

THE EFFECTS OF TAPE-RECORDED COMMENTARY ON STUDENT REVISION: A CASE STUDY

JEFFREY SOMMERS

The profession has learned much about responding to student writing since the dismal days described by Cy Knoblauch and Lil Brannon and Nancy Sommers only a few years ago. They argued that ideally responding should function as an intervention in the writing process rather than as an evaluation of a final written product. Brannon, Knoblauch, and Sommers also focused attention on the need for instructors to respect the student's "ownership" of the text, moving away from the kind of prescriptive response in which the instructor appropriates the student's text. These persuasive arguments about more suitable approaches to responding to student writing inform the teaching of many writing instructors and, according to George Hillocks, Nina Ziv, and Sarah Warshauer Freedman, can be helpful to students.

However, despite such advances in responding to student writing, problems linger; misunderstandings between student-writers and teacher-responders abound. The difficulty for students in interpreting teacher's written notations, focused on by John Butler, has not disappeared. According to Nancy Sommers, students are oftentimes unable to discriminate between comments and unable to make distinctions about the relative importance of their instructors' written comments. Another obstacle to clear communication has been inadequate "anchoring" of comments to text (N. Som-

mers, 152; Hayes and Daiker, 4), creating problems for students in understanding to which part of their text the response refers.

A more fundamental difficulty with response to student writing is providing a context for the teacher's comments, making the response serve as a facet of the entire course rather than as a discrete activity unrelated to classroom instruction. Ziv and Hillocks both conclude that to be effective, comments on student writing must be given in the context of classroom instruction. In a large-scale survey and study, Freedman confirmed that effective high school teachers provide a rich context for their comments, using a number of modes of response. Her survey indicates that the most effective response mode reported by the teachers was one-to-one conferences with their students (72), although the survey also suggested that the teachers were unable to find adequate time to employ one-to-one conferences as much as they felt necessary. Thus, written commentary remains a widely used mode of responding to student writing. Sperling and Freedman observe that "written comments are often misconstrued even when they are addressed to the most promising students in otherwise successful classrooms; they are misconstrued even when they are accompanied by teacher-student conferences, by peer response groups, as well as by whole classroom discussion focused on response." (344). And they conclude that teacher written response is misunderstood even in classes in which teachers are responding according to the recent principles for effective response articulated by Sommers and others.

The misunderstandings caused by written comments and the infeasibility for many instructors of wide-scale one-to-one conferences have led a number of teachers over the past two decades to seek an alternative mode of response—oral, tape-recorded commentary on student writing. Sommers concludes her discussion of response by noting that "Written comments need to be an extension of the teacher's voice—an extension of the teacher as reader" (155), and Ziv argues that comments on student writing "can only be helpful if teachers respond to student writing as part of an ongoing dialogue between themselves and students" (376).

Although neither Sommers nor Ziv has tape-recorded response in mind, their language is drawn from the act of speaking: "voice," "dialogue." If, as Freedman argues, the ideal of response is "collaborative problem solving" (7), the oral mode of responding needs to be considered carefully, for it allows the teacher's voice to be

heard, encourages an ongoing dialogue between teacher and student, and leads to collaborative problem solving.

Freedman's survey shows that individual conferences are most effective in responding to student writing. She concludes that "it is unclear what kinds of response during the process are most and least helpful. The teachers are inconsistent in their opinions about the helpfulness of all other in-process techniques (that is, of peer groups, written comments, grades, and student self-assessments)" (71). Freedman's parenthetical listing of "all" response techniques does not mention the use of oral tape-recorded response although articles by Klammer, Hunt, and Yarbro and Angevine on its use have appeared in the literature, and Knoblauch and Brannon cite three small-scale research studies (1969, 1973, 1978) on the use of tape-recorded commentary. Sperling and Freedman report that teachers may already be using the oral response format of conferences as a means of clarifying their written comments (346); thus, a closer examination of the value of oral response in the form of tape-recorded commentary seems called for.

Perhaps because most discussions of tape-recorded instructor commentary have been impressionistic and speculative or perhaps because the technology itself seems off-putting, tape-recorded commentary on student writing has not been accorded its place as an effective mode of response. In this article, my purpose is to support the claim that tape-recorded response has distinct advantages over other methods of response, and my method is to examine in detail the record of an ongoing interaction between an instructor and a freshman composition student, an interaction that employed tape-recorded commentary about the student's writing. This case study will show the effects of tape-recorded comments upon a student's subsequent revisions and will substantiate two claims:

1. Tape-recorded comments are more understandable to students: The tape recorder allows the instructor to make more comments more clearly and in a more detailed fashion in a relatively short period of time than would be possible with written comments. Nancy Sommers reports that most teachers spend 20-40 minutes responding to an individual student paper, although she does not report how she learned this. Even if she is wrong and teachers only spend 10-20 minutes on each paper, teachers using tape-

recorded comments can still say much more as well as saying it more clearly (Klammer, 180). Yarbrow and Angevine reported that 90% of their subjects in an experimental tape commentary class reported that they understood their teacher's tape recorded comments better than they had understood previous instructors' handwritten comments (396).

Tape-recorded response permits instructors to explain important issues in the students' work, teach them about the writing process, and review concepts already covered in class. Hillocks concluded that "longer comments," which he defined as over ten words in length and including one or more compliments and very specific suggestions for improvement, are effective when "preceded by instruction related to their content" (275). The tape-recorded approach encourages more of these longer comments and provides increased opportunity for instructors to relate their comments to prior instruction.

