* an offered logic, but you could certainly add logic to places I didn't mark.

The detail that Jennifer provided in her comment to Stephanie defines satire logic, explains why it's necessary, and identifies specific places throughout the student's essay that "need" this logic.[45] However, without the model of satire logic identified by Jennifer's positive comments, the student explains, she would have been "confused." This example demonstrates how powerful positive feedback can be for students, particularly when it identifies a successful example of a technique or strategy that the student needs to develop throughout their writing. As Stephanie explained, without these models, she often felt confused about how to proceed. "Usually, if they just say, 'This doesn't work,' then I'm kind of like, 'Well, what does work then?',," she said.

Students not only described using positive comments to identify models within an essay, but also extending those models to their subsequent writing. Nathan, for instance, began his first-year writing course with a belief that positive feedback could be applied across essays. "Positive, obviously, just tells you what you're doing good," he said. "And that you can keep doing for your next essays." At the end of the semester, Nathan recalled, "I used all of my essays, actually, to model my last one, a little bit. But obviously, I used the ones that had more positive comments. And I was, 'Okay, I did good in that. Let's try to show that again in the last one'." Like Stephanie, Nathan suggested that positive feedback helped him to identify models for his writing. In transferring these models across assignments, however, Nathan was not striving

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[45] In her marginal comments, Jennifer wrote, "Why?," nine times, which indicated precisely where Stephanie needed to work in appeals to logic, as her end note explains.

towards a goal that his instructor set for his writing, as Stephanie did, but was setting his own goals, as he aimed to repeat techniques or strategies that Hadley identified as effective. For Nathan, positive feedback not only helped him implement the critical comments he received, as Stephanie described, it actually changed the way he approached his writing and the goals he set for his writing in subsequent assignments.

As Nathan described his engagement with Hadley's positive comments, he positioned them as more important than the critical comments he received. As he explained:

> Positive ones, I usually look at those more because I'm like, 'Okay, I did good on that, and he noticed it. So, let's try to get him to notice the next one.' And then, with the negative ones, I look at those, but not as much. But, I just use them to like, 'Okay, I did that wrong. Let's approach it a different way.' I usually look at the positive ones more, because even if it was just, 'Strong thesis,' I'm like, 'Okay, he said, "Strong thesis." So, let's look at that.' And, it's kind of, pulling out the stuff from the old essay, and putting in the stuff from the new essay–obviously, not plagiarizing my old essays, just like, an outline in a way.

Consequently, for Nathan, positive feedback clearly had more potential to inform his future writing than the critical comments that he received, as he described giving much less attention to the things he did "wrong"–which he aimed to avoid in his writing–and much more attention to the moments in his essay that his instructor identified as effective.

Nathan was not the only student to describe applying his instructor's positive comments across essays. Other students also suggested that positive comments transferred more readily across contexts than critical (or even neutral) comments could. As Ding reflected on the feedback she received from Jennifer over the course of the semester, she explained:

> I'm pretty sure, like, every paper has its own sparkles, right? So just maybe, like, point that out, and make them realize what their strength are in writing. So, maybe they can feel more confident… If you say a new thing, like, 'You should do this,' students won't, like, easily remember it and use it for the future. But, if it's something she already have, but she didn't know whether it's good or bad, if you point out it's good, she will, like, carry on.

Like other students, in this moment, Ding suggested that positive feedback impacts students' affect–helping them to build confidence–and that it helps students see strengths that they did not previously recognize. For Ding, this latter effect was particularly important, as she noted that when students learn that one of their strategies or techniques is effective, they will carry it forward in the future. This point is particularly compelling coming from Ding, whose primary

goal was not to remember Jennifer's feedback, but to pass her first-year writing course with as little effort as possible.[46]

In the moments described here, Stephanie, Nathan, and Ding each expressed a high degree of certainty regarding their ability to repeat a strategy they had already used in their writing. In response to their instructor's critical feedback, however, the students expressed much less certainty about how to proceed, with some, like Stephanie, suggesting they would not know what steps to take without positive feedback, and others, like Nathan, offering vague descriptions of those steps, such as avoiding a particular strategy or technique altogether. Consequently, although these students' responses to positive feedback generally diverge from the findings of Kluger and DeNisi (1996), as the students increased the attention they devoted to the strategies or techniques that their instructor identified as effective, they appear to align with these scholars' findings regarding critical–or as Kluger and DeNisi term it, negative–feedback. As they explain, negative feedback can result in the abandonment of a goal when that goal is perceived as having a low likelihood of being attained. If these students did not feel capable of achieving the goals their instructor set in his or her critical feedback–as their responses seem to indicate–they would be much more likely to abandon those goals, choosing not to engage with that critical feedback.

The responses of these students highlight the important role that positive feedback plays in students' writing process–as those students who might benefit the most from their instructor's written comments also seem to have considerable difficulty engaging with feedback that is critical of their work. This may be particularly true for students like those who participated in this study, who have lower levels of motivation to work on their writing or who have little belief in their capabilities as writers. In contrast to their instructors, these students frequently expressed beliefs that positive feedback could help them improve their writing, unlike the critical feedback that they received.

The impression that this commenting practice makes on students should not be underestimated. For some students, positive feedback not only impacted how they approached their writing, but also how they approached their instructor. As Abigail described Jennifer's feedback, for instance, she said, "She always started her feedback with saying what she liked in the paper, which was helpful that it wasn't negative criticism. And then, she would go into the

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[46] The goals that students, including Ding, expressed for their writing and for using their instructor's feedback will be explored in detail in the next section.

specific things that need to be fixed." This pattern of positive and critical comments, Abigail explained, directly informed her impression of Jennifer. "I really appreciate that. It showed that she wanted us to improve, instead of nagging, I guess," she said. "I think she was really conscientious of our feelings. And, she never said anything, like, offensive." For Abigail, Jennifer's written comments not only informed her understanding of her writing, but also her understanding of her instructor. Abigail's beliefs about instructor feedback extended beyond the margins of her essays, suggesting that in addition to functioning as a pedagogical tool, those comments also served as an important form of interaction that directly informed the instructor-student relationship.

Ronnie identified the same pattern in Jennifer's positive comments, which ultimately led him to trust the critical comments that Jennifer offered. "I like her, um, idea of how, like, to compliment what you did well, and then, like, soft transition, and then what you didn't do well, and then, like, kind of suggestions," he said. "It establishes–I find her very credible. Not only that she is like, an English teacher, but she recognizes things I do well. And, that's very big for me in trusting her opinions on what I didn't do well." In this moment, Ronnie suggested that Jennifer's positive feedback not only helped him to engage with critical feedback, but was actually essential in order for him to trust that feedback and, by extension, trust his instructor. Without enough positive feedback, Ronnie explained, he would not only struggle to trust his instructor, but would struggle to engage with her at all:

> Well, as soon as the balance between positive and negative shifts too far, then there's like a–like, there's–for me, it was a pretty emotional response to things. Like, not even for that one essay, but for future essays. You're less prone to talk to them about it because you kind of feel like there's bias, almost, in what she's saying. And I know there is bias, because you can't not be biased in writing. But, it's hard to talk to someone if you think that they're biased against you.

For Ronnie, just as the presence of positive feedback could establish credibility, its absence had the opposite effect, leading him to conclude that his instructor was biased against him. This finding reinforces the notion that instructor feedback directly informs the relationship that develops between instructors and students, suggesting that students look to this feedback, and particularly to positive feedback, for indicators that can help them better understand their instructor and their instructor's understanding of them. The response that Ronnie describes here–that he would avoid talking to his instructor about her feedback–suggests that for some students,

this commenting practice is a key component of the communication that takes place between instructors and students, both on and off the page.

As this consideration clearly demonstrates, for students in Jennifer and Hadley's classes, positive comments had many functions that extended well beyond the affective benefits anticipated by their instructors. In some cases, this feedback informed students' beliefs, as it shaped their understandings of the standards that define good writing, helped them to recognize effective moments in their own writing, and even contributed to the understandings they developed of their instructor and his or her feedback. In other cases, this feedback informed students' writing processes, as positive feedback helped them to implement critical feedback, directed their attention towards repeating effective techniques or strategies, and identified models that they could use to further implement those techniques or strategies, both within and across writing assignments. For some students, positive comments were more important than critical comments because they were the only comments that students were confident they could use. They were also the only comments that some students remembered.

Beyond the Written Comment: Students' Goals, Beliefs, and Variations in Response

In contrast to the two commenting practices explored in the previous section, students much more frequently indicated that the goals that they set for their writing or the beliefs that they held about writing and feedback informed their responses to the written comments they received from their instructor. In what follows, I explore these goals and beliefs as they informed students' engagement with instructor feedback. This exploration is particularly important as composition scholars frequently recommend that instructors strive to support students' purposes for writing without clarifying what those purposes are. As the findings presented here demonstrate, however, the goals that students prioritized were often not in alignment with the learning objectives of their first-year writing course, suggesting that at least in some cases, students likely have purposes for writing that their instructors would find more beneficial not to support.

Performance vs. Mastery: The Impact of Goals and Beliefs on Student Response

The one goal that was shared by every student who participated in this study was to give their instructor what he or she wanted. In contrast to the mastery goals that Hadley and Jennifer

set for students,[47] this goal focused exclusively on students' performance. According to Pintrich (2003), performance goals "represent a concern with demonstrating ability, obtaining recognition of high ability, protecting self-worth, and a focus on comparative standards relative to other students and attempting to best or surpass others" (p. 677). As students described their efforts to give their instructor what he or she wanted, they focused primarily on demonstrating their abilities and obtaining recognition of their abilities in line with their instructor's standards.

For some students, this performance goal emerged from a general uncertainty about how else they might develop their writing. As Ding recalled, looking over Jennifer's comments on her first essay, "I mean, I read the paper as a whole, like, another time. But, I mean, I already read it a couple of times before I hand it in, so now I couldn't find any more where I can see improvement." For Ding, directly implementing Jennifer's feedback was the only way she knew how to improve her writing. "That's the advice she gave me, and that's what I did," the student said. Stephanie described a similar difficulty with moving beyond her instructor's feedback:

> I usually just try to do what they address. But, like, in the past, if we have the chance to revise, teachers will be like, 'You have to do more than what I just said.' Like, 'I didn't write everything that you need to fix.'… That's so frustrating. I then would just, like, read the paper and change random things that I thought, I guess, I could change. But, then it's like, 'Well, I can't read your mind. I don't know what you want.' Because, like, you think your paper's good. And you don't know what needs to be fixed.

In this moment, Stephanie indicated that her tendency to directly implement her instructor's feedback extended as much from her sense that her writing was "good" when she turned it in as it did from her desire to give her instructor what he or she wanted. Consequently, any changes that Stephanie made that were not suggested by her instructor felt "random," as she could not determine what would be recognized as an indicator of high ability without her instructor's feedback.

For other students, this goal emerged from a belief that the evaluation of writing is subjective. This belief was widely shared by students in Jennifer and Hadley's classes, with two-thirds of the students describing writing in this way. This "radically relativistic view," Thaiss and Zawacki (2006) argue, can lead students to "see teachers as idiosyncratic" and to "feel confused

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[47] As Pintrich (2003) explains, mastery goals "orient the student towards learning and understanding, developing new skills, and a focus on self-improvement using self-referenced standards" (p. 677). As Chapter 3 demonstrates, the mastery goals that the instructors set for students aimed to engage them in the writing process, in contrast to the students' performance goals, which often led them to focus on their instructor much more than on their writing.

and misled as teachers use the same terms to mean different things" (p. 139). For instance, as Abigail talked about her feelings about writing, she contrasted English with math, a subject in which, as she described, "it's either right or wrong, and you can work on it." In contrast to math, she observed, "English is something that's a lot harder to work on because there's not necessarily a right/wrong answer. And, teachers often look for different things and have different expectations." In response to these differences, she concluded, "So, I haven't been as confident in writing as in other areas." In this moment, Abigail positioned her belief that the evaluation of writing is subjective as one that emerged from variations she noticed across her instructors' expectations. Like John, these variations left her unsure about the standards that define good writing. In line with Dryer's (2013b) suggestion, then, it seems that "the shifting standards and rationales for the many appraisals they have already received" do, in fact, convince students "of the subjectivity of reader response" (p. 29), even before they reach their first semester of college.

While some students expressed the kind of confusion that Thaiss and Zawacki describe–as students' uncertainty about the standards that define good writing explored here suggest–others identified this variation as a relatively straightforward part of the writing process. For instance, Megan noted, "Usually, when I, like, turn in the first paper for a teacher, I kind of do it lightheartedly because I know every teacher has a different style." For Megan, variations in her instructors' feedback were not confusing or misleading, but were expected. When she received feedback from her instructor, she explained, "I don't take it personally. It's just kind of, like, your job. You are, like, a student, so people are just there to tell you what to do and what not to do, and that's really it." In this moment, Megan positioned instructor feedback as directive and suggested that her "job" as a student is simply to follow those directions. Consequently, Megan identified turning in her writing and getting feedback from her instructor as an important step in learning his or her expectations. "After a first paper that I turned in with a teacher," she explained, "I can kind of figure out how they want me to write." In response to instructor feedback, she explained, "You just kind of follow it." In line with her goal to give her instructor what he or she wanted, Megan indicated that she would likely directly implement the feedback she received, regardless of the degree of control it exerted over her writing.

In extreme cases, students' beliefs about writing–and about themselves as writers–led them to conclude that their instructor's evaluation was the only evaluation that mattered. Like

Abigail, for instance, Taeyoun[48] pointed to differences in the preferences that people expressed as an indicator that writing is subjective. "Sometimes, I think, writing really depends on people," she said. "So, someone think that this essay is really good, but someone will not." In addition, she suggested that at times, her self-assessment did not align with her instructor's assessment of her writing. "Sometimes, I think this way I wrote is more strong than what he thought," she explained. However, Taeyoun described responding to this difference by generally accepting Hadley's opinions over her own, regardless of whether she agreed with them. "But anyway, he's better than me," she concluded. "So, I'm kind of accepting his opinion… because he is a teacher, and he has learned about and studied a lot about the writing, and he is professional." For Taeyoun, her decision to prioritize Hadley's opinion over her own had much more to do with her beliefs than her desire to realize a performance goal in her writing.

Consequently, Taeyoun was not only likely to directly implement Hadley's comments–regardless of the control they exerted over her writing–but also to change her beliefs about writing in response to the feedback that she received. "I don't have, really, confidence in English writing," she said. "So, I don't even have my opinion. I'm just learning, and just accepting of his."[49] In this way, Taeyoun demonstrates that in spite of her "radically relativistic view" of writing, her uncertainty regarding the standards that define good writing also led her to use Hadley's feedback "to build a general picture of 'what all teachers expect'," as Thaiss and Zawacki describe (p. 139). As she speculated about how she would have responded to Hadley's feedback on her first essay,[50] Taeyoun explained, "I think I will do, I will try to, like, address every comments, because that's what he wants. And he wouldn't write, like, not important thing. I think there are more problems, but he just wrote a major problem, so I think it should be fixed."

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[48] Taeyoun, who identified her strongest academic language as Korean, had the least amount of experience with writing in English of all of the students who participated in the study. She enrolled in first-year writing during her first semester in the United States. Prior to that semester, she had attended a university in Japan where lectures were given in both English and Japanese and where she had started an English-based writing course that she dropped, along with all of her other courses, when she was admitted to this university.

[49] According to Taeyoun, this lack of confidence was not reflective of her feelings about writing in general, but specifically about writing in English. "If my teacher is Korean, and I wrote in Korean," she explained, "then I can argue with him–not emotionally, but about that topic." Consequently, Taeyoun's acceptance of Hadley's opinion likely had more to do with her limited experience with the English language.

[50] Taeyoun's second interview, where we discussed her response to Hadley's written comments on her first essay, was also her last interview, as she dropped the course early in her process of drafting the second essay. Consequently, during this interview, I talked with Taeyoun about how she might respond to Hadley's feedback if she had decided to stay in the class, and asked her all of the questions that I asked other students in the final interview.

In each of these cases, students in Hadley and Jennifer's classes describe directly implementing their instructor's feedback, a response that Black and Wiliam (1998) caution could have undesirable consequences in the writing classroom. As these scholars argue, "a student who automatically follows the diagnostic prescription of a teacher without understanding of its purpose or orientation will not learn" (p. 54). If the students made changes to their writing without understanding what they accomplished by doing so (as was clearly the case when Stephanie made "random" revisions to her essay in order to do what she thought her instructor wanted) or implemented their instructor's feedback even when they disagreed with that feedback (as Taeyoun reported), they would not learn. In cases such as these, supporting students' purposes (i.e., helping them to fulfill performance goals) could potentially undermine the most fundamental objectives of the first-year writing course and prevent students from fully engaging in the writing process. Though students can certainly learn from directly following their instructor's comments, they can only do so if they understand why they are making specific changes in their writing, an understanding that students are not likely to develop if their focus is on performance goals like giving their instructor what he or she wants. When students focus on goals such as this one, their engagement with feedback becomes an automated process that they are much less likely to learn from.

Just as students' beliefs about writing informed their goals, as was the case with students' desire to give their instructor what he or she wanted, their goals also informed their beliefs, and by extension, the ways that they engaged with instructor feedback. In revising her first essay, for instance, Stephanie explained that her goal was to give Jennifer "a stronger paper in general, with, like, the issues that she wants addressed to be addressed and not be an issue anymore." As she looked over Jennifer's comments on that essay, Stephanie explained that her instructor's feedback "shows kind of what she wants as a grader." The belief that she developed–that feedback shows what her instructor wants–informed Stephanie's decision to directly address each of Jennifer's comments in her revision, in line with the student's performance goal. Because Stephanie aimed to give her instructor what she wanted, she interpreted Jennifer's written comments as indicators that could help her fulfill that goal. "I figure if she took the time to mention it," the student said, "then it probably needs to be fixed."

For some students, the goal to earn a particular grade in their first-year writing course–another performance goal commonly shared by students who participated in this study–had an

even stronger influence on their beliefs about and engagement with instructor feedback. Ding, for example, explained that because she was taking Jennifer's first-year writing course pass/fail, she spent very little time reading her instructor's comments on her essays. "I took writing classes before," she said, "and I couldn't remember any of the comments. So I kind of knew the comments won't be very helpful for the future. So, that's why I didn't, like, read them very, very carefully." When her grade did matter, however, Ding described investing much more time and effort into reading her instructor's feedback. As she recalled, "When I was in [my former university] and I was taking like ESL, that was actually a graded class, so I want to make sure that I got an A on every paper. So, I look through very carefully and revise it very carefully." The contrast in Ding's engagement with her instructor's feedback indicates that from this student's perspective, instructor feedback primarily functioned to help her improve her grades, as the revisions she made in response to that feedback ultimately earned her an A on her essays. Because the student believed that she would not remember her instructor's comments, however, Ding clearly saw little utility for her instructor's comments beyond this function. Consequently, Ding suggests that grades are a highly motivating factor, not only encouraging the student to invest in her writing, as Reed and Burton (1985) found, but also to engage with her instructor's feedback, ultimately aligning her with students in Still and Korber's (2010) study who expressed a desire for "forms of writing instruction that tell them what to do to improve their grades" (p. 220). As she explained, "At that time, the goal was not to, like, remember for the future. It's to get a A." For Ding, the performance goal of achieving a particular grade in a writing course directly informed her beliefs about instructor feedback, and consequently, the degree to which she engaged with the feedback she received from Jennifer on her writing.

Like Ding, Patrick's goals for engaging with his instructor's feedback were primarily grade-driven. As he explained, "It's pretty obvious that most students care more about the grade than the comments. So, a lot of students will look at the grade first. And um, a lot of students will use the comments strictly to figure out how to improve their grades." For Patrick, his efforts to engage with Hadley's feedback were directly informed by this goal:

> I mean ultimately, for a lot of students taking a required course, the grade is the end result. So you look at this feedback and you know exactly how the instructor's going to be reading it, you know exactly what you need to improve on, where you lost points and so that the next time when the essay is worth more stakes, I guess, worth more points, you know you won't be making those mistakes again. And you also know what the instructor's reading for.

The beliefs that Patrick described–that instructor feedback explains his grade and shows what his instructor wants–reflect his goals to increase his grade and give his instructor what he wants. Though these performance goals certainly differ from the mastery goals that Hadley set for his feedback, interestingly, the actions that resulted from the student's goals align, as Patrick described responding to Hadley's feedback in exactly the way his instructor hoped, taking the comments from one essay and applying them to the next writing situation. Consequently, although students' engagement with instructor feedback at times appeared to fulfill their instructor's expectations, this alignment in and of itself did not mean that students and instructors shared goals, but instead, that they understood the same means as being capable of accomplishing goals that ultimately diverged.

In line with the performance goals explored here, every student who participated in the study described moments where they directly implemented their instructor's feedback, at times, even when they did not agree with that feedback. As Patrick explained:

> When you write an academic paper, you have the broad audience like Mr. Corgin's been telling us about, you know. Like, if you're writing an essay about college football, your audience is gonna be the NCAA, or college football players, or something. But I mean, the reality is, for most students the audience is the instructor. And so, for me, that really, that was–those comments really helped me say, 'Okay, this is what my audience wants. This is what I'm gonna give him or her, because this is what's gonna pay off best for me.' So, I'd say they definitely help me find, you know, issues that–even if I don't agree with whether or not they're issues–it's something I can fix and I can work on because I–it really tells you what the audience wants.

In this moment, Patrick identified Hadley as his only audience and Hadley's comments as indicators of what the instructor wanted. The conclusion that Patrick drew–that he would not only give Hadley what he wanted, but would do so regardless of whether he agreed with his instructor's opinion–increased the possibility that the student would implement feedback without understanding "its purpose or orientation," making it less likely that Patrick would learn from the process of engaging with Hadley's feedback, as Black and Wiliam (1998) caution.

This possibility is reinforced by the way that Patrick described using Hadley's feedback, particularly when the instructor's comments suggested changes that Patrick identified as "nothing big." For example, on Patrick's first essay, Hadley offered the following comment:

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> help to overcome stress. ~~Franky and I became~~ close through praying together before wrestling meets and discussing ∨our worries and struggles with each other. We even found that we faced

Figure 4.1: Hadley's Written Comment on Patrick's First Essay

In response to this comment, Patrick explained, "I think he just wanted 'with each other' to be 'discussing with each other our worries and struggles.' This–something quick like that–I can just, you know, move a couple of words over… It's not something I would put a lot of thought into, um, small things like that. If the teacher says to do it, I just kind of do it." From Patrick's perspective, comments like this did not require thought because it was in his best interest to make the change, regardless of whether he agreed that doing so would improve his writing. "If it bothered them the first time," he said, "and they see it didn't get changed, it might bother them more the second time. So, just do it… Especially if I don't see much of a difference, just kind of do it because that's what they want." Though the change that Hadley suggests in this instance does not significantly alter the student's writing, the fact that Patrick would implement his instructor's comment without question demonstrates that his focus was much more on his *instructor* and the performance goal of giving his instructor what he wanted than it was on goals that might have led him to focus on his *writing*. As Black and Wiliam conclude, then, in moments like this one, Patrick clearly would not learn from his instructor's feedback. Instead of functioning as a pedagogical tool, comments like this one were much more likely to function as an indicator of what instructors are looking for in students' writing.

The emphasis that Patrick placed on performance goals led him to interpret his instructor's feedback as directive, even in the more dialogic space of a one-on-one conference. For example, late in the process of drafting his first essay, Patrick set up a meeting with Hadley to talk through the final changes he could make before turning his essay in. "I had just written a rough draft," he said, "and I thought, 'Okay, you know, I'm just going to clean it up, make it– make sure it's clear, make sure it's, uh, it flows well, make it a little more artistic, I guess, for lack of a better word. And, you know, turn it in'." The belief that Patrick expressed here–that a rough draft would require only minimal changes–clearly informed his goals for his meeting with Hadley. In contrast to his goal to make relatively small revisions, however, in his meeting with Hadley, Patrick recounted, "He said that my original argument didn't have a specific audience or a specific purpose. So basically, I mean, I wasn't meeting the original assignment."

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Consequently, in their meeting, Patrick explained that he and Hadley reworked the focus of his essay. "It was about just spirituality in general in today's society. And, we decided to gear it more towards spirituality for college kids," he said.

As a result of Hadley's feedback, Patrick changed the entire focus of his essay, something he initially had no intention of doing. "I come out of that and, you know, knowing, 'Okay, basically I have to start over'," he recalled. "And even though I had a few ideas from the previous draft, most of that was scrapped." Clearly, this meeting did not support Patrick's goal to make minimal revisions, but instead required him to substantially revise his essay on a scale that he had not anticipated. Consequently, Patrick explained, "I was a little frustrated, I'll be honest." In part, Patrick's frustration extended from his belief that his essay was close to finished before he met with Hadley, and, in part, from the short period of time he had to complete his revisions. "I went on a Thursday afternoon," he recalled. "So, I basically had Friday, Saturday, Sunday to write the paper." In this moment, Patrick's beliefs about and goals for his writing were clearly countered by the feedback he received from Hadley in their one-on-one conference.

In response to this experience, Patrick decided not to seek out additional one-on-one meetings with his instructor. "I didn't after that," he said. "I guess I was just afraid that I was going to be under that pressure again. And, it was later in the semester, so there was more going on. So, I didn't feel like I had time to deal with changing the whole essay again." As he explained:

> Office hours, I think, can be helpful. But, a lot of times, too, they can end up, um, I found–it might just be Mr. Corgin–but, I found that they can end up going to a much deeper level than I intended, you know. I was intending to work on, this is– 'How do I exactly tie this evidence in?' Or, 'What would the next argument you'd be expecting be? What questions would you be asking?' And, before you know it, we're rethinking the purpose of the paper, and the point of view of the paper, and the audience of the paper, when I really already have these thoughts planned out. And I was moving. So, in a way, it was, you know, it was helpful because it really steered a new direction. But, at the same time, I was kind of frustrated because it was like, 'I'm already working on this thing. And now, we're just changing the entire base of the paper. So now, I have to go back and redo all this to fit a new argument.'

In this moment, Patrick suggested that although he entered his meeting with Hadley with clear goals in mind, he ultimately was not able to accomplish those goals in the space of their one-on-one meeting. Although Patrick's specific goal in this case–to make minor revisions to his essay– was one that Hadley likely would not have wanted to support, it is equally likely that the

instructor would not have wanted to elicit Patrick's subsequent response, as the student ultimately decided that engaging with Hadley in office hours conversations would not generate the kind of dialogue the student wanted.

Like Patrick, John described the conferences that he had with his instructor in ways that were not particularly dialogic. This student, however, did not visit Jennifer during his drafting process, but reported regularly meeting with her after receiving her written comments on his essays. "I met with her every time after an essay, I got feedback," he said. John identified two purposes for his consistent visits to Jennifer's office. First, he suggested that the visits demonstrated to his instructor that he was engaged. As he noted, "It helped for her to see, like, I was invested in the class and whatever." And second, he explained that he wanted more guidance for implementing Jennifer's feedback. "I needed it just to have a sense of direction, like, what was I going to change," he explained, "because I wasn't just gonna go–even though I saw the comments and everything–I didn't really know too much of, I know this was wrong, but I didn't know what, how to improve that. So, talking about it with her definitely helped." In contrast to Patrick, who visited his instructor's office hours with a clear sense of direction and objectives in mind, John's main objective was to gain this sense of direction–something he noted that written comments alone did not provide–in order to facilitate his revision process. In his meetings with Jennifer, he explained:

> I'd have my notepad, and so she'd be like, 'Okay, what do you think you could change? How do you think this could get, you could improve this?' And honestly, I would, like, throw out a couple of words. But, in the end, like, if I pushed her hard enough, I think she gave me–like, that's what happened for the first and last essays. She told me what she, what you could do and everything like that. And, that's how I got the A.

In this moment, John clearly indicated that although Jennifer attempted to engage him in a dialogue, he prioritized his performance goal, resisting that dialogue in order to get the instructor to tell him the specific steps that he could take to revise his essay. This suggests that from John's perspective, writing was a process of trial and error that he had to work through until he figured out what his instructor wanted. John's meetings with Jennifer ultimately helped him to fulfill this goal, as he suggested that he was able to use this in-person feedback to figure out what Jennifer thought he should do, ultimately enabling him to earn an A on two of his essays. Just like Patrick, John suggests that he did not experience one-on-one meetings with his instructor as dialogic interactions, but instead, as sources of directive feedback, in contrast to his instructor's goals.

