

“Students’ Perceptions of Written Instructor Feedback on Student Writing”

Eric Wisz

Abstract

Instructor feedback on student writing has been a popular topic of discussion and research in the field of writing studies for the past few decades. As an undergraduate student researcher, I conducted one-on-one interviews with undergraduate students about their perceptions of and feelings towards written instructor feedback on student writing. Using a mock page of student writing, I created two examples of instructor feedback that I had participants read and discuss during the one-on-one interviews. This article reports on the qualitative data gathered from these interviews. Participants made a distinction and created a binary between comments that directed them to focus on the ideas of their paper and feedback that directed them to focus on word choice and sentence structure. Participants valued feedback framed from a reader’s perspective. Participants thought open-ended questions in feedback were helpful in seeing the relationship between and developing their ideas. They found suggestions and examples helpful in formulating their own revisions and explanation useful in learning grammar rules and discourse community norms. Participants saw the merits and benefits of a variety of feedback forms, which suggests that the form of feedback ought to be dependent on the context—what the feedback is discussing, the revision the feedback is implying, the skills and knowledge of the particular writer to whom the feedback is geared, where the writer is in their writing process, etc.—in which it is given.

Introduction

We assume that feedback on student writing plays a pedagogically prominent role in students’ development as writers, just as class instruction, course readings, student-instructor writing conferences, or peer writing tutoring sessions. Indeed, there is much overlap between these forms of instruction, but for the purpose of this article, I focus on written instructor feedback on student writing.

The meaning of written instructor feedback influences how students conduct their revision processes and future writing processes and, thus, how they view the act of writing. In his inquiry into instructor feedback on student writing, Straub (1996) finds that “the way comments are framed has a direct influence on the meaning of the comments” (p. 235). Thus, this article focuses on, more specifically,

student perceptions of instructor feedback on their writing. My overall research question is the following: How do students perceive instructor feedback on student writing when different feedback approaches are presented? Student perspectives in this report take the form of transcripts from student interviews. Due to the limited scope of this project (12 student interviews), the data gathered from these interviews should not be generalized to all students. Rather, the purpose of this study is to contribute student voices to the ongoing discussion on instructor feedback practices.

I begin by offering an overview of some of the relevant literature from the field of composition studies pertaining to instructor feedback on student writing. I then outline how the interviews in this study were conducted and detail some relevant participant demographics. Finally, I discuss some of the students' impressions, interpretations, and uses of instructor feedback and what this could mean for feedback practices. Participants made a distinction and created a binary between comments that directed them to focus on the ideas of their paper and feedback that directed them to focus on word choice and sentence structure. Participants tended to respond positively to feedback framed in terms of a reader's perspective. Participants thought open-ended questions in feedback were helpful in seeing the relationship between and developing their ideas. They found suggestions and examples helpful in formulating their own revisions and explanation useful in learning grammar rules and discourse community norms. Overall, participant responses indicate that what qualifies as "good" feedback depends on the rhetorical situation of the feedback.

Instructor Feedback in Literature

Instructor as a Reader and Audience Awareness

A common goal of instructor feedback is to give student writers the perspective of a reader on their writing. As Elbow (1973) eloquently put it, he tries "to transmit my experience of [their] words" (p. 121). The hope is that in doing so student writers will understand their readers' points of view and develop a sense of audience awareness, an important rhetorical skill one needs to produce effective writing. This is a skill that extends far beyond academic writing, one that writers can use in future communicative interaction.

Audience awareness is important to understanding where dissonance exists between a writer's intended meaning and the meaning perceived by a reader. Brannon and Knoblauch (1982) argued that the urge to revise comes from the sense of not having fully communicated an intended meaning (p. 163). They suggested that by pointing out the perceived meaning (instead of formal or technical flaws), instructors can highlight where in the text the perceived meaning falls short of the intended meaning and, in doing so, create this urge to revise. For Brannon and Knoblauch, the purpose of instructor feedback is to "make the

writer think about what has been said, not to tell the writer what to do” (p. 163). They believed firmly in a nondirective approach that “return[s] control of choice-making as soon as possible to the writer, while also creating a motive for making changes” (p. 163). Instructors may suggest “ways to eliminate the discrepancies,” but they must leave “decisions about alternative choices to the writer” (p. 162). The revision process is an opportunity for writers to continue asserting their control over the text but this time with a reader’s point of view in mind.

Promoting a sense of audience awareness with student writers can assist in providing assistance with technical flaws. Shaughnessy (1977) emphasized that even in learning grammar, it is important that student writers understand readers’ perspectives (p. 39–40). Like Brannon and Knoblauch (1982), Shaughnessy discussed revision as the process of rereading one’s text and determining where the intended meaning that exists in writers’ heads is not fully communicated on the page. Shaughnessy further explained that even when writers are able to make this determination, they still need to determine specifically where revision needs to be made to eliminate the identified dissonance (p. 78–79). Thus, Shaughnessy argued, it is important for instructors to be, and for students to understand instructors as, readers earnestly trying to understand writers’ meanings rather than people making corrections (p. 84).

Feedback Familiarizing Students with Discourse Communities

Academic disciplines are groups of people with the same goals, and the values that underlie these goals form discourse communities of and within academic disciplines (Journet, 1999). Feedback on student writing can be used to communicate values and norms of these discourse communities to students.

In his case for paralogic hermeneutics in rhetorical theory, Kent (1989) argued that the linguistic conventions shared within a discourse community actually reflect much deeper, somewhat shared yet perpetually shifting systems of interpretation. In his discussion of paralogic hermeneutic theories, Dobrin (1999) suggested that discourse community expectations—the results of these semi-shared systems of interpretations—should be clear to students so that they are empowered to be effective communicators in these discourse communities. According to paralogic hermeneutic theories, communication requires a collaborative dialogue, specifically a triangulation between two communicators and common objects in the world. Breuch (2002) supported this dialogic approach to instruction as an effective way to practice post-process pedagogy. In terms of feedback as dialogue, systems of interpretation of discourse communities are actualized in individual moments of communication that involve an instructor, a student, and the student’s text. In other words, feedback is a place where the structures of these systems of interpretation are constructed via instructor-student dialogue, and, as such, feedback is a tool that instructors use, wittingly or not, to communicate the values of these systems and communities to students. Feedback should be framed in such a way that makes the discourse

communities, their ways of knowing, their values, and the reasons for these values clear to student so that students can more proficiently navigate and participate in them in the future.