Ziv discriminated between what she termed "explicit cues" and "implicit cues" in response. The "explicit cue" points out a specific error or indicates a specific change while the "implicit cue" calls attention to a problem, suggests alternative directions for the student to pursue, or questions the student about her text (368-369). She argues that effective response moves in the direction of implicit cues; tape-recorded response is an effective method of passing along not only explicit cues, which are clearly and securely anchored to the text, but is also extremely effective in giving implicit cues. Tape-recorded response allows the teacher to make clear the relative weight of the comments, addressing a concern voiced by Nancy Sommers about written comments. Hunt describes these same advantages of tape-recorded response when he says, "I can debate . . . I can suggest . . . ; I can digress" (584).

2. Tape-recorded response encourages individualized instruction: Both teachers and students in Freedman's study confirm that individualized instruction is preferable in responding to student writing (91), a point implicit in the arguments made by Nancy Sommers and Brannon and Knoblauch as well. Other researchers argue that response perceived by the student as personal rather than impersonal tends to be more effective (Siegel, 306; Hayes and Daiker, 4). Tape-recorded response individualizes instruction, most noticeably in its personalized voice. Hunt observes that the

most significant advantage in using tape-recorded comments is the "change of atmosphere of the situation as a whole, in the new relationship between writer and reader that is produced" (584). Where once the students read abbreviations scrawled in the margins of the draft, now they hear a "human voice." Inflection can be used both to generate enthusiasm for revision and also to soften criticism; thus praise sounds genuine and criticism becomes more tactful. Yarbrow and Angevine report an increased motivation to write reported by 73% of the students questioned, as a result of tape-recorded comments about their writing (396), corroborating an attitude adjustment observed by Knoblauch and Brannon in their survey of three earlier research studies into tape-recorded response.

Of course, one-to-one conferences with students provide the same kind of individualization. But with a typical load of fifty or seventy-five and occasionally one-hundred composition students per semester, I have not had time for personal conferences with each student, a time-management problem that is sadly too common according to Freedman (161). Interestingly, Hunt points out one advantage of the tape-recorded approach over conferences is that tape-recorded comments tend to stay closer to the text (584). But even if that were not the case, tape-recorded comments do provide individualized instruction superior to written comments and can serve as a workable alternative to conferences.

The student writing that I will examine was written in a first-semester composition course by a woman in her late thirties who had returned to school after a number of years spent rearing her children. With each draft of her paper, the student submitted a tape cassette upon which I recorded my comments. Faye wrote her assignment initially in early September and was required to rewrite it later that month. She subsequently *chose* to rewrite the paper three more times, making five drafts in all. I commented on the paper the first four times I saw it and then graded it at the end of the term. The five versions of Faye's paper totaled roughly 5000 words while my comments on her four submitted drafts equalled approximately 3000 words. Hence in examining this case study, I will use excerpts from both Faye's texts and my transcribed comments rather than providing complete texts.

During the semester, I kept a master copy of all my taped comments on my students' writing, comments that I have had

transcribed; after examining over 500 pages of transcription, I selected Faye's work to study. While the length of Faye's texts as well as the number of revisions that she undertook is not typical of all of my students, the interaction between her as writer and me as reader/commentator is representative. Table 1 provides an overview of the revision changes made by Faye and my time investment in responding to her series of drafts

TABLE 1

Date Submitted	Version #	Title	# of Para.	Wds.	COMMENTS Length (Time)	Pages (Typed)
September 16	1	My Trip to Kalamazoo	25	2200	8'58"	4
September 23	2	Embarrassing Moments	4	475	4'18"	2
November 16	3	Embarrassing Moments	7	730	6'31"	3.5
November 21	4	Embarrassing Moments	7	740	1'18"	1
December 3	5	Embarrassing Moments	7	750	-	-

I devoted 21 minutes 5 seconds (an average of 5 minutes 16 seconds) to commenting on her writing, producing a total of 10.5 double-spaced typewritten pages of comments (avg. 2.6 pages). Even if ten minutes per response is added, to account for reading and planning time, each response required less than sixteen minutes on average, compared to the twenty-to-forty-minute average estimated by Nancy Sommers for written response.

And the taped commentary covers more ground. The expansiveness of the comments becomes quite clear in viewing those statistics: 10.5 typewritten pages converts to over twenty hand-written pages of commentary, a quantity of comments that would require hours to compose, but which required me approximately one hour to verbalize.

The individualized instruction present in the tapes is clear also, present in the tape's personal voice, a voice that praises enthusiastically and criticizes strongly. The comments sound like one person speaking to another rather than the often more impersonal voice of written comments. Indeed, the voice of the tape recorded commentary is more personal than even extremely effective written commentary is likely to be. The results? Faye went through

a rigorous revision process and mastered her material in her own way. She was as pleased with her paper as I was.

Table 2: Faye's First Draft

Date Submitted	Version #	Title	# of Para.	Wds.	COMMENTS Length (Time)	Pages (Typed)
September 16	1	My Trip to Kalamazoo	25	2200	8 '58"	4

Faye's first draft, as the table indicates, was a very long one; my comments were also lengthy. There was much to say about this first draft.

This first excerpt is the introduction from Faye's paper. In it she mentions both her current title and the one she will eventually use.

From Faye's First Draft:

"Last summer on the fourth of July my husband and I headed for Kalamazoo to visit a cousin of mine, and to attend a wedding on the following Friday evening.

"I'm a real camera freak. I love to catch people at their most embarrassing moments and sneak a shot of them with my camera. I'm now on my third photo album of 'Embarrassing Moments.' So I hang my camera around my neck and carry it with me wherever I go."