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In contrast to Patrick and John's experiences, when students set mastery goals for their writing, they often engaged with their instructor's feedback in ways that were more likely to promote learning. As Pintrich (2003) explains, mastery goals "orient the student towards learning and understanding, developing new skills, and a focus on self-improvement using self-referenced standards" (p. 677). Though only one-third of the students who participated in this study described setting mastery goals for their writing, a number likely reflective of the specific population selected for this study, these goals had a clear impact on the ways that students engaged with their instructor's feedback.

For example, as Nathan thought about how he would approach revising his first essay, he said, "I would definitely take his comments into consideration." In responding to Hadley's comments, Nathan described several ways that he would also move beyond his instructor's feedback:

> I would, like, read through it again, make sure I agree completely with all of his comments, and then probably change things according to how he wants them. And then, I would go back and read it again. And then, I would–things that weren't, maybe to me still seemed unclear, or not like my own, I maybe would either, like, add to, or maybe just delete a little something. That's just what I would do. Or maybe, completely do the whole essay over again.

Like other students, Nathan explained that he would directly implement his instructor's written comments in line with his goal to give his instructor what he wanted, though the student presumably would only do so in response to comments that he agreed with. Whereas most students described their revision process ending at this step, Nathan positioned his instructor's feedback as a starting point upon which he would continue to build, in part to make sure that his revisions were clear, and in part to ensure that his writing felt like his own.[51] In focusing on self-improvement and self-referenced standards, these mastery goals increased the likelihood that Nathan would learn specific strategies and techniques from the process of implementing Hadley's feedback in his writing.

Ronnie described engaging with Jennifer's feedback in a similar way. "I think her feedback is more guidance than a formula for success," he said. Instead of simply implementing

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[51] Nathan expressed a strong sense of ownership over his writing that at times made it difficult for him to process the feedback he received from his instructor. As he explained, "I feel, sometimes when I get feedback from other people, it becomes theirs. Even though that's not true, I know that." In ensuring that his revisions did not include anything "not like my own," then, Nathan likely aimed to ensure that he had not changed his writing too far beyond what he identified as his own personal style.

Jennifer's feedback, Ronnie explained, "I rely on my own feedback a lot." As he explained the rationale behind this self-reliance, the student noted, "I think I have a pretty good idea of what a good piece looks like." Like Nathan, Ronnie's self-reliance and self-referenced feedback enabled him to move beyond Jennifer's feedback as he revised his writing, suggesting that students' ability to assess their own writing could lead them to set mastery goals for their writing.

In these moments, Nathan and Ronnie described engaging with their writing in ways that Hadley and Jennifer did not address in their comments. This engagement was informed by these students' beliefs about their instructor's feedback, which they positioned as a starting point and not an ending point for their revisions, and by the mastery goals that they set for their writing. As Ronnie articulated the effort that he invested in revising his first essay, for instance, he expressed a focus on self-improvement. "The first essay, I did a lot more revisions then she commented on, just because I made it a point to make it a good essay," he said. "I wanted to find meaning in it. And, I wanted to show her that–no, not even show her what, kind of like, show myself that I could. And, once I did, it opened so many doors in terms of how I saw things." In contrast to other students, Ronnie indicated here that Jennifer's comments did not address every improvement that he could make to his writing, but that in order to develop a "good" essay, he would need to strive towards his own standards. In aiming to show himself what he could accomplish, Ronnie set a mastery goal that pushed him to move beyond his instructor's feedback, in line with his beliefs about instructor feedback.

The experiences of these two students demonstrate that when students set mastery goals for their writing–even goals as broad as wanting to do "good" according to their own standards–they are more likely to understand instructor feedback as supporting their purposes, not determining them, in line with Jennifer and Hadley's goals. This is true even for students who simultaneously aim to achieve performance goals, as both of these students also expressed a desire to give their instructor what he or she wanted. Mastery goals, then, could be much more influential than performance goals for informing students' engagement in the writing process.

Students who set mastery goals not only described engaging with their writing in ways that aligned with their instructor's goals, but also described one-on-one meetings with their instructor as sources of dialogic feedback that ultimately supported the goals they set for their writing. For instance, like John, Ronnie also described seeking out a meeting with Jennifer because he felt he needed direction on how to approach revising his first essay. What helped him

get started, he said, "was going into office hours and talking to her about like, 'Okay, I don't really know, like, what message I'm trying to drive home'." As he recalled, "I didn't really have, like, a system of dealing with it, with the kind of problem that I had. And so, through the office hours, she kind of, like, gave me her system." Like John, in this moment Ronnie articulated that he got something from his meeting with Jennifer. However, while John described taking away specific directions for how he should revise his essay (in line with his performance goal to get Jennifer to tell him what to do), here, Ronnie described taking away a system that he could use to achieve his mastery goal on his own.

Consequently, whereas John's goal led him to focus on his *instructor* and on what he could get her to do, Ronnie's goal–to figure out the message that he wanted to emphasize in his essay–led him to focus on his *writing* and on engaging in a process of thinking about his writing. In light of this goal, Ronnie reported engaging with the questions that Jennifer asked him in their meeting. "Her system," he explained, "it was more–it was just like, 'Why is this important? Okay, now you said this. Why is that important?' It's like, three, four, or five questions. In the matter of five, ten minutes, I got a lot more clarity in what I wanted, tried to say." As a result of this meeting with Jennifer, Ronnie suggested he was not only able to use his instructor's system to address the issue he was having with his first essay, but that he began to adapt that system and make it his own. "Using that, I was able to, like, go through it," he said. "And now, I'm kind of developing my own system, wherein if I, like, come across the same situation, I might be able to deal with it myself now, but in, like, a shorter time period." For Ronnie, his meeting with Jennifer enabled him to not only engage in a dialogue with his instructor, but also to achieve the mastery goal he set for his writing, causing him to think much more deeply about his writing in the process, in line with Jennifer's goals.

Like Ronnie, Megan described her meetings with her instructor in ways that ultimately aligned with Hadley's goals. Unlike the other students, who described seeking out meetings with their instructor on their own, the two meetings that Megan had with Hadley were both required. Even so, as Megan described these meetings, she repeatedly positioned them as dialogic conversations that helped her to accomplish mastery goals. For instance, in her first meeting with Hadley, a required conference that took place early in students' process of developing their first drafts of their second essay, Megan explained, "I mean I knew where I started from and where I had to end up. But, just kind of getting there, he asked me questions that I would never have

thought to answer that would help me. So yeah, that helped." At the end of the semester, as Megan thought back on her second meeting with Hadley, where they discussed her plans for revising her second essay, she again emphasized the dialogic nature of talking with her instructor one-on-one. As she described this meeting, which was required of all students who chose to revise an essay, Megan recalled:

> It was more of just talking back and forth of what I was trying to get across. And, it was more of him asking questions like, 'What were you trying to say here?' And then, that kind of led me to, 'Oh, this is what I was actually trying to say.' So, it was more of him asking questions, and me trying to develop the answers through the paper. That kind of thing.

The way that Megan describes her conversation with Hadley here is not only dialogic, but also clearly supported her goal for her writing, as she recalled talking back and forth with her instructor in a way that ultimately helped her to clarify her intended meaning.

Like Patrick, Megan described her meetings with Hadley as ultimately changing the focus of her essays. However, she positioned this shift as one that emerged from her, not from her instructor, again suggesting that her conversations with Hadley supported her goals for writing. "I usually completely changed my idea," she said, "but it was good. It was good to have, like, one-on-one because I felt like it was more discussion then. And like, 'Is this idea good?' Like, 'Yes.' It was kind of like, 'Well, yes. Well, what do you think about this?' Like, 'How would you develop this?' Like, 'Are you sure you could finish this idea?' type thing." In these examples, Megan frames the questions that Hadley asked her in person as part of a discussion that ultimately supported her goals, with each question prioritizing her opinion, strategies, or judgment, not her instructor's. In contrast to Patrick, Megan did not understand her meetings with Hadley as changing her ideas, but as helping her to think more about those ideas on her own. If part of a conversation strayed too far from her focus, Megan did not feel obligated to substantially change her essay, but instead responded by disregarding that feedback. "I felt like sometimes, a discussion would go, like, completely off in one direction," she said. "And then, it would be like, 'Oh, that was a good discussion. But, I will never use it in my writing'." In this comment, Megan clearly expressed a belief that she did not have to implement Hadley's feedback if it strayed too far from her intended focus. For Megan, her understanding of the meetings she had with Hadley positioned them as dialogic spaces that supported her goal to develop "good" ideas in her writing.

The contrasting experiences of these students were also informed by additional beliefs about instructor feedback. For instance, as Megan explained, her conversations with Hadley helped her to better understand his written comments:

> I liked talking through them with him, just because I could ask questions when they came up. And, it wasn't like 'Oh, well. I don't know what this means, so it's either irrelevant, or I'm not going to really acknowledge it.' And, I felt like some of the time, when we'd, like, for the thesis example, like, we'd talk about the audience that he had commented on, but then it led us into something else that ended up being a big thing that would change my paper. So, I feel like it was kind of the conversation that got to some things that actually helped me, and these were just more of conversation starters than my sound revisions.

Once again, in this moment, Megan positioned her conversation with Hadley as dialogic, as it enabled her to ask questions in a way that Hadley's written comments did not. In spite of this limitation, however, Megan described Hadley's written comments as "conversation starters," explaining that they were not the "sound revisions" she would ultimately make, but could lead to bigger changes in her writing. In this way, although Megan described written comments as not inherently dialogic, she also positioned them as having dialogic potential.

As she explained, Hadley's written comments "sparked, kind of, both of our conversations to be able to talk in person." This was true, Megan suggested, even when she was not specifically engaging in conversation with her instructor. As she looked over Hadley's written comments on her first essay, for example, Megan said, "I think the comments, there weren't grammatical things, which I've never seen on a paper given back. It was more things to think about, or questions for me to answer. They weren't definite, 'Use a comma here. Don't use a comma there,' that kind of thing. So, it seemed more like working than a definite answer." The beliefs that Megan expressed about her instructor's written comments–that they were a tool for thinking that could spark dialogue–may have informed Megan's decision to solicit Hadley's feedback on her final essay. Of the three study participants that completed Hadley's first-year writing course, Megan was the only one to turn in a self-addressed, stamped envelope in order to get Hadley's comments on the self-reflection she completed at the end of the semester and on her final essay. She was also the only student of the three to actually engage with Hadley's feedback by completing the revision option that he offered. This suggests that in contrast to her classmates Patrick and Nathan, Megan's beliefs about instructor feedback (e.g., that Hadley's feedback

could help her think about her purposes for writing) may have ultimately led her to value that feedback in a different way.

Patrick expressed considerably different beliefs about Hadley's written comments. In his final interview, as he reflected back on the feedback he had received from his instructor over the course of the semester, Patrick explained, "It's kind of like if there were a debate where each side's only allowed to speak once. And, you're at the disadvantage of going first. So, he can pick apart the holes in your argument, and you can't really respond." From Patrick's perspective, Hadley's comments were not things to think about or questions to be answered, as Megan believed, but functioned as the final assessment of the quality of his writing. For Patrick, receiving his instructor's feedback put him at a "disadvantage," as he saw no way to respond to his instructor. Instead, he suggested, the only thing he could do was to focus on addressing the concerns that Hadley raised as he drafted his next essay, in line with the student's performance goals. "It makes you a lot more careful on your next one," he said, "to make sure there are fewer and fewer holes to be picked apart. So, that way you can—you can make sure that your initial argument is as strong as it can be, since you're not going to be able to respond to every reader who questions it."

The contrast between the experiences that Megan and Patrick had with their instructor's feedback are not surprising, given the wide variety in student response that has been documented to date, as Chapter 1 demonstrates. What this exploration reveals is that these differences correspond with the beliefs that the students expressed about feedback and the goals that they set for their writing, not with the practices that shaped their instructor's feedback.[52] As Chart 4.1 on the following page demonstrates, Hadley's written comments exerted a similar degree of control over Megan and Patrick's writing. On average, the written comments that each student received exerted very similar amounts of firm control over their writing, with 56 percent of the comments that Megan received and 55 percent of the comments that Patrick received falling into this category. Though Patrick received a higher proportion of comments that exerted firm control over his first essay (at a difference of 16 percent), the instructor's comments on the second essay

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[52] A possible exception merits consideration here: The students' prior experiences with instructor feedback likely differ from one another and could certainly inform the way they responded to Hadley's written comments. For instance, in the previous example, Megan noted that Hadley's comments did not directly tell her what to do, which differed from what she had experienced in the past. If Patrick, in contrast, was used to comments that took less control over his writing, he might experience Hadley's feedback as more controlling, at least partially explaining the responses he expressed here. Though Patrick did not suggest in any of his interviews that Hadley's written comments were more controlling than what he typically experienced, this possibility is certainly worth considering.

	Essay 1	Essay 2	Essay 3
■ Firm Control (Megan)	0.4130	0.7460	0.5068
□ Firm Control (Patrick)	0.5682	0.5357	0.5441
▦ Moderate Control (Megan)	0.2826	0.1429	0.2192
▨ Moderate Control (Patrick)	0.2273	0.2321	0.2206
▪ Mild Control (Megan)	0.3043	0.1111	0.2740
▫ Mild Control (Patrick)	0.1818	0.2321	0.2353
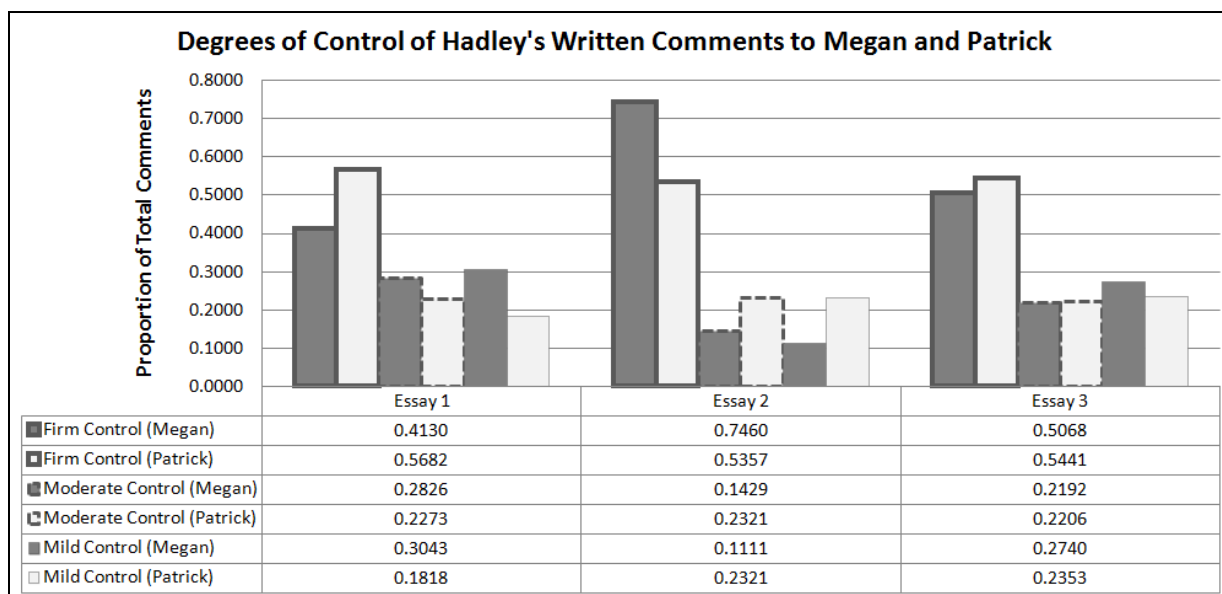
Chart 4.1: Degrees of Control of Hadley's Written Comments to Megan and Patrick reversed this pattern, with Megan receiving roughly 20 percent more comments that took firm control over her writing than Patrick did.[53] And, in the third essay–the last that Patrick received Hadley's comments on–the degrees of control are almost identical across the comments that each student received. Consequently, it seems unlikely that the differences these students expressed were directly informed by their instructor's commenting practices.

Further evidence for this conclusion comes from the fact that the comments that Megan identified as conversation starters were from her second essay, which exerted more control over her writing than any other set of comments that she or Patrick received. Moreover, although the comments that Patrick received were generally stable in the amount of control that they exerted over his writing–with a range of only 3.3 percent–his description of how he would use Hadley's written comments notably shifted at the end of the semester. In Patrick's revision plan for his third essay, for instance, he wrote, "My instructor recommended a different approach to the problem, but I feel like changing the argument as suggested would be a bit too drastic, and get away from my initial idea. This would reduce the power and relevance of some of the evidence I

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[53] This pattern holds for students in Jennifer's class as well, as the comments that she gave Ronnie and John exerted a very similar degree of control over the students' writing. However, one aspect of the comments that Patrick and John received merits additional consideration. Like Patrick, John received firmer feedback than Ronnie did on his early essays (7 percent more on his first essay and 15 percent more on his second essay), a difference which ultimately could have informed the beliefs that these students developed about their instructor's feedback. If so, their responses to the comments that they received on later essays, even when those comments exerted less control over their writing, may have been informed by these early comments. Consequently, future research might systematically explore the beliefs that students develop *from* their instructors' written comments and how those expectations inform students' subsequent responses to instructor feedback.

chose." In this moment, the student suggested that he would not directly implement Hadley's comments, as he had previously described.

Instead, Patrick explained that he would modify his instructor's feedback in order to realize goals that *he* set for his writing. In his final interview, as he looked over Hadley's written comments on his third essay, Patrick said, "It was enough to where I felt that it was too much change to be my original idea." If he revised this essay, Patrick explained, he would use his instructor's comments to think about how he could strengthen his own point. "It did show me that I didn't communicate all the specifics of my idea well enough," he said. "So, I really addressed a lot more specifics that were brought up in that idea, as just connected to my idea." According to Patrick, "When he gave that, his argument that was slightly changed, he did suggest some things. And, I did tie those back into my thing. He'd suggested some reasoning that supported his argument. And, I did end up tying those back in… But I used them to address my argument, not his." In each of these moments, Patrick described using Hadley's comments to think about his argument, indicating that he may have started to see these comments as dialogic. This shift in Patrick's engagement with Hadley's feedback is particularly important as it suggests that before he could see his *writing* from a new perspective, he may first have needed to see the *feedback* that he received on that writing in a new way. Clearly, this shift did not correspond with a shift in the instructor's commenting practice, but with a shift in the type of goals that the student set for his writing, reinforcing, once again, the notion that when students set mastery goals for their writing, they more fully engage in the writing process.

Developing Beliefs that Promote Engagement: Students' Response to Revision Plans

As this chapter demonstrates, students' goals and beliefs directly informed how they engaged with and responded to their instructor's feedback. For some students, these goals and beliefs changed over the course of their first-year writing class. Though Megan ultimately described engaging with Hadley's feedback in ways that aligned with the instructor's goals, for instance, early in the semester she expressed that it was sometimes difficult for her to see how she might use the comments she received. As Megan reflected on the written comments she received from Hadley on her first essay, she identified a central take-away from her instructor's end note:

> So, this is where he talked a lot about the audience. Like, he said how my argument would have been better… if I made it more specific. Which, kind of like, I'd say if I had to group all the comments he made, it'd be just in that thing. Like, they're all kind of focused on the same kind of main correction. And then he said, 'As you work on essay two, keep audience in mind.' Like, that's really the one thing I'd take out of it.

Among all of the feedback that Hadley gave Megan, the student suggested that her instructor essentially made one point that could be carried forward into her next essay, that she "keep audience in mind." In drafting her second essay, Megan described using this process-oriented comment both before and after she wrote her first draft:

> Writing my thesis, I thought more about the audience. And then, when I was kind of drafting the rest, like my explanation I guess, I thought less about the audience, and figured I'd kind of go back and tailor it. But, I just wanted to kind of get my ideas out there. And then, I guess, second round I'd go back and really look at the audience like he'd been talking about.

For Megan, this comment clearly transferred from her first to her second essay, informing both her first draft and the focus of her subsequent revisions.

Other comments, however, were not so easy for Megan to apply across essays. Shortly after receiving Hadley's comments on her first essay, Megan explained, "I felt like some of it was kind of paper specific. Like, it wouldn't really help me, kind of, in the long run." These "paper specific," or task-oriented comments, Megan explained, required a different kind of thinking than she had previously experienced when engaging with her instructors' feedback:

> Like, I'm not gonna be on the next paper, 'Make sure I remember the age of children,' because I'm not writing about that again. But, I guess I'd have to go– I'd have to really think about it. Maybe that's the difference. Like, I have to actually think about these comments. It's not like, take my paper. Hold it in front of me. Have my computer next to me. Change one word. Go back. Change another word. It's like, I have to really think about it, process it, and maybe read the paper over a few more times.

As she described Hadley's comments here, Megan explained that they required her to engage in a process of thinking, in contrast to a process of doing, in line with her instructor's goals. This conclusion is one she only reached after spending time reflecting on her instructor's feedback and how she might use that feedback in the future, as her past experience had never required her to think about her instructor's comments in this way. According to Megan, Hadley's feedback "wasn't just, like, quick fixes and easy to take to the next paper." Consequently, she initially struggled to see the ways she could apply Hadley's task-oriented feedback across her essays.

By the end of the semester, Megan described applying even task-specific comments to her future writing. This shift, however, did not happen without support. As part of her participation in this study, Megan completed a revision plan in response to Hadley's written comments on her first three essays. These revision plans asked her to engage with Hadley's written comments in very specific ways: first, by identifying the comments that she would actually respond to if she revised her essays; second, by prioritizing those comments from most important to least important; third, by making notes on each comment addressing any thoughts or observations she wanted to record; fourth, by writing out a plan for revising her essay in response to those comments; and fifth, by reflecting on what she would gain from implementing the changes she outlined. (For a sample revision plan, see Appendix G.) Though these plans were initially designed to provide a written record of how students responded to their instructor's comments, they ultimately contributed to the understandings that students developed of their instructor's feedback. As Berzsenyi (2001) concludes, asking students to respond to instructor feedback in writing can "invigorate in students an attitude toward writing that involves self-awareness, effective communication with others, and interest in their own writing" (p. 89).

In completing her revision plans, Megan explained, she started to see connections between the task-specific feedback she received on individual essays and her writing more generally. "In the revision plan, when I had to do, like, the comment and then my notes on it, I felt like my notes were something I could take to my next paper," she said. The time that Megan spent thinking about how Hadley's feedback could apply across essays, she reflected, occurred "only because I did the revision plans. But if I hadn't, then I kind of wouldn't after that." Consequently, the revision plans that Megan completed directly informed her goals for and beliefs about Hadley's feedback, as she began to see connections between the feedback she received on her essays and the strategies or techniques that she could use in her writing more generally. Using these plans, Megan was able to apply Hadley's feedback from one essay to the next in line with the instructor's goals, regardless of whether the comments she received were task-specific or future-oriented.

In Megan's revision plan for her first essay, for example, all ten of the comments that she included were task-oriented, marginal comments. This is particularly interesting, given that Megan initially could not see any use for these comments beyond the scope of her first essay. "Now that I'm writing my second paper, I'll probably never look at the margin comments," she

said. "But, I'll definitely keep looking at the rubric and the letter that I had."[54] The notes that she wrote on these comments in her revision plan, then, were particularly important, as they represent the only way that she reportedly engaged with this type of feedback.

In her revision plan, Megan's notes on Hadley's marginal comments generalized them beyond the scope of her first essay, as she suggested. For instance, in response to Hadley's marginal comment, "So are you suggesting the child should set goals for athletic achievement? At what age is this reasonable? Can this be expressed more clearly in thesis?," Megan noted, "Focusing thesis would've helped." In this note, Megan generalizes Hadley's specific questions about what she is arguing in her essay to conclude that she should write a more focused thesis. This point, extracted from the specifics of her first essay, is something that Megan could clearly use to think about the focus of each thesis she subsequently wrote, as she described doing in her second essay. Additionally, in contrast to her initial confusion about how she could use a comment about the age of children in an essay on a different topic, in her revision plan, Megan responded to Hadley's comment, "Good point, but the age of child seems an important aspect to specify in this argument," by noting, "Should have specified in the thesis and kept consistent throughout essay." Here again, Megan raises two points that could clearly extend to any essay: first, that she should include specific details in her thesis statements; and second, that she should be consistent in her focus throughout an essay. Clearly, Megan's beliefs about Hadley's feedback shifted as a result of these revision plans, as she was able to generalize the points that Hadley made in his comments so that they were useful across contexts.

At the end of the semester, as she reflected on what she was taking away from her first-year writing course, Megan explained that engaging with Hadley's feedback ultimately helped her to see her writing in a new way:

> I think I have learned more to kind of see the other side, kind of play devil's advocate, and think about if someone reads my paper, like, what they could say back to it, which I had never really thought about. Or, like, really kind of asking my own paper questions, seeing where there is holes, that kind of different thing. So, good stuff.

In this moment, Megan suggested that as an outcome of her first-year writing course, she was not only able to see her individual essays in a new way, but that she actually learned how to generate

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[54] In addition to the comments that Hadley wrote over the text and in the margins of students' essays, he provided them with a rubric that had general scoring criteria as well as a longer hand written end note (which Megan refers to here as a letter) that offered students global comments about the effectiveness of their essays.

this kind of feedback for herself. According to Megan, prior to the course, she had "never really thought about" approaching her writing in this way. The value that Megan placed on this outcome, in identifying her new self-assessment abilities as "good stuff," not only reinforces the notion that students are capable of developing new beliefs about their instructor's feedback and new methods for engaging with and even producing that feedback on their own, but also suggests that they themselves may understand these shifts in their goals and beliefs as particularly beneficial.

<center>* * *</center>

As this chapter demonstrates, the considerable variation that exists in the literature on students' response to instructor feedback extends, at least in part, from the beliefs that students express about writing and instructor feedback and from the goals that students set for their writing, which for some students emphasize mastery and for others performance. The results considered here indicate that even when students' actions appear to be in line with their instructor's mastery goals, students may in actuality be using the same means their instructor identified in order to accomplish a performance goal. On their own, performance goals likely decrease how much students learned from engaging with their instructor's feedback, as the students who participated in this study focused much less on understanding or developing new skills or techniques, and much more on simply implementing their instructor's comments, regardless of whether they exerted firm, moderate, or mild control over their writing. When students focused on mastery goals, they were much more likely to use their instructor's comments to engage in a process of thinking, in line with Jennifer and Hadley's goals, increasing the likelihood that they learned about writing in the process of doing so.

Students' goals and beliefs directly informed how they engaged with their instructor's feedback, even when that engagement did not align with the types of comments that they received. The two commenting practices that emerged as particularly important, however, were recurring comments and positive feedback. Each of these types of feedback focused students' attention on particular aspects of their writing, indicating that students are more likely to focus on issues that are repeatedly addressed and that positive feedback not only mitigates students' affective responses, but also helps them to recognize effective moments in their writing, to identify models for their writing, and to put critical feedback to use. Positive feedback was

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especially important for the students who participated in this study, as for some students, it was the only feedback they remembered and the only feedback they reported being able to use.

The experiences of these students suggest that much more than instructors' goals or even instructors' commenting practices, what truly shapes students' responses to instructor feedback are the goals that students bring into (and that emerge from) the writing process and their beliefs about writing and instructor feedback. As this chapter makes clear, students' beliefs and goals informed the ways that they utilized their instructor's feedback, whether that meant that they directly implemented that feedback, modified it, or rejected it altogether. These findings demonstrate that in order to develop an understanding of students' responses to instructor feedback, researchers must first develop an understanding of students' goals and beliefs as they evolve throughout the process of engaging with that feedback.

More work remains to be done along these lines, as different student populations would likely have different goals and beliefs about writing. For instance, students with strong beliefs in their capabilities as writers may be more likely to reject or modify their instructor's feedback as they compare that feedback to their own standards for their writing. Similarly, highly motivated students might be more likely to set mastery goals for their writing, focusing not just on their instructor and what he or she wants, but on particular skills or techniques they want to develop in their writing. In order to develop a richer understanding of the variation in students' responses to instructor feedback, the goals and beliefs expressed by other populations should also be explored.