Student Perspectives

Previous studies on students' perspectives on instructor feedback on student writing have found a diverse array of student opinions on and preferences for feedback. In their study of students' perspectives of feedback, Poulos and Mahony (2008) found that "students do not hold a homogenous view of what effective feedback is and how it could be used" (p. 145). Straub (1997) found that students prefer a variety of forms of written feedback, including advice, open-ended questions, and explanation.

Despite the diversity of student preferences in terms of feedback, general trends of how students perceive feedback and its utility emerge from previous research. Previous work indicated that students prefer feedback that is clear (Bevan, Badge, Cann, Willmott, & Scott, 2008; Lizzio & Wilson, 2008). In their literature review of students' and instructors' perspectives of feedback, Agius and Wilkinson (2013) noted a number of studies (Duers & Brown, 2009; Duncan, 2007; Higgins, Hartley, & Skelton, 2002) that found that academic terminology prevented students from understanding instructor feedback. Though Nicol (2010) did not collect data from students, Nicol advised instructors to make sure they are expressing feedback with terminology that students can understand.

Along these lines, studies have also found that students tend to prefer feedback that is specific. In their surveys of students, Lynch and Klemans (1978) and Straub (2000) found that students prefer elaboration or explanation in feedback. Robinson, Pope, and Holyoak (2013) found a primary concern of students in terms of feedback is a "lack of information about how to improve work" (p. 267), and Agius and Wilkinson (2013) found specificity to be a major trend in research on what students expect in feedback (Bone, 2006; Duers & Brown, 2009; Duncan, 2007; Higgins et al., 2002; Poulos & Mahony, 2008; Straub, 1997; Weaver, 2006).

Research has indicated that students desire feedback that will help them improve their future writing practices as well (Bevan et al., 2008; Carless, 2006). Feedback can certainly contain advice that is both context specific and transferable, as suggested by Ädel (2016) and Nicol (2010).

Straub's (2000) results lend insight to what his student participants view as the nature of writing—the transcription of ideas. Straub found that students respond well to positive comments, preferring comments that acknowledge and develop (not deconstruct) the ideas on the page. However, students in this study believed there to be a strong distinction between form and content and did not necessarily feel that the main purpose of instructor feedback is to focus on the ideas

(content) but the writing itself (form). Straub (1997) found that students tended to dislike negative comments on content. Lynch and Klemans (1978) also found that students resent comments on the content of their writing. This could be due to the fact that students “view writing as essentially a matter of transcribing thought, not a way of thinking and shaping thought” (Straub, 2000, p. 264). If students at times perhaps do not recognize writing as the process of developing ideas just as much as it is the process of transcribing them, then they will not likely see the process of revision as the development of ideas but may view it as simply the refinement of language used to describe these ideas. This has an impact on what students view as the nature of feedback as well—a tool for instructors to discuss with students the language used to describe ideas, not to discuss the ideas themselves.

Studies on Multilingual Writers’ Perceptions and Uses of Feedback

Much of the scholarship on students’ perceptions and uses of instructor feedback on student writing has focused on multilingual students. While this study includes multilingual participants, the majority of the participants are native-English speakers. However, there are certainly parallels between findings that focus on native-English speakers and multilingual students. Conrad and Goldstein (1999) and Hyland (1998, 2003) noted that multilingual students’ use of instructor feedback varies greatly from student to student. Ferris (1997) found that specific comments tended to prompt more positive revision among multilingual students than did general comments, and Goldstein (2004) also suggested that instructors give text-specific feedback. In terms of specificity, Goldstein also argued for including specific suggestions for revision strategies in feedback.

Feedback on content. Literature on feedback for multilingual writers tends to focus on feedback in terms of content and feedback in terms of error or form. Hedgcock and Lefkowitz (1994) found that multilingual students prefer feedback related to content in earlier drafts of an assignment and feedback related to errors in later drafts of the assignment, which was the opposite of the concerns expressed by native-English speakers in the study. Abdollahifam (2014) found that feedback related to the ideas of the writing, the instructor’s ideas on the topic, and request for further explanation had a positive effect on student motivation and writing. While Ferris (1997) also found that requests for more information led to significant revision, these revisions did not always have a positive impact on the students’ papers.

Feedback on errors. Hyland (2003) and McMartin-Miller (2014) found that multilingual writers see the value in feedback related to errors. Students in Hyland’s study believed that repeated feedback on errors would lead to long-term improvement in error recognition and correction (p. 228). McMartin-Miller found that multilingual students prefer comprehensive error feedback but were satisfied with the common practice of selective marking of repeated errors. Ferris (1997, 2006), Ferris and Roberts (2001), and McMartin-Miller (2014) found that

instructor feedback on errors led to student self-editing and revisions. McMartin-Miller found no difference between more and less-explicit error feedback in terms of self-editing, whereas Ferris (2006) found that less-explicit, or indirect, error feedback led to greater writing improvement over time.

The aim of this study is to contribute to the research on students' perceptions of feedback a handful of in-depth student perspectives on instructor feedback on student writing. In order to gather in-depth responses, participants were asked to read and engage with mock student writing and instructor feedback in one-on-one interviews.

Student Interviews

Qualitative data on students' perceptions, interpretations, and uses of written instructor feedback on student writing were gathered through one-on-one interviews with undergraduate students at a large Midwestern university. All interviews were conducted by me. Participants were recruited from four writing studies classes during the Fall 2017 semester with the permission of the instructors of these courses. One participant was in none of these classes—she was a friend of another participant and volunteered to participate although I did not directly recruit her. Interviews were recorded with student permission for later transcription and analyzed. I submitted an IRB application for this study but was notified by IRB that this study did not need to go through the IRB process.