In my opening remarks, I praised Faye's paper and then posed a key question. At the start I referred to her memo, a brief note that I require the students to write to me about their draft and to submit to me when they submit the draft. This memo, or note, helps the instructor gain some insight into what the student is trying to accomplish in the draft as well as helping the student keep ownership of the draft. The memo begins a dialogue about the draft, giving the student the initial say. Faye had expressed concern with her paper's length, an issue related to my main concern of my comment: her lack of focus. Note my calling attention to the major point of my response. I saw possibilities for her paper and wished to let her know that, especially since the possibilities that I saw were suggested in her paper itself.

Instructor comments:

"FAYE, WHAT I'M LOOKING AT NOW IS YOUR FIRST PAPER CALLED 'MY TRIP TO KALAMAZOO.' THIS IS A REAL RIP-SNORTER, I GUESS. THERE'S A WHOLE LOT OF STUFF

IN THERE. YOU SAID YOU SUSPECTED THAT IT WAS TOO LONG. YOU SAID YOU SHOULD HAVE BEEN ABLE TO MAKE THE ESSAY MORE EXCITING AND THAT YOU THOUGHT IT WAS PROBABLY TOO LONG. I THINK I WANT TO ADDRESS BOTH OF THOSE QUESTIONS. LET ME SAY FIRST, I ENJOYED READING IT. THE STORIES THAT YOU TELL ARE ALL INTERESTING AND MANY OF THEM ARE VERY FUNNY. THERE ARE AN AWFUL LOT OF THEM, HOWEVER, AND THE MAJOR POINT I WANTED TO FOCUS ON IN COMMENTING HERE IS THAT I DON'T THINK I'M TOO SURE THAT I UNDERSTAND WHAT THE MAIN IDEA OF THE PAPER IS. WHAT'S GOING TO HOLD ALL THESE STORIES TOGETHER?

"YOU IMPLY IN THE SECOND PARAGRAPH OF THE PAPER THAT YOU ARE GOING TO BE TELLING US ALL THESE EMBARRASSING MOMENTS IN THE PHOTO ALBUM THAT YOU'VE BEEN KEEPING. WE'RE GOING TO HEAR LITTLE STORIES OF PICTURES YOU TOOK OF PEOPLE EMBARRASSING THEMSELVES, YET NOT EVERYTHING IN THE ESSAY FITS INTO THAT CATEGORY. THERE'S ANOTHER PART OF THE ESSAY WHICH JUST SEEMS TO BE TAKING THE POINT OF VIEW THAT YOU'RE GOING TO TELL US ABOUT A TRIP WHERE EVERYTHING WENT WRONG. THERE'S ANOTHER PART OF IT WHERE THERE SEEMS TO BE A SERIES OF ANECDOTES ABOUT HOW PRACTICAL JOKERS TRY TO GET EVEN WITH ONE ANOTHER. THERE'S A NUMBER OF DIFFERENT DIRECTIONS YOU CAN GO IN THIS PAPER IN OTHER WORDS AND I THINK YOU'RE GOING TO HAVE TO PICK ONE."

Here, in the opening comment about her draft, I have made certain that there will be no confusion about the relative weight of my comments, a recurrent problem in the responses surveyed by Nancy Sommers. The commentary here focuses on what Ziv terms the "macro level" of the draft (366). This global concern leads quite naturally into the rest of the commentary, commentary that follows Peter Elbow's suggestion that readers supply writers with "movies of the mind" (85). Elbow's argument is that readers of a writer's draft are answering a "time-bound, subjective but *factual* question" about what happened to them as they read the draft, the idea being to provide the writer with a sense of the writing's impact upon a real reader (85). This "movies of the mind" ap-

proach is a valuable one for students who frequently are unaccustomed to having readers respond seriously as readers rather than judges. Elbow's approach is an excellent way to leave ownership of the text in the student's hands as well as to intervene in the writing process rather than judge the written product. (My comments to Faye on her third draft address the issue of how effectively I had left ownership of the paper in her hands.)

Because the Elbow approach is designed as an oral response, it is much easier to provide "movies of the mind" by using tape-recorded commentary than by employing written comments, which are limited by the space available in the margins of the text. Hunt has pointed out that written comments exist as a "spatial display" (583); they can be looked at on a page, are immediately available to an audience, and can be re-read. Taped comments, on the other hand, appear to an audience in a "temporal display" (583). This temporal quality of tape-recorded response facilitates the "movies of the mind" approach because it gives the writer the sense that the reader is moving through the text. In the following excerpt, I very well could have written the same comments as an end comment; however, as an end comment, the response would be visible as a single entity and might well come across as a final judgment rather than as a series of reading impressions.

Another advantage of tape-recorded response is that the teacher, by responding orally in the manner suggested by Elbow, can serve as a model for students who are expected to participate in peer response groups in composition classes. Since modeling group interaction is an effective tool for creating effective peer group response, according to Karen Spear, the more facilitative role played by the teacher who responds in the movies-of-the-mind approach can offer a more suitable model on which students can pattern their behavior.

As I continued to respond, I verbalized "movies of my mind" for Faye to consider.