In addition, students' goals and beliefs should be considered in relation to the goals and beliefs expressed by their instructors. In the next chapter, then, I return to the feedback cycle introduced in Chapter 1 in order to explore how students and instructors interacted with one another's feedback over the course of the semester in their required first-year writing class.

CHAPTER 5

Communication, Interpretation, Negotiation:
Exploring the Role of Instructors' and Students Beliefs in the Feedback Cycle
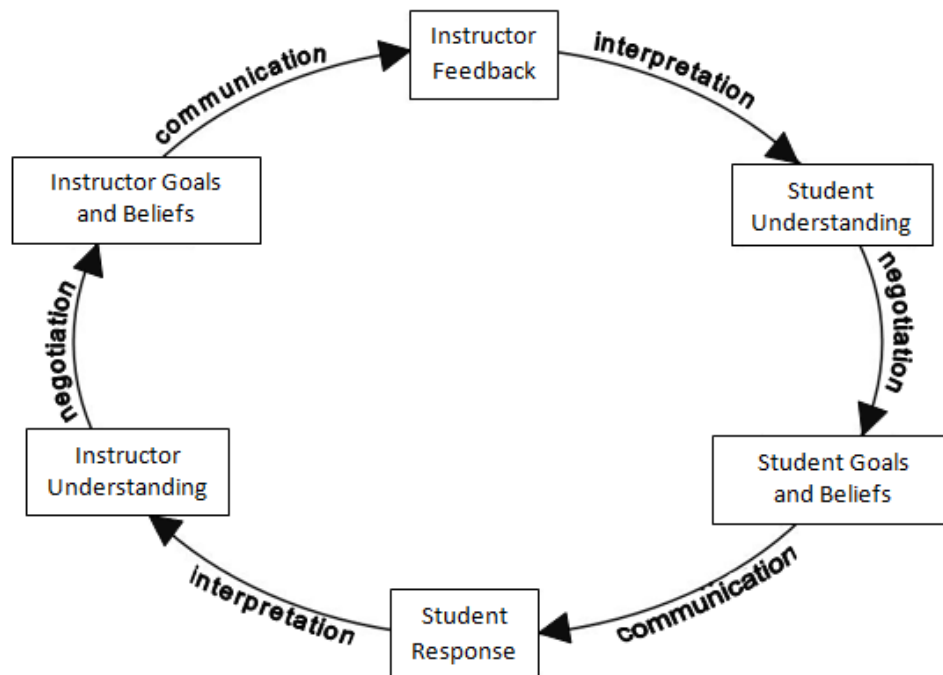
Figure 5.1. The Feedback Cycle in the First-Year Writing Classroom

This chapter brings together the two strands of findings that have shaped this dissertation–those devoted to instructors' experiences with feedback and those devoted to students' experiences with feedback. In bringing instructors' and students' experiences into conversation with one another, this chapter aims to demonstrate how complicated the interactions that take place during the feedback cycle (depicted in Figure 5.1) are, as instructors and students engage in the process of *communication*, *interpretation*, and *negotiation* introduced in Chapter 1. In Chapter 3, this process was explored in terms of how instructors aimed to communicate their goals and beliefs to students through the feedback that they offered. In Chapter 4, it was explored in terms of how students' goals and beliefs informed their responses to instructor feedback. In this chapter, instructors' and students' experiences are considered

together, first in terms of how they interpreted the feedback they offered one another, and then in terms of the full cycle of their engagement with one another's feedback.

The treatment of feedback offered in this dissertation and exemplified in this chapter notably deviates from much of the literature that has theorized feedback in educational studies and that has explored feedback in the composition classroom to date. In defining feedback as *any indicator that regards performance or informs future decisions and development*, this study foregrounds the role of interpretation, as instructors and students do not exchange *information* with one another, but must interpret the *indicators* that they receive in order for those indicators to function as feedback. This focus demonstrates that instructors and students can–and often do– develop different understandings of feedback, understandings that ultimately inform the ways that they engage with the writing process. In addition, this approach positions feedback as something that students *and* instructors both give *and* receive. In positioning student response as a form of feedback, I argue that the understandings that instructors develop of students' responses inform their future decisions when offering students feedback, as this chapter demonstrates.

In what follows, I begin by taking a close look at students' interpretations of instructor feedback with a focus on the beliefs that informed those interpretations. I then consider the instructors' interpretations of students' responses, which were equally informed by a set of beliefs that each instructor described. In this way, this chapter considers two types of beliefs expressed by students and instructors: those that they brought with them into the writing classroom, explored in Chapters 3 and 4, and those that emerged from their interactions with one another, considered here for the first time. In distinguishing between these two types of beliefs, this chapter aims to demonstrate that students' and instructors' beliefs come into play at every point of the feedback cycle, informing the moments of *communication, interpretation,* and *negotiation* through which students and instructors engage with one another's feedback, and ultimately emerging from this process.

The chapter then turns to explore the full cycle of *communication*, *interpretation*, and *negotiation* that unfolded as instructors and students engaged with one another's feedback. Because of the complex nature of the interactions that took place as instructors and students interacted in the feedback cycle, this chapter focuses on the experiences of two students, Nathan, who enrolled in Hadley's section of first-year writing, and Ronnie, who enrolled in Jennifer's

first-year writing course. Nathan and Ronnie were selected as the focus of this chapter in part because their instructors recounted memorable experiences with them that enabled me to consider both sides of the feedback cycle, and in part because each student described engaging with instructor feedback in a range of ways. In considering the intersections in the experiences described by Nathan, Ronnie, Hadley, and Jennifer, this chapter demonstrates how these students engaged with instructor feedback, and how this engagement was ultimately understood by their instructors.

Emerging Beliefs and Expectations: Interpreting Instructor Feedback

Students' beliefs about writing and instructor feedback directly informed how they engaged with the comments that they received on their writing, as Chapter 4 demonstrates. These beliefs, however, were not just brought into the writing classroom by students, but actually emerged from the process of engaging with their instructor's feedback. For Nathan and Ronnie, the patterns they noted in their instructor's written comments early on directly informed their beliefs about and interpretations of subsequent feedback. These beliefs became particularly troubling for each student when the initial patterns they identified were disrupted, leading them to draw conclusions about themselves as writers or about their instructor that ultimately made the process of engaging with their instructor's feedback and with their writing more difficult.

Shifting Patterns in Positive Comments: Nathan's Understandings of Hadley's Feedback

As Chapter 4 demonstrates, positive feedback played a powerful role in students' writing processes. This was particularly true for Nathan. When he received Hadley's feedback on his first short assignment, for instance, the student recalled, "I got a 9.5 out of 10 and I was just like, 'Yes.' Like, 'I got this.' And, like, there were positive comments everywhere, like 'good,' 'check.' I'm used to checks being good, so. And like, I don't know, I think I did a really good job on this." In this moment, Nathan focused on two aspects of the feedback that he received from his instructor–the grade and the positive comments–interpreting his grade as an indicator of his future success and Hadley's positive comments as an indicator that he had done "a really good job" on the assignment. For Nathan, Hadley's feedback directly informed the student's beliefs about his capabilities as a writer (or his self-efficacy) and about the quality of his writing, as Bandura (1997) theorizes.

For Nathan, the feedback that he received on this first short assignment not only impacted his self-efficacy beliefs, but also informed his beliefs about the feedback that he would subsequently receive from his instructor. Because of this, when Nathan received Hadley's feedback on his first major essay, he expressed confusion regarding shifts in both the grade he earned and the number of positive comments he received. "Going from this grade to getting a C+ is like, 'What?'," he said. "Like, 'Good,' 'Great detail'," he read aloud as he looked over Hadley's feedback on his short assignment. "Transitioning from that to this," he said in reference to his first major essay, "it was like, weird." It was not just the shift in grades, then, that caused Nathan confusion, but also the shift in the number of positive comments that he received. As he looked over Hadley's feedback on his essay, Nathan described ways in which his instructor's written comments did not align with the beliefs he had developed:

> This is all constructive criticism, but like, I just want, like, a positive thing somewhere. Like even, 'good transition,' on the bottom or something would be like, 'Oh, yeah. I got that down.' …Because like, we were learning about how to transition, and I was like, 'Oh, they haven't learned this before?' And then, I forget, like I learned this in high school and in college last year, so I'm like, 'Well, that's like normal that they might need to freshen up.' Yeah. And so, honestly, I was expecting like, 'Oh, good transitions,' or like, yeah, that was–like, 'You connected this very well.' To be honest, that was one of the comments I was expecting as a positive one. But I didn't get any of them, any positive comments. But, like I said, that's discouraging.

Interestingly, though Nathan cites having extensive experiences with transitions–which he learned about in high school and in the first-year writing course that he took at another university before transferring and enrolling in Hadley's course–he described looking for a comment like "good transition" as an indicator that he had mastered the skill of using transitions in his writing. In so doing, Nathan expressed a belief that his instructor's feedback was a direct indicator of the quality of his writing, implying that at least for this student, persuasion–particularly in the form of positive feedback–may have had a greater impact on self-efficacy beliefs than Bandura (1997) suggests.[55]

This possibility is reinforced by Nathan's response to the absence of positive comments on his second essay. "I think last time I said that I felt like I was a pretty decent and good writer,"

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[55] In interpreting instructor feedback as a direct indicator of his performance, Nathan indicated that this feedback did not function as a form of persuasion that he would evaluate in terms of the situational factors that informed his performance before accepting that feedback, as Bandura (1997) argues, but that it had a strong impact on the self-efficacy beliefs that the student developed.

he said. "Now I just feel like I'm a shitty writer. Like, I'm just like, 'Oh, God.' Like, I don't know. Like, going back to the positive things, there's not one positive thing written on here. So, that's like–Like, it kind of brings me down a little bit." Just as the presence of positive comments on his early short assignment led him to conclude that he had produced "good" writing, here the absence of positive feedback directly informed how Nathan felt about his writing. In contrast to the previous example, however, the conclusion that Nathan drew in this moment was not just reflective of his first essay, but of his overarching beliefs in his capabilities as a writer which were clearly contingent on the grades that he earned and the positive comments he received.

Nathan's knowledge that Hadley offered positive comments on students' writing informed his interpretation of the absence of these comments. As the student attempted to understand this shift in his instructor's commenting practice, he at times speculated that it was an indicator of the quality of his writing–once again directly linking his instructor's feedback to his performance. For instance, as he looked over the written comments that he received on a later short assignment, Nathan again noted a lack of positive feedback. "I don't even know if there is anything positive on here, to be honest," he said. "But then, I guess if it's like bad, then you can't say anything positive." For Nathan, one interpretation of an absence of positive comments was that there was an absence of positive moments in his writing.

This was not the only interpretation that Nathan offered as he attempted to understand the shift in Hadley's commenting practices. Other explanations focused more on Nathan's writing instructor than on the student's writing. When asked if positive comments would have changed the way he felt about the feedback he received on this later short assignment, Nathan explained that they would have made him feel, "Ok. Yeah. Yeah. But still like, 'Ok. He saw–Like, he's not just, like, looking for the bad." Here, Nathan's focus was squarely on his writing instructor. This focus, as Chapter 4 demonstrates, was common among students who participated in this study. The understanding that Nathan developed of Hadley's commenting practice not only reflected the student's beliefs about how Hadley approached his writing, but also extended to the student's beliefs about the instructor, suggesting that the student believed there were positive moments in his writing, but that his instructor did not recognize them because he was only focused on the "bad" moments. As Nathan attempted to explain the "weird" shift he noted in the amount of positive feedback he received from his first short assignment to his first major essay, he speculated, "I don't know. Maybe he was just really in a pissed off mood."

Nathan's focus on his instructor led him to understand an absence of positive feedback more as a personal attack than as a pedagogical strategy. This felt particularly true, Nathan explained, when a lack of positive comments was accompanied by a low grade, as it was in the feedback he received on his first major essay. "When it's like a low grade," he said, "I'm just like, 'Oh, God. He's just like, picking out all the negatives and tearing me apart.'" Though Nathan began this statement with a focus on writing (and more aptly on his instructor's approach to commenting on his writing), the student did not describe Hadley as "tearing" his *writing* "apart," but instead framed the issue much more personally, as Hadley "tearing *me* apart" (emphasis mine). The shift that Nathan made here–from his writing to himself–is one that he frequently and fluidly made over the course of his interviews. In this moment, it led Nathan to interpret his instructor's comments as an indication that Hadley was "looking for the bad" in the student himself, not just in his writing. This belief made it difficult for Nathan to engage with feedback that did not include positive comments, particularly when that feedback was accompanied by a low grade.

For Nathan, a range of beliefs emerged from his instructors' commenting practices, including beliefs about his capabilities as a writer, about the quality of his writing, and about the types of feedback that he would subsequently receive. When Nathan received a high grade and positive feedback, his beliefs were generally positive, as he expressed a high level of self-efficacy and a belief that his writing was good. When Nathan received lower grades and no positive feedback, the student expressed low levels of self-efficacy and a belief that his writing was bad. Shifts in Hadley's feedback also informed the student's beliefs about his instructor. In each of these cases, the beliefs that Nathan developed informed his engagement in the writing process, as the consideration of Hadley and Nathan's interactions through the feedback cycle, presented later in this chapter, demonstrates.

Shifting Beliefs about Instructor Comments: Ronnie's Understandings of Jennifer's Feedback

Ronnie also developed beliefs about his instructor's feedback that emerged from his initial interpretations of the written comments that Jennifer gave him on his writing. As he looked over Jennifer's comments on his first essay, for instance, Ronnie paused at the bottom of the first page where Jennifer wrote, "great list." That comment, he suggested, stood out to him from the other comments he received. "That was actually one of the more encouraging things,"

he said. "Weirdly enough, that was one of the more encouraging things." The reason that this comment was encouraging, Ronnie went on to explain, was that:

> Most people wouldn't catch on it. And, um, like, when I was making that list, I was like, 'Ok, I should start with, like, east to west coast. And I should put not all the cities I've been to, but like, the important ones. And not too long, but not too short.' And, she had actually, like, had been talking to us about lists a lot. Kind of like, sprinkling it in throughout the class. And so, when she said 'great list,' that was, like, confirmation that I understood what she meant, which was cool.

Like Nathan, in this moment Ronnie described interpreting his instructor's positive feedback as an indicator that he "understood what she meant," which he ultimately found encouraging. "I thought it was cool," he said. "Little things like that are always fun to read."

Though Ronnie did not initially expect Jennifer to comment on the list he generated in his first essay, Jennifer's comment clearly informed the student's subsequent beliefs about her feedback. By the time that Ronnie received Jennifer's feedback on his second essay, he expressed a belief that she would comment on specific moments in his writing. "There were, like, pretty funny things in here that I thought she would take notice of," he said, skimming over a paragraph toward the end of his second essay. "That was the whole point." In this moment, Ronnie indicated that he not only believed that Jennifer would "take notice of" the "funny things" in his second essay, but that he was specifically striving to bring those things to her attention. In positioning these funny moments and his instructor's attention to them as "the whole point," Ronnie demonstrated that the beliefs he developed from Jennifer's feedback–and more specifically, from the fact that she commented on an aspect of the student's writing that he put a considerable amount of thought into–directly informed the goals he set for his writing.

In this case, Ronnie's focus on his instructor's experience of reading his writing led him to set a performance goal, which centered on "obtaining recognition" from his instructor (Pintrich, 2003, p. 677). In line with this goal, Ronnie expressed a belief that Jennifer would comment on the funny things he wrote. As he explained, "She'll underline it. I mean, she's pretty explicit about what she takes notice of." For Ronnie, Jennifer's comments served as a direct indicator that his instructor noticed something in his writing. When he received Jennifer's comments on this essay, however, Ronnie expressed that he felt "confused" that his instructor had not underlined the funny things he thought she would. Just as the presence of underlining indicated that his instructor had noticed something in his writing, for this student, its absence indicated the opposite. "I wanted some underlines," he said.

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As Ronnie interpreted Jennifer's feedback, he concluded that she did not notice this paragraph, not only because of the absence of underlining, but also because of the total number of comments he received on this part of his essay. "You can kind of tell that–through the comments–that there were parts that she, like, didn't pay attention to," he said. "Like, this paragraph here, the second to last, there is like, not very many comments." Here again, Ronnie interpreted the absence of his instructor's feedback as an indicator that she did not see something in his writing. This time, however, his interpretation shifted from whether Jennifer *noticed* this paragraph to whether she *paid attention* to it. Because of his belief that his instructor would notice the choices he made in his writing and comment on what she noticed, Ronnie interpreted the comments that he received from Jennifer on this paragraph as an indicator that she must not have been paying attention to that part of his essay.

Although Ronnie explained that his interpretation of Jennifer's feedback was informed by the number of comments he received, an analysis of those comments suggests that this was not likely the case. As Table 5.1 demonstrates, there were some similarities between Ronnie's interpretation of his instructor's attention to this paragraph and the frequency of comments that Jennifer wrote. For instance, in this paragraph (Ronnie's second to last), Jennifer only underlined one segment of text. The segment of text that she underlined was among the shortest in the student's essay, with only two words being positively evaluated in this way. In addition, Jennifer did not make any marginal comments on this paragraph. Each of these commenting practices were substantially lower than the averages for the essay as a whole, as Jennifer underlined more

Essay 2.1	Student's Words Underlined	Segments of Text Underlined	Textual (T) Comments	Marginal (M) Comments	Total Comments (T & M)
Paragraph 1	21	4	5	2	7
Paragraph 2	2	1	5	1	6
Paragraph 3	30	3	5	2	7
Paragraph 4	32	5	13	2	15
Paragraph 5	14	2	4	1	5
Paragraph 6	5	1	1	3	4
Paragraph 7	20	4	8	4	12
Paragraph 8	36	3	7	0	7
Paragraph 9	2	1	7	0	7
Paragraph 10	8	1	2	0	2
AVERAGE	**17.0**	**2.5**	**5.7**	**1.5**	**7.2**

Table 5.1: Frequency of Jennifer's Textual and Marginal Comments per Paragraph, Essay 2.1

words in almost every other paragraph in Ronnie's essay and generally made at least one marginal comment per paragraph.

Even so, it is unlikely that Jennifer "didn't pay attention to" this paragraph, as the number of textual comments that the instructor made was above average, bringing the total number of comments on the paragraph to just under the average of 7.2.[56] In contrast to Ronnie's understanding, this paragraph actually received the same number of comments as (and often more than) 80 percent of the paragraphs in his essay. Although Ronnie's interpretation of Jennifer's comments on this paragraph did in some ways align with the frequency of comments that she gave the student, it is much less likely that the understandings he developed emerged from Jennifer's commenting practices, and much more likely that they emerged from the fact that she did not offer feedback that specifically aligned with the student's belief that she would notice the funny moment in his essay.

From Ronnie's perspective, however, Jennifer not only paid less attention to this paragraph in his essay, but to his second essay as a whole. "If I'd seen that she was paying a lot more attention to what I was saying," he said, "I'd have definitely tried harder. Like, I'm definitely one of those kids where if somebody's looking really intently, I'll definitely try harder. It's terrible, but it's how I've grown up." Once again, Ronnie's interpretation of where his instructor directed her attention was not supported by the frequency of comments that Jennifer gave the student. As Table 5.2 on the following page demonstrates, Ronnie actually received more comments per paragraph on his second essay. In his first essay, Jennifer underlined fewer segments of text, underlined fewer words in the essay, made fewer textual comments, and made fewer total comments per paragraph. The only commenting practice that did not increase in frequency from Ronnie's first to second essay was the number of marginal comments that Jennifer made, which decreased by less than one comment per paragraph. Clearly, it was not the frequency of Jennifer's comments that led the student to conclude that she was not paying attention to his writing.

As Ronnie described his understanding that Jennifer did not pay attention to his second essay, he indicated that the content of the comments that he received also led him to draw this

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[56] Jennifer's textual comments included edits, minimal marks, and correction symbols written directly over Ronnie's text and made up 57.3 percent of the written comments that he received on his second essay. These comments predominantly addressed surface-level features, such as grammar and mechanics, or were text-holistic, responding broadly to passages or phrases through underlining or comments like "ha!," "hee," and "hmm?"

Essay 1.1	Student's Words Underlined	Segments of Text Underlined	Textual (T) Comments	Marginal (M) Comments	Total Comments (T & M)
Paragraph 1	0	0	1	0	1
Paragraph 2	11	2	8	3	11
Paragraph 3	4	1	4	4	8
Paragraph 4	0	0	1	4	5
Paragraph 5	0	0	6	0	6
Paragraph 6	21	3	3	2	5
Paragraph 7	22	4	10	3	13
Paragraph 8	32	2	4	1	5
Paragraph 9	6	2	6	2	8
Paragraph 10	17	2	3	3	6
Paragraph 11	33	3	5	2	7
AVERAGE	**13.3**	**1.7**	**4.6**	**2.2**	**6.8**

Table 5.2: Frequency of Jennifer's Textual and Marginal Comments per Paragraph, Essay 1.1

conclusion. "The changes she makes are, like, superficial," he noted. In response to these "superficial" comments, Ronnie explained, "If this is what I have to do for this class, and it's this little, like, de-prioritize that part. Like, whatever I benefit more from, I'll pay more attention to." In this moment, Ronnie suggested that Jennifer's comments served not only as indicators of what his instructor was paying attention to, but also as indicators of where he should direct his attention as he revised his writing. "If I'd gotten profound questions like I did on the first one, in comments, I would have definitely made a lot bigger effort to make it good," he explained. "Like, that first essay, I made it a point, like, the entire week was about making that essay great. Forget about any other class. It was just that essay."[57]

For Ronnie, the questions that Jennifer asked seemed to be particularly important, though these questions did not necessarily have to be written in question form. For instance, although Ronnie received 16 questions, all of which appeared in the margins of his first essay,[58] none of

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[57] This description of Ronnie's engagement with Jennifer's feedback on his first essay directly contradicts the description the student offered during his second interview, shortly after receiving Jennifer's feedback on this essay. During this earlier interview, the student explained that he put off working on his revision until a day or two before it was due. Though I do not have additional evidence that can corroborate either point that the student made, it seems likely that Ronnie's recollection at the end of the term, which he reports here, was less accurate.

[58] The majority of the questions that Ronnie received on his first essay asked the student to engage in a process of doing, more so than a process of thinking. For instance, "transition?" appeared seven times in the student's essay, asking him to add transitions between most of his paragraphs. Other comments included "?" marked next to issues with grammar or word choice or included short phrases prompting the student to explain or clarify something, such as Jennifer's comments, "huh?," "what is this?," and "what does this mean?," each which asked the student to clarify a particular word or phrase. The few questions that held more potential to engage Ronnie in a process of thinking are not likely the questions he identified as profound, as they each addressed his parents' process of emigrating to the United States, a section of the student's essay that Jennifer ultimately asked Ronnie to cut. These

those questions was addressed in the revision plan that he wrote in response to Jennifer's feedback. Instead, in the plan that he outlined, Ronnie wrote:

> I'll need to think for a longer time and pretty deeply about what it means for my dad to come to all my soccer games, what kind of resolution he really tries to gain, and what Jennifer means in the feedback letter when she says "try and explore ideas like what it means to sacrifice, is it fair, etc."

The questions that Ronnie identified about his father here were not questions that Jennifer asked him to think about, but likely emerged from the one comment where she addressed "resolution" in the student's essay, explaining that she was having a difficult time identifying the essay's main focus. "I know we talked about resolution as your Big," she wrote, "but the essay actually feels unresolved." Similarly, the comment from Jennifer that Ronnie explicitly acknowledged was not framed as a question, but instead as a suggestion that offered specific points that he could use to focus his essay. As Jennifer wrote, "You might look at whether sacrifices are worth it, or how we decide that. You might look at what responsibility we have if someone sacrifices for us, and whether that's fair." Because Ronnie suggested that he would need to think for "a longer time and pretty deeply" about these comments, they were likely the "profound questions" that he identified in the feedback that Jennifer gave him on his first essay.

Interestingly, though Ronnie contrasted the content of Jennifer's feedback on his second essay against the feedback that prompted his thinking process in the first essay, in actuality, the instructor offered the student very similar comments on each essay. Early in her end note to Ronnie's second essay, Jennifer wrote:

> The most integral part of the satire, of course, is the main commentary. The main commentary, as we discussed in class, is what the satire criticizes. While your paper is full of details, I'm not entirely sure what the main commentary is. That we're awkward? That we go after romance instead of friends? That we can't dress? Ultimately we need that one unifying idea for the paper, and every paragraph needs to criticize that very behavior. Other topics can come up along the way (a la side commentary), but we always need to know that we're moving in the right direction.

Just as she did in her end note to Ronnie's first essay, Jennifer explained that she could not identify the main focus of the student's essay and offered steps that Ronnie could take in order to make that focus clear, describing topics that could serve as the "main commentary" for his

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comments asked Ronnie questions about how much his parents sacrificed in the move ("Actually everything? It sounds nicely romantic, but is it true?"), the price they paid ("which was?"), and his knowledge of their thought processes during this time, which was before he was born ("How do you know all of this?").

second essay. The similarity between these comments and those that Jennifer offered on Ronnie's first essay suggests that it was not likely the content of Jennifer's comments that led the student to conclude that she was not paying attention to his writing.

Consequently, the only differences that emerge in the experiences that Ronnie described as he interpreted Jennifer's feedback on his first and second essays were his beliefs about instructor feedback. On his first essay, Ronnie was surprised that Jennifer commented on his "great list," something he did not believe most instructors would notice. On his second essay, in contrast, he had come to expect that she would comment on the aspects of his writing that he aimed to bring to her attention. Because Ronnie believed that Jennifer would notice things that other teachers would not and that she would comment on the things that she noticed, he was surprised that Jennifer did not "notice" the funny moments at the end of his essay. These beliefs had a particularly negative impact for this student, as Ronnie's unfulfilled expectations led him to conclude that his instructor was generally not paying attention to his writing. This conclusion, Ronnie reported, ultimately informed his decision to invest less effort in revising his second essay, demonstrating that students' beliefs have clear consequences for their engagement in the writing process.

Certainly, just as the beliefs that students bring with them into the writing classroom inform their experiences with the writing process, as Chapter 4 demonstrates, students also develop beliefs from the written comments that they receive that shape the ways that they understand and engage with their instructor's feedback. For Nathan, these beliefs emerged from a shift in his instructor's commenting practices, as the grades and quantity of positive feedback that the student received went down after his first short assignment, leading him to draw conclusions about his capabilities as a writer, the quality of his writing, and his writing instructor. The beliefs that Ronnie developed, in contrast, did not emerge from a shift in his instructor's commenting practices, but from a shift in his expectations for those comments. Like Nathan, when Ronnie's expectations went unfulfilled, he drew conclusions about his writing instructor that ultimately made it more difficult for him to engage with her feedback. As Nathan and Ronnie's experiences demonstrate, the beliefs that students develop from their instructor's feedback not only inform their interpretations of subsequent feedback, but also their understandings of their instructors. For some students, instructor feedback is not just a

pedagogical tool, but ultimately shapes the relationship that develops between instructor and student.

Like Nathan and Ronnie, the instructors also described beliefs that emerged from the interactions that they had with students. In the next section, I turn to explore these beliefs as they were articulated by each instructor and as they informed the understandings that the instructors developed of students' responses to their feedback.

Established Beliefs about Engagement: Interpreting Student Response

Just as Nathan and Ronnie's beliefs about their instructor's feedback informed the understandings that they developed of the comments they received on their writing, the instructors also interpreted each student's response to feedback in light of beliefs that they readily described. By far, the most powerful beliefs that informed Hadley and Jennifer's understandings of their students were those that regarded students' engagement in the writing process. Both instructors described encountering distinct types of engagement in their first-year writing classes which ultimately led them to develop a set of beliefs about student engagement. These beliefs, which were relatively similar for each instructor, informed the ways that Hadley and Jennifer interpreted and understood students' responses to their feedback in their first-year writing course. In contrast to Nathan and Ronnie, the instructors' beliefs were not informed by their interactions with one student, but emerged from the accumulation of their experiences with students across years of teaching a variety of writing courses.