During the interviews, participants discussed two different examples of mock instructor feedback (Appendix A and Appendix B). I created these mock feedback examples using one page from a paper I wrote four years ago about the American Dream and landownership in the early American colonies. I then gave feedback on this page as an instructor using a modeling approach (Example 1, see Appendix A) and a dialogic approach (Example 2, see Appendix B). Some aspects of my original writing of the paper were modified so that I could craft comments on certain aspects of writing (e.g., topic sentences, comma errors, and citation errors). In Example 1, feedback provides students with potential rewordings of phrases and sentences. For example, one comment in Example 1 reads, "This is confusing. Reword: 'J. Hector St. John Crèvecoeur was a French-American who wrote about life in America during the time of the American Revolution. He wrote about...'" The comments in Example 1 are written in the imperative, and feedback is given on grammar, citation style, and word choice. The comments are short and written in an impersonal tone (e.g., "Omit" and "Insert comma"). They are explicit and provide little rationale. Example 1 contains a large amount of scaffolding. The feedback in Example 2 is written in a much more conversational tone with the goal of using the comments as a way to open up a dialogue between the instructor and student. For example, one comment on Example 2 reads, "As a reader, I want some context for this quote. Who's saying it?" Comments in Example 2 take the perspective of a reader, offering reflective comments and asking open-ended questions. These

comments are not as explicit and provide more rationale than the comments in Example 1. Example 2 contains a low amount of scaffolding. Example 2 does not address much of the grammar, word choice, and citation style issues that Example 1 addresses. Otherwise, the feedback comments in Examples 1 and 2 focus on the same areas of the text and express similar broad ideas to the student writer. The main differences of the two examples are the mode and tone in which the feedback is given—in other words, the difference is in how the feedback is framed.

While creating these feedback examples, I did not want to simply create a “directive” example and a “facilitative” example. Although these examples could be mapped onto a directive-facilitative spectrum, my intention in creating these models (and, as will be evident in future sections, discussing the data that resulted from the interviews) was to recognize complexities and nuances of feedback not captured by a reductive directive-facilitative paradigm.

Although the two feedback examples are not inherently antagonistic or incompatible with each other, they are fairly extreme in their approaches. By this I mean that Example 1 uses modeling to an extreme that would likely never be called for or practical in actual situations of feedback. Similarly, Example 2 uses questions to an impractical extreme. According to Straub (1996):

At one extreme, some comments are overly harsh or disrespectful, and usurp control over student writing, making sweeping editorial changes and dictating what should be said or how it should be presented from top to bottom. At the other extreme, some teacher comments are so minimal and generic that they become detached and offer no help, no real response. Both extremes ought to be avoided. (p. 247)

Although Straub specifically discussed feedback that falls on the extremes of a directive-facilitative binary, his sentiment towards the impracticality of extreme forms of feedback is noteworthy.

During the interviews, participants read the sample student writing and the two examples of instructor feedback (see Appendix A and Appendix B). I told the participants that the student writing in these examples was one page of a larger paper turned into an instructor as a rough draft. I asked the participants to pretend as if they had received this feedback on a rough draft that they had turned in and that they were going to revise the paper and submit a final draft. I then asked them the interview questions (see Appendix C) on their perceptions, interpretations, and potential uses of the feedback from the two examples. As participants responded to the interview questions, I encouraged them to elaborate on their thoughts and asked follow-up questions that prompted participants to clarify their ideas and provide more detail and specificity to their responses.

Participant Demographics

Twelve interviews were conducted in total. Interviews lasted from 20 to 40 minutes depending on how much participants had to say about the feedback examples. By agreeing to volunteer their time to participate in this study to discuss instructor feedback, participants demonstrated that they are all highly motivated students who are invested in their learning. Participants range from first-semester freshmen to fifth-year seniors. Ten participants are native-English speakers, and two have first languages that are not English. Although most participants were recruited from Writing Studies classes, there are a wide variety of majors (e.g., physical sciences, social sciences, and humanities) represented throughout the participants, as the majority of students in these classes are not Technical Writing and Communication majors (the undergraduate major degree offered by the Department of Writing Studies). However, a disproportionate number of Technical Writing and Communication majors are represented, as four of the twelve participants are Technical Writing and Communication majors. As will be discussed later, it is likely that due to the focus of the Technical Writing and Communication major on learning the discursive conventions of technical fields, some Technical Writing and Communication majors prefer more explicit suggestions in their feedback than participants in other majors.

Another population that is disproportionately represented among the participants is student writing consultants at the university's writing center—five of the participants are writing consultants. One course from which participants were recruited was the consultant training course that all first semester undergraduate consultants are required to take. The consultants represent a variety of majors from the physical sciences, social sciences, and humanities. When consultants were interviewed, they could, of course, use what they had learned as writing consultants when discussing the feedback, but they were told to approach the feedback examples as students who had received them from an instructor, not as a consultant who was working with a writer who had received the feedback. They were told to approach the feedback as writers, not consultants, in order to ensure that they were sharing their own perspectives on the feedback, not speculating as to what other students might think of the feedback.

Discussion

The recorded interviews were transcribed and coded for thematic patterns. This section of the article will discuss the major themes and their implications for instructor feedback. These patterns are not intended to be generalized to all undergraduate students. Rather, my goal is to offer student voices to the conversation on instructor feedback.

Participants' Perceptions of Form and Content

As stated previously, Straub's (2000) study suggested that students perceive a clear distinction between form and content in writing. Participants mentioned that Example 1 was focused on grammar (errors or form) while Example 2 was focused on ideas. According to Participant K, "I believe the person who writes this [question] wants more of the significance of the topic while this [directive comment] is more focused on grammar issues." The two pieces of feedback that Participant K is discussing (a question posed in Example 2 and a comment in Example 1) both address the same concern—word choice—at the same part in the text. In fact, both comments make similar suggestions in how to address revising the word choice at this point in the text, yet participants, such as Participant K, saw a significant difference in the nature of revisions suggested in these comments. I find this form-content binary to be fascinating because, as previously mentioned, both feedback examples commented on the same areas and gave the same general direction as suggestions for revisions. Participants also picked up on the similarities in what the feedback addressed and in the general direction it suggested for revision, as participants mentioned that the revised versions of the two examples would likely look very similar.

For many participants, how the feedback is framed—as a question or as an explicit suggestion—may impact how the participants perceived what the instructor was asking them to do during the revision process. This difference in participant perception of revision processes can be seen not only when participants discuss individual comments, as with Participant K above, but also as they discuss their hypothetical revision processes holistically. When asked how they would go about revising the paper if they had received Example 1's feedback, eight participants noted that they would quickly make revisions to the text, simply creating sentence-level revisions based on the instructor's suggestions and only focusing on sentences on which the instructor commented. For example, Participant G said about Example 1, "The straightforward—I think—nature of just telling you, 'Do this,' doesn't really leave a lot of room for thinking about how you might want to improve the paper on a more substantial level. It's just the line-by-line editing." Other participants echoed this sentiment that Example 1 was more focused on the "line-by-line editing." However, participants discussed how they would approach revising Example 2 more holistically. For example, Participant I stated:

I would read the comments ... And then ... let's see ... I think I would ... I would just reflect on—yeah, reflect on the comments, and then I probably would reread it and then just try to see where those points of—Because this one I guess is different because it doesn't try to exactly, explicitly state ... direct sentences or specific points of where it was.