Instructor's Comments:

"YOU PROBABLY HAVE ENOUGH HERE TO WRITE TWO OR MAYBE THREE DIFFERENT PAPERS. LET ME SHOW YOU WHAT I MEAN. LET'S START ON PAGE ONE. 'I'M A REAL CAMERA FREAK,' YOU SAY IN THE SECOND PARAGRAPH. 'I LOVE TO CATCH PEOPLE.' THAT WHOLE PARAGRAPH SOUNDED LIKE TO ME THAT IT SHOULD HAVE BEEN THE

INTRODUCTION. THE FIRST PARAGRAPH REALLY WASN'T EVEN NEEDED. YOU THEN TELL US ABOUT THE LITTLE KID AND THE TOILET PAPER AND I'M WAITING FOR YOU TO SAY AT SOME POINT YOU GOT OUT YOUR CAMERA AND TOOK A PICTURE, BUT YOU DIDN'T. ACTUALLY, YOU TELL US THAT A PAGE OR TWO LATER. YOU NEED TO, IF YOU'RE PURSUING THE PHOTOGRAPH IDEA, EVERYTIME THERE'S AN INTERESTING CANDID PHOTO TO TAKE YOU NEED TO MAKE CLEAR, IN FACT, THAT YOU TOOK THE PHOTO. THE BUSINESS ABOUT THE WOMAN WITH THE TIP HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH PHOTOS, RIGHT? YOU DIDN'T TAKE A PICTURE OF THIS. SO HOW DOES IT FIT INTO THE PAPER? NOW IT LOOKS LIKE YOU'RE GIVING US AN EXAMPLE OF SOMEONE'S STRANGE BEHAVIOR. LIKEWISE WITH THE NEXT PARAGRAPH. THE BUSINESS WHERE YOUR HUSBAND'S PUSHING THE DOOR WHERE IT SAID PULL OR VISA VERSA—THERE'S NO PHOTOGRAPH BEING TAKEN, SO HOW DOES THIS BELONG IN HERE? WHY DOES IT BELONG IN HERE?

I was much more expansive here than I would, or could, be in writing because of the element of time involved in speech as opposed to writing (see Table 2). Klammer estimates that an instructor can cover five times as much ground in the same amount of time when using tape as opposed to pen or pencil (180). And given the length of Faye's first draft, writing comments would have taken a considerable amount of time.

In my comments there is a rambling quality, attributable both to the manner in which I make these recordings and the medium itself. I read through the student's draft quickly once, making some quick notes to myself about my reactions, but I basically "freewrite" aloud in responding to the writing. In other words, I do not work from a script. Over time, with practice, I have become better at eventually getting to the point, at finding the point I wish to make. Still, every once in awhile, I do need to re-record a comment which has lost focus and rambled on aimlessly.

However, written comments present their own difficulties as far as organization is concerned. If the written comments are composed extemporaneously as my oral comments are, they run the same risk of being unclear, a risk aggravated by the relative brevity of the written comments which do not afford the instructor the

easy opportunity to restate and qualify. If the written comments are carefully prepared and organized prior to writing, the time required to compose them is increased, perhaps to the twenty or more minutes reported by Nancy Sommers. In addition to the slowness of such carefully composed commentary, the spontaneity of the movies-of-the mind approach gradually diminishes. The extra time and greater effort required to compose a well-organized written comment, I would argue, increase the distance between the reader and her initial response, allowing the reader to slip into the role of judge rather than reader.

Hunt, in his observations about spatial versus temporal display, also notes that the spatial quality of written comments permits them to be more complex in their organization. "Everyone who has written lectures . . . is aware of this problem and has compensated for it by repetition, simplicity of organization, and the making of organizational phrases more obvious" (583). Such compensation for the medium of the spoken word occurs throughout my commentary on Faye's work, contributing to clarity of communication, in much the same way that Sperling and Freedman's teacher used oral response to clarify his written comments.

In concluding my response, I used the tape as an opportunity to do some teaching about the writing process and to remind Faye as well of the textbook's discussion of her very problem.

Instructor's Comments:

"OK, SO WHERE DOES THAT LEAVE YOU? I THINK IT LEAVES YOU WITH A DECISION TO MAKE. DO YOU WANT TO FOCUS ON ONE ASPECT OF YOUR SUBJECT OR ON ANOTHER? THERE'S A SECTION OF DONALD MURRAY'S TEXTBOOK CALLED 'FOCUSING' WHICH TALKS ABOUT THIS VERY PROCESS THAT I'M DEALING WITH RIGHT NOW."

As I concluded my comments, I tried to let Faye retain ownership of her own material, primarily by asking her questions. By asking questions and leaving the decisions up to Faye, I am trying to encourage the independent problem-solving in Freedman's model for responding. Such comments are easier to make orally; once again, the time factor is clearly on the side of tape-recorded commentary as these concluding comments take up only a small portion of the overall comment but would require minutes to write out. The oral approach also provides a sense of closure to the

comments as well as offering a final encouragement; although both are possibilities in written comments, there is a temptation to lapse into evaluation as a means of providing closure in written comments, at least in my own experience. The increased awareness of audience provided by the tape-recorded response—after all, speaking into the tape-recorder to a specific student makes it very easy to gain a strong sense of a listener—assists me in refraining from adopting the role of judge.