According to Hadley, these beliefs emerged from years of interactions that he had with students.[59] "I think the tendency is to group them together," he said. "I think the tendency is to kind of look at a student and say, 'Oh, I've seen you before,' right? 'I know the way that you operate.'" In this moment, Hadley clearly articulated that his understandings of students were informed by beliefs he had developed about students in the past, though he also described his efforts to question such categorizations. "I think you're always putting the brakes on and saying, 'Well, they have some tendencies, but maybe this isn't the student I have seen 100 times before'," he said. "I mean, you can learn sort of broad things along the way, but I think in that way each student is sort of their own challenge. Some are easier than others." For Hadley, the similar

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[59] In contrast to Hadley, who talked at length about how he developed general beliefs about students, Jennifer did not specifically pinpoint the source(s) of the beliefs that she developed. She did, however, talk about students using very similar generalizations to those made by Hadley, which is demonstrated in what follows.

"tendencies" that he observed in current and former students were not necessarily indicators that those students were entirely alike, a belief that the instructor explained led him to make a conscious effort not to categorize students.

Even so, as the instructors interacted with students through the process of *interpretation, negotiation,* and *communication,* they clearly interpreted students' responses to their feedback in ways that aligned with their general beliefs about students' engagement. These beliefs–that some students are ready to work on their writing and some students are not–directly informed the understandings that the instructors developed of students' responses to their feedback.

Beliefs about Engagement: Some Students Are Ready to Work on Their Writing

Hadley expressed a belief that some students were clearly ready to work on their writing, a belief that he developed from his years of experience teaching writing. "Some of my better students, they sort of find their way to being coachable," he said. "You get along better with certain coaches than others, certainly. So, there is always that. But, I feel like, in addition, there is also some merit to being coachable, to being sort of open to having your writing critiqued and then putting those into motion." The distinction that Hadley made here–between being open to and using feedback–indicates that in order for a student to be understood as "coachable," he or she must not only use instructor feedback, but also be "open" to the process of receiving that feedback. This combination was something that Hadley indicated students did not necessarily have when they entered his class, as the students who he categorized this way ultimately "*find their way* to being coachable" (emphasis mine).

Jennifer shared Hadley's belief that some students are ready to work on their writing, though the terms she used to describe these students, and the conditions she set for them, differed. "I feel like some students really get it," she said. "And, you know, they show up the first day of class and they are like, 'Writing is not one of my strong suits.' And in some ways, they are really easy to work with because, like, we are on the same page." In contrast to Hadley, Jennifer's focus in this moment was not on students' engagement in the writing process, but on their self-efficacy for writing. This focus is interesting, as Jennifer indicates a belief that all students are weak writers, and that those who are ready to work on their writing are those who recognize this weakness.

This contrast aside, there are several similarities in the ways that Jennifer and Hadley described the students they understood as ready to work on their writing. Like Hadley, Jennifer closely linked students' use of her feedback to her identification of whether they belonged in this category. "Some people get it right off," she explained. "When I say, like, 'You probably need a page of analysis,' they do a page of analysis. And it's, like, fine tuning from there. And so, I think people really learn with the big papers to engage with what I am saying." From this perspective, the students who "get it"–like Hadley's "coachable" students–are the students who "engage" with instructor feedback. Though Jennifer added that engaging with her feedback "doesn't mean that they have to do what I say," in this moment, she clearly expressed a belief that the students who are ready to work on their writing are those who directly follow the feedback that they receive.

Beliefs about Disengagement: Some Students Are Not Ready to Work on Their Writing

The instructors' beliefs about students who are ready to work on their writing were offset by their beliefs about students who are not. As Hadley described his interactions with students in his first-year writing course, for instance, he identified some students as "complacent." From Hadley's perspective, "complacent" students are those who do not want to change their approach to writing. As he explained:

> I mean, you take a certain kind of a writer, who's a little complacent, I guess, and they've been rewarded as they've come up for writing really good five paragraph themes, let's say. And they figured out how to work that system. If they're complacent, if they're not, you know, interested in making that jump to the college level, they can resent the fact that you're asking them to kind of change their approach. Or, you know, you've probably heard–if you haven't, you will hear this, right, 'Oh, well my high school English teacher would have given this an A.' I want to say, 'Look around you. You're not in high school anymore.' So, yeah, I think that you can meet some resistance. It has to do with motivation and attitude.

In contrast to the students who are ready to work on their writing, Hadley described the students who are not ready as those who are not "interested" in changing their approach to writing, in part because of their "motivation and attitude," and, in part, because their approaches were successful in high school. Some of these students, Hadley suggested, were not just complacent, but actually resistant, as they resented being asked to change their approach to writing.

Jennifer's description of students who are not ready to work on their writing was also in sharp contrast to her description of those who are. Immediately after describing her beliefs about the students who "get it," Jennifer explained:

> Then there are students who come in, and they are like, 'I've always breezed through. Like, you know, English is easy for me. I just, like, have to take it.' And you look at their writing, and well, 'This is satisfactory. It's not thrilling anyone.' And I think that's hard, because I never want to take a mindset of like, 'I have to break this person down.' And so, there's like, that hard balance of finding the way to do it constructively.

The contrast that Jennifer established here suggests that unlike the students who are ready to work on their writing, these students' beliefs–that "English is easy," that it is a course they only take because they "have to" (but presumably do not need), and that it can be "breezed through"– prevented them from working on their writing. As Jennifer described them, students who are not ready to work on their writing are not necessarily unmotivated, but simply do not understand the amount of effort that writing actually takes:

> I think a lot of people just like, discredit writing, and they think it's really easy and that they have it down. And, it is not until someone points out like, 'Hey, you know, if we can write on the level from, like, one to ten, like, maybe writing a four, you are doing a great job. But, did you know that there's five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten?' And so, not necessarily that people should go on to become writers, or like, go on to pursue English as a major, but that they realize that there's a different level out there, and that if they attain it, they'll have even better communication throughout their whole lives.

In this moment, Jennifer suggested that she would likely understand many or even a majority of the students in her first-year writing course as not yet ready to work on their writing. However, from Jennifer's perspective, these students are not complacent or resistant, but simply do not "realize" that there is a higher standard that they could attain. In order for them to become ready to work on their writing, then, they need to recognize that they have work left to do, something she explained that she aimed to help students realize.

Indicators of Engagement in the First-Year Writing Class

The beliefs that Hadley and Jennifer described about students who are ready and who are not ready to work on their writing were grounded in the instructors' understandings of students' beliefs about feedback and the writing process. For Hadley, students who are ready to work on their writing are open to instructor feedback, while those who are not ready are not interested or

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are resentful of that feedback. For Jennifer, students who are ready have little belief in their capabilities as writers; those who are not have confidence that is presumably not reflective of the quality of their writing. In each of these cases, because students' beliefs were not directly accessible, the instructors described indicators that they used to determine whether a student was ready to work on his or her writing, or not.

One key indicator of students' engagement was whether they sought out meetings with their instructor during office hours. As Hadley described his office hours interactions with students from Nathan's class, he mentioned that there were some "students I probably should have seen more often." However, the instructor concluded, "I just don't think they were that committed to the course or putting the time in." Students who chose not to visit office hours were likely understood as students who were not yet ready to work on their writing, as Hadley's description of their motivation aligned them with his description of "complacent" students. In response to this understanding, Hadley explained, "And those students, you know, I'm not going to sweat those students, however bad that sounds. I want them to do well. I'll teach them along with the other ones. But, if they're not putting in the effort–I'm not going to take on that responsibility if they're just not going to do the drafts." Here, Hadley indicated that he not only understood a student's decision to attend office hours as an indicator of his or her "effort," but as an indicator of whether he or she was engaging in the writing process at all. As Hadley articulated, his belief that students who do not attend office hours do not "do the drafts" informed his understanding that they were not ready to work on their writing, which ultimately left him less willing to invest effort in helping them do so.

Because Jennifer offered students multiple opportunities to revise their essays after they received her feedback, their responses to her written comments–more so than visits to office hours–became important indicators of student engagement:

> I think something like having individual written comments, I am able to point out, you know, 'Well, this paper accomplishes A, B and C,' you know? 'It doesn't do D, E, and F, which is really what we are focusing on in a college-level writing class.' And some of them, I think, really push back. And most of them don't, you know. Some of them are like, 'Oh, wow. I didn't realize.' So, for those people, those are the ones, you know, who then are on board. We still, like, have lost a month, right? So, it takes them a month to be able to get a first paper and get them feedback in my class. Nonetheless, it tends to really go from there.

Here, Jennifer clearly echoed her belief that many students do not realize there are higher levels of writing that they can attain, and described using her written comments to help students reach this realization, ultimately striving to help students transition from students who are not ready to work on their writing to students who are. Some students, however, "push back," a response that, Jennifer suggested, indicates students are still not ready to work on their writing. Students who are ready to work on their writing, in contrast, respond by getting "on board," which presumably means that they implement the instructor's feedback in their writing. This transition, Jennifer explained, took longer for some students in her first-year writing course than it did for others:

> I think the revisions, where they keep turning it back in also really helped because sometimes I am like, 'You've done A, B, and C, and you didn't do D, E, F,' and they turn their paper back in with like two things changed, and then I am like, 'Okay, well you have still done A, B, and C. You still haven't done D, E, and F. This was a C+. It is still a C+. And they are like, 'Oh. Huh. Like, I do have a lot to go.'

In this moment, Jennifer identified the quantity of revisions that students make as an indicator of whether they are ready to work on their writing, suggesting that students who do not make extensive changes to their writing in response to her feedback have not yet realized the amount of effort it takes to work on their writing. From Jennifer's perspective, these students were not understood as *resistant*, as the instructor expressed a belief that some students need multiple rounds of revision in order to be ready to work on their writing.

Interpreting the Responses of Students Who Are Ready to Work on Their Writing

Just as the beliefs that students developed about their instructor's feedback ultimately informed how they interpreted that feedback, the instructors' beliefs about students' engagement in the writing process–in terms of whether students were ready to work on their writing or not–informed their interpretations of students' responses to instructor feedback. When the instructors described a student in ways that aligned with their beliefs about students who are ready to work on their writing, they foregrounded the ways that the student utilized their feedback, generally overlooking moments that the student appeared to disregard instructor feedback.

One student who Hadley described in this way was Nathan's classmate, David. As Hadley reflected on the experience of working with David, he identified some initial concerns he had about the student. "I was a little unsure about him at first," Hadley said. "Because he had a hard time, like, raising his hand and just sort of following basic rules. He would, like, shout

things out as I was talking to students." Despite his initial uncertainty, as Hadley interacted with David one-on-one, he came to understand him as a student who was ready to work on his writing:

> We worked together in office hours. He responded to some of my comments, you know? I could tell he was thinking about these things, so that by the end of the semester, he was writing essays that still had that sort of spark and liveliness and playfulness. He was a little bit of–I don't know how to say–you could tell he was a little bit of a non-conformist, which I kind of liked. But, he was sort of reining that in, thinking about audience more, how to build an argument that could still push the boundaries, but sort of keep the audience in mind, but also keep the focus in mind so it wasn't going in five different directions. And I would feel like with him, on an individual basis, once again, I could see where some of my advice to him, he was really putting it into action. And he became a better writer as a result of it, I think. So that's the ideal case, I guess.

In this moment, Hadley interpreted the interactions that he had with David during office hours as an indicator that the student not only used his feedback, but that David was open to "thinking" about that feedback. This understanding aligns David with Hadley's description of the students who are ready to work on their writing, an understanding that informed Hadley's interpretations of his interactions with the student. For instance, in contrast to his initial understanding of David as a student who did not "follow basic rules," a statement that emphasized something the student *did not* do, Hadley's focus shifted to what the student *did do*, interpreting David's writing as an indicator that the student had "responded to" his feedback by "putting it into action." Though it is clear from Hadley's description that the student did not implement all of the instructor's feedback (as Hadley noted that David responded to "some," but not all of his comments), the instructor did not focus on the feedback that David chose not to use, but on the feedback that he did use. Consequently, Hadley's belief that David was ready to work on his writing led the instructor to interpret the student's response to instructor feedback in ways that foregrounded the students' engagement in the writing process.

Jennifer similarly described her interactions with Cali, a student in Ronnie's class, in ways that foregrounded her engagement with the instructor's feedback. According to Jennifer, Cali initially stood out as one of the more confident students in the class, an understanding which would have distinguished her from the students who are ready to work on their writing, who did not identify writing as one of their strong suits. As she recalled:

> She came to meet with me after the first day of class. We had read a single page from–it was a Baldwin essay–so, we had to show active reading and practice that.

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And between class and my office hours, she went to the [computer lab], printed out the 40 page essay, read it, took margin notes in it, and came to meet with me to talk about the essay in full. It was like, 'Oh my God.' I was overwhelmed by that. But there was something where I think she was overcompensating in the beginning. And by the end of the term, she–I think–had like, really earned the confidence that she then seemed to have.

In this moment, Jennifer interpreted Cali's actions of printing, reading, annotating, and seeking out a discussion about a non-required reading, all on "the first day of class," as an indicator that she seemed to have "confidence" at the start of the semester. However, in suggesting that Cali was "overcompensating" and that the student had earned her confidence by the end of the term, Jennifer expressed a belief that Cali did not actually have the confidence that she initially conveyed. This belief aligned Cali with Jennifer's beliefs about the students who are ready to work on their writing. As Jennifer reflected on Cali's process of drafting her first essay, she speculated:

I think writing the initial draft must have been one of the most frustrating things ever because she knew that it was–I think there was some combination of she thought she really had it down, and she knew there was something weird about it. But, I think she was just a really positive, bubbly person, so what I always got from her was enthusiastic.

Here, Jennifer described competing understandings of Cali's confidence about her essay: first, that Cali "thought she really had it down," and second, that "she knew there was something weird about" it. This second interpretation, in contrast to the first, aligns Cali with the students who are ready to work on their writing. Cali's "positive, bubbly" personality, then, became an explanation for her enthusiasm, instead of an indicator of a confidence in her writing that would have set her apart from the students who are ready to work on their writing. Just as Hadley did with David, Jennifer reinterpreted Cali's behavior to align with her beliefs about the student's engagement, suggesting that once an instructor develops an understanding of a student as ready to work on his or her writing, indicators that counter that understanding might be subject to negotiation, ultimately being modified or rejected by the instructor in order to maintain a focus on the ways the student uses instructor feedback.

As Jennifer described Cali's engagement in the writing process, she focused primarily on the ways that the student put her feedback to use:

She wrote this first paper that was like, really good effort, total mess. It was, like, all over the place. It was trying to do what would be difficult to accomplish over the course of 50 pages, let alone five. So, same thing as always, I write her my

> letter. I say, 'Come meet with me. We'll reverse outline.' And we reverse outlined together, and she had this moment where she was like, 'Ahh. I can see. It makes sense. I'm going to try it out.' So she went home. She tried it out. Her essay looked totally different. It looked amazing. And it was like, amazing-in-the-Bs, but it was amazing.

Here, Jennifer identified two moments that Cali used instructor feedback on the first essay: first, when she came into office hours as requested, and second, when she "tried it out" in her revisions of the essay. In line with these indicators, Jennifer emphasized the positive changes that resulted from the student's revisions, describing these revisions as "totally different" and "amazing." Though she qualified that "amazing" was actually "amazing-in-the-Bs," Jennifer made no mention of what prevented Cali's essay from reaching the A-level, suggesting that her understanding of Cali as a student who was ready to work on her writing, and her beliefs about this type of student, led Jennifer to look first and foremost for indicators that the student was engaging with her feedback in contrast to indicators that the student had not engaged with her feedback.

As this consideration demonstrates, when the instructors described their interactions with students who they identified as ready to work on their writing, they foregrounded the ways that those students engaged in the writing process. Though Hadley and Jennifer each acknowledged ways that David and Cali may not have engaged with their feedback or diverged from their beliefs about this type of student, the instructors overlooked these moments, instead emphasizing the specific moments that each student used their feedback. Clearly, the instructors' beliefs about students who are ready to work on their writing, and the understandings they developed of students that reflected these beliefs, directly informed the instructors' interpretations of students' responses to their feedback.

Interpreting the Responses of Students Who Are Not Ready to Work on Their Writing

In contrast to the experiences that Hadley and Jennifer described when interacting with students who they understood as ready to work on their writing, when the instructors described their interactions with students who they understood as not ready to work on their writing–including Nathan and Ronnie–they foregrounded the ways that students *did not* utilize their feedback, often overlooking the ways that those students engaged in the writing process.

Hadley, for instance, generally described Nathan as a student who was not ready to work on his writing. The instructor's interpretation of students' visits to office hours likely informed

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this conclusion. Nathan did not attend office hours at any point over the course of the semester; in fact, the only time that he met with his instructor one-on-one was during a required conference that Hadley scheduled with each student early in their process of drafting the second essay.[60] For Hadley, this indicator likely suggested that Nathan was not ready to work on his writing.

However, the student did solicit Hadley's feedback via email. Nathan described many moments where he emailed his instructor in order to get comments and suggestions on particular issues in his writing. Early in his process of drafting the first essay, for example, Nathan recalled emailing Hadley to get his instructor's feedback on the topic he was developing for the assignment:

> I remember I emailed him with a list of possible topics I was looking for, and I'm like, 'Which one of these seem like–are some of these too broad?' And he's like, 'I think this one would be too broad.' He had–each one would be like, 'I don't know how you'd talk about that one.' And blah, blah, blah. And he's like, 'This one might be an actual possibility.' So then I would go with that one. I remember he gave me, actually, an idea. I generated an idea. I took points from all of them and I was just like, 'Oh, I can do that.' And then I created: *college and money, should students work while in college?* and whatnot. And I definitely used his email. It was long, but I definitely used it to think about–that's how I created my idea.

The description that Nathan offered here shows that he engaged with Hadley's feedback, interpreting his instructor's comments to mean that most of the topics he had suggested were either "too broad" or too difficult to "talk about." Nathan's understanding of Hadley's feedback was that he should develop the topic that the instructor identified as "an actual possibility." Though Nathan suggested that he "would go with that one," he did not directly implement his instructor's comment, but instead described combining points from each of the topics he had initially suggested in order to generate a new idea. In this way, Nathan negotiated his understanding of Hadley's feedback with the value that he placed on creating his own ideas, a value that Nathan also indicated through shifting his language from "*he gave me*, actually, an idea" to "*I generated* an idea" (emphasis mine). In this way, Nathan took ownership over the process of developing his topic, even when using his instructor's feedback. Consequently, Nathan drafted his first essay using his newly generated topic, and in so doing, communicated his response to his instructor's feedback.

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[60] Although Hadley mistakenly recalled during his final interview that Nathan had attended office hours, he explained that he did not see much of the student as the semester went on and expressed a belief that Nathan may not have been motivated enough to seek out the feedback that he needed, as the following discussion illustrates.

As Figure 5.2 on the following page demonstrates, however, the response that Nathan communicated was not likely one that the instructor anticipated, as the student ultimately pursued his own goal–to create his own idea–in contrast to Hadley's suggestion that the student use the topic he identified as "an actual possibility." It was also not likely a response that the instructor desired, as Nathan's decision to combine aspects of all of the topics that Hadley had commented on did not actually narrow the student's topic in the way the instructor recommended. When he received Nathan's essay, Hadley interpreted the student's writing as an indicator of how he engaged with instructor feedback, concluding, "I felt like he wasn't entirely understanding my feedback in those emails." As he explained, "I seem to remember him struggling with the first essay, it being very broad–the argument for the first essay being very broad and sort of clumsily handled, not only on the upper level concerns, but also on the sentence levels." Like the topics that he had given Nathan comments on, Hadley determined that the topic the student chose for his first essay was "very broad," supporting his conclusion that Nathan had not understood the feedback he gave him via email. In response, Hadley described communicating to Nathan through the written comments he offered on the final draft of the student's essay, feedback which Hadley described as having "a lot to do with focus, thesis, organization, nuancing," and "complexity."

As Nathan read the written comments he received from Hadley on his first essay, he interpreted them in light of his belief that he would receive positive feedback. Nathan's beliefs about positive feedback not only informed the student's understanding of the comments he received, as previously discussed, but also informed his response to that feedback. Because the student believed that positive feedback indicated that he had done something successfully in his writing and that an absence of positive feedback indicated that he had done something unsuccessfully, Nathan interpreted the feedback he received–which did not include a single comment that he identified as positive–to mean that his instructor wanted him to change everything about his writing. As he explained, "I guess it like helps because it's all–it lets me think of like, what I need to do and work on. But then, it's also like, 'Ok. Now I'm changing everything. And it's like, not mine.' So then I feel like–then again, he's my teacher and I'm supposed to please him–but then I feel like I'm becoming him and not giving my own, like, personal spice to it."
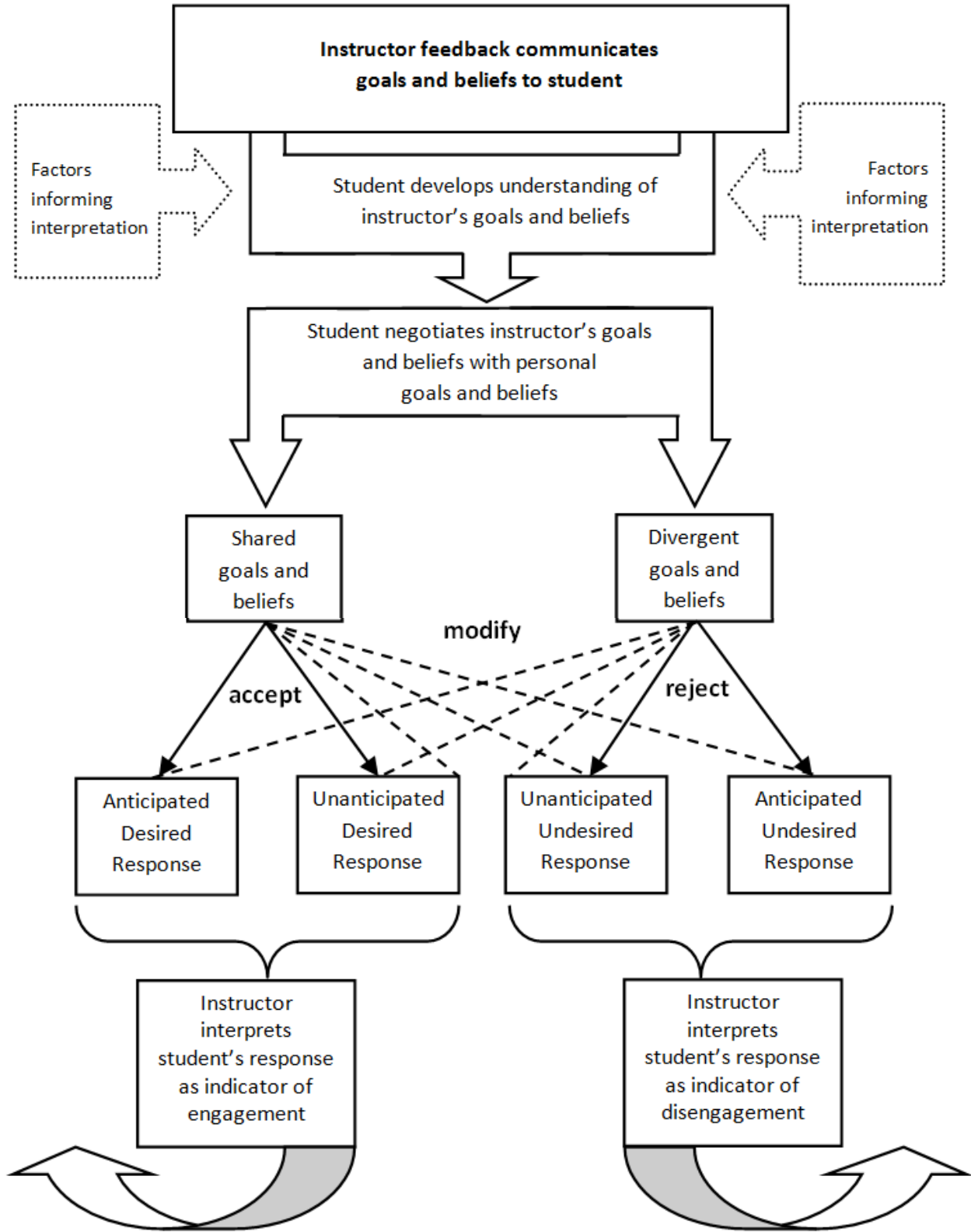
Figure 5.2: Student and Instructor Response to Feedback in the First-Year Writing Classroom

Here, Nathan suggested that "changing everything" that his instructor commented on would mean that his writing was no longer *his*. This understanding was difficult for Nathan, as it ultimately created tension between his mastery goal to add his own "personal spice" to his writing–which focused on "self-improvement using self-referenced standards" (Pintrich, 2003, p. 677)–and his belief that he was supposed to please his instructor. Nathan's personal investment in his writing extended this tension beyond his essays to his sense of self, as he equated the decision to use Hadley's feedback with his perception that doing so would also mean "becoming" his instructor, a transformation not just of his writing, but of his very identity.

Nathan negotiated this understanding of Hadley's feedback with his own goals for his writing. "I definitely want to like, please him," Nathan explained. "I want to find out, obviously, like what he's looking for. But, I just want to do it in my own way." As a result, the student described making a conscious decision to reject some of his instructor's comments on his first essay in order to maintain his individuality. "I think I understood what he meant by most of them," he said. "But then, like, some of them I probably wouldn't change because I would change my whole style of writing." According to Nathan, the decision to reject his instructor's feedback was not connected to whether he understood a particular comment (as Hadley had concluded), but instead resulted from the student's efforts to maintain his "style of writing" and consequently, his sense of self. As he explained, "I don't want like, to completely, like, change myself or, like, my writing."

However, a consideration of the revision plan that Nathan developed in response to Hadley's comments on his first essay indicates that the student may not have always understood his instructor's comments as well as he reported. Of the comments that Hadley made on the first essay, the student selected six marginal comments for inclusion in his revision plan. Interestingly, Nathan did not include any of the comments that Hadley wrote in his end note to the student, but did include almost all of the marginal comments that the instructor offered.[61] The notes that Nathan made in response to each of these comments are included in Table 5.3. In several cases, Nathan's notes repeat Hadley's comments verbatim, suggesting that the student may have been unsure what Hadley's comment really meant or how he might implement that comment in his writing. For instance, in response to Hadley's comment, "Claim needs to be clearer–State your

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[61] The only marginal comments that Nathan did not include in his plan were Hadley's comments, "If the purpose of this paragraph is to present and refute counter-arguments how might you wrap up this paragraph?," "What are you trying to say here, exactly?," and "Be specific."

Priority	Selected Comment	Nathan's Notes
1	Thesis – Claim needs to be clearer – State your position in definite terms	Have a more specific audience while also stating position in definite terms so it is clearly stated.
2	Evidence needs to be more specific and original so as to better appeal to audience	State evidence in a more direct way. Choose evidence that is not so obvious.
3	Language is often too abstract & vague, weakening evidence	Be more specific in word choice; delete wordiness
4	What was your job?	Name what job was – waiter
5	Abstract- What do you mean to say? That jobs help students prioritize their time? How so? Illustrate with specific examples, perhaps based on your personal experiences	Use personal experiences so audience can envision an example of a real world situation and not be bored by obvious facts.
6	Perhaps work in flexible hours to topic sentence and develop from there for better paragraph org.	For paragraph 4, the topic sentence should probably mention flexible job hours.

Table 5.3: Nathan's Revision Plan in Response to Hadley's Written Comments on Essay 1

position in definite terms," which Nathan identified as the most important comment that he received, the student noted that he would respond by "stating position in definite terms so it is clearly stated." Though this repetition does not definitively indicate that Nathan did not understand Hadley's comment, it suggests that a misunderstanding was certainly possible, and perhaps likely. In response to this comment, Nathan also noted that his revision would "have a more specific audience," potentially indicating that the student did not understand what Hadley was specifically asking him to accomplish in his thesis, or alternatively, reflecting the student's efforts to add "spice" to his writing as he made changes beyond those recommended in the feedback that he received.[62] Other notes that Nathan made on his revision plan more directly indicate that the student misunderstood his instructor's comments. For instance, in response to

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[62] Nathan's focus on identifying a more specific audience for his essay is not reflected in the feedback that he received from Hadley. Though the instructor repeatedly referenced the audience for the essay, none of his comments suggested that the student should select a different audience, but instead, that Nathan should more carefully consider the needs of the readers that his essay addressed. For instance, in his end note, Hadley wrote: "Chances are, *your audience has heard these before*… Dispatching of the most obvious points would have pushed you to <u>develop</u> & <u>consider</u> more original, effective points *to persuade the audience*… This essay is rife with filler–bloated, abstract language that really offers little in terms of evidence & *does a poor job of connecting to the audience*… Along with paying attention to how you develop evidence effectively *for your audience*, in Essay #2, keep working on *using their values & potential point of view* to organize & develop your argument" (italics mine).