Four other participants had similar reflections to Participant I, stating that they would refer to the paper's main argument or thesis statement while revising Example 2.

Feedback can influence how student writers go about their revision and, more broadly, writing processes, whether they focus on choosing the correct words and grammatical structures to express their ideas, or on contemplating the ways in which their ideas are related to each other. Both considering word choice and grammatical forms and contemplating the relationship between ideas are important aspects of writing and revision processes. Thus, the degree to which feedback draws student writers' attention to word choice, grammar, the relationship between ideas, etc., should be carefully considered by instructors as they offer feedback on student writing.

Instructor as a Reader

Overall, these interviews suggest that participants were more receptive to feedback when it was given in a reader's perspective. The fact that participants found a reader's perspective in the feedback helpful supports the theories of Ädel (2016), Brannon and Knoblauch (1982), Elbow (1973), and Shaughnessy (1977). Participants offered praise to feedback in Example 2 that provided a reader's perspective, such as the praise offered by Participant I: "I think that [feedback comment in Example 2] is always nice to help remind you to take a step back and reflect on what you're writing and how it's being read by people who aren't you." Participant F also expressed receptiveness to receiving a reader's perspective: "If I'm missing [providing the reader context for evidence], I would want someone to tell me, so my readers aren't lost in what ... they're reading. And it helps build the paper, not necessarily tear the paper apart." Participants touched on a few specific benefits of feedback that takes a reader's perspective. First, if feedback promotes audience awareness, writers are more likely to keep their audience in mind in the future. According to Participant H,

I really like the reader's portion of it, like, "Your readers will want to know this. What is the main idea of the paragraph?" Because then that's something that I can go through and look at in each of my paragraphs.

Audience awareness is a fundamental rhetorical skill in producing effective writing. Participants recognized this and suggested that feedback that helps put them in the mindset of readers is useful to them because they are reminded to apply this mindset throughout the rest of their writing.

Further, if feedback is framed as a reader's response, writers feel as though they are still in control of the paper. By taking the point of view of a reader, instructors can promote student agency in crafting the text. In her comments on the feedback in Example 2, Participant L said,

[The instructor] told the person in charge of the essay saying that they have to describe more of their essay and what their essay is about, not only ... make the essay good but also make the reader understand what is actually going on or what the writer is trying to tell the reader.

Participant L calls the writer “the person in charge of the essay” and sees the instructor’s role, as Brannon and Knoblauch (1982) suggested, as notifying the writer where the intended idea may not be entirely expressed to the reader. This study suggests that framing feedback as a reader’s perspective indicates to the participants that the decisions that they face during their writing processes are theirs to make and that the instructor’s role is to indicate the impact of these decisions on their potential readers.

A potential pitfall of providing a reader’s perspective. Participant A noted what he perceived to be a shift in audience in the comments of Example 2. He noted that one comment begins with “As a reader...,” and other comments reference “your readers” as if the readers were separate from the instructor:

That's interesting to me because in ... one scenario you're writing for me—the instructor. The next scenario, we're preparing this paper together for readers. So it's kind of that shift of I don't know what I am. Like the instructor doesn't know what they are in this review scenario ... That's something I've wanted to tear apart for a while.

In my experience as a student writer, writing center tutor, and in-class writing tutor, the ambiguity in terms of intended audience for class writing assignments can be frustrating for students. Participant A seemed to resent the avoidance of prescriptive feedback on student writing prominent in the field of Writing Studies in favor of more corrective feedback he experiences as a technical writing intern. He is the only participant that mentioned frustration with the shifting audience in the feedback of Example 2, and this could be because he had particular negative feelings towards certain feedback approaches. However, I think his frustration might represent a larger frustration that students sometimes have with dissonance between intended and actual audiences of writing assignments (e.g., telling students, “The audience for this paper is your peers,” even though the instructor is the only one assigning grades).

The following three subsections will focus on three features of feedback on which participants frequently commented in their interviews—open-ended questions, suggestions/examples, and explanation.

Open-Ended Questions in Feedback

Eight of the participants focused, though not exclusively, on the questions from Example 2 when discussing feedback that they like, as they found the questions intellectually stimulating and beneficial for their learning processes, similar to Straub’s (1997) findings. Two major themes arose from the data in terms of the benefits to students of open-ended questions. These themes both relate to the transferability of feedback. First, writers might ask the same kinds of questions

posed in instructor feedback elsewhere in their writing. According to Participant J, a sophomore studying Technical Writing and Communication,

And you know you might just end up kind of asking these questions throughout the rest of your paper too and seeing if the flow sort of, you know, matches. And you might end up just writing a way better paper because of the questions you asked in one paragraph. Yeah, definitely rather than just getting verbatim what you should rewrite. You know, just kind of like, “Well maybe this is what you should think about while you're writing the rest of your paper and while you're reading what you've already written.” So, I think it could just lead to a more ... thought-provoking revision process.

Second, open-ended questions such as those posed in Example 2 can assist student writers in contemplating the implications of the revisions they make. As Participant C suggested, “I ... think [posing questions as done in Example 2] gives a better idea of why you're doing stuff, which helps so that you actually learn as opposed to just plug a hole.” Participant C indicated that considering the “why” of revisions is an important element for a successful learning process. While the open-ended questions posed by Example 2 were specific to the text, they also gave participants insight that was transferable to their future writing, which supports Bevan et al.'s, (2008) and Carless's (2006) findings and Ädel's (2016), Goldstein (2004), and Nicol's (2010) recommendations.

Participants stated that open-ended questions also would prompt some to have conversations about their writing. Many participants said that after considering or crafting revisions to address the open-ended questions in Example 2, they would ask the instructor (or in some cases, a writing consultant, friend, or sibling) if their revisions adequately addressed the concern raised by the instructor in the comment. For example, Participant L speculated, “So, I'd maybe send an email like, ‘Is this what you were talking about?’ Or if it was in a Google doc or something, I'd ... respond to comments.” In considering and revising in light of open-ended questions, students want to have a conversation about their writing. Like Participant L, most participants who discussed having a conversation about revisions with the instructor of Example 2 said that they would first revise on their own and then check in with the instructor. Participant F explained her revision process for Example 2:

So maybe this one I will feel like ... I will work on it on my own first because the comments are—they're helpful comments, so I'll probably develop my ... maybe develop my main idea and work on my quotes and all that and go back to the teacher and double check it with them if that's meeting things, or if they feel like I need to add more. But the comments are good enough to get me started in revising.