Instructor's Comments:

“WHAT YOU’VE DONE SO FAR IS YOU’VE ACCUMULATED A LOT OF HUMOROUS INCIDENTS, ALL OF WHICH AS YOU TELL THEM SEEM TO BE CONNECTED TO THE SAME TRIP, ALL OF WHICH ILLUSTRATE HOW PEOPLE MAKE FOOLS OF THEMSELVES AND HOW THEY MAKE FOOLS OF OTHER PEOPLE. BUT HOW YOU’RE FINALLY GOING TO DECIDE TO TELL THAT STORY, THAT’S WHAT YOU HAVEN’T FOCUSED ON YET. ARE YOU GOING TO FOCUS ON THE PRACTICAL JOKE ASPECT OF PEOPLE TRYING TO MAKE FUN OF EACH OTHER? ARE YOU GOING TO FOCUS ON THE—I CAN’T THINK OF THE RIGHT WAY TO DESCRIBE THIS—PHENOMENON OF HOW CERTAIN PEOPLE MANAGE TO ALWAYS MAKE THINGS GO WRONG? AND THEN YOU COULD TALK ABOUT THE BURNT OUT KITCHEN AND YOUR HUSBAND NOT PUSHING THE DOOR WHEN HE SHOULD BE PULLING IT AND LIKE THAT. OR ARE YOU INTERESTED IN THIS PHOTO ALBUM OF YOURS AND THE CANDID PHOTOS OF PEOPLE IN LIFE’S EMBARRASSING MOMENTS? YOU CAN PICK ANY OF THOSE. I CAN’T TELL YOU WHICH ONE TO GO WITH. IT’S YOUR CHOICE, BUT I THINK YOU NEED TO EXCLUDE EXAMPLES THAT AREN’T RELATED TO THE CHOICE THAT YOU DO MAKE, AND STREAMLINE THE STORY.”

Faye's Second Draft

Date Submitted	Version #	Title	# of Para.	Wds.	COMMENTS Length (Time)	Pages (Typed)
September 23	2	Embarrassing Moments	4	475	4'18"	2

Faye's second draft was required; I assign the students to rewrite their first assignment, in order to acquaint them with the idea of rewriting, an alien activity to many of them. In her revi-

sion, Faye had performed major surgery on her essay, as the table indicates, cutting approximately 1700 words and 21 paragraphs in an effort to focus the paper. Faye's new opening paragraph dropped the trip concept along with the camera approach, instead retaining several of her initial anecdotes and stringing them together as part of a story of a typical picnic.

From Faye's Second Draft:

"I'm always amazed at weird situations some people can get themselves into. I remember a picnic that I went on last summer where a few people found themselves in quite awkward predicaments."

In Faye's memo, she commented on the taped comments she had received on her first draft, writing, "The tape was very helpful to me in revising my paper. You commented that my paper was too long as I had thought, explained why, and gave me suggestions of different ways I could go in. You made me realize that I was focusing on too many ideas." Despite her appreciation for the taped commentary, she sounded uncertain about her revision. Once again, I used her own comments as a starting point for mine. She wrote to me:

From Faye's Memo:

"I dropped the parts about the trip, the pictures, and the practical jokes and how things sometimes seem to go wrong. All I used were three examples of embarrassing moments that happened to people while on a picnic. I'd like to know if you feel my paper is now too short?"

Basically, Faye had ruined her paper in an effort to find its focus. Her major surgery now required an autopsy. My goal was to get her to find a more workable angle from which to view her material. On this second draft I spent about one-half the time commenting that I had spent on her first draft, yet I still made enough macro and micro level comments to fill two typewritten pages in transcript form, which would require considerably more than four minutes to write out.

After reading her second draft, I began to realize that the photo approach was far more interesting to me than her new picnic approach. But I was trying to walk a tightrope—not very successfully I fear—wanting to let her choose the approach she liked best rather than deciding for her.

Instructor's Comments:

"IS THE CANDID CAMERA APPROACH YOU STARTED OUT WITH A TECHNIQUE THAT WOULD WORK HERE? I'M SUGGESTING ONLY THAT YOU COULD PROBABLY STILL USE THE SAME STORIES YOU'VE TOLD HERE ALTHOUGH I'M NOT SO SURE THEY'RE THE MOST SPECTACULAR ONES YOU HAD IN THE FIRST VERSION. YOU COULD PROBABLY STILL USE THESE AND THE PICNIC APPROACH—IF YOU COULD FIND SOMETHING TO JUICE THEM UP A BIT. MAKE THEM MORE LIVELY AND HOLD THEM TOGETHER. RIGHT NOW IT JUST LOOKS LIKE SHEER COINCIDENCE THAT THESE THINGS HAPPENED."

As my response continued, I returned to the movies-of-the-mind commenting approach. She had told a story in her first draft about Tyrone, a good-looking but vain man whose appearance she had admired. Later, in a second anecdote about Tyrone, his toupee came off in the swimming pool, making a memorable photo for her album. In Draft 2, however, because Tyrone appears only once, in the swimming pool scene, he is a stranger to us and the impact is blunted. I said so in my comment, but only fleetingly; this was an aside that I made as I concentrated on Faye's lack of focus in the essay.

This comment brings to mind the frustration I used to feel when writing marginal comments. Ziv argues that implicit cues are necessary for students to develop as writers; the Elbow approach to responding is an effective means of providing those implicit cues, embedded in the genuine reader response given to the text. But it would have taken too long for me to explain about Tyrone in writing without telling Faye precisely what to do, so I probably would never have mentioned the problem at all. I just would not want to spend so much time on such a minor point. On the tape, however, my comment about Tyrone was easy to voice and occupied only twelve seconds.

Instructor's Comments:

"THE THIRD STORY IS OK TOO EXCEPT THAT IT MADE MORE SENSE IN THE FIRST VERSION BECAUSE WE'VE ALREADY SEEN—WHAT'S THE GUY'S NAME?—TYRONE. HE HAD ALREADY APPEARED IN THE ESSAY EARLIER AND YOU'D BEEN ADMIRING HIS GOOD LOOKS SO IT MADE IT PARTICULARLY AMUSING TO SEE HIS PROBLEMS IN THE

POOL. THIS TIME HE COMES TO US AS A STRANGER AND SO IT DOESN'T HAVE QUITE THE SAME IMPACT."