Hadley's comment that the essay's "evidence needs to be more specific and original," Nathan did not describe a need to narrow the focus of his evidence, but to present his evidence in "a more direct way." Nathan did, however, note that he would "choose evidence that is not so obvious," in line with the instructor's recommendation that he use more "original" evidence. In some cases, Nathan's revision plan clearly demonstrated his understanding of Hadley's comments. In others, it suggested that the student may not have fully understood what Hadley communicated in his comments, even in those the student identified as the most important. Though Nathan reported that his decision to modify or reject Hadley's comments resulted from his belief that following his instructor's feedback too closely could change his style or even his sense of identity, in some cases, the modifications that the student made could have also resulted from his misunderstandings of Hadley's feedback, in contrast to the student's beliefs.

Though Nathan may not have always understood the feedback that he received from Hadley, he emphasized that he not only valued those comments, but also strove to communicate that value to his instructor. "Even in my emails I send," he noted, "I really want to do well. Not to the point where I'm badgering him, 'You need to give me a good grade.' It's been like, 'Your feedback's been really important to me, because I really want to do well.'" Here, Nathan expressed a belief that Hadley's feedback could help him to "do well" in his first-year writing course. In distinguishing his desire to "do well" from getting "a good grade," Nathan suggested that he aimed to communicate his investment in his writing, not in his grades, to Hadley as he sought out his instructor's feedback.

Hadley, however, did not develop an understanding that Nathan was a student who was invested in his writing. Just as Nathan's beliefs about his instructor's feedback (e.g., that Hadley gave students positive feedback) informed the student's understanding of the comments he received on his first essay, Hadley's belief that Nathan was not ready to work on his writing informed the instructor's interpretation of the student's response to his feedback. As Hadley recalled, "I do remember us having some office hours in which he seemed eager, but I don't–I just had the feeling that his–he wasn't entirely receptive in some ways, or didn't quite know what to do with some of the advice that I was giving to him."[63] Though the student "seemed eager,"

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[63] In this moment, Hadley misremembers Nathan's office hour visits, suggesting that the student came to his office more than once. There are many possible explanations for this discrepancy, such as difficulty that Hadley had recalling his interactions with the student after the term had ended. It seems equally possible that Hadley confused the frequent emails that he received from Nathan, which solicited the instructor's feedback, with visits to his office.

then, Hadley's understanding of Nathan contrasted him against the students who are ready to work on their writing.

Hadley's belief that Nathan was not ready to work on his writing led him to focus primarily on the ways that the student *did not* use his feedback. As Hadley described his interpretation of Nathan's response to the feedback he gave him during their required conference on the second essay, he recalled:

> I remember us having a conversation in which I felt like I was putting some stuff out there, he was kind of understanding it–maybe this is the way all office hours go–but then when the paper comes in, it just wasn't there, right? So I probably gave him a version of that, right? You know, 'I was expecting this,' or, 'Based on our conversation, I thought that we had talked about, you know, a complex claim and these certain criteria, but the paper doesn't quite do that.'

In this moment, Hadley described interpreting his interactions with Nathan in their one-on-one conference as an indicator that the student "was kind of understanding" the feedback that he gave him. This understanding, he explained, led him to believe that Nathan would implement the feedback they discussed. When Nathan turned in his final draft, however, Hadley interpreted the student's writing–which he deemed as lacking "a complex claim" among other criteria–as an indicator that the student had not used the feedback he received. In response to this understanding, Hadley explained that he used his written comments to communicate his initial expectations, and the ways he felt that Nathan had not met those expectations, to the student. This moment was particularly significant for Hadley. As he recalled:

> I kind of felt like that was the tipping point. Like, here he had gotten two sets of comments that were basically telling him more or less the same thing… and I kind of felt like it was up to him at that point… to kind of take that and then maybe come and see me in office hours, or go to [the writing center] or do something with that. But, I kind of feel that he either didn't know what to do with it, or just didn't feel up to it, or whatever it was–felt uncomfortable coming and talking to me.

In identifying this moment as a "tipping point," Hadley inidcated that the comments he wrote to Nathan on his second essay marked a decisive moment, after which it became the student's responsibility to seek out further help on his writing. Hadley offered several understandings of Nathan's response to his feedback here–that the student "didn't know what to do," or "didn't feel up to it," or "felt uncomfortable"–suggesting that he interpreted the student's response to his feedback as an indicator that Nathan ultimately was not ready to work on his writing. "I

communicated to him. I'd emphasized it. The ball was sort of in his court, and he decided not to seek me out," Hadley said.

This interpretation led the instructor to conclude that Nathan was not invested in the writing process. "I don't think he maybe was interested or assertive enough in seeking out advice," he explained, "beyond sending some emails, or capable of, you know, formulating and putting together some of the advice, capable or willing to put in the effort to do that." Each of the understandings of Nathan that Hadley presented here foregrounds the ways that Nathan *did not* engage with the instructor's feedback, suggesting that the student was not "interested," not "assertive," not "capable," or not "willing" to do so. In positioning Nathan in this way, Hadley aligned him with the students he identified as "not putting in the effort," or those who were not ready to work on their writing. And just as he described his response to those students, the understanding that Hadley developed of Nathan in this moment likely informed his decision to not "take on that responsibility" for Nathan either.

In contrast to Hadley's understanding of Nathan's choice to seek out the instructor's feedback via email and not in person, as Nathan talked about this response, he often foregrounded the ways that Hadley's emails helped him to engage in the writing process more than an in-person meeting could. "I'm more of a visual learner," he said. "I would always refer back to his emails and be like, 'Okay. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Oh, that's what he meant.'" In this way, Nathan expressed a belief that the written feedback that he solicited via email supported his engagement with the writing process, allowing him to refer back to Hadley's comments multiple times as he worked to interpret what his instructor "meant."

For Nathan, the ability to return to Hadley's emails was a key aspect that distinguished this form of feedback from the feedback he could get in one-on-one meetings. As he explained, "Like, sometimes I have to go back and read the paragraph again, and it's not like I could be like, 'Oh could you repeat those four sentences you said at the beginning of this so I can look at them?'" For Nathan, the decision to solicit feedback via email as opposed to in person was not because he was not invested in his writing, but instead resulted from a desire to continuously revisit the feedback that Hadley gave him on his writing. As Nathan explained, "Even though he can't be here, I can't call him up and say, 'Hey, Mr. Corgin, can you repeat that?' But email, in a way, I can go back and look at it."

Though he described his motivation for emailing his instructor in terms of his engagement in the writing process, Nathan also expressed apprehension about meeting with Hadley one-on-one, so much so that he decided not to seek out Hadley's feedback during office hours. In part, this apprehension stemmed from Nathan's beliefs about his instructor, who he described as "very intimidating." And, in part, it stemmed from the student's belief that he would not be able to process Hadley's feedback in the moment. Before he conferenced with Hadley, Nathan expressed uncertainty about what a one-on-one meeting with his instructor might be like:

> I'm afraid to go in there and be like, 'Well, I'm not sure how my thesis is working.' And he just like starts talking, and talking, and talking, and I don't know what the heck he is talking about. Like in his email, so like pages long. So I'm like, 'Well, I can't even imagine what in person would be like.'

Here, Nathan's understandings of Hadley's written feedback–and particularly the length of that feedback–inform his beliefs about what his instructor's spoken feedback might be like. The possibility that Hadley might just start "talking, and talking," then, contributed to Nathan's decision not to attend Hadley's office hours.

When Nathan attended his required conference with Hadley, however, his apprehension was temporarily assuaged. "We all had to do it," he explained. "It was required for 15 minutes, and we just had to talk about how we were going to go about writing essay number two." Although this conference was required, Nathan emphasized that it was a positive and helpful experience. As he recalled, "We talked about *The Great Gatsby*; that was what I wrote about for essay two. And that actually really helped. I took notes while he was talking. He was kind of like teaching, but personally teaching. That helped." Instead of Hadley "talking, and talking, and talking," after experiencing a one-on-one meeting with his instructor, Nathan repeatedly described the meeting as helpful, suggesting that he engaged with the feedback that his instructor gave him. Nathan also left this meeting with a new belief about his instructor. "That conference," he explained, "it kind of, like, eased me a little bit because he doesn't seem, like, as intimidating as I thought he was." As a result, Nathan recalled, "I was like, 'Oh, I'm going to go to office hours, or try to at least once every two weeks, or something like that.'"

Though he left his first one-on-one meeting with Hadley with a plan to regularly attend office hours, that plan changed shortly after Nathan received Hadley's written comments, and a C, on his second assignment. Nathan described having a difficult time processing this set of feedback, in large part because of the low grade that he earned. "I'm very sensitive about my

grades," he explained, "because, like I just said, um, yeah, I've done bad on essays before, but, like, I feel like I have to be perfect all the time." Here, again, Nathan equated his writing with himself, this time expressing a belief that the grade he earned on his writing served as an indicator of his own perfection, or lack thereof. His sense of perfectionism made it difficult for him to process the feedback he received on this essay:

> This one, I was really upset for. I remember I called my mom. I'm not going to lie, I was almost in tears. I was just like, 'Why am I doing so bad?' And she's just like, 'I don't know.' And she's like, 'You want to send it to me, and I can look over it?' And I was just like, 'Well, I can, but I already got a C on the paper.' And some of my friends were like, 'You should go talk to him in office hours.' And I feel like that would have been like–I don't know if I could have done that… Because I feel–Sometimes, I feel like when teachers give me feedback on anything, it's almost in a way like they're yelling at me. I hate when teachers yell at me, because I am a teacher's pet. I have to be their favorite all the time.

In this moment, Nathan described interpreting the written feedback that he received from his instructor as an indicator that he was "doing so bad" on the essays he wrote in his first-year writing class and as an indicator that his instructor was "yelling" at him. These beliefs, Nathan suggested, ultimately informed his decision not to seek out additional one-on-one meetings with Hadley, in spite of (or perhaps because of) his desire to be his teacher's "favorite." In contrast to Nathan's goal, however, Hadley interpreted the student's decision not to attend office hours as an indicator that Nathan was not invested in his writing, a belief that the instructor suggested directly informed his future interactions with the student.

In this example, Nathan and Hadley's beliefs each had a powerful impact on the ways that they engaged with one another's feedback. For Nathan, the beliefs that informed and emerged from his interactions with his instructor's feedback were particularly complex, as the student expressed varying beliefs about feedback that were at times positive–such as his belief that Hadley's feedback could help him improve his writing–and at times much more negative, as the student also expressed beliefs that feedback was an indicator of his perfection (or lack thereof) and that receiving feedback was like being yelled at by his instructor. Nathan's beliefs about his writing, about his instructor, and about himself were equally influential (e.g., the student's beliefs that changing his writing would change his identity, that his instructor wanted him to change everything in his writing, and that he had to be perfect all the time) as the student negotiated each of these beliefs with the feedback that he received, leading Nathan to use some

of his instructor's feedback, but not all, and informing his decision to seek out Hadley's feedback in forms that the student identified as less threatening than face-to-face meetings.

Nathan's responses to Hadley's feedback, however, led the instructor to develop beliefs about the student that aligned him with students who are not ready to work on their writing. In line with his beliefs about these students, Hadley focused primarily on the ways that Nathan *did not* engage with instructor feedback, repeatedly emphasizing a belief that the student was either resistant or did not understand how to engage with instructor feedback. What is most striking about this example, however, is how it counters Hadley's descriptions of David's engagement in the writing process. David, like Nathan, negotiated the feedback that he received from Hadley, opting to use some of the instructor's comments, but not all. Because Hadley believed that David was ready to work on his writing, however, the instructor focused on the feedback that David *did* use and foregrounded the ways that the student engaged in the writing process.

This finding demonstrates that the beliefs that Hadley developed about each student directly informed the ways he interpreted their responses to his feedback. Because the instructor understood Nathan as a student who was not ready to work on his writing, Hadley did not acknowledge the ways that the student engaged in the writing process. At times, it was not possible for Hadley to see the ways that Nathan was engaging in the writing process, as Nathan modified his instructor's feedback beyond recognition. However, at other times, Hadley observed Nathan's response to his feedback, but did not interpret that response as an indicator that the student was engaged in the writing process. This was true even when Nathan made explicit efforts to communicate his engagement to his instructor.

In the same way, as Jennifer described her interactions with Ronnie, she expressed beliefs about the student that aligned him with the students who are not ready to work on their writing. According to Jennifer, Ronnie, "was the one who came into class and was kind of like–he was the one I said he's like, cocky, but not in a bad way. He just like, strutted his stuff." This confidence, Jennifer emphasized, did not match "how he was doing in writing," indicating that she likely understood the student as not ready to work on his writing. This understanding ultimately informed the interactions that took place between the instructor and student as they engaged in the process of *interpretation, negotiation,* and *communication* depicted in the feedback cycle at the start of this chapter.

As Jennifer described her goals for commenting on Ronnie's writing, for instance, she echoed the goals she set for the students who were not ready to work on their writing:

> Ronnie, I would say it's probably–in addition to the obvious, like, I want him to learn how to write–like, perspective. And, to learn, partially, that there is so much he doesn't yet see. And, he needs to see that. And that's like, reader awareness. And then, also that he's immensely capable of doing it. And so, some combination of, 'You actually have more to go than you think you do, but you can do it.' So, I think that was sort of, like, my mindset when writing to him, which maybe somehow gets conveyed in the tone or what details I choose to give.

Like the goals she set for the students who were not ready to work on their writing, Jennifer described her efforts to help Ronnie understand what level he had reached in his writing and what levels remained to be reached. She also expressed a belief that Ronnie was capable of improving his writing, a belief that she described working to communicate to the student through her written comments. In this way, Jennifer suggested that her understanding of Ronnie directly shaped her communication to the student through the written comments she gave him on his writing.

As Ronnie interpreted the feedback that Jennifer gave him on his first draft of his first essay, he developed a belief that he had a lot of work to do, in line with the message that Jennifer aimed to communicate to him. This belief, however, did not come from his interpretation of the written comments that the instructor gave him, but from his interpretation of the C+ that he earned on the assignment. As Ronnie explained, the grade was the first thing he looked for when he received Jennifer's comments on this essay. "As soon as I got the essay," he recalled, "I just, like, flipped through, and I was like, 'Oh.'" As he explained, "I mean, I was upset–I'm not gonna say I wasn't–um, at that. And, especially because there are so few essays in class, that every essay is really important. It's like 15 percent of the grade, so I knew that not only did I have to put a lot of work in there, it had to actually be good." In this moment, Ronnie interpreted the grade that he earned–and the weight it carried for his course grade–as he developed beliefs regarding the quantity and the quality of effort that he would need to invest in the writing process, suggesting that at least for this student, his effort was directly tied to his performance goal of earning a particular grade in his first-year writing course.

As Jennifer had aimed to communicate through her feedback, Ronnie developed a belief that he had a considerable amount of work to do. Instead of motivating Ronnie to work on his writing, however, this belief actually led him to put off working on his revisions until "like a day

or two before I was supposed to turn them in," he said. Ronnie noted that it was "not normal" for him to put off working on an assignment, but that "the C+ really pissed me off." As a result of his grade, Ronnie decided to delay working on his revisions. "I put it away," he said. "I just took my mind off it." According to Ronnie, "It was a combination of I had a mountain of work to do, and this was like, probably the hardest work that I had to do. So, I kind of put it off to the end, because, like, it was really hard." Consequently, though Ronnie interpreted the message that Jennifer aimed to communicate, the beliefs that he developed ultimately made it more difficult for him to engage in the writing process, as he was not particularly motivated to invest the amount of effort in his writing that his grade indicated it would require.

Ronnie's struggles, however, were not solely because of the grade that he earned. In addition, Ronnie described having a difficult time engaging with comments that he had not anticipated. Ronnie expressed that he valued his ability to assess the quality of his writing, particularly when that assessment matched his instructor's. "I'll turn in a piece," Ronnie said, "and I'll already have ideas about where there possibly could've been, like, faults. And when I see feedback from the teacher, like, identifying those very faults that I had thought about in the back of my head, then that makes me more confident writing with that teacher." Interestingly, Ronnie positioned his confidence not in terms of his writing, but in terms of his "writing with that teacher," suggesting that each new writing situation he encountered would likely cause him to reevaluate his writing and his self-efficacy for writing. In part, Ronnie explained that his increased confidence came from finding what he referred to as "confirmation" in his instructor's comments. And, in part, it came from the sense of self-reliance that this confirmation provided. "If you don't see what it is, exactly, like, what the problem is, then like, you don't feel as self-sufficient," he said. Consequently, in contrast to his focus on performance, Ronnie also expressed a focus on mastery, as he valued his ability to set "self-referenced standards" (Pintrich, 2003, p. 677), in contrast to relying solely on his instructor's feedback. At times, this focus, which directly opposed Jennifer's goal to communicate to Ronnie that "there is so much he doesn't yet see," made it difficult for Ronnie to engage with his instructor's feedback.

This was certainly the case for some, but not all, of the written comments that Ronnie received from Jennifer on his first essay. In general, Ronnie suggested that the comments he received from Jennifer aligned with his beliefs about what was working and not working well in his writing, noting that he "anticipated a lot of them." He also suggested that he was able to

productively engage with Jennifer's comments when he finally began working on his second draft of the essay. "The comments were definitely helpful," he said. As he read back over the letter that Jennifer wrote to him at the end of that essay, Ronnie recalled:

> I went through like, sentence by sentence. Um, obviously the good parts were easier to read. But when it came down to, like, uh, so like, right about here, 'But I'm having a hard time picking out the Big. I know we talked about resolution as your Big, but the essay actually feels unresolved.' And like, yeah. Yeah, I understood this part. Like, she wrote about it in here. 'There's no real analysis in here, and no eventual conclusion that leaves us feeling solid.' So like, ok. That's, that's fine. But then, she actually, she gets down, she gets pretty specific, um, about cutting down the summary of emigration. I understood that, cutting that down to two or three lines. I eventually got it to like, six lines, but I'm not gonna cut it any shorter.

In reading through Jennifer's comments, Ronnie suggested that he had an easier time engaging with his instructor's positive comments than with her critical comments. Even so, he identified three critical comments that he did not have difficulty processing, explaining that he "understood" or that he was "fine" with Jennifer's comments that his essay "feels unresolved," that there is "no real analysis," and that the "conclusion" does not feel "solid." When he got to the fourth comment, however, Ronnie contrasted it against the first three, indicating that this comment may not have been as easy for him to process. Like Jennifer's other comments, Ronnie explained that he "understood" this comment; however, he also articulated his decision to only partially implement the instructor's recommendation that he cut down the summary "to two or three lines." In identifying this recommendation as "pretty specific," Ronnie suggests that he likely found it to be more specific than the other comments that Jennifer made, a difference that could have informed his decision not to follow the exact specifications she offered.

What seems to have been even more influential, however, was the fact that Ronnie had not anticipated this comment, which, as he described, made it more difficult for him to process. "She said to really cut down the summary of my parents' immigrating. That surprised me," he recalled, adding that he felt "a little hurt" when he first saw the comment. "I guess initially, I didn't completely agree with it," Ronnie explained. "But, eventually it made sense to me." As he interpreted this comment, Ronnie had to work through an affective response–his feelings of "surprise" and "hurt"–before he could develop an understanding of the meaning of Jennifer's comment. He also explained that he had to work to understand why he had not anticipated his instructor's comment. "I think I was more upset at myself than the comment," he said. "Yeah,

because reading back over, I understood, um, that it was too long. I just didn't see it coming. So like, when it came, I was like, 'Wow, I didn't expect this.'" For Ronnie, this comment was not difficult to process because he disagreed with his instructor or because he could not understand her point, but because she had pointed out something that he initially believed was effective. Because Jennifer's feedback conflicted with his beliefs about his writing, the student found it more difficult to process. Consequently, this comment took on another meaning for Ronnie, as he interpreted it as an indicator that his writing "wasn't quality. It wasn't up to my quality," he said. This belief, Ronnie explained, made it more difficult for him to engage in the writing process. "It's definitely harder for me to work with a piece that wasn't up to my normal standards," he said. "Definitely."

Although he found it difficult to work on his second draft of this essay, Ronnie reported making extensive changes as he revised his writing. "Like, probably I ended up changing 60 percent of the essay," he said. "Maybe like 40 percent, but. And, I wasn't, like, in the mood to do that." Many of these changes, he explained, were in direct response to Jennifer's comments. For instance, Ronnie identified one of Jennifer's comments as particularly important: "Delve into some new analysis. You might look at whether sacrifices are worth it, or how we decide that. You might look at what responsibility we have if someone sacrifices for us, and whether that's fair. Etc." As he recalled, "I read this over, like, I don't know, probably ten times." According to Ronnie, this comment became "the most important thing for me" because, "I was, like, lacking in that area. And so, I was looking for some kind of like, insight into how I could fix it." In this moment, Ronnie expressed a belief that Jennifer's comments were an important resource that he could use to "fix" issues in his writing. However, as he explained the specific ways he had responded to his instructor's comments, he did not describe following them exactly (as Jennifer suggested the students who are ready to work on their writing did) but instead modified them to suit his interests. "She gives specific examples," he said. "But, it wasn't, like, so pervasive. It was kind of, just like, general points that I did with them, I did with those points whatever I wished." Consequently, as Ronnie described his beliefs about Jennifer's feedback here, he indicated that he would likely engage with that feedback in ways that his instructor ultimately might not recognize.[64]

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[64] In this moment, Ronnie's suggestion that Jennifer made "general points" does not seem intended to suggest that her comments were not "specific," as he clearly described the examples that she offered in this way. When he

Ronnie also described making very intentional decisions to not follow Jennifer's recommendations. These decisions, however, did not mean that he was not engaging with his instructor's feedback. As he explained:

> She said, 'You need to redo the ending, um, because, like, ironically, it doesn't feel very resolved when your whole piece is about resolution.' And, I didn't actually agree with that. I wasn't gonna redo the ending, and I never did. I hope she doesn't hate me for that. But, I thought it didn't feel very resolved because I didn't approach the analysis as clearly as I needed to. And so, I thought, 'Ok. If I get this done, then my ending will actually come out as being nicely written.' And so, I think that's what happened in that copy.

In line with the flow chart presented in Figure 5.2, as Ronnie interpreted this feedback from his instructor, he developed an understanding that Jennifer wanted him to change his conclusion in order to make the essay feel more "resolved." Though Ronnie shared Jennifer's goal of making the essay more resolved, he negotiated his understanding of her feedback with his additional goal to keep his conclusion intact. As Ronnie explained, "I think the ending is one of the more authentic pieces, and it can work. So, I tried to keep those there." Because Ronnie's beliefs about and goals for his conclusion diverged from Jennifer's recommendation that he "redo" the ending of his essay, Ronnie could not directly implement his instructor's feedback. As the figure demonstrates, Ronnie's options were to either reject or modify his instructor's comment, or to reject or modify his goal. In this case, Ronnie described striving to achieve the goal that he shared with his instructor and to maintain his goal of keeping his conclusion by modifying Jennifer's feedback, resulting in a response that was likely unanticipated by his instructor. Instead of making the revision that Jennifer recommended, Ronnie identified a possible explanation for the lack of resolution–that it could have been caused by an unclear analysis–and consequently focused his revision on improving his analysis in order to demonstrate that the conclusion was actually "nicely written." In this way, Ronnie demonstrated a clear engagement with his writing and with his instructor's feedback, an engagement that led him to make changes to his writing that he believed were important, regardless of whether they directly followed, modified, or rejected his instructor's comments.

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suggested that her points were not "so pervasive," then, the student might have been referring to the directive nature of the examples that Jennifer provided. If so, then calling them "general points" could mean that the examples she offered were possibilities that he could consider, but that he ultimately did not feel obligated to directly implement them in his writing. In any case, Ronnie's point that he felt free to use Jennifer's comments for "whatever" he "wished" suggests that he clearly understood her comments as open to modification.

It seems likely that Jennifer's interpretation of the revisions that Ronnie made to his writing was informed by her belief that the student was not ready to work on his writing. In contrast to Ronnie's belief that he had revised 40 to 60 percent of his essay, when Jennifer received his second draft of the first essay, she described interpreting his writing as an indicator that he had not engaged in the writing process. "Yeah, so the first essay, I'm pretty sure he got a C on it," she recalled. "And he was one of the students who handed in revisions like, 'I revised it.' And like, 'No, I'm not giving you a C if one sentence needs to be changed.' Like, I wouldn't do that. And so, he went multiple times there." In this moment, Jennifer once again aligned her beliefs about Ronnie with her beliefs about the students who were not ready to work on their writing, suggesting that he had not yet realized how much effort he needed to invest, and so would need to continue submitting his writing "multiple times."[65]

A comparison of Ronnie's first and second drafts of his first essay, however, demonstrates that Jennifer did not develop her belief that Ronnie was not ready to work on his writing from the changes the student made to this essay, but instead, that these beliefs actually informed her interpretation of the changes he made to his writing. As Table 5.4 demonstrates, from his first draft to his second draft, Ronnie did not change one sentence, as Jennifer believed, but, in fact, cut 992 words and added 923 words. Consequently, only 521 words that appeared in his first draft also appeared in his second draft, meaning that Ronnie revised more than even he believed, with 63.9 percent of his second draft being newly generated material and 36.1 percent of the draft being material that also appeared in his first draft.

Like Hadley, Jennifer's beliefs about students' engagement in the writing process clearly informed her interpretations of students' responses to her feedback. Like Cali, Ronnie made a substantial number of revisions to his essay. Like Cali, Ronnie earned a B on his second draft of the assignment. Unlike Cali, however, Jennifer did not describe Ronnie's writing as "amazing-in-the-Bs," and instead suggested that the student barely revised his writing. In interpreting Ronnie's revisions through the understanding that he was not ready to work on his

Total Words (First Draft)	Deleted Words (from First to Second Draft)	Added Words (from First to Second Draft)	Total Words (Second Draft)
1,513	992	923	1,444

Table 5.4: Ronnie's Revisions from First to Second Draft

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[65] Here, "multiple times" refers to the three total drafts that Ronnie submitted to Jennifer for his first assignment, meaning that after she commented on this second draft, he submitted one more revision.

writing, then, Jennifer focused on the changes the student *did not* make in his writing, at the expense of recognizing the changes he *did* make. Consequently, this consideration reinforces the powerful impact that instructors' beliefs have on their interpretations of students' response to their feedback.

The impact of these beliefs is far reaching. In some cases, students may have picked up on the beliefs that their instructor expressed about them. This was particularly true when the beliefs that instructors expressed were negative. For instance, as Hadley described his beliefs about Nathan, he repeatedly suggested that the student was less capable than other students in his first-year writing class. "I got the impression from him that he wanted to do his best," Hadley noted, "but he really struggled with technical things." These "technical things" led Hadley to question Nathan's ability to develop the content of his essays. "So, stylistically," he said, "just getting a read on his capabilities on the page, I didn't have a lot of confidence in his ability to handle these sorts of nuanced and complex ideas." As Hadley put it, "I feel like his capacity was pretty weak." The belief that Hadley expresses here–that Nathan was not capable of writing at the level he expected of first-year writing students–clearly emerged from the instructor's interpretation of the student's writing. This belief also may have informed the communications that took place between the instructor and student.

Though Hadley certainly would not have intended to communicate this belief to Nathan, in his interviews, Nathan repeatedly expressed concerns that his instructor was forming negative beliefs about him. "I don't know if teachers do this," Nathan said, "but they probably, like, my guess is they look at all our background information. Like, 'Oh, he's from [upstate], so he must be dumb.'"[66] Nathan's concern did not stop here, however, as he speculated that his instructor likely used this belief to justify investing more time in other students in his class. "So, he's just like, 'We're not gonna worry about him. We're gonna worry about the ones who are actually from the big cities and elite high schools'," Nathan said. Though the grounds for Nathan's speculation certainly differed, the conclusion the student draws here was clearly similar to Hadley's explanation that he was "not going to sweat those students" he identified as not ready to work on their writing, indicating that in some ways, Hadley's beliefs about the student may have inadvertently been communicated to him.

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[66] During his interviews, Nathan repeatedly mentioned stereotypes against individuals, like himself, who grew up in the northern part of the state which was much more rural than the area surrounding the university.