Participants generally agreed with Participant F that though they may ask the instructor of Example 2 questions as they revise, the questions the instructor poses are enough for them to start their revision processes.

Participants had different views as to the value of conversation in writing processes. Some participants viewed the question-prompting characteristics of the feedback in Example 2 as this feedback being inadequate since there was not enough information in the feedback for student writers to complete revisions on their own. Other participants viewed the potential conversation these open-ended questions prompted about their writing as a fundamental component of the writing process. Responses from participants in this study suggest open-ended questions could be an effective tool for instructors to cultivate conversations with these participants, though participants' attitudes towards these conversations would likely vary.

Participants also identified and discussed a number of potential shortcomings of open-ended questions in feedback. Participant A, the Technical Writing and Communication major who voiced a degree of hostility towards Example 2's lack of explicit feedback, argued that a major constraint of open-ended questions is that they do not model for student writers the type of discourse-specific language that students might not know but that might be necessary for meaningful revisions. Participant A used his experiences learning the languages of technical writing during a technical writing internship:

But in my internship when I would get an instruction manual reviewed a lot of times, my mentor would do that—this exact thing where he would rewrite a whole entire step ... at least the part that needed revision, and it was a lot easier to see how language came into play when trying to communicate something as opposed to just leaving [an] open-ended question, “Could you break this up?” “Could you clarify more?” ... That's not really helpful for a writer who's learning.

Participant A suggested that open-ended questions in and of themselves might not be helpful for writers who are learning a new concept, genre, or academic language. It might be that student writers who are learning a new discourse community need to see possible revisions for a particular scenario in their writing before they can effectively answer questions to create revisions in similar types of scenarios.

Open-ended questions—especially a lot of open-ended questions—could very well further confuse a student writer who is already confused. As Participant K said, “Like, yeah, I understand you're questioning the person's writing, but questioning them doesn't help them in a way because they might be confused themselves too.” Whether student writers are confused about the content of the paper or the conventions of the respective genres in which they are writing, Participant K suggested that asking students to think more deeply on a topic on

which they are already less than confident could very likely diminish their confidence even further.

Some participants mentioned how if the instructor's desired revision is obvious, framing the feedback in the form of a question can be condescending. In discussing the final comment on Example 2, Participant C read, "Financial independence?" in a condescending tone. Participant C suggested that—although it is something that we likely intuitively know already—putting a question mark at the end of a statement does not automatically make it kinder or less pushy. In fact, in some cases it does the opposite.

Suggestions/Examples in Feedback

Participants saw the lack of suggestions and examples provided in Example 2 as one of the feedback's shortcomings. One participant spoke to this point when discussing what she might have found unhelpful about Example 2: "I guess there could be more suggestions. Like ... if you read that comment—like if you read one of the questions that they asked and didn't necessarily know how to respond, it could be nice to have an example of—or some kind of something more directional." This participant expressed a concern that she or a student receiving this feedback may not be able to craft a meaningful revision with open-ended questions alone.

Although participants liked the idea of the instructor providing alternative phrasings or examples, some participants did not appreciate the tone of the feedback in Example 1 because they felt like the feedback was too commanding. Participant H addressed how the tone of Example 1 seemed commanding to her:

I didn't like how they were—I felt like they were ordering—like let's say this is my paper, and I felt like they were ordering me around. I obviously—I wrote this because I thought it was, for me, it represented what I wanted to say. And so them just telling me like, "Insert this here." It's like, well I didn't want to insert that there. Instead of maybe something like over here it says something like, "You do this. Maybe you want to think about this." And then—it's a little different than just telling me what to do. It's saying, "Maybe you should think about it." Instead of, "Do it."

Participant H, like other participants in this study and Straub's (1997) study, found the suggestions of Example 1 helpful but did not like how these suggestions were given—less so as suggestions and more so as commands. From participant responses, it seems to be more so the tone and grammatical structure of the feedback, which is written in the imperative, than the mode of the comment (e.g., suggestion, question, etc.) that makes participants feel as though they are losing control, or agency, over their writing.

Despite what participants deemed a harsh tone in Example 1, many participants, interestingly, perceived the feedback in Example 1 as suggestions, not mandates. This tendency for participants to view these imperatives as suggestions could be due to the fact that many of the students who volunteered to participate in this study are motivated students who care about their writing. Although no measurement of participant motivation as a student or efficacy as a writer was collected in this study, the fact that these students volunteered 20 to 40 minutes of their time to talk about instructor feedback on student writing indicates that they care about writing instruction enough to offer their time to contribute to our knowledge on writing instruction. Thus, the participants are likely highly invested in their education and academic writing experiences. If participants are highly invested students, they likely care deeply about their writing and ideas and will favor developing their own ideas in their own words rather than using words or phrases that an instructor provides. In wanting to express their own ideas and words in their writing, participants will likely be inclined to use feedback from an instructor that rewords phrases or sentences as models for what their writing could look like as opposed to mandates for what their writing needs to look like. Wingate (2010) found that highly motivated students are more likely to deeply engage with feedback. When asked how closely she would follow the suggestions from Example 1, Participant H replied:

Knowing myself, I'd probably would end up doing my own thing just as a kind of ... stick it to 'em kind of thing. But that's me. I could see how some other people might not—like might just use this. But I definitely probably wouldn't like if they—I wouldn't write this. I would use this more of a guide than anything else.

Other participants made statements that reflected Participant H's "stick it to 'em" sentiment. Overall, participants were a bit resistant to the idea of direct mandates in feedback. Students less motivated than those who volunteered to participate in this study might not share Participant H's attitude and may be more likely to use the suggestions that an instructor provides, especially if the feedback with these suggestions is written in the imperative.

Explanation in Feedback

Participants in this study tended to prefer explanation when it comes to feedback addressing grammar concerns. Shaughnessy (1977) emphasized that student writing is an effective tool to teach students grammar. Similar to Straub's (1997) findings and Hyland's (2003) and McMartin-Miller's (2014) findings with multilingual writers, participants in this study appreciated receiving feedback on grammar for a variety of reasons. Some participants saw adhering to grammar rules as a fundamental part of good writing. Participant K, a freshman multilingual student, stated that she believed that having grammatical errors in a formal piece of writing is seen by the audience as disrespectful. Participant L pointed out that, in terms of Example 1, providing explanation for grammar rules instead of just

correcting grammar errors will help student writers not commit these errors in the future:

If putting punctuation at the end of quotations is a persistent problem, just explaining why once could be super—because it could help them way into the future, right? So stuff like that where I'm like this could have been a teaching moment, and you really didn't do that, I was like ...