In summing up my comments on Faye's second draft, I tried to be honest, but at the same time I wanted to hold a general conversation with her.

Instructor's Comments:

"MAYBE YOU COULD USE A BREAK FROM THIS ONE AND FOCUS ON OTHER PAPERS. IT'S A STRANGE SITUATION. I DON'T THINK I CAN REMEMBER ANYBODY DOING QUITE WHAT YOU'VE DONE HERE. MOST OF THE STUDENTS USUALLY SUFFER FROM A SHORTAGE OF DETAILS AND INFORMATION AND WHEN THEY ACTUALLY GET MORE THAN THEY NEED, WHICH IS RARE, THEY JUST THROW SOME OF IT OUT AND THEN THEY'RE OK. HERE, I'M SOMEWHAT AFRAID THAT YOU'VE THROWN THE BABY OUT WITH THE BATH WATER. SO THINK ABOUT IT AND IF YOU WANT TO TALK ABOUT IT, AS I SAID, YOU CAN COME IN AND SEE ME AND I'LL MAKE SURE I'M THERE IN MY OFFICE."

Faye did take my suggestion and set aside the paper for about seven weeks. Klammer conjectures that tape-recorded comments, by anticipating students' questions, may reduce the students' need to visit instructors for personal discussions of their work, an observation that I find convincing in light of Sperling and Freedman's explanation of their subject teacher's use of conferences as a means of explaining unclear written comments. I do not know if Klammer's observation explains her decision, but Faye did not come to see me to discuss the paper, choosing to work through her revising on her own with the assistance provided by the taped response.

I wanted to let Faye know that I had confidence that she could finish the paper but that perhaps she needed a changed perspective on it. My voice itself in the comments assisted me in expressing my confidence in her, and I am convinced that at least in part because my comments were encouraging, Faye continued to revise her paper.

Faye's Third Draft						
Date Submitted	Version #	Title	# of Para.	Wds.	COMMENTS Length (Time)	Pages (Typed)
November 16	3	Embarrassing Moments	7	730	6'31"	3.5

After seven weeks had passed, Faye submitted a third version of her paper, a draft significantly changed in length from her second draft, as indicated in the table. In her memo, she described her new approach: “I’m using a different approach—as I am looking through my album and thinking about some of these situations when they happened.”

Faye’s new opening paragraph incorporated much of her first draft’s opening but with a significant—and effective—new approach.

From Faye’s Third Draft:

“I’m a real camera freak. I love to catch people at their most embarrassing moments and sneak a shot of them with my camera. So I hang my camera around my neck and carry it with me wherever I go. As I sit here placing photographs in my third album of ‘Embarrassing Moments,’ my thoughts drift back to some of these events that took place.”

Later in Draft 3, Faye is about to tell a story about a man emerging from a restroom at a restaurant, toilet paper trailing him like a kite tail. This story had appeared in Draft 1 but had been dropped in Draft 2, the picnic version. In Draft 3, however, Faye has changed the man, originally a stranger, into Uncle Tyrone, allowing her the opportunity to admire his good looks and thus set up the “toupee in the pool” story later on. She has followed up on my twelve-second comment, a comment that was not so much a suggestion as it was an incidental observation, an implicit cue rather than an explicit one.

From Faye’s Third Draft:

“One evening my husband and I were invited to go out for dinner with my aunt and uncle. Aunt Carrie and I were standing in line in the restaurant, and as I saw the men come out of the restroom I admired Uncle Tyrone’s handsome looks.”

My comments this time were anchored very specifically to the text, more at Ziv’s micro level than at the macro level at which I had been commenting on drafts one and two. Now that Faye’s paper had begun to work, I was able to be more specific in my response. I read a portion of her work that I found effective and made a parenthetical comment that she would later remember and use to good effect in subsequent drafts. Because I had been rather positive at the beginning of my response, thus letting Faye know that there were aspects of her paper which I genuinely liked and admired, I believed that she would be more receptive later to criticism.

Instructor's Comments:

"WE'RE GOING TO VISUALIZE YOU AS YOU SIT THERE LEAFING THROUGH THE ALBUM LOOKING AT THE PICTURES. NOW, WHAT THIS IS GOING TO ALLOW YOU TO DO IS TELL A SERIES OF BASICALLY UNRELATED STORIES BECAUSE THEY'RE RELATED BY VIRTUE OF THE FACT THAT YOU HAVE PHOTOGRAPHS OF EACH ONE IN THE PHOTO ALBUM. AND THAT IS REALLY A LOT MORE INTERESTING I THINK THAN JUST TELLING US THE STORIES. NOW FLIP TO PAGE 4. THE STORY ABOUT THE ALKASELTZER IN THE FOUNTAIN ENDS VERY EFFECTIVELY. 'I THOUGHT I WAS GOING TO BE SICK BUT I HURRIEDLY GRABBED MY CAMERA FOR THE CREEPING CRUD SHOT.' THAT REMINDS US THAT YOU ARE TAKING PICTURES— THAT YOU'VE GOT A PICTURE IN THE PHOTO ALBUM THAT YOU ARE LOOKING AT, AND, IN FACT THAT YOU HAVE A NAME FOR IT—THAT'S REALLY EFFECTIVE."

It is worth noting that Faye paid close attention to my final compliment about the name, using it as the basis for several subsequent revisions. Lisa, the student subject of Sperling and Freedman's study, was also very good at following up on her teacher's compliments, in her eagerness to please him (347-363). However, Faye, unlike Lisa, had been provided with a clear explanation of *why* I had praised her writing. The ease with which implicit cues can be given and anchored specifically to the text can replace the sort of blind accommodation that marked Lisa's revision process with a better-informed problem-solving approach to revision.