Nathan also speculated that his instructor formed negative beliefs about him based on his writing, again in line with beliefs that Hadley actually expressed. Nathan's belief that Hadley was drawing conclusions about him based on his writing made it difficult for him to engage in the writing process. "I just like can't think. Like, when I'm writing, I feel like he's, like, sitting right here judging," Nathan said. "I know, as bad as that sounds, but like I said, I'm not against him because he's my teacher. But, it's just very discouraging." In this moment, Nathan suggested that Hadley did not just evaluate his writing, but *judged* it–a verb choice that indicates that in addition to assessing his writing, Nathan believed that his instructor used that writing to form an opinion about the student which Hadley himself demonstrated to be true.

Nathan's belief that his instructor was judging him, the student explained, made him even more sensitive to the feedback that Hadley gave him on his writing. From Nathan's perspective, this written feedback served as an indicator of his instructor's beliefs about him, both as a student in the class, and as a person:

> I would assume that–the students who don't like to read feedback–is because maybe they feel like they're a bad writer, or they're expecting bad, negative feedback or whatever… And maybe those are the students who–they're worried– they think that they're a bad writer. And so, they don't want to see what their teacher has to think about them, because I know I always thought that. You'd start to think inwards, like, 'Oh, wow, that kid's a dumbass.' Sorry. I don't know. I just always felt like that.

In this moment, Nathan described instructor feedback as a direct indicator of what instructors "think about" students, suggesting that as he read Hadley's feedback, he often interpreted it to mean that his instructor believed he was "a dumbass." At the conclusion of the semester, however, after Nathan had received an increasing amount of positive feedback on his writing, the student explained that the positive comments he received showed him that Hadley was "noticing that I'm understanding." Just as negative feedback could suggest to Nathan that his instructor was drawing negative conclusions about him more generally, he emphasized that positive feedback could have the opposite effect.

<p style="text-align:center">*   *   *</p>

The examples explored in this chapter demonstrate that students' and instructors' beliefs– about feedback, about writing, about themselves, and about each other–not only inform how they respond to one another's feedback, but also how they interpret and develop understandings of

that feedback in the first place. For students, the beliefs that emerged from their instructor's commenting practices were particularly influential, as the high grade and positive feedback that Nathan received on his first short assignment led the student to believe that he would receive similar feedback in the future and as Jennifer's comment on the list that Ronnie carefully constructed informed his belief that she would consistently comment on similar moments in his writing. In each of these cases, the students' beliefs directly informed their interpretations of the subsequent feedback they received from their instructor, making it particularly difficult for them to engage in the writing process when those beliefs were disrupted.

Though it is unlikely that instructors could mitigate beliefs like those that the students expressed here, if Hadley was aware that Nathan was expecting positive feedback or if Jennifer was aware that Ronnie wanted feedback on the funny moments in his second to last paragraph, the instructors would have been much more likely to offer students comments that aligned with their beliefs, potentially preventing the difficulties that each student subsequently experienced. A step as simple as asking students to identify aspects of their writing that they would like comments on could prevent the kinds of difficulties that each student encountered when engaging with his instructor's feedback, simultaneously giving them more control over their writing. As Ronnie's experiences in particular demonstrate, such an approach to commenting could help instructors better engage students in the writing process and prevent them from developing understandings that ultimately may hinder their ability to do so. And, as Nathan's experiences indicate, this approach could help to shift students' focus from their instructor's evaluation of their writing, and by extension, themselves, towards a focus on the aspects of their writing upon which they solicited their instructor's feedback.

For the instructors, the beliefs that emerged from their years of interactions with students were equally influential. The belief that some students are ready to work on their writing, for instance, led Hadley and Jennifer to focus exclusively on the ways that students *did* use their feedback. The belief that some students are not ready to work on their writing, in contrast, led the instructors to focus exclusively on the ways that students *did not* use that feedback. In this way, the beliefs that Hadley and Jennifer expressed about students' engagement directly informed how they interpreted indicators of engagement, at times leading the instructors to develop different understandings of the same response, such a student's selective use of instructor feedback which

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Hadley identified as an indicator of David's engagement in the writing process, and as an indicator of Nathan's disengagement or lack of understanding.

Though it is quite possible that Nathan and Ronnie did not use their instructor's feedback in ways that significantly (or perhaps even positively) impacted their writing, these findings suggest that the instructors' beliefs about students prevented them from recognizing the ways that students did put their feedback to use as they engaged in the writing process. As this chapter demonstrates, instructors should not only strive to help students' see their writing in a new way, but should work to see that writing in a new way themselves.

In the next and final chapter, I conclude this dissertation by discussing the implications of the findings explored in this and in each of the previous chapters, offering suggestions for how scholars and instructors might ultimately put these findings to use.

Feedback and Its Function in the Writing Classroom:
Final Considerations and Future Directions

As the results presented in this dissertation indicate, there is no one approach to instructor feedback that on its own can engage all students in the writing process. Because students in this study expressed varying beliefs about writing and instructor feedback and set a variety of goals for engaging in the writing process, they ultimately developed different understandings of their instructor's feedback and responded to that feedback in a range of ways. The fact that students developed different understandings of their instructor's feedback, even when they received comments that were relatively similar, demonstrates that feedback is not *information*, as definitions from the field of educational studies generally suggest, but that it is an *indicator* which must be interpreted as individuals develop understandings of the feedback they receive. The theorization of feedback that emerged from the findings of this study defines feedback as *any indicator that regards performance or informs future decisions or development*. This definition highlights the interpretive nature of feedback, suggesting that students are likely to develop differing understandings of the same feedback, understandings that at times also diverge from what their instructor intended to communicate.

This definition opens space for students' responses to instructor feedback to be identified as a form of feedback in and of themselves. In this way, the theorization of feedback offered here contrasts much of the previous scholarship devoted to instructor feedback, which positions feedback as a linear process beginning when an instructor communicates information to a student and ending when that student either accepts, modifies, or rejects that information. The findings presented in this study, in contrast, demonstrate that feedback functions as a cycle of *communication, interpretation,* and *negotiation,* where instructors and students continuously interact with one another as they develop understandings of and respond to the feedback that they receive from one another. In this treatment of feedback, instructors *and* students give feedback, though certainly in different forms. For instance, the written comments that an

instructor offers students *communicate* a message that students must *interpret* as they develop understandings of their instructor's expectations. Students then *negotiate* the understandings they develop, often in relation to their beliefs about writing or instructor feedback and in relation to their goals for their writing, and respond by accepting, modifying, or rejecting that feedback. The students' responses become important feedback for instructors, as those responses *communicate* a message about each student's engagement with his or her instructor's feedback. As instructors *interpret* these responses, they develop understandings of students' engagement in the writing process that they *negotiate* with their beliefs about students and their goals for commenting on student writing, a process that ultimately informs the feedback that instructors offer students in their subsequent *communications*.

This theorization of feedback has two important implications. First, this approach offers a means for explaining how instructors and students develop understandings of the feedback they exchange with one another, understandings that are often informed by the beliefs that they bring into the writing classroom and that emerge from their interactions with one another. Second, it positions instructors and students as *givers* and *receivers* of feedback. In the literature that has explored instructor feedback and student response to date, student response has rarely–if ever– been conceptualized as a form of feedback. For the instructors in this study, however, these responses–particularly in students' efforts to solicit instructor feedback outside of class and to revise their writing accordingly–became important indicators through which the instructors developed beliefs about students that identified them as either ready to work on their writing, or not. Because these beliefs informed the instructors' subsequent efforts to provide students with feedback–regulating the instructors' behavior in line with their goals for that feedback–students' responses clearly functioned as feedback.

This theorization emerged, in part, from bringing together disparate bodies of literature in order to create a richer understanding of feedback in the writing classroom. These bodies of literature–from educational studies and from composition studies–have much more to say about this topic when put in conversation with one another than either can alone. For instance, as Chapter 1 demonstrates, the literature from educational studies offers a useful framework for understanding how feedback functions; however, because this literature was not developed with the context of the writing classroom in mind, it cannot adequately represent the role that feedback plays in this space. Likewise, the literature from composition studies has extensively

documented what instructor feedback and student response look like–both in the writing classroom and more often through experimental designs–but has stopped short of explaining the many discrepancies (between instructors' goals and commenting practices and across the range of students' responses) that emerge in this literature. In exploring the intersections of these bodies of literature specifically in relation to the findings generated by this study, this dissertation not only confirms findings that are well established in the field of composition studies, but also moves beyond them, ultimately theorizing the function of instructor feedback in the writing classroom.

This approach to feedback is particularly important as it offers a better understanding of the one form of direct interaction that instructors have with every student in the writing classroom. Although instructors often invest more time in offering students feedback than they invest in any other pedagogical practice, many scholars have argued that this practice is not well understood, even after decades of continued research. In order to address concerns raised by Sommers (2013) and others, this study has worked to develop a more systematic approach to instructor feedback, one that has built on and contributes to the scholarship devoted to feedback in the writing classroom.

In what follows, I begin by highlighting several ways that this study contributes to scholarship in the field of composition studies. I then outline the key findings that emerged from interviews with instructors and students and from the corpus of written comments, revision plans, and revisions that the study participants produced over the course of one semester in a required first-year writing class. The findings of this study have generated as many potential lines of inquiry as insights, and consequently, the chapter turns to identify important questions that merit additional consideration. Finally, the chapter concludes by offering recommendations that could help writing instructors use their feedback to more fully engage students in the writing process. In this way, this final chapter concludes this dissertation study by suggesting how the findings presented here can be implemented in line with both scholarly and pedagogical pursuits.

Contributions to Existing Scholarship

By and large, the commenting practices that composition scholars have been recommending for the past 30 years have remained unquestioned. In this body of literature, writing instructors are encouraged to make their feedback dialogic, reflecting an engaged

conversation with students rooted in classroom contexts and instructor voices, to leave control over writing–as much as possible–in the hands of students, and to prioritize students' purposes for writing, working both to understand those purposes and to help students achieve them in their writing (Brannon & Knoblauch, 1982; Connors & Lunsford, 1993; Sommers, 1982, 2013; Sprinkle, 2004). While these goals are widely accepted and commonly recommended by composition scholars, others have noted they are not always realized in instructors' commenting practices (Montgomery & Baker, 2007; Ferris, 2014; Lee, 2009). In these studies, however, little attention has been paid to *why* the divergences identified might occur in the first place, leaving instructors' voices notably absent from this body of research.

Instead, the literature generally focuses on the written comments that instructors produce or on students' responses to those comments. For instance, although Sommers (1982) interviewed instructors as part of her study examining 35 instructors' commenting practices, their voices are not actually present in the findings that she reports, as she focused her analysis on their written comments and the ways in which those comments failed to realize particular goals. It is not clear in Sommers' work whether the instructors actually aimed to achieve the goals that she discusses. Similarly, in Connors and Lunsford's (1993) corpus study examining a collection of 3,000 essays commented on by 300 writing instructors, the researchers did not interview instructors, but instead inferred their intents from the practices realized in the written comments that were collected. As Connors and Lunsford explained, "As we looked over the patterns of general commentary our readers found, we were reminded of how much rhetorical *forms* can tell us about the purposes and attitudes of those using them" (p. 209, emphasis original). This assumption–that commenting practices accurately convey instructors' purposes and attitudes–is clearly countered by existing research and by the findings of this dissertation study, as in several cases the goals that the instructors described and the commenting practices that they used did not align. One of the major contributions of this study is its focus on explaining *why* instructors' goals and commenting practices diverge, a focus which ultimately revealed that the recommendations frequently made by composition scholars need to be closely examined to determine whether they can–and ultimately, whether they should–be realized in instructors' written comments.

An additional contribution is this study's focus on the experiences of students who are more likely to have difficulty engaging in the writing process, those with low levels of

motivation for writing or little belief in their capabilities as writers. Though students' voices play a prevalent role in the literature devoted to student response, by and large, study participants have not been selected to represent a variety of experiences and perspectives, but to reflect the average student experience in a particular context. For instance, in one of the few studies that has been conducted within the context of an actual writing classroom (in this case, in an introductory technical writing course), Still and Koerber (2010) describe their decision to select 12 student participants who matched the averages of the larger student population in terms of gender, age, and the scores they gave their self-assessments of the quality of their writing. In addition, Still and Koerber report that the average grade these students earned in the course matched the average grade of their classmates. In selecting typical samples like this one, scholars are able to generalize their findings to larger populations. However, they are not able to speak to the experiences of students who likely need the most support engaging with instructor feedback.

The students included in this study introduce new voices to the conversation about instructor feedback in the writing classroom. Though these voices are among the least represented in the literature on student response, this study demonstrates that they are among the most important for considering how instructor feedback can more fully engage students in the writing process, as practices that support these students' engagement are likely to also engage students who are more motivated to work on their writing or who have stronger beliefs in their capabilities as writers.

Furthermore, this study not only confirms the findings of previous research that demonstrates that students respond to instructor feedback in differing ways, but also moves beyond that research, exploring *why* this was the case for the students who participated in this study. This focus revealed that students' goals for and beliefs about writing and instructor feedback directly informed their engagement with the feedback they received on their writing. For instance, like previous research, the findings of this study indicate that students' engagement with instructor feedback is informed by performance goals such as fulfilling instructors' expectations or earning particular grades in their writing class (Burkland & Grimm, 1986; Huot, 2002; Reed & Burton, 1985; Still & Koerber, 2010). However, this study also identified many more goals and beliefs that informed students' engagement in the writing process, which students at times brought with them into the writing classroom, and at times emerged from the experiences that they had within this context. The contribution of this study is not just the

identification of a complicated set of goals and beliefs that informed students' responses to instructor feedback, but also a consideration of the factors that led students to set goals and to develop beliefs in the first place.

The findings regarding students' responses to instructor feedback–particularly in relation to the goals and beliefs that students expressed–highlight the set of assumptions inherent within scholars' recommendations for commenting on student writing. For example, the recommendation that instructors should support students' purposes for writing implies that students have goals for their writing that align with the objectives of a writing course, and that consequently should be supported. As Sommers (1982) articulates the rationale behind this particular recommendation, for instance, she suggests that students' writing communicates a message that is inherently theirs until instructors impose another viewpoint on that writing by providing feedback. This rationale does not acknowledge the fact that most (or perhaps all) student writing is developed in response to instructors' requests, requests that often set clear parameters for what messages are acceptable and for how those messages should be conveyed. Though students do, of course, develop their own messages within the parameters they are given–messages which they very well could be invested in and passionate about–it should be no surprise that some students exclusively strive to give their instructor what he or she wants in response to this rhetorical situation, as the findings of this study demonstrate. Consequently, in multiple ways, this study highlights the need to revisit the prominent recommendations for commenting on student writing, considering what these recommendations mean from instructors' and students' perspectives and whether they can and should be realized in instructors' commenting practices.

This study brings together a set of data that has rarely been captured within a single study exploring instructor feedback in the writing classroom. As Chapter 2 demonstrates, the vast majority of the extant scholarship has considered feedback outside of the context of the writing classroom and has captured only instructor or only student voices. This study is one of few to consider instructors' and students' voices within the context of an actual writing classroom, and one of even fewer to put those voices in conversation with each other. Furthermore, in considering instructors' and students' descriptions of their experiences in relation to a corpus of the instructors' written comments and the revision plans and revisions that students developed in response to those comments, this study offers a more comprehensive consideration of feedback

within a single context than has previously been offered. Each of these areas of investigation has contributed in significant ways to the findings that have emerged from this study, which the next section turns to address.

Key Findings

The theorization of feedback presented in this dissertation would not have been possible without each of the data sets explored in this study. In bringing together the experiences described by instructors and students as they engaged with one another's feedback, and in contrasting those descriptions against the actual comments that instructors made on students' writing and the revision plans and revisions that students made in response, this study has generated a set of findings that demonstrates not only *how* instructors and students engaged with one another's feedback, but also *why* they engaged in the ways that they did. Over the course of this study, instructors and students frequently expressed goals and beliefs that played a pivotal role in the feedback cycle. In what follows, I discuss these goals and beliefs as they informed– and in some cases emerged from–students' and instructors' engagement with the feedback they offered one another.

Striving for Mastery or Performance: Instructors' and Students' Goals in the Writing Classroom

The goals–which Pintrich (2003) defines "as the reasons and purposes for approaching and engaging in achievement tasks"–that instructors and students described in this study can generally be divided into two categories: *mastery goals*, which "orient the student towards learning and understanding, developing new skills, and a focus on self-improvement using self-referenced standards"; and, *performance goals*, which "represent a concern with demonstrating ability, obtaining recognition of high ability, protecting self-worth, and a focus on comparative standards relative to other students and attempting to best or surpass others" (p. 676-77). As the findings of this study demonstrate, these two types of goals had a direct impact on the ways that students engaged with and responded to instructor feedback.

In every case, the goals that the instructors set for their feedback were clearly mastery goals, which aimed to help students better understand their writing and the writing process and to develop new skills and techniques for writing. For instance, Jennifer and Hadley each described a goal to give students feedback that would lead them to see their writing in a new way in order

to help students develop a better understanding of their writing. Many of the mastery goals that the instructors set for their feedback aligned with those frequently recommended by scholars in the field. However, as Chapter 3 demonstrates, several of these goals were ultimately not realized in the comments the instructors actually gave students on their writing.

There were several reasons for the divergences noted between the instructors' goals and commenting practices. First, the instructors' goals were at times in direct competition with one another. For instance, in addition to their goal to help students see their writing in a new way, Hadley and Jennifer each described a goal to support students' purposes for writing. Because the commenting practices that could best fulfill either goal could not simultaneously fulfill both goals, the instructors ultimately prioritized the goal they described as helping students to improve their writing, resulting in commenting practices that were more likely to help students see their writing in a new way. Instead of supporting students' purposes for writing, a goal that scholars suggest can be realized by offering students comments that take mild or moderate control over their writing, the instructors' written comments primarily exerted firm control over students' writing. Second, the instructors suggested that some goals were difficult to realize through their written comments. Although each instructor expressed a goal to engage students in a dialogue about their writing, for example, they explained that this goal was much easier to accomplish in conferences and in one-on-one meetings. Consequently, the instructors explained that they deprioritized the goal to make their feedback a dialogue in the written comments they offered students, instead focusing on this goal in the feedback that they offered students in person.

A key finding of this study is that divergences between instructors' goals and commenting practices often emerge from tensions within or between goals. Because these tensions occurred within and between goals that are commonly recommended by scholars in the field of composition studies, this finding suggests a need to think much more critically about the goals that can and should inform instructors' commenting practices.

The findings of this study also suggest a need to think critically about how instructors' goals ultimately inform students' engagement in the writing process. For many students, the goal they emphasized most frequently was to give their instructor what he or she wanted, a performance goal that often informed students' decisions to directly implement their instructor's feedback, even if they did not agree that doing so would ultimately improve their writing. In some cases, this response led students to engage with their instructor's feedback in ways that

appeared to align with their instructor's mastery goals, though in actuality the students were simply using the same means to achieve different ends, as their focus was not on what they could learn about their *writing*, but on what they could learn about their *instructor* and what he or she wanted. When students focused on mastery goals, in contrast, such as a desire to find meaning in their writing, they much more often focused on their writing as they engaged with their instructor's feedback, increasing the likelihood they would learn about writing in the process. This was true even for students who simultaneously expressed investment in performance goals for their writing.

Consequently, a second key finding of this study is that the goals that students set for their writing have a much stronger impact on their engagement with and response to instructor feedback than instructors' goals or commenting practices. In addition to a focus on which goals can and should inform instructors' commenting practices, then, this finding indicates that much more attention should be devoted to considering the goals that students set for their writing.

Writing, Feedback, and Each Other: Instructors' and Students' Beliefs in the Writing Classroom

Equally important are the beliefs that instructors and students expressed as they engaged with one another's feedback. In some cases, these beliefs were brought into the writing classroom, as instructors articulated beliefs about feedback and about students' engagement in the writing process that they developed over their years of teaching writing, and students expressed beliefs about writing and instructor feedback that were informed by their past educational experiences. These beliefs also emerged from the experiences that students had in the writing classroom, as early sets of feedback that students received ultimately led them to believe they would receive similar feedback on their subsequent writing. Regardless of whether these beliefs were brought into or emerged from the writing classroom, they directly informed the interpretations that instructors and students developed of the feedback they offered one another as well as the ways that each engaged with and responded to that feedback.

In one instance, an instructor's beliefs about feedback actually contributed to a divergence between his goals and commenting practices, as Hadley's efforts to offer students positive feedback, explored in Chapter 3, demonstrate. Though Hadley believed that positive feedback had affective benefits for students, he also believed that it could not help them improve their writing. Consequently, he did not always offer this type of feedback to students, particularly

to those who earned the lowest grades in his first-year writing course. The third key finding of this study is that instructor's beliefs about feedback clearly inform their commenting practices, at times contributing to the divergences that emerge between instructors' goals and commenting practices.

The instructors' beliefs about students, however, appeared to be even more influential, as both instructors described beliefs about students' engagement in the writing process that ultimately informed how they interpreted students' responses to their feedback. As Chapter 5 demonstrates, Jennifer and Hadley each expressed beliefs that some students are ready to work on their writing and that some students are not. When the instructors described a student in ways that aligned him or her with their beliefs about students who are ready to work on their writing, they focused exclusively on the ways that the student used their feedback, foregrounding his or her engagement in the writing process. When they described a student in ways that aligned with their beliefs about students who are not ready to work on their writing, in contrast, the instructors focused exclusively on the ways that the student *did not* use their feedback, foregrounding the student's disengagement.

The beliefs that Jennifer and Hadley expressed about students directly informed how they interpreted indicators of students' engagement. For example, though Nathan and his classmate David each selectively used Hadley's feedback in their writing, because the instructor believed that Nathan was not ready to work on his writing and that David was, he interpreted the students' decisions to modify or reject some instructor feedback as an indicator that Nathan was disengaged or that he did not understand the feedback he received and alternatively as an indicator that David was engaged in the writing process. Jennifer expressed similar beliefs and interpreted students' responses to her feedback in similar ways. As she reflected on Ronnie's revisions to his first essay, for instance, she suggested that the student only changed one sentence in his essay, in line with her belief that he was not ready to work on his writing. In actuality, however, the student had revised more than 60 percent of his essay, as the findings presented in Chapter 5 demonstrate. Consequently, the fourth key finding of this study is that the instructors' beliefs about students directly informed their interpretations of students' engagement in the writing process. When the instructors identified students as not ready to work on their writing, they were not always able to recognize students' engagement.

The effects of the beliefs that Hadley and Jennifer developed about students may have extended beyond their ability to recognize students' engagement in the writing process. In some cases, students indicated that they picked up on the beliefs that their instructor expressed about them. This was particularly true when the beliefs that the instructor expressed were negative. For instance, just as Hadley repeatedly expressed a belief that Nathan was not as capable as other students in his first-year writing class, Nathan repeatedly expressed a belief that the instructor thought he was "dumb." This belief made it difficult for Nathan to engage with Hadley's feedback and in the writing process more generally, as Chapter 5 shows. The fifth key finding of this study is that the beliefs that instructors develop may get communicated to students, a possibility that suggests these beliefs hold potential to inform students' future decisions or development, ultimately functioning as a form of feedback.

Other beliefs more commonly expressed by students had to do with writing and with instructor feedback. In many ways, the beliefs that students expressed about writing corresponded with the goals that they set in their first-year writing course. Students who expressed an understanding of the standards that define good writing, for instance, set mastery goals that led them to critically engage with their instructor's feedback. Students who expressed uncertainty about these standards or who believed that such standards do not exist, in contrast, set performance goals that focused on giving their instructor what he or she wanted because they either did not know what else to do or believed that doing so was the only way to produce what would be considered good writing by that instructor. This suggests that students' beliefs likely inform the goals they set for their writing, which is the sixth key finding of this study.

The seventh, and final, key finding of this study is that students' beliefs not only inform the ways that they engage with instructor feedback, but actually emerge from that feedback. As Chapter 5 makes clear, Nathan and Ronnie developed beliefs about their instructor's feedback from early sets of feedback that they received. For Nathan, receiving a high grade and positive feedback on an early short assignment led him to believe that he would receive similar grades and additional positive feedback on his subsequent writing. Similarly, after receiving a positive comment on a list he had carefully constructed, Ronnie expressed a belief that Jennifer would consistently comment on aspects of his writing that he gave special attention. The beliefs that these students developed directly informed their expectations for and interpretations of their instructor's feedback. When these beliefs were disrupted–in that Nathan received lower grades

and no positive feedback and Ronnie did not receive comments where he expected them–these students each described having a particularly difficult time engaging in the writing process. This suggests a need to consider the beliefs that students bring into and that emerge from the writing classroom, as each informed students' engagement with instructor feedback.

Together, these findings suggest that goals and beliefs play an important role in the process of *communication, interpretation,* and *negotiation* through which instructors and students engage with and respond to one another's feedback. Although instructors' goals and commenting practices are certainly important, these findings suggest that they are not the only, or perhaps most influential, factor that shapes students' response to instructor feedback. Some students, for instance, expressed beliefs that their instructor's feedback engaged them in dialogue, gave them a sense of control over their writing, and helped them to realize the goals that they set for their writing, in line with the instructors' goals. This was true for students in both sections of first-year writing included in this study, regardless of the specific commenting practices that each instructor employed. However, in both classes, other students expressed beliefs that the same types of comments, given by the same instructors, were directive, not dialogic, and took control over their writing. These contrasting responses suggest that students' responses to instructor feedback are not solely dependent on instructors' goals and commenting practices, as the goals the instructors expressed and the practices they realized were generally consistent across students. Instead, the findings of this study demonstrate that students' beliefs about writing and about instructor feedback and the goals that they set for their writing have a powerful impact on how they understand and engage with instructor feedback.

The intersections between instructors' and students' experiences explored in this dissertation offer a rich understanding of how feedback functions in the first-year writing classroom, an understanding that can ultimately inform future research and instructors' commenting practices, which the next two sections respectively address.

Questions for Future Research

The approach to feedback offered in this dissertation raised a number of questions that would benefit from additional research. In what follows, I consider three of these questions as they emerged from this study and offer suggestions for how scholars in the field of composition studies might seek to answer them.

What goals can and should be realized in instructors' written comments?

This study explored goals that emerged as particularly complicated for the instructors and students who participated in this study, ultimately focusing on the instructors efforts' to support students' purposes for writing, to help students see their writing in a new way, to engage students in dialogue, and to offer positive feedback on students' writing. Exploring instructors' efforts to realize these goals and the ways that goals intersected with students' responses demonstrated that at least for these instructors and students, some goals could not be realized and some would have been better left unrealized. This finding suggests that instead of striving to implement the same goals that have been touted for decades, composition scholars should question what those goals mean–from both instructors' and students' perspectives–with a particular focus on how each goal aligns with the learning objectives of particular writing courses.

In addition to the goals considered in this study, future research might explore other prominent recommendations, such as the recommendation that instructors use their written comments to promote students' responsibility for revising (Lees, 1979; Sprinkle, 2004; Straub, 1996; Willingham, 1990). According to Willingham (1990), instructors can accomplish this goal by asking students questions in their written comments, as questions promote dialogue and leave control in the hands of students. In contrast to Willingham's recommendations, however, the students who participated in this study often understood questions to be just as directive as, and at times more confusing than, the other types of comments that they received. Clearly, more research is needed to develop an understanding of what it means to promote students' responsibility for revising and to determine the role that questions can and should play in this process.

What does the feedback cycle look like in other writing courses, at different institutions, and from the perspectives of other students and instructors?

The findings presented in this dissertation represent a first step towards developing an understanding of the goals that inform students' and instructors' experiences with feedback in the writing classroom. Because this study speaks most directly to the experiences that instructors and students have in a required first-year writing course–a context where instructors are often overworked and underpaid and where students' objectives often prioritize fulfilling a requirement over developing their writing–more research is needed to determine how feedback

functions in other writing courses, at different institutions, and for different students and instructors. Though the findings of this study can be usefully considered in relation to other contexts, there would be much benefit to exploring how feedback functions in a range of settings, particularly in non-required writing courses where students' investments and interests likely differ. The student responses that fill the pages of this dissertation are reflective of the students who participated in this study, those with little belief in their capabilities as writers and low levels of motivation for writing. Students with stronger beliefs in their capabilities and higher levels of motivation for writing would likely set different goals and engage with their instructor's feedback in different ways. Consequently, future research should explore students' and instructors' experiences with feedback in a variety of writing contexts, with a focus on representing the goals and beliefs expressed by as many different populations as possible.