Participant L's tone and her trailing off at the end of this statement suggest a sense of frustration in having the paper marked with corrections to grammar without any explanation provided for why what the student had written was grammatically incorrect. It is understandable that if participants value and strive for grammatical correctness, they will be frustrated when grammar errors are pointed out to them, yet they are provided with no way of knowing how not to commit that error again in the future. Participant L suggested that explanation of grammar rules could provide her with transferable knowledge of grammar, supporting the findings of Bevan et al. (2008), Lizzio and Wilson (2008), and the suggestions of DeNisi (1996) and Nicol (2010) that students prefer feedback that can be applied to future writing. Participants suggested that explanation of grammar rules is a way to ease frustration and improve understanding of the grammars of standardized Englishes.

Participant L also offered some insight in the use of feedback to comment on word choice. While other participants saw the instructor's concerns about word choice in Example 1 as nit-picky and frequently unwarranted, Participant L offered insight that portrayed the word choice comments in Example 1 in a more complex and nuanced light. Participant L saw the comments dealing with word choice in Example 1 as the result of one of two possibilities. Either the instructor's preferences for some words over others was a personal preference, or it reflected the preferences and practices of the discourse community in which this paper was designed to teach the student to participate. Participant L stated that if the second possibility were the case, indicating so would have helped her as someone learning the ropes of a specific discourse community:

Again, when you're talking about discipline, I feel like if these are changes that need to be made, then still saying them—like, "The language here is not correct," or whatever but then saying why so ... I mean, but that's a big "if" too—I don't know if that's the reason why it was presented or not so ...

Without explanation that certain words are preferred over others in a specific discourse community, Participant K would have no way of knowing that she might need to modify her diction to effectively participate in the specific discourse community. While most participants resented the feedback pertaining to word choice, they might have seen this feedback differently had it been supplemented with further explanation as to why the instructor felt that the current words were inappropriate. Cases of word choice could be where instructors enact Dobrin's

(1999) advice of making the structures of discourse communities clear to student writers.

Conclusion

The results on which I chose to focus in this article are representative of trends that I saw in the data. There were many instances in which participants expressed different and even contradictory perceptions, interpretations, and potential uses of written instructor feedback on student writing. I believe that these differences are products of a variety of factors, such as the participants' years in school, areas of study, and personal preferences. In the future, it would be advantageous for studies inquiring on students' perceptions, interpretations, and/or uses of written instructor feedback on student writing to focus on narrower populations of students (e.g., students in first-year writing classes, students studying technical communication, or students studying physical sciences). By studying a narrow population, we might be able to uncover more specific trends than what are presented in this study in terms of what these students find useful in instructor feedback and how they use feedback to improve as writers. More specific trends about students' relationships with instructor feedback will provide us with more concrete and pragmatic advice in terms of the practices instructors use to give feedback on student writing.

While studies of narrow populations may lead to more specific results, there were some distinct patterns from the data in this study that are important to consider. First, participants preferred feedback when it was given from a reader's perspective. Just as Brannon and Knoblauch (1982) and Shaughnessy (1977) posited, seeing a reader's perspective helps student writers to notice where the ideas of the page were not yet fully developed in terms of the writer's intended meaning. As Straub (1997) suggested, open-ended questions in feedback prompted participants to consider the relationship between ideas and the further development of these ideas. The findings of this study support Straub's (2000) research in that I found that participants liked receiving suggestions/examples as a way to imagine what potential revisions could look like. They spoke about how they would use these suggestions/examples as a model to guide their revisions. The fact the participants prefer suggestions/examples supports the findings of Bone (2006), Duers and Brown (2009), Duncan (2007), Ferris (1997), Goldstein (2004), Higgins et al. (2002), Lynch and Klemans (1978), Poulos and Mahony (2008), Straub (1997), and Weaver (2006), all of which indicate that students prefer specific feedback. Finally, in accordance with Shaughnessy (1977), participants found explanation valuable in learning grammar rules and the language norms of discourse communities. As Hyland (2003) and McMartin-Miller (2014) found with multilingual students, participants in this study tended to value feedback on grammar.

Before discussing important takeaways of this study, I would like to highlight another limitation in addition to the nonrepresentational and limited participant

sample. Only two examples of instructor feedback were used, so not all kinds of feedback styles/approaches were captured in this study. The results suggest that participants recognized that other feedback approaches exist, as participants did not necessarily favor one feedback example over the other.

It is important to note that participants in this study saw value in various modes of feedback—reflective comments, questions, suggestions/examples, explanation, and corrections. Although many participants, when asked to generalize about their preferred feedback mode, discussed open-ended questions, they identified how different modes of commenting are advantageous in different situations. Participants saw the value in and said that, ideally, they would like explicit suggestions/examples alongside questions, but they preferred these to be framed as possible models, not strict guides to which they were expected to adhere. For me, these results affirm the notion that we have a myriad of pedagogical tools when responding to student writing, and to not utilize all of them at the times when they are called for is doing our students a disservice.

Another common theme from the data across the participants is that the framing of feedback affects how participants construct their hypothetical revision processes. As Straub (2000) found, students tend to see writing through a “form” and “content” binary. The type of feedback that students receive affects through which lens of this binary they view the particular revisions that they enact. On the one hand, as Shaughnessy (1977) discussed, feedback that discusses word choice and grammatical structures prompts students to focus on the discursive representation of their ideas. On the other hand, as Straub (1997) noted, asking open-ended questions prompts students to consider the paper holistically and see the relationship between the main ideas that they discuss throughout their paper. Similar to Abdollahifam’s (2014) and Hedgcock and Lefkowitz’s (1994) findings with multilingual students, this study finds that students appreciate feedback that directs their thinking towards the “content” side of the binary. Unlike Straub’s (2000) study, participants in this study appreciated feedback that challenged the ideas on the page. However, there might be ways to undermine the student perception of a form-content binary. Asking open-ended questions and then pointing out how students’ word choices and/or grammatical structures do or do not provide clear answers to these questions might be a way to demonstrate to students that language is the construction of ideas more so than the mere transmission of them. The results here suggest that more research needs to be done to better understand how feedback impacts students’ revision processes.

