**Comments on My Comments**

When I read students’ essays, assigning a grade is the least of my labors. Most of my effort is in commenting on your essay to show you both the strengths and weaknesses of your paper, operating under the assumption that this will help you become more aware of your own skills as a writer and encourage you to develop those skills further. But it is hard for me to know if this works in any given case, or even in general. Do students really read these comments?

So, adapting an assignment used by some of my colleagues, here’s what I’m asking for.

1. Read all of the comments on the essay and consider them.
2. Next, respond. Type me a note, attached to your original essay, that **seeks clarification** if you don’t understand a comment, **explains** anything I had a question about, and tells me **what you would revise** if you were to have another go at it. You can also write on the draft, say, to answer a question I had.
3. This is NOT about negotiating for a better grade. If you are mad about your grade or anything else, wait until you are calm to write this. Rancor is counterproductive.
4. The note to me should be fairly short and focused, no more than a page (150-120 words). On the other hand, it should be long enough to show that you have really reflected.

Below is a sample, which is completely invented:

Dr. Sparks,

Thank you for taking the time to comment so thoroughly on my essay. I was especially glad that you “got” the reference to X-Files in my title and introduction and thought it was great for my topic and audience. I really spent a lot of time trying to make a good “hook,” as we discussed in class.

I agree with you that the conclusion could be better, though, less redundant with the introduction and topic sentences. I was running out of time by that point, so I fell back on my “5-paragraph essay” training. I *have* noticed that real writers out in the world use more sophisticated ending strategies, and I’m going to work on that.

As for grammar, I am embarrassed by all the comma splices, but I think I understand what I was doing wrong now. I will be sure to use something stronger than a comma, like a semi-colon or period, when I have two independent clauses in one sentence, or I’ll subordinate one clause. For example, a corrected version of a comma splice I had would be like this: “Ever since I watched Scully solve a bizarre murder case by finding a needle mark at the base of a fingernail, I have wanted to work in forensic science.” Or “I was fascinated by how many secrets Scully could uncover by her careful scrutiny of a dead body; this led to my current career choice of forensic science.”

Sincerely, Student’s Name, class section number (249 words)