How do instructors interpret students' responses to their feedback?

   This study captured enough data from the instructors' interviews to demonstrate that their experiences with feedback–and particularly with students' responses to feedback–are a crucial component of the feedback cycle that has generally been overlooked in the extant literature. Because this study did not capture the experiences of each instructor as they unfolded, however, it was only able to explore the moments that stayed with instructors after their semester of teaching had ended. The experiences that each instructor recounted in their final interviews offered compelling counter narratives to experiences that students described, as the two case studies included in Chapter 5 demonstrate. The intersections between instructors' and students' experiences would likely have been even more compelling if they had been captured in the same moments *during* the semester and through questions that specifically asked the instructors to reflect on each of their students' responses to their feedback. Consequently, future research should explore the experiences of writing instructors in greater detail, as such an exploration would contribute to a richer understanding of how feedback functions in the writing classroom.

Using Instructor Feedback to Promote Students' Engagement in the Writing Process

   In addition to the questions that emerged from this study, the findings presented here have also informed a set of concrete recommendations that are intended to support students' engagement with instructor feedback in the writing classroom. In both Hadley and Jennifer's

classes, the written comments that the instructors offered students existed in a space outside of the classroom, where students were left to figure out what their instructor's feedback meant and how it should be used without the support of their instructor. This lack of instruction led many students to directly implement their instructor's feedback without much consideration, in contrast to the instructors' goal that their comments engage students in a process of thinking. This finding suggests that if instructors want students to critically engage with their feedback, they need to teach them how to do so. The following recommendations offer strategies that can support students' engagement with instructor feedback with the aim of making the process of giving and receiving feedback more productive for students and instructors.

Instructors should explain their goals for providing students with feedback, particularly the written comments they give students on their writing. In this study, students' beliefs about writing and the role that feedback plays in the writing process informed the ways that they engaged with their instructor's feedback. This finding suggests that talking with students about their beliefs and how those beliefs align or do not align with instructors' goals could help students start to understand and approach instructor feedback in new ways. By sharing their goals with students, instructors can encourage students to engage with the feedback they receive in more critical, and ultimately, more productive ways.

Students should set mastery goals for their writing early in the drafting process in order to divert at least some of their attention from a focus on giving their instructor what he or she wants towards a focus on utilizing specific techniques or strategies in their writing. Like the students in this study who set mastery goals for their writing, this strategy could lead students to move beyond directly implementing their instructor's feedback and instead to consider whether and how particular comments could be used to help them accomplish goals they set for their writing. Even if students select skills or techniques because they think their instructor values them, ultimately, as they engaged in the writing process, they would be focused on a specific aspect of their *writing,* not on their instructor.

Students should identify aspects of their writing on which they want feedback. As the findings of this study demonstrate, students develop expectations for their instructor's feedback that if unfulfilled, can make it difficult for them to engage in the writing process. If students are given the opportunity to request feedback on specific aspects of their writing, they will be less likely to experience this effect. In addition, this strategy gives students more control over their

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writing and the writing process, allowing them to at least partially direct their instructor's attention towards aspects of their writing that they are most invested in learning more about.

Instructors should provide students with comments that help them achieve their mastery goals and that address their concerns. Asking students to set goals that focus on their writing is a first step towards getting them to move beyond a focus on their writing instructor. In order to further support this shift, instructors should ask students to report their goals when they submit their writing for feedback and then provide comments identifying moments that students achieved those goals and moments that those goals could be achieved in even more effective ways. In addition, instructors should offer students comments that directly respond to students' requests for feedback. By balancing this focus on students' goals and concerns with the other comments an instructor would typically make, instructors can better support students' purposes for writing in a way that could potentially increase their engagement with their writing and with the writing process.

Students should reflect on instructor feedback in writing. Every student who participated in this study suggested that the revision plans that they completed helped them better understand and better utilize the written comments that they received from their instructor. These revision plans provided a clear structure that helped students engage with the feedback that they received, asking them to:

1. *Select* the comments they would respond to in revision, emphasizing that they did not have to address every comment they received from their instructor.

2. *Prioritize* those comments, suggesting that not every comment they received was of equivalent standing.

3. *Interpret* those comments, highlighting the need for students to critically engage with each comment.

4. *Plan* the revisions that they would make in response to those comments, indicating that comments should not simply be implemented, but should be part of a larger plan.

5. *Reflect* on what they would accomplish by making the revisions they outlined, demonstrating the need to have writing-focused purposes for revising.

Revision plans are only one way that students might use writing to reflect on instructor feedback. Collecting students' written reflections in any form can help instructors recognize the ways that students are engaging with feedback and can help them identify students who might particularly benefit from additional support in this process.

Instructors should use positive feedback to identify moments of effectiveness, not just moments of excellence. The students who participated in this study clearly demonstrated that positive feedback has more than affective benefits. For some students, positive feedback was the only feedback they remembered or the only feedback they felt they could put to use. Consequently, instructor feedback that identifies an effective topic sentence or a well chosen example can be more helpful for some students than critical comments addressing the same techniques or strategies. This is particularly true when students are struggling to implement a technique or strategy in their writing, as identifying one effective example provides them with a model they can use to develop their writing and shows them that they are capable of doing so. Thinking about positive feedback in the ways that students in this study articulated allows instructors to move beyond the belief that they have to praise students for achieving excellence, and towards an understanding that positive comments can be–and in fact are–productive tools for students at every level of success. Consequently, positive feedback should be used to help students distinguish between the techniques and strategies they are using effectively and those that would benefit from further development. In this way, positive feedback can help students develop a better understanding of the characteristics that define good writing, an outcome that would be particularly beneficial for students like those who participated in this study, who often expressed uncertainty about what makes writing good. This shift is particularly important, both because instructors like Hadley often express that it can be difficult to consistently offer students–and more specifically, low achieving students–positive comments, as Chapter 3 demonstrates, and because for some of these students, positive comments are the only comments that seem useful or that leave a lasting impression.

Instructors should use critical comments to build on or extend positive feedback. Some of the comments that students who participated in this study identified as the most helpful evaluated a particular aspect of a student's writing as effective and then offered a neutral or critical comment that explained how the student could build on or develop that moment. These comments, students explained, were easier to engage with because the presence of the positive comment gave them a sense of direction for how they might focus their revisions. This benefit, however, was only realized when students were able to recognize the positive aspects of the feedback they received. When positive feedback was undermined by a critical comment that directly contradicted it or was embedded within a critical comment, students expressed confusion

that at times made it difficult for them to even decipher what the comment meant. Consequently, instructors should make sure that their positive comments are distinct from the critical comments that might follow, and that their critical comments do not undermine their positive comments, but instead suggest how students might extend or build upon effective moments in their writing.

Instructors should support the development of self-assessment skills. The findings of this study demonstrate that students who engaged in self-assessment were more likely than their classmates to move beyond directly implementing their instructor's feedback, particularly when they did not understand or agree with that feedback. In order to promote this kind of engagement, instructors should ask students to assess their own writing and should collect those self-assessments from students. This strategy has two clear benefits, as students' self-assessment skills would develop from the process of repeatedly assessing their writing and as instructors could identify students who would benefit from additional support developing self-assessment skills. If instructors offer students feedback on their self-assessments, students could see the ways in which these assessments align and do not align with those of their instructor, again supporting the development of self-assessment skills and increasing the likelihood that students would critically engage with their writing and with their instructor's feedback.

Instructors should only repeat comments that they want to bring to students' attention. The students who participated in this study interpreted patterns in their instructor's feedback as indicators for where they should focus their attention. Comments that repeatedly addressed the same issue in students' writing became a central focus in their efforts to revise their writing and in the subsequent writing that they produced. In some cases, these patterns also indicated to students that they no longer needed to focus on an issue in their writing, as some students described interpreting a lack of repetition as an indicator that they had resolved an issue. This suggests that instructors should not only avoid repeating comments that are not particularly significant, but should also talk with students about what patterns in their feedback mean, especially if a lack of repetition is not necessarily an indicator that a particular issue has been resolved in a student's writing. To facilitate this process, instructors might consider logging their comments to track patterns in their feedback or asking students to identify those patterns as part of their process of reflecting on the feedback they receive.

Instructors should assume that all students are engaged in the writing process, whether they can readily recognize that engagement or not. The students in this study all engaged in the

writing process, but at times, they did so in ways that their instructors did not recognize. When the instructors were not able to see evidence that a student was engaging in the writing process, the understandings that they developed ultimately led them to decrease the amount of effort they invested in providing feedback to those students. Asking students to respond to feedback in writing can help instructors concretely see the ways that students are engaging in the writing process, but beyond these moments, instructors should strive to always give students the benefit of the doubt in order to avoid, as much as possible, drawing conclusions that underestimate students' engagement.

Final Considerations

This dissertation demonstrates the need for a theoretically grounded approach to instructor feedback in the writing classroom. To start, such an approach might shift from conceptualizing the written comments that instructors offer students as *responses* to their work–a term that has been carried far and wide across the literature in the field of composition studies, though not defined–and start thinking about them as *feedback*. Such a shift acknowledges that the comments that instructors offer students are not simply intended to help them see how their instructor reacts to their writing, but to help them build towards clear goals that at times belong to instructors and at times to students.

The theorization of feedback presented here emerged from looking closely at how both students and instructors experienced the process of giving and receiving feedback during one semester in a required first-year writing course. Though there is a large body of scholarship devoted to exploring instructor feedback in the writing classroom, this study demonstrates that there is much left to explore, particularly when it comes to grounding the recommendations that are frequently repeated but rarely examined in this work. Continuing this research is particularly important, as the recommendations that scholars make have great import. For instance, though neither of the instructors who participated in this study was trained as a composition specialist, the beliefs that they each expressed about feedback clearly aligned with the goals most frequently acknowledged by scholars in the field. This suggests that the recommendations scholars make have great reach, and thus should be carefully considered in a variety of writing contexts.

APPENDICES

Appendix A. INSTRUCTOR SURVEY

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. It should take you no more than 5 to 7 minutes. If you have any questions, or would like more information about the dissertation study in which the results of this survey will be used, please contact Justine Neiderhiser (janeider@umich.edu).

General Demographic Information
In this section, please select the box which most accurately applies to your situation. If you would prefer not to provide information for any of these questions, feel free to leave the question blank.

1. What is your gender?
2. How would you classify yourself? [Arab, Asian/Pacific Islander, Black, Caucasian/White, Hispanic, Indigenous or Aboriginal, Latino, Multiracial, Other: Please specify]

Teaching Experience

Please provide the following information about your experiences teaching writing. If you would like to provide additional information for any of the questions listed here, feel free to comment in the space provided.

3. What is your position at the University of Michigan? [Graduate Student Instructor, Lecturer, Assistant Professor, Professor, Other: Please specify]

   Comment:

4. How long have you been teaching writing, at both the University of Michigan and other institutions? [This will be my first time teaching a writing course., Less than 2 years, 3 to 5 years, 6 to 10 years, I have been teaching writing for more than 10 years.]

   Comment:

5. What writing courses have you taught at UM? Please check all that apply. [The course listings have been excluded to protect the anonymity of this institution]

   Comment:

Providing Feedback on Student Writing
In the questions that follow, you will be asked to explain when in the writing process you intend to give students feedback on their writing, what kinds of feedback they will receive, and how you perceive the function of that feedback in students' writing processes. If you have taught writing in the past, please consider both your past strategies and your current plans in your response to each question. If you will be teaching for the first time, please answer each question based on how you plan to respond to student writing in the fall. If you would like to provide additional information for any of the questions listed here, feel free to comment in the space provided.

6. When will you provide students with written comments on their writing? Please select all that apply. [I do not plan to provide students with written comments on their writing., Before they submit their first drafts, On their first drafts, On their second or subsequent drafts (not on final

drafts), On final drafts after they have been submitted for evaluation, Other: Please specify]

    Comment:

7. How will you provide feedback to your students on their major assignments? Please select all that apply. [I will not provide students with feedback on their major assignments., Spoken comments during class activities, Spoken comments during conferences, Spoken comments during office hours, Spoken comments during full class workshops, Spoken comments during small group (peer) workshops, Spoken comments on final drafts, Written comments during class activities, Written comments during conferences, Written comments during office hours, Written comments during full class workshops, Written comments during small group (peer) workshops, Written comments on final drafts, Emails, Grades, Other: Please specify]

    Comment:

8. What kinds of feedback will students receive from each other on their major assignments? Please select all that apply. [Students will not provide each other with feedback on their major assignments., Spoken comments during class activities, Spoken comments during full class workshops, Spoken comments during small group (peer) workshops, Spoken comments on final drafts, Written comments during class activities, Written comments during full class workshops, Written comments during small group (peer) workshops, Written comments on final drafts, Out of class meetings, Email, Grades, Other: Please specify]

    Comment:

9. Will students be required to revise their papers after they receive written comments from you? Please select the response that most appropriately matches your policy. [Yes students are required to revise every paper they turn in after I have written comments on it., Yes students are required to revise at least one paper they turn in after I have written comments on it., No students have the option to revise at least one paper after I have written comments on it, but this is not a required component of my course., No students are not required to revise their papers after I have written comments on them., Other: Please explain]

    Comment:

10. In your own words, briefly describe the role that you feel your feedback plays in your students' writing process. Why do you give students feedback on their writing? What do you hope they will gain from the feedback that you provide?

11. Are you interested in learning more about what your students actually do with the feedback that you provide on their writing? If so, please consider being a participant in the next phase of this study. If you are interested, please provide your name and email address in the space below.

Thank you for completing this survey. Your response is much appreciated!

Appendix B. CLASSROOM INVITATION FOR STUDENTS

Is writing your favorite subject?   **[Image omitted: Sheets of lined notebook paper with writing]**

Then this study is probably not for you.

I am conducting a research study this fall about how first-year writing students respond to the written comments that their instructors give them on their writing. I am specifically interested in understanding the experiences of students who typically haven't enjoyed the writing process.

If you don't like writing, don't feel like a good writer, or just don't have a strong desire to work on your writing, I want to talk to you!

I invite you to participate in this study in two ways:

Option 1: Be a Classroom Participant

Compensation: End of Semester Pizza Party
Your entire class will be invited to share the results of two brief surveys addressing your feelings about writing. You will also be asked to share the written comments that your instructor gives you on the major assignments you will write over the course of the semester. No time outside of class is necessary to be a study participant, and your identity will remain anonymous.

Option 2: Be an Interview Participant

Compensation: $100 cash
In addition to being a classroom participant, interview participants will be asked to complete four interviews: two during the fall semester, one at the conclusion of the fall semester, and one at the start of the winter semester. These interviews will take place outside of class and will last about 60 minutes each. You will also be asked to complete brief revision plans responding to the comments your instructor gives you on your major assignments. Your identity will remain anonymous in the study if you desire.

Participating in this study as a classroom and/or interview participant is completely voluntary. Even if you decide to participate now, you may change your mind and stop at any time.

_____   *I am interested in participating in this study as a classroom participant.*

_____   *I am interested in participating in this study as an interview participant.*

_____   _____
Name   Email Address

If you have questions about this study, please contact the researcher:
Justine Neiderhiser, janeider@umich.edu
Joint Program in English and Education, University of Michigan

Appendix C. CONSENT FORM FOR CLASSROOM PARTICIPANTS

Consent to Participate in a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study being conducted by Justine Neiderhiser of the University of Michigan's Joint Program in English and Education. The purpose of the research is to better understand how first-year writing students who typically haven't enjoyed the writing process respond to the written comments that their instructors give them on their writing.

If you agree to be part of the research study, you will be asked to share the results of two brief surveys and to provide access to the comments your instructor gives you on your major writing assignments over the course of the semester. No additional time outside of class is necessary and your identity will remain anonymous in the study. Participating in this study is completely voluntary. Even if you decide to participate now, you may change your mind and stop at any time.

_____ *I would like to take part in this study as an anonymous classroom participant. I give my permission for the use of my survey results, major writing assignments, and my instructor's comments on these writing assignments in the study.*

_____ *I am not interested in participating in this study.*

_____   _____

Signature   Date

_____

Print Name

_____   _____

Email address   Phone Number (optional)

If you have questions about this study, please contact the researcher:
Justine Neiderhiser, janeider@umich.edu
University of Michigan
Joint Program in English and Education

Appendix D. STUDENT SURVEYS

Writing Self-Efficacy Instrument[67]

For each of the following writing tasks, please rate the probability that you would successfully communicate what you wanted to say in writing on a scale from zero (not possible) to 100 (certain success).

1. Write a letter to a friend or family member.
2. List instructions for how to play a card game.
3. Compose a will or other legal document.
4. Fill out an insurance application.
5. Write an instruction manual for operating an office machine.
6. Prepare a resume describing your employment history and skills.
7. Write a one or two sentence answer to a specific test question.
8. Compose a one or two page essay in answer to a test question.
9. Write a term paper of 15 to 20 pages.
10. Author a scholarly article for publication in a professional journal in your field.
11. Write a letter to the editor of the daily newspaper.
12. Compose an article for a popular magazine such as Newsweek.
13. Author a short fiction story.
14. Author a 400 page novel.
15. Compose a poem on the topic of your choice.
16. Write useful class notes.

For each of the following writing skills, please rate the probability that you would successfully perform each skill on a scale from zero (not possible) to 100 (certain success).

1. Correctly spell all words in a one page passage.
2. Correctly punctuate a one page passage.
3. Correctly use parts of speech (i.e. nouns, verbs, adjectives, etc.).
4. Write a simple sentence with proper punctuation and grammatical structure.
5. Correctly use plurals, verb tenses, prefixes, and suffixes.
6. Write compound and complex sentences with proper punctuation and grammatical structure.
7. Organize sentences into a paragraph so as to clearly express a theme.
8. Write a paper with good overall organization (e.g. ideas in order, effective transitions, etc.).

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[67] From Shell, Murphy, and Bruning (1989). The complete scale consists of both self-efficacy and outcome expectancy measures for reading and writing. Only measures for self-efficacy in writing will be included in this study.

Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire (MSLQ)[68]

For each of the following statements, please rate the degree to which you identify with the statement on a scale from one (not at all true of me) to seven (very true of me).

1. In a class like this, I prefer course material that really challenges me so I can learn new things.
2. If I study in appropriate ways, then I will be able to learn the material in this course.
3. When I write a paper I think about how poorly I am doing compared with other students.
4. I think I will be able to use what I learn in this course in other courses.
5. I believe I will receive an excellent grade in this class.
6. I'm certain I can understand the most difficult material presented in the readings for this course.
7. Getting a good grade in this class is the most satisfying thing for me right now.
8. When I write a paper I think about other parts of the paper that I'm having trouble writing.
9. It is my own fault if I don't learn the material in this course.
10. It is important for me to learn the course material in this class.
11. The most important thing for me right now is improving my overall grade point average, so my main concern in this class is getting a good grade.
12. I'm confident I can learn the basic concepts taught in this course.
13. If I can, I want to get better grades in this class than most of the other students.
14. When I write papers I think of the consequences of failing.
15. I'm confident I can understand the most complex material presented by the instructor in this course.
16. In a class like this, I prefer course material that arouses my curiosity, even if it is difficult to learn.
17. I am very interested in the content area of this course.
18. If I try hard enough, then I will understand the course material.
19. I have an uneasy, upset feeling when I write a paper.
20. I'm confident I can do an excellent job on the assignments and papers[69] in this course.
21. I expect to do well in this class.
22. The most satisfying thing for me in this course is trying to understand the content as thoroughly as possible.
23. I think the course material in this class is useful for me to learn.
24. When I have the opportunity in this class, I choose course assignments that I can learn from even if they don't guarantee a good grade.
25. If I don't understand the course material, it is because I didn't try hard enough.
26. I like the subject matter of this course.
27. Understanding the subject matter of this course is very important to me.
28. I feel my heart beating fast when I write.
29. I'm certain I can master the skills being taught in this class.
30. I want to do well in this class because it is important to show my ability to my family, friends, employer, or others.
31. Considering the difficulty of this course, the teacher, and my skills, I think I will do well in this class.

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[68] From Duncan and McKeachie (2005). The complete MSLQ consists of two parts: motivation and learning strategies. Only the scale for motivation will be included in this study.

[69] The word "test" was replaced with the word "papers" to better suit the context of a composition classroom.

Appendix E. PROTOCOLS FOR INSTRUCTOR INTERVIEWS

INSTRUCTOR INTERVIEW 1 (LATE AUGUST 2013)

BRIEF: *Thank you for sitting down with me today. As you know, we'll be chatting about the general focus of your course, what you hope students will learn in your course, and the role that you feel feedback plays in this process. I'll ask you some questions about your typical approaches to commenting on student writing and then I'll ask you to comment on a sample student essay. We'll talk a little bit about the essay and the comments you make on it. Then there will also be a chance for us to discuss anything that you would like to address that we don't get to during the interview. Of course, you should feel free to bring up anything that you feel is relevant as we talk. The interview should last approximately one hour.*

QUESTIONS ABOUT THE COURSE CONTEXT

1. How would you describe the focus of your course?
2. How do you think your course compares to other first-year writing courses?
3. What are your learning goals for this course?
4. How do you plan to help them reach these goals?
5. How would you describe yourself as a writing teacher?
6. What role does feedback play in your approach to writing instruction?

APPROACHES TO GIVING FEEDBACK

7. How do you provide feedback to your students on their writing?
8. Why do you give your students feedback on their writing?
9. What is the focus of the written comments that you give students on their writing?
10. What do you hope students will gain from the feedback that you provide?

DISCUSSION OF STUDENT PAPER

MINI-BRIEF: *Now I'd like to give you a few minutes to write comments on a sample student essay. You might be familiar with this assignment. It's a Directed Self-Placement essay similar to those your students have written this summer. The prompt that this student was given was: [removed for anonymity]. As you look over this essay, I'd like you to imagine that you have asked students in your class to revise their DSP essays as their first assignment. You are giving each student comments to help him or her revise the essay. Take as much time as you need. Then, we'll talk a little bit about the ways that you responded to this student's writing.*

11. Now that you've had a chance to look at the paper, can you describe your general impression of the writing?
12. How do you think that impression is reflected in the comments that you wrote for this student?
13. Can you describe the process that you worked through as you commented on this paper?
14. What were you hoping to accomplish through the comments that you provided to this student?
15. Was there anything that you would have liked to communicate to the student that you don't feel you were able to, or that you weren't able to communicate as well as you would have liked?
16. Which comment do you think is the most important?
    a. Probe: How did you indicate the significance of that comment to the student?
17. Which comment is least important?
    a. Probe: What do you want the student to take away from that comment?
18. If this student was in your class, what would you expect his or her next steps to be? What would you want the student to do with these comments?

PERCEPTIONS OF FEEDBACK

19. What role do you think feedback should play in a student's writing processes?
20. Do you think that your feedback plays this role for students in your writing courses?
21. What are the main characteristics that make for effective feedback?

Is there anything that you would like to discuss further or that we haven't yet addressed?

INSTRUCTOR INTERVIEW 2 (MID-FEBRUARY 2014)

BRIEF: *Thank you for taking the time to talk with me. Like we discussed at the start of the semester, today I'd like to chat about the experiences that you had with providing feedback to students this semester. I'd like to start by addressing the general focus of the course and the kinds of feedback that you gave students this semester. Then, we'll discuss experiences with feedback that you found particularly significant. Finally, I'd like to go through some of the experiences that students found to be most significant and share some of my preliminary study findings with you. Please don't hesitate to bring up anything you feel is relevant to our conversation as we talk. This interview should take approximately one hour.*

REFLECTING ON THE COURSE CONTEXT
1. What do you think students learned in your course?
2. How did you help students learn these concepts?
3. What role did feedback play in your writing instruction?

REFLECTING ON GIVING FEEDBACK
4. How did you provide feedback to your students on their writing?
5. What was the focus of the written comments that you gave students on their writing?
6. What do you think your students gained from the feedback that you gave them?
7. What role do you think your feedback played in your students' writing processes?
8. Did your approach to providing feedback to students shift at any point during the semester?
    a. Probe: Why do you think that is?
    b. How will you approach giving feedback next semester?
    c. Probe: What will you change about the feedback you provide to students?
    d. Probe: What will you keep the same?

SIGNIFICANT MOMENTS FOR THE INSTRUCTOR
9. Can you describe a moment in which you felt very positive about the feedback you provided to a student?
    a. Probe: What did you want the student to do in response to that feedback?
    b. Probe: What did the student do in response to that feedback?
    c. Probe: How do you think the student felt receiving that feedback?
10. Can you describe a moment in which you gave feedback that may have been difficult for a student to receive?
    a. Probe: What did you want the student to do in response to that feedback?
    b. Probe: What did the student do in response to that feedback?
    c. Probe: How do you think the student felt receiving that feedback?

SIGNIFICANT MOMENTS FOR THE STUDENTS

MINI-BRIEF: *Ok, now I'd like to talk about some of the findings that are emerging from the study. In particular, I'm hoping we can talk about [STUDENT PARTICIPANT NAMES]. I have a few questions that I'd like to address for each of these students and some sample comments for us to look at as we talk.*

11. What was your experience with providing feedback to [STUDENT]?
12. Can you recall any significant moments from working with [STUDENT] over the course of the semester?
13. What did you most want [STUDENT] to learn from the written comments you provided [HIM/HER]?
14. [STUDENT] identified a few comments that were particularly significant for [HIM/HER]. *Repeat set of questions as needed for each student.*
    a. Probe: What were you trying to express when you said [COMMENT]?
    b. Probe: What did you want [HIM/HER] to do in response to this comment?
    c. Probe: What did the student do in response to that feedback?
    d. Probe: How do you think the student felt receiving that feedback?

PERCEPTIONS OF FEEDBACK

15. Reflecting on all of the experiences that you have had this semester, how would you describe the main characteristics that make for effective feedback?

Is there anything else that you would like to discuss further or that we haven't yet addressed that you think we should?

Appendix F. PROTOCOLS FOR STUDENT INTERVIEWS

STUDENT INTERVIEW 1 (EARLY SEPTEMBER 2013)

BRIEF: *Thank you for agreeing to chat with me today. I'm doing a study to help college writing instructors better understand how students perceive the written feedback they receive on their writing. I want to emphasize that what I'm really interested in is how you respond to the feedback that you receive; I'm not evaluating your writing or you as a student. I'll be asking you questions about your past experiences with writing and with receiving feedback on your writing. I'll ask you some questions about what kinds of feedback have motivated or discouraged you and what you usually do when you receive feedback on your writing. We'll also talk a little bit about your expectations for your current writing course. My goal is to better understand what your experiences with writing have been like, so feel free to bring up anything that you think might be relevant to our conversation. This should take about an hour.*

PAST EXPERIENCES WITH WRITING
1. What writing classes have you taken in the past?
2. What were your experiences in these classes like?
3. How would you describe yourself as a writer?
4. How do you feel about writing?
   a. Probe: How important do you feel it is that you are able to write well?
   b. Probe: Do you feel you are capable of writing well?

PAST EXPERIENCES WITH FEEDBACK
5. In the past, what was the focus of the feedback that you have received on your writing?
6. What are all the ways in which teachers have responded to your writing in the past? Writing? Speaking? Video?
7. How do you feel about getting feedback on your writing?
8. Can you describe a moment in which you felt very positive about the feedback that you received on your writing?
   a. Probe: What was that feedback?
   b. Probe: How did that feedback make you feel?
   c. Probe: What did you do in response to that feedback?
9. Can you describe a moment in which you felt very negative about the feedback that you received on your writing?
   a. Probe: What was that feedback?
   b. Probe: How did that feedback make you feel?
   c. Probe: What did you do in response to that feedback?
10. What role does feedback play in your writing process?

PERCEPTIONS OF FEEDBACK
11. What are teachers trying to accomplish when they give you feedback on your writing?
    a. Probe: Do you think they are successful in this?
12. Has the feedback that you have received in the past has changed the way you write?
    a. Probe: If so, how?
13. What kinds of feedback do you think would help you improve your writing?
14. What kinds of feedback will not help you improve your writing?