Perhaps the most important takeaway from this study is the fact that participant responses suggest that different forms of feedback are effective for different students in different contexts. Feedback, like writing, is a contextual, or rhetorical activity. Participants noted that how they perceived the feedback in this study would depend on many contextual factors, including their relationship with their instructor and their background knowledge on the subject matter. Further, this

study only focused on formative feedback—what students see as effective summative feedback could be quite different than what they value in formative feedback. Although feedback is a complex rhetorical activity, it is my hope that this research has given us an opportunity to listen to how a handful of students perceive, react to, and use instructor feedback on student writing.

References

- Abdollahifam, S. (2014). Investigating the Effects of Interactional Feedback on EFL Students' Writings. *Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 98, 16–21. doi:10.1016/j.sbspro.2014.03.383
- Ädel, A. (2017). Remember that your reader cannot read your mind: Problem/solution-oriented metadiscourse in teacher feedback on student writing. *English for Specific Purposes*, 45, 54–68. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.esp.2016.09.002>
- Agius, N. M., & Wilkinson, A. (2014). Students' and teachers' views of written feedback at undergraduate level: A literature review. *Nurse Education Today*, 34, 552–559. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.nedt.2013.07.005>
- Bevan, R., Badge, J., Cann, A., Willmott, C., & Scott, J. (2008). Seeing eye-to-eye? Staff and student views on feedback. *Bioscience Education*, 12(1), 1–15. doi:10.3108/beej.12.1
- Bone, A. (2006, December). The impact of formative assessment on student learning: A law-based study. Retrieved from <https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/impact-formative-assessment-student-learning-law-based-study>
- Brannon, L., & Knoblauch, C. H. (1982). On students' rights to their own texts: A model of teacher response. *College Composition and Communication*, 33(2), 157–166. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/357623>
- Carless, D. (2006). Differing perceptions in the feedback process. *Studies in Higher Education*, 31(2), 219–233. doi:10.1080/03075070600572132
- Conrad, S. M., & Goldstein, L. M. (1999). ESL student revision after teacher-written comments: Text, contexts, and individuals. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 8(2), 147–179. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S1060-3743\(99\)80126-X](https://doi.org/10.1016/S1060-3743(99)80126-X)
- Dobrin, S. I. (1999). Paralogic hermeneutic theories, power, and the possibility for liberating pedagogies. In T. Kent (Ed.), *Post-process theory: Beyond the writing-process paradigm* (pp. 132–148). Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press.

- Duers, L.E., & Brown, N., (2009). An exploration of student nurses' experiences of formative assessment. *Nurse Education Today*, 29(6), 654–659. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.nedt.2009.02.007>
- Duncan, N. (2007). 'Feed-forward': Improving students' use of tutors' comments. *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*, 32(3), 271–283. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02602930600896498>
- Elbow, P. (1973). *Writing without teachers*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Ferris, D. R. (1997). The influence of teacher commentary on student revision. *TESOL Quarterly*, 31(2), 315–339. Retrieved from https://www.jstor.org/stable/3588049?seq=1&cid=pdf-reference#references_tab_contents
- Ferris, D. (2006). Does error feedback help student writers? New evidence on the short-term and long-term effects of written error correction. In K. Hyland & F. Hyland (Eds.), *Feedback in second language writing: Contexts and issues* (pp. 81–104). New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Ferris, D., & Roberts, B. (2001). Error feedback in L2 writing classes: How explicit does it need to be? *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 10, 161-184. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S1060-3743\(01\)00039-X](https://doi.org/10.1016/S1060-3743(01)00039-X)
- Goldstein, L. M. (2004). Questions and answers about teacher written commentary and student revision: Teachers and students working together. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 13, 63-80. doi:10.1016/j.jslw.2004.04.006
- Hedgcock, J., & Lefkowitz, N. (1994). Feedback on feedback: Assessing learner receptivity to teacher response in L2 composing. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 3(2), 141–163. [https://doi.org/10.1016/1060-3743\(94\)90012-4](https://doi.org/10.1016/1060-3743(94)90012-4)
- Higgins, R., Hartley, P., & Skelton, A. (2002). The conscientious consumer: Reconsidering the role of assessment feedback in student learning. *Studies in Higher Education*, 27(1), 53–64. doi:10.1080/03075070120099368
- Hyland, F. (1998). The impact of teacher written feedback on individual writers. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 7(3), 255–286. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S1060-3743\(98\)90017-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/S1060-3743(98)90017-0)

- Hyland, F. (2003). Focusing on form: Student engagement with teacher feedback. *System*, 31, 217–230. doi:10.1016/S0346-251X(03)00021-6
- Journet, D. (1999). Writing within (and between) disciplinary genres: The “adaptive landscape” as a case study in interdisciplinary rhetoric. In T. Kent (Ed.), *Post-process theory: Beyond the writing-process paradigm* (pp. 96–115). Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press.
- Kent, T. (1989). Paralogic hermeneutics and the possibilities of rhetoric. *Rhetoric Review*, 8(1), 24–42. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/465679>
- Lizzio, A., & Wilson, K. (2008). Feedback on assessment: Students’ perceptions of quality and effectiveness. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 33(3), 263–275. doi:10.1080/02602930701292548
- Lynch, C., & Klemans, P. (1978). Evaluating our evaluations. *College English*, 40(2), 166–180. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/375748>
- McMartin-Miller, C. (2014). How much feedback is enough?: Instructor practices and student attitudes toward error treatment in second language writing. *Assessing Writing*, 19, 24–35. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.asw.2013.11.003>
- Nicol, D. (2010). From monologue to dialogue: Improving written feedback process in mass higher education. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 35(5), 501–517. doi:10.1080/02602931003786559
- Poulos, A., & Mahony, M. J. (2008). Effectiveness of feedback: The students’ perspective. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 33(2), 143–154. doi:10.1080/02602930601127869
- Robinson, S., Pope, D., & Holyoak, L. (2013). Can we meet their expectations? Experiences and perceptions of feedback in first year undergraduate students. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 38(3), 260–272. doi:10.1080/02602938.2011.629291
- Shaughnessy, M. P. (1977). *Errors and expectations: A guide for the teacher of basic writing*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Straub, R. (1996). The concept of control in teacher response: Defining the varieties of “directive” and “facilitative” commentary. *College Composition and Communication*, 47(2), 223–251. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/358794>

Straub, R., (1997). Students' reactions to teacher comments: An exploratory study. *Research in the Teaching of English*, 31(1), 91–119. Retrieved from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40171265>

Straub, R. (2000). *The practice of response: Strategies for commenting on student writing*. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, Inc.