As I continued my comments, I developed an extended analogy which I would never have attempted in handwritten comments given the time it would take to do so. Also, I was able to ask Faye to flip pages while I talked about the sequence of her anecdotes, taking advantage once again of the temporal display of oral commentary. How could I do that in a written comment? I could carry the analogy on in my marginal comments, assuming a continuity for them that would only exist if the student were willing to read them consecutively without regard to the intervening text and comments. Or I could write my concerns at the end of the paper, requiring the student to flip pages and try to jump back and forth to my comments. Hunt has observed the very frustrations to which I am referring and writes that "many suggestions for improvement of student writing are very complicated and

never get fully expressed simply because of that complexity" (583). He notes that with written comments such suggestions often are omitted entirely because of the great effort involved in trying to articulate them effectively. With the cassette, however, the student had her eyes free to read and her hands free to take notes while I occupied her ears.

Although I made my comments in the form of an extended analogy, Faye herself converted the comments into marginal notes. Students generally jot notes in the margins as they listen to the tapes, avoiding the frequent problems students experience with illegible handwriting or obscure abbreviations and symbols. Hunt also notes the same advantages, arguing that the need for instructors to use "cryptic hieroglyphics" disappears (584). Equally important, however, may be that when Faye listens to my comments, considers them, and converts them into her own notes, she has clearly been engaging in the "social and cognitive process" that Freedman holds up as the model of response (6). Finally, because Faye has written her own notes on my comments, what Hunt calls the "unavoidably temporary" (581) nature of taped commentary is no longer unavoidable; Faye's marginal notes have made the comments permanent. Thus my analogy made my point more vividly and memorably than I would have been able to in a written marginal note, if indeed I had even attempted to make such a comment at all.

Instructor's Comments:

"UNFORTUNATELY, THERE ARE TOO MANY PLACES IN THE PAPER WHERE YOU DON'T REMIND US OF THE PHOTO ALBUM. IN OTHER WORDS, WE NEED TO SEE— TRY TO VISUALIZE THIS AS IF IT WERE A TV SHOW. IT STARTS OUT WITH—WE SEE A SCENE OF YOU SITTING IN AN EASY CHAIR WITH A PHOTO ALBUM ON YOUR LAP. THE CAMERA COMES IN OVER YOUR SHOULDER AND SHOWS US THE FIRST PICTURE AND—WHILE YOU THINK SOMETHING ABOUT HOW YOU LIKE TO TAKE PICTURES OF EMBARRASSING MOMENTS. AND, THEN YOU, WE CLEARLY SEE YOU'RE GOING TO REMEMBER SOME. AND, WE LOOK AT THE FIRST PICTURE AND IT'S THE ONE WITH THE LITTLE KID WITH THE TOILET PAPER. RIGHT? AND YOU TELL THE WHOLE STORY. THEN YOU SHOW US THE NEXT PICTURE. THE CAMERA, RATHER, SHOWS US YOU LOOK-

ING AT THE NEXT PICTURE OR TURNING THE PAGE IN THE ALBUM AND THEN YOU TELL US THE NEXT STORY. AND IT'S CONSTANTLY REMINDING US BY BRINGING US BACK JUST BRIEFLY TO YOU SITTING IN YOUR EASY CHAIR LOOKING AT THE PICTURE ALBUM. MUCH OF THE TIME THOUGH WE DON'T. AND, SO WHAT WE'RE GETTING IS A LOOK AT THE PICTURE AND A DISCUSSION OF THE STORY AND WE SEE YOUR YOUR COUSIN WALKING INTO THE MIRROR. AND THEN THE NEXT THING WE SEE IS THE NEXT STORY AND THERE'S NO TRANSITION AND IT'S CONFUSING."

The subsequent comments offer as strong an example as I can provide of the personal relationship established by the tape-recorded approach. The inflection in these comments, particularly at the end where I actually giggled over her new-found success, demonstrate the personal quality of taped comments, the changed atmosphere of the student/teacher interaction about which Russell Hunt writes.

Instructor's Comments:

"YOU'VE DONE IT [PHOTO ALBUM STRUCTURE] WELL AT THE BEGINNING AND ENDING—CAN YOU DO IT CONSISTENTLY THROUGHOUT THE PAPER? YOU DON'T WANT TO SAY 'AS I TURN THE PAGE' OVER AND OVER AGAIN. THERE'S GOT TO BE A WAY TO GENTLY REMIND US WHAT IT IS WE'RE READING HERE WHICH IS JUST NOT A SERIES OF STORIES BUT THE STORIES BEHIND THE PHOTOGRAPHS THAT YOU ARE LOOKING AT AS WE READ THE PAPER. NOW I THINK IF YOU CAN DO THAT THE PAPER WILL WORK EVEN BETTER THAN IT IS NOW. AND THIS IS A SUCCESSFUL PAPER FOR THE FIRST TIME REALLY [GIGGLE]. . . ."

As I concluded my response, I was teaching again, commenting on not only this revision but on another one of a different essay that she had submitted at the same time. This type of teaching, a form of individualized instruction quite common in one-to-one conferencing, is simple to do in the tape-recorded comments. However, such teaching is not so simple in written commentary, where there is really no one appropriate "space" on the text which such a comment could be written without suggesting

some connection between it and the specific portion of the text; even at the end of the draft, such comment ary might suggest a final comment on the text when it is actually intended to be an observation about the student's work in the entire course. When taping responses, however, such a comment can fit nicely at the beginning or at the end of the response, and in fact, owing to the temporal quality of the tape, can be inserted almost at any point without confusing the student. Little time is required to make these "teaching" comments, and I find myself instructing in this manner fairly often.