COURSE EXPECTATIONS

15. There are a number of options for first-year writing. Why did you take the general first-year writing course?
16. What do you expect to learn from this course?
    a. Probe: What kind of writing do you think you will do?
    b. Probe: How important do you think it is to be able to write these genres well?
    c. Probe: How do you think your section compares to other sections of this course?
17. What kinds of feedback do you expect to receive on your writing in this course?
18. How much effort do you plan to put into this course?

Is there anything else that you think we should talk about?

STUDENT INTERVIEW 2 (LATE OCTOBER 2013)

BRIEF: *I am so glad that you could meet with me today! I'm really looking forward to seeing how the semester is going for you. We're going to start by talking a little bit about what's happened in class, then we're going to look at some of the specific comments your instructor gave you on your first paper. Then, we'll talk a little bit about your revision plan. I really want to get a sense of what it's been like for you to receive feedback on your writing and to try to work with that feedback, so feel free to bring up anything that you think might be relevant. This interview should take about an hour.*

ORIENTING QUESTIONS
1. How's the semester going?
2. What kinds of writing assignments have you done so far?
3. Have you received feedback on any of your writing?
   a. NO: Would you consider the comments that your instructor gave you on your paper feedback?
   b. YES: What are the ways in which your teacher has responded to your writing?
      i. Probe: How would you describe that feedback? What was the focus?
      ii. Probe: Does anything stand out to you about the comments you've received on your writing?

DISCUSSION OF INSTRUCTOR COMMENTS

MINI-BRIEF: *Ok, let's talk about some of the specific comments that your instructor has given you so far this semester. If you want to take a minute to look back over your paper, I have copies here that you can look at. Whenever you're ready, I'd like to start by talking about the process you went through when you first received feedback on this paper. Later, we'll talk about the revision plan that you drafted in response to these comments.*
4. Now that you've had a chance to look through your paper, can you remember what you did first after you received the feedback?
   a. Probe: Did you look at the comments when your instructor gave them to you?
      i. Probe: What did you read first?
   b. Probe: What did you first do when you got these comments?
   c. Probe: What did you do with the comments once you had a chance to work through them?
5. How does the feedback you got on this paper compare with the kinds of feedback that you have received in the past?
6. How did the feedback you received on this paper make you feel?
   a. Probe: Were any comments particularly motivating?
   b. Probe: Were any comments particularly discouraging?
   c. Probe: Were there any comments that you just felt you weren't able to address?
7. What do you think your instructor was hoping to accomplish in giving you this feedback?
   a. Probe: What makes you think this?
8. After reading these comments, how would you describe your writing ability?
   a. Probe: Did these comments influence the way you feel about writing?
9. Are there any comments that really stood out to you?
   a. Probe: What about that comment made it stand out to you?
   b. Probe: Do you remember how you felt about that comment at the time?

       c. Probe: How do you feel about it now?

       d. Probe: What did you do with the comment? Did it influence your writing process?

10. Are there any comments that you found difficult to address?

       a. Probe: What was difficult about this comment?

       b. Probe: Can you imagine a better way that your teacher could have written this comment?

11. Are there any other comments that you would like to talk about?

MINI-BRIEF: *So, I know you spent some time working through your revision plan for this paper. Can we talk about that now? I have a copy here for you to look over if you'd like. When you're ready, let's start by talking about what you were hoping to accomplish in this plan.*

12. Ok, so can you describe what you wanted to accomplish in your revision plan?

13. How did you address the comments that your instructor wrote on your paper?

14. Did you address any problems that your instructor didn't mention?

15. Can we talk a little bit about the comments that you responded to here? What was it about these comments that led you to address them in your revision plan?

16. I noticed that you didn't address this comment, which says [COMMENT]. Why did you choose not to respond to this comment in your plan? **repeat as needed**

17. How well do you think you would be able to make the changes you outline here?

18. Will these changes make your paper better?

19. Will making these changes make you a better writer?

20. How motivated are you to make the changes that you outline here?

Are there any experiences that you've had so far in your first-year writing course that you would like to talk about?
Anything else you think we should talk about?

STUDENT INTERVIEW 3 (EARLY DECEMBER 2013)

BRIEF: *It's great to see you! Today we're going to check in and see how your first-year writing course has gone so far. Like our last conversation, we're going to start by talking a little bit about what's happened in class, then I'm going to ask you to choose one of the papers that you've completed this semester, and we'll look at some of the specific comments your instructor gave you on it. Then, we'll talk a little bit about your revision plan for that paper. I want to make sure we get to anything that you think is relevant to the feedback you've been getting on your writing, so don't feel obligated to stick to just the questions that I ask. We should be done in about an hour.*

ORIENTING QUESTIONS
1. How's the semester going?
2. What kinds of writing assignments have you done so far?
3. How would you describe the feedback that you've been getting on your writing?
   a. Probe: What is the focus of this feedback?
   b. Probe: Does anything stand out to you about the comments you've received on your writing?

DISCUSSION OF INSTRUCTOR COMMENTS

MINI-BRIEF: *Alright, I have copies of each of your papers and revision plans here. Which one would you like to talk about today? I'm going to give you a few minutes to choose the paper you'd like to discuss and to look over the comments and your revision plan. Whenever you're ready, I'd like to start by talking about what it was like to receive feedback on this paper. Then, we'll talk about the revision plan that you drafted in response to these comments*
4. Why did you choose this paper?
5. Now that you've had a chance to look through your paper, can you remember what you did first after you received the feedback?
   a. Probe: Did you look at the comments when your instructor gave them to you?
      i. Probe: What did you read first?
   b. Probe: What did you first do when you got these comments?
   c. Probe: What did you do with the comments once you had a chance to work through them?
6. How does the feedback you got on this paper compare with the kinds of feedback that you received on your first paper?
7. How did the feedback you received on this paper make you feel?
   a. Probe: Were any comments particularly motivating?
   b. Probe: Were any comments particularly discouraging?
   c. Probe: Were there any comments that you just felt you weren't able to address?
8. What do you think your instructor was hoping to accomplish in giving you this feedback?
   a. Probe: What makes you think this?
9. After reading these comments, how would you describe your writing ability?
   a. Probe: Did these comments influence the way you feel about writing?
10. Are there any comments that really stood out to you?
    a. Probe: What about that comment made it stand out to you?

      b.   Probe: Do you remember how you felt about that comment at the time?

      c.   Probe: How do you feel about it now?

      d.   Probe: What did you do with the comment? Did it influence your writing process?

11. Are there any comments that you found difficult to address?

      a.   Probe: What was difficult about this comment?

      b.   Probe: Can you imagine a better way that your teacher could have written this comment?

12. Are there any other comments that you would like to talk about?

MINI-BRIEF: *So, I know you spent some time working through your revision plan for this paper. Can we talk about that now? I have a copy here for you to look over if you'd like. When you're ready, let's start by talking about what you were hoping to accomplish in this plan.*

13. Ok, so can you describe what you wanted to accomplish in your revision plan?

14. How did you address the comments that your instructor wrote on your paper?

15. Did you address any problems that your instructor didn't mention?

16. Can we talk a little bit about the comments that you responded to here? What was it about these comments that led you to address them in your revision plan?

17. I noticed that you didn't address this comment, which says [COMMENT]. Why did you choose not to respond to this comment in your plan? *repeat as needed*

18. How well do you think you would be able to make the changes you outline here?

19. Will these changes make your paper better?

20. Will making these changes make you a better writer?

21. How motivated are you to make the changes that you outline here?

Are there any experiences that you've had so far in your first-year writing class that you would like to talk about?
Anything else you think we should talk about?

STUDENT INTERVIEW 4 (MID-JANUARY 2014)

BRIEF: *It's so nice to be able to sit down with you again! As you know, this is the last time that I'll be asking you questions for this study. I just want to thank you for all the hard work that you put into this project. Talking with you has really changed the way that I think about feedback. So, today we are going to come back to some of the questions that I asked you before you took your first-year writing course. As always, if there is anything else you want to talk about, we can talk about that at any time. This should only take about 30 minutes.*

REFLECTING ON THE COURSE

1. How does it feel to have completed your first-year writing course?
2. What was your experience in your first-year writing course like?
3. How much effort did you put into this course?
4. What did you like the most about this class?
5. What did you like the least about this class?

REFLECTING ON WRITING
6. Do you think you're a better writer after taking this class?
7. How would you describe yourself as a writer?
8. How do you feel about writing?
    a. Probe: How important do you feel it is that you are able to write well?
    b. Probe: Do you feel you are capable of writing well?

REFLECTING ON FEEDBACK
9. How do you feel about getting feedback on your writing?
10. What do you think your teacher most wanted you to learn from the feedback [HE/SHE] gave you on your writing?
11. Is that what you learned from [HIS/HER] comments?
    a. Probe: Did you learn anything else from the feedback you received?
12. Did the feedback that you received last semester change the way you think about writing?
    a. YES: How?
    b. NO: Why do you think that is?
13. What role does feedback play in your writing process?
14. What kinds of feedback do you think will help you improve your writing?
15. What kinds of feedback will not help you improve your writing?

Now that we are done with the study, is there anything that you want me to know, that you want other writing instructors to know, or that you would like your instructor to know?

Appendix G. SAMPLE STUDENT REVISION PLAN (PATRICK, ESSAY 1)

In the space below, write the comments that you have *selected* to focus on for your revisions. Make sure that you *prioritize* these comments, listing the most important comment first and the least important comment last. You may add rows to or delete rows from the template as needed.

Priority	Selected Comment	My Notes
1	What if you led with this idea in topic sentence of conclusion and developed a suggestion about the value of religion as students go forward? Or what about a recommendation?	Clearly the conclusion didn't work as planned- work on developing a clear conclusion strategy. Keep the ideas but develop a call to action.
2	I thought you were going to say he was part of your youth group- how does the wrestling team example support main idea in topic sentence?	Clear up the topic sentence, and perhaps change the order from youth group to wrestling team. Seems focused more on church than social here.
3	Link back to larger point about benefits for your audience and context	Add a sentence or two- how does prayer and discussion help to reduce stress??
4	Link to education or self-discovery to strengthen appeal of this evidence to your audience	Add a sentence or two- tie paragraph to bigger picture
5	Can you bring in your position on the value of a spiritual life to this point on self-discovery?	Mention why it is important to discover our own spiritual life

In the space provided here, write out your revision plan. You might decide to organize your thoughts by starting with the changes you plan to make to the introduction, then the body, then the conclusion. Or, you might organize your thoughts according to the priorities you outlined above. Whatever organization you choose here, be sure to describe the specific changes that you plan to make to your essay.

Revision Plan:

1. Develop third paragraph. Focus less on friend group from church and how spirituality enabled me to connect to others, even in social settings (i.e. Franky).
2. Add sentences to each paragraph, tying them into broader argument (benefits of spirituality).
3. Develop paragraph on self-discovery by explaining value of a spiritual life in self-discovery.
4. Rework conclusion to add a broader "call to action".
5. Grammar and wording issues.

Finally, take a few minutes to **reflect** on the changes you have outlined above. What do you hope to accomplish through making the changes that you've outlined here?

Reflection: I think the largest benefit of these revisions would be making my paper stronger by connecting all my points and therefore strengthen my broader argument. Expanding my conclusion to incorporate a "call to action" will also add to the effectiveness of my argument. My biggest problems are tying my paragraphs together and explaining how they relate to the broader argument, and these changes will help to fix that.

Appendix H. CODEBOOK FOR ANALYZING WRITTEN COMMENTS

CATEGORY DEFINITIONS

ORIENTATION describes where a written comment directs a student's attention, such as towards the task at hand or the skills needed to complete the task, towards steps that he or she could take, or inward, towards the student's self-perception.

> *Source:* Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Adapted to suit the contexts of the first-year writing classroom

DEGREES OF CONTROL describes the degree of imposition that a written comment exerts, whether that be firm control, moderate control, or mild control over a student's writing.

> *Source:* Sprinkle, 2004; Expanded to more fully capture the complexity of instructors' written comments

VALENCE describes the degree to which a written comment *explicitly* expresses a value judgment about a choice, technique, or strategy used by a student, about the students' writing more generally, or about the student.

> *Source:* Interview data; Students and instructors frequently described the importance of positive feedback and varying responses to critical feedback. I added the code neutral feedback to capture the full range of valence in instructor comments.

LOCATION describes the general area in which a comment was written on a student's essay, which in this study included textual comments, marginal comments, and endnotes.

> *Source:* Intuition; I wanted to capture the different types of comments that the instructors made on student writing, though the results of this analysis did not emerge as significant, and consequently are not included in the findings presented in this study.

RHETORICAL SITUATION describes what aspects of a student's writing a written comment addresses, including content features, textual features, and contextual features.

> *Source:* Sprinkle, 2004; Expanded to more fully capture the complexity of instructors' written comments; the results of this analysis did not emerge as significant, and consequently are not included in the findings presented in this study.

Note: Each of the categories and codes used to analyze the instructors' written comments is presented here, with definitions of the specific codes applied and examples from Jennifer and Hadley. When the examples are not labeled, they were pulled from the Directed Self-Placement essay that the instructors each commented on during their initial interview. When they are labeled, the number following the participant's name indicates the essay number and draft number that the comment was made on (for instance, Abigail 1.1 means that the comment was made on Abigail's first submission of her first essay).

ORIENTATION OF INSTRUCTOR WRITTEN COMMENTS

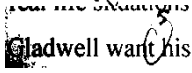| CODE	DEFINITION	EXAMPLE(S)
Task	Comments that address the task or essay the student was asked to complete, including how well the task is being accomplished or performed; Comments that ask the student to acquire more or different information relevant to the task; or that help students build more surface knowledge by explaining the task	*Hadley:* Can you set up this reference more clearly? *Jennifer:* Critically ENGAGE with the source material.
Process	Comments that address the processes used to create a project or complete a task; Comments aimed at the processing of information or learning processes required for understanding or completing the task; Comments that show relationships between tasks	*Hadley:* Maybe use this to focus your thesis? *Jennifer:* But ultimately, you want to pick a single focus [Abigail, 1.1]
Self-Regulation	Comments that address the student's self-regulation in monitoring, directing, or taking action towards a learning goal, that address or promote the development of self-evaluation skills, or that address the student's confidence to engage further on a task	*Hadley:* Keep working on intro/conclusion strategies [Patrick, 1.1] *Jennifer:* Ask me, or Google, about quotations and punctuation.
Personal	Comments that are directed towards the student, as opposed to their text, often evaluating or express affect about the student	*Hadley:* I know your thinking has been evolving on this topic [Megan, 3.1] *Jennifer:* This is a testament to your humility as a narrator [Ding, 1.1]
Other	Comments that are either unclear in their orientation or do not fit within the other categories	*Jennifer:* I'll stop marking this. *Hadley:* n/a

DEGREES OF CONTROL OF INSTRUCTOR WRITTEN COMMENTS

CATEGORY	CODE	DEFINITION	EXAMPLE(S)
FIRM CONTROL	**Correction**	Comments that change the student's essay	*Hadley:* feedbacks. *Jennifer:* Gladwell want his
	Command	Comments that tell the student exactly what to do or write, often (but not always) using imperatives	*Hadley:* states: "there *Jennifer:* Try a new ending
	Evaluation	Comments that make value judgments with a high degree of certainty, including strong modals (should)	*Hadley:* Awkward as stated *Jennifer:* Too cheesy
MODERATE CONTROL	**Qualified Evaluation**	Comments that make value judgments that are tempered by the use of qualifiers such as weak modals (could, might) or hedge words (feels, seems like) that decrease the degree of certainty	*Hadley:* Conclusion seems repetitive *Jennifer:* This section feels so wonderfully intimate [Ding, 3.1]
	Suggestion	Comments that offer potential changes a student *could* make, without obligation or offer a strategy or specific resource that the student *could* use to revise the essay	*Hadley:* This might serve as a decent thesis [Megan, 1.1] *Jennifer:* Perhaps zoom in.
	Directive Question	Comments that pose a question asking the student to make specific changes; These questions foster *action*	*Hadley:* Maybe use this to focus your thesis? *Jennifer:* Can you give an example?
MILD CONTROL	**Non-Directive Question**	Comments that pose a question asking the student to think about his or her writing; These questions foster *reflection*	*Hadley:* Why the exclamation point? *Jennifer:* How do you feel about all of this?
	Explanation	Comments that outline the logistics of an assignment, articulate why a particular comment or mark has been made, or explicate what a particular change or writing technique could accomplish	*Hadley:* [Can this be condensed] to more succinctly express your position? *Jennifer:* Stretch is a writing technique in which you take a small idea and extend it by going into great detail. [Ronnie, 1.1]
	Description	Comments that outline what a student is doing in his or her essay without value judgments	*Hadley:* summary *Jennifer:* What is above is 1 page w/out smoke detectors. [Abigail, 3.1]
	Reader Response	Comments that reflect a reader's reaction	*Hadley:* ? I thought you were going to say he was part of… [Patrick, 1.1] *Jennifer:* I so admire your openness toward the end [Stephanie, 1.1]

VALENCE OF INSTRUCTOR WRITTEN COMMENTS

CODE	DEFINITION	EXAMPLE(S)
Positive	Comments that explicitly convey a positive value judgment, most often about choices made or techniques used by a student, such as those that identify a choice or technique used as successful	***Hadley:*** ✓ Intro captures reader's attention with specifics ***Jennifer:*** Great opening
Neutral	Comments that do not explicitly convey a positive or negative value judgment, most often about the choices made or techniques used by a student, such as those that ask students to try a choice or technique not used in the student's essay or to think about a particular choice. These comments may include implicit value judgments that are not specifically stated.	***Hadley:*** I wonder if you have experiences you can draw on? ***Jennifer:*** Why not?
Critical	Comments that explicitly convey a negative value judgment, most often about choices made or techniques used by a student, such as those that explicitly identify a choice or technique used as unsuccessful	***Hadley:*** usage ***Jennifer:*** You still haven't SHOWN this.

LOCATION OF INSTRUCTOR WRITTEN COMMENTS

CODE	DEFINITION	EXAMPLE(S)
Textual	Comments written over a student's text, including edits, minimal marks, or correction symbols that attend to textual features in the essay	***Hadley:*** feedbacks. Gladwell want his ***Jennifer:***
Marginal	Comments written in the margins of a student's essay	***Hadley:*** "But the age of the child seems an important aspect to specify in this argument" [Megan, 1.1] ***Jennifer:*** "LOVELY section" [Ronnie 3.1]
Endnote	Comments written after the conclusion of a student's essay, usually in the form of a letter to the student	***Hadley:*** "Look at the section in Roberts' essay about calling a spade a spade and cutting padding" [Nathan, 1.1] ***Jennifer:*** "Your biggest efforts in revision will be dealing with 'satire logic.'" [Stephanie, 2.1]

RHETORICAL SITUATION OF INSTRUCTOR WRITTEN COMMENTS

CATEGORY	CODE	DEFINITION	EXAMPLE(S)
CONTENT FEATURES		Comments that address the essay's clarity, focus, or adherence to a central point and that address specific points made or that could have been made	*Hadley:* "You seem to be arguing that some parents push their kids too hard in athletics" [Megan, 1.1] *Jennifer:* "Try to end on selfishness" [Stephanie, 2.1]
	Development and Support	Comments that address the essay's logical development, including the use of evidence and supporting devices (statistics, quotations, examples, etc.) and the need for more or less elaboration from the student	*Hadley:* "How does this connect to and develop your claim?" [Megan, 2.1] *Jennifer:* "Explain briefly." [Ding, 1.1]
TEXTUAL FEATURES	**Organization**	Comments that address the essay's organization, including the arrangement of ideas and the presence of repetition, or that address the use of organizational tools such as introduction or conclusion strategies, topic sentences, transitions, and paragraph breaks	*Hadley:* "Where might you break this bit?" [Taeyoun, 1.1] *Jennifer:* "Establish it clearly earlier on so we know what you mean here." [Ding, 3.1]
	Grammar and Mechanics	Comments, edits, minimal marks, or correction symbols that attend to textual features in the essay that violate standard conventions such as punctuation, grammar, and spelling	*Hadley:* "Proofread carefully" [Taeyoun, 1.1] *Jennifer:* "I meant that vs. who, but this also works!" [John, 2.2]
	Style	Comments, edits, minimal marks, or correction symbols that attend to textual features in the essay that do not violate standard conventions such as the presence of clichés	*Hadley:* "Avoid vague terms" [Patrick, 2.1] *Jennifer:* "Jarring tonal shift" [John, 1.2]
	Text-holistic	Comments that address the essay as a whole or a specific part of the essay, such as a paragraph or phrase	*Hadley:* "Interesting" [P, 3.1] *Jennifer:* [Abigail, 1.1] dumplings filled with heaven.
CONTEXTUAL FEATURES	**Person-based**	Comments that are directed towards the student as opposed to the text, such as evaluations of his or her capabilities, effort, or affect	*Hadley:* "keep it up!" [Nathan, 3.1] *Jennifer:* "The good news is that, like the second paper, you clearly are capable of doing it" [Ding, 3.1]
	Audience Awareness	Comments that address the rhetorical situation of the essay, emphasizing a reader's potential reaction, including the instructor's response	*Hadley:* "Some might argue w/ this definition" [Megan, 3.1] *Jennifer:* "'Change is certain' comes a bit as a surprise" [Abigail, 1.2]

Appendix I. ESSAYS SELECTED FOR SECOND CODING

HADLEY'S COMMENTS ON STUDENTS' ESSAYS

Student	Essay Number	Number of Comments	Assigned Number
Megan	1.1	46	14
	2.1	63	1
	2.2	14	16
	3.1	73	12
	4.1	**38**	**3**
	5.1	14	7
Nathan	1.1	76	4
	2.1	66	11
	3.1	111	13
	*4.1	**18**	**17**
	*5.1	9	10
Patrick	**1.1**	**44**	**2**
	2.1	56	6
	3.1	68	15
	*4.1	13	8
	*5.1	8	5
Taeyoun	**1.1**	**35**	**9**

* = comments not returned to student

Total Comments: 752   10 percent = 75 comments

Calibration: 2 – Patrick, Essay 1.1, 44 comments

Coding: 9 – Tae Youn, Essay 1.1, 35 comments
               3 – Megan, Essay 4.1, 38 comments
               17 – Nathan, Essay 4.1, 18 comments

Total Comments Independently Coded by Second Coder: 91, 12.1 percent

JENNIFER'S COMMENTS ON STUDENTS' ESSAYS

Student	Essay Number	Number of Comments	Assigned Number
Abigail	1.1	112	29
	1.2	58	3
	1.3	**24**	**35**
	2.1	129	18
	2.2	47	4
	3.1	109	32
	3.2	61	25
Ding	1.1	130	15
	1.2	44	10
	2.1	12	27
	2.2	159	2
	3.1	**177**	**19**
John Hancock	**1.1**	**103**	**6**
	1.2	42	11
	1.3	50	14
	2.1	124	8
	2.2	16	33
	3.1	107	22
	3.2	33	9
	4.1	68	26
Ronnie	1.1	102	34
	1.2	44	5
	1.3	71	17
	2.1	96	31
	2.2	58	23
	3.1	147	1
	3.2	**58**	**21**
	3.3	28	28
	4.1	78	16
Stephanie	1.1	91	13
	1.2	**32**	**24**
	2.1	109	30
	2.2	37	12
	3.1	145	7
	3.2	30	20

Total Comments: 2,731   10 percent = 273 comments

Calibration: *6 – John, Essay 1.1, 103 comments*

Coding: 24 – Stephanie, Essay 1.2, 32 comments
            19 – Ding, Essay 3.1, 177 comments
            35 – Abigail, Essay 1.3, 24 comments
            21 – Ronnie, Essay 3.2, 58 comments

Total Comments Independently Coded by Second Coder: 292, 10.7 percent

Appendix J. KAPPA CALCULATIONS FOR SECOND CODER DATA

COHEN'S KAPPA CALCULATIONS FOR CALIBTRATION CODING

ORIENTATION	Task	Process	Self-Regulation	Personal	Other	TOTAL
Task	**129**	6	3	0	3	141
Process	0	**0**	1	0	0	1
Self-Regulation	0	0	**3**	0	0	3
Personal	0	0	0	**1**	0	1
Other	1	0	0	0	**0**	1
TOTAL	130	6	7	1	3	*147*

Number of observed agreements: 133 (90.48% of the observations)
Number of agreements expected by chance: 124.9 (84.97% of the observations)

Kappa = 0.366; **SE of kappa** = 0.122; **95% confidence interval:** From 0.127 to 0.606
The strength of agreement is considered to be '**FAIR**'.

DEGREES OF CONTROL	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	TOTAL
Correction (A)	**9**	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	10
Command (B)	0	**16**	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	17
Evaluation (C)	0	0	**58**	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	58
Qualified Evaluation (D)	0	0	6	**3**	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	10
Suggestion (E)	0	0	0	0	**2**	0	0	0	0	0	1	3
Directive Question (F)	0	0	0	1	0	**14**	1	0	0	0	0	16
Non-Directive Question (G)	0	0	0	0	0	2	**4**	0	0	0	0	6
Explanation (H)	0	0	1	1	0	2	0	**10**	0	0	0	14
Description (I)	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	**2**	1	0	5
Reader Response (J)	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	**5**	0	8
Other (K)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	**0**	0
TOTAL	9	16	69	5	2	19	6	11	3	6	1	*147*

Number of observed agreements: 123 (83.67% of the observations)
Number of agreements expected by chance: 33.9 (23.03% of the observations)

Kappa = 0.788; **SE of kappa** = 0.038; **95% confidence interval:** From 0.713 to 0.863
The strength of agreement is considered to be '**GOOD**'.

VALENCE	Positive	Neutral	Critical	TOTAL
Positive	**59**	1	0	60
Neutral	1	**25**	4	30
Critical	0	10	**47**	57
TOTAL	60	36	51	*147*

Number of observed agreements: 131 (89.12% of the observations)
Number of agreements expected by chance: 51.6 (35.11% of the observations)

Kappa = 0.832; **SE of kappa** = 0.039; **95% confidence interval:** From 0.756 to 0.908
The strength of agreement is considered to be '**VERY GOOD**'.

COHEN'S KAPPA CALCULATIONS FOR INDEPENDENT CODING

ORIENTATION	Task	Process	Self-Regulation	Personal	Other	TOTAL
Task	**329**	15	1	3	1	349
Process	3	**18**	4	1	3	29
Self-Regulation	0	1	**1**	1	0	3
Personal	0	0	0	**0**	0	0
Other	0	0	1	0	**0**	1
TOTAL	332	34	7	5	4	*382*

Number of observed agreements: 348 (91.10% of the observations)
Number of agreements expected by chance: 306.0 (80.10% of the observations)

Kappa = 0.553; **SE of kappa** = 0.058; **95% confidence interval:** From 0.439 to 0.667
The strength of agreement is considered to be '**MODERATE**'.

DEGREES OF CONTROL	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	TOTAL
Correction (A)	**41**	2	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	44
Command (B)	6	**37**	21	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	64
Evaluation (C)	0	8	**155**	5	0	0	0	3	3	3	0	177
Qualified Evaluation (D)	0	0	0	**1**	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Suggestion (E)	1	4	0	0	**7**	0	0	0	0	0	0	12
Directive Question (F)	0	0	0	0	0	**12**	12	0	0	0	0	24
Non-Directive Question (G)	0	0	0	0	0	2	**1**	0	0	0	0	3
Explanation (H)	0	2	2	1	0	0	0	**20**	0	0	0	25
Description (I)	0	0	3	1	0	0	1	2	**15**	0	0	22
Reader Response (J)	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	**4**	0	6
Other (K)	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	**2**	4
TOTAL	48	53	181	8	8	15	15	26	19	7	2	*382*

Number of observed agreements: 295 (77.23% of the observations)
Number of agreements expected by chance: 102.5 (26.84% of the observations)

Kappa = 0.689; **SE of kappa** = 0.028; **95% confidence interval:** From 0.633 to 0.744
The strength of agreement is considered to be '**GOOD**'.

VALENCE	Positive	Neutral	Critical	TOTAL
Positive	**120**	15	1	136
Neutral	1	**29**	6	36
Critical	1	44	**165**	210
TOTAL	122	88	172	*382*

Number of observed agreements: 314 (82.20% of the observations)
Number of agreements expected by chance: 146.3 (38.29% of the observations)

Kappa = 0.712; **SE of kappa** = 0.030; **95% confidence interval:** From 0.653 to 0.770
The strength of agreement is considered to be '**GOOD**'.

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