Weaver, M. R., (2006). Do students value feedback? Student perceptions of tutors' written responses. *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*, 31(3), 379–394. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02602930500353061>

Wingate, U. (2010). The impact of formative feedback on the development of academic writing. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 35(5), 519–533. doi:10.1080/02602930903512909

Appendix A: Feedback Example 1

Example 1

Thomas Jefferson was one who envisioned America as small farm owners. Jefferson imagined 'yeomen's republicanism,' referring to a polity of independent householders who owned the land that they lived on, commanded the labor of their wives and children, and produced the necessities of their own subsistence." (Johnson 24). Jefferson saw America as a rural nation, consisting of small farms that could be sustained by a family. The farm could, in turn, sustain the family. He believed that all Americans should strive to be "yeomen" farmers by being self-sustainable on their own small patch of farmland. Originally from France, J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur, who wrote about America during the time of the American Revolution, also saw the ideal American as an owner of a small farm. De Crèvecoeur believes that the American Dream is for a poor man to have "a place of residence; he is called inhabitant of such a county, or of such a district, and for the first time in his life counts for something." (de Crèvecoeur 78-79). Many immigrants coming to America were too poor to own land in Europe, so de Crèvecoeur saw the independence of owning one's own land as the key to be an American. Just owning a small plot of land was all that was necessary, in de Crèvecoeur's eyes, to be successful in America.

The paradox of independence, however, challenges the significance of independence in America and the American Dream. Southern America was not, in fact, a nation of independent farm owners like Jefferson and de Crèvecoeur imagined. The idea of success in the southern United States was not to own a small plot of land, but the goal of southern farmers was to purchase a lot of land and rely on slave labor for upward economic mobility. Southern plantation owners actually viewed owning slaves as a sign of being independent. This is ironic because their economic stability depended upon slaves: the more slaves a person acquired, the less work he or she would have to do, and the more dependent they would become.

Commented [1]: Insert topic sentence about small farm ownership, independence, and the American Dream.

Commented [2]: Omit.

Commented [3]: "According to Johnson."

Commented [4]: Omit comma.

Commented [5]: Omit.

Commented [6]: Don't use passive voice. Instead say, "...small farms that a family could sustain on their own."

Commented [7]: This is confusing. Reword: "J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur was a French-American who wrote about life in America during the time of the American Revolution. He wrote about..."

Commented [8]: "believed"

Commented [9]: Omit comma.

Commented [10]: This is redundant. Omit. Use what Jefferson and de Crèvecoeur said to advance your claim/main idea: "Jefferson and de Crèvecoeur's view of America as a nation of small, independently owned farms represents the ideals of the American Dream. According to this view, independence is a central component to the American Dream"

Commented [11]: Insert comma.

Commented [12]: "a large amount"

Commented [13]: Omit.

Commented [14]: "financially independent"

Commented [15]: "financial"

Commented [16]: Insert comma.

Appendix B: Feedback Example 2

Example 2

Thomas Jefferson was one who envisioned America as small farm owners. Jefferson imagined 'yeomen's republicanism,' referring to a polity of independent householders who owned the land that they lived on, commanded the labor of their wives and children, and produced the necessities of their own subsistence," (Johnson 24). Jefferson saw America as a rural nation, consisting of small farms that could be sustained by a family. The farm could, in turn, sustain the family. He believed that all Americans should strive to be "yeomen" farmers by being self-sustainable on their own small patch of farmland. Originally from France, J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur, who wrote about America during the time of the American Revolution, also saw the ideal American as an owner of a small farm. De Crèvecoeur believes that the American Dream is for a poor man to have "a place of residence; he is called inhabitant of such a county, or of such a district, and for the first time in his life counts for something," (de Crèvecoeur 78-79). Many immigrants coming to America were too poor to own land in Europe, so de Crèvecoeur saw the independence of owning one's own land as the key to be an American. Just owning a small plot of land was all that was necessary, in de Crèvecoeur's eyes, to be successful in America.

The paradox of independence, however, challenges the significance of independence in America and the American Dream. Southern America was not, in fact, a nation of independent farm owners like Jefferson and de Crèvecoeur imagined. The idea of success in the southern United States was not to own a small plot of land, but the goal of southern farmers was to purchase massive amounts of land and rely on slave labor for upward economic mobility. Southern plantation owners actually viewed owning slaves as a sign of being independent. This is ironic because their economic stability depended upon slaves: the more slaves a person acquired, the less work he or she would have to do, and the more dependent they would become.

Commented [redacted]: You jump right into your support/evidence here. Your readers will want to know what the main idea of this paragraph is—what it is that you're demonstrating with this evidence—before you in start talking about the evidence.

Commented [redacted]: As a reader, I want some context for this quote. Who's saying it?

Commented [redacted]: You have a lot of information about de Crèvecoeur in this sentence. Could you break it up so that it's easier for you readers to understand?

Commented [redacted]: I noticed the rest of this paragraph is in the past tense. Is there a reason for the shift to present tense here?

Commented [redacted]: I'm left wondering at the end of this paragraph how the evidence you presented here supports your main idea/claim. What does Jefferson and de Crèvecoeur's view of America say about the American ideals at this time?

Commented [redacted]: I find this a little vague and confusing. Independent how so? Certainly they weren't independent in terms of farm labor. Independent from having to rely on a boss for a paycheck? Financial independence?

Appendix C: Interview Questions

1. What are your first impressions of these feedback examples?
 - a. Does anything stand out to you from either of these examples?
 - b. Is there anything that's unclear from either of these examples?
2. Is there anything you like about the feedback in example 1? If so, what do you like about it?
3. Is there anything you don't like about the feedback in example 1? If so, what do you not like about it?
4. Is there anything you like about the feedback in example 2? If so, what do you like about it?
5. Is there anything you don't like about the feedback in example 2? If so, what do you not like about it?
6. Let's say you're going to revise this paper. Which feedback would you prefer?
 - a. What would be helpful for revising from example 1?
 - b. What would be unhelpful for revising from example 1?
 - c. What would be helpful for revising from example 2?
 - d. What would be unhelpful for revising from example 2?
7. If you had to pick one, which feedback example would you prefer?