Instructor's Comments:

"SO I LIKE YOUR PAPER WHICH IN ALL HONESTY I COULDN'T SAY ABOUT THE EARLIER VERSIONS. IT STRIKES ME THAT YOU'VE DONE THE SAME THING IN GENERAL TERMS WITH BOTH OF THESE REVISIONS THAT I HAVE LOOKED AT. YOU STARTED OUT WITH PAPERS THAT BASICALLY TOOK A NARRATIVE POINT OF VIEW THAT RECOUNTED A SERIES OF EVENTS AND IN CHRONOLOGICAL SEQUENCE THE STORIES THAT YOU ARE TELLING ARE NOT TERRIBLY EXCITING OR TERRIBLY FUNNY—THEY SORT OF JUST 'WERE.' . . . SO I END WITH THE SAME NOTE THAT I BEGAN; I HOPE THAT I HAVEN'T MADE YOU WRITE PAPERS THAT YOU DIDN'T WANT TO WRITE. I THINK YOU HAVE MADE BETTER PAPERS OUT OF THESE—AND HERE I THINK YOU HAVE TAKEN THE CONTENT AND FOUND WAYS TO PRESENT IT AND IT'S FAR MORE INTERESTING THAN THE STRAIGHT NARRATIVE APPROACH YOU USED EARLIER."

As I commented, I was looking ahead to future writing, done both for me and for others, by generalizing about what Faye might learn from her revising. I also sought absolution for my comments, as I feared that I had been too directive.

Faye's Fourth Draft						
Date Submitted	Version #	Title	# of Para.	Wds.	COMMENTS Length (Time)	Pages (Typed)
November 21	4	Embarrassing Moments	7	740	1'18"	1

Subsequently, Faye rewrote her paper yet again and re-submitted it to me. Her essay had begun to work and had not

changed in major ways, as the chart indicates. I had little new to add to my earlier responses, so my entire response lasts only for slightly longer than one minute, still enough response to fill close to one page of typewritten transcript. Faye pointed out the effect of my earlier commentary on this draft: "I tried to use transitions throughout and keep referring back to my photo album as you suggested." She has continued to find the comments helpful it appears, helpful enough to make use of.

In this draft, Faye has begun to give the photos names, picking up on my off-handed compliment, an implicit cue, about her having named her Alka Seltzer photo "the creeping crud" shot. My praise took the form of a subordinate clause and occupied a mere five seconds of air time on the tape.

From Faye's Fourth Draft:

"The next picture I'm looking at is called 'The Screamin' Demons.' "

"After snapping my picture, I went over and asked her if she was O.K. She told me she was fine, just a little embarrassed. Well, she should have been, with her nose smashed up against the mirror and sheer terror in her eyes. This poor girl thought that what was actually a mirror was another room; and that what was indeed herself was another person. I wonder if I should enter my 'Sophisticated Sophia' photograph in a beauty contest?"

Another interesting point is that the character of Sophisticated Sophia in Draft 1 was named Carrie. In Draft 3, when the story re-appeared, Carrie, a name Faye had decided to use as her aunt's name, was changed to Loretta. In Draft 4 Loretta has given way to Sophia, solely, I suppose, for the sake of the alliteration. Faye is a writer who can take a hint, a hint that was born of my movies-of-the-mind commentary, a cue that was so implicit that I was not even conscious of having made a suggestion at all.

Faye's final paragraph showed that she had clearly gained total control of her material.

From Faye's Fourth Draft:

"I treasure my photo albums. I'm sure a lot of people would love to get their slimy little hands on them too. So I keep them in my safe to prevent anyone from snatching them—or maybe losing them in a fire. The best medicine I could ever have when I'm feeling down is to drag out my albums and have a good laugh. That's my 'picker-upper.' "

My main suggestion focused on the essay's structure, and clearly whatever sins I might have displayed earlier in taking charge of her work, I atoned for by turning responsibility back to her.

Instructor's Comments:

"THE USE OF THOSE TRANSITIONS HOLDS THE PAPER TOGETHER . . . IN FACT THE ONLY SUGGESTIONS THAT I'D MAKE FOR YOU ABOUT THIS PAPER ARE TO READ IT OUT LOUD AND SEE IF THERE ARE NOT SOME CHANGES YOU WANT TO MAKE FOR THE SAKE OF CREATING A MORE EUPHONIOUS SOUND. IN OTHER WORDS, I THINK THERE IS NOTHING LEFT FOR YOU TO DO BUT POLISH THIS PAPER. AND I DON'T HAVE ANY PARTICULAR POINTS IN THE PAPER TO POINT AT OR ANY SPOTS IN THE PAPER THAT I WANT TO POINT AT AND SAY THAT THIS NEEDS WORK. BUT, AS THE AUTHOR HERSELF, YOU CAN TELL, I THINK, IF YOU READ YOUR OWN WORK OUT LOUD WHERE YOU ARE NOT QUITE SATISFIED WITH WHAT YOU HAVE SAID OR WHETHER—OR WHERE—YOU CAN JUST SUDDENLY HEAR A BETTER WAY TO SAY IT."

Looking ahead, I was teaching once again since these comments might be applicable at some point to Faye's other essays. Because I also wanted Faye to be motivated to revise the paper yet a fifth time, I tried to show her my confidence in her ability to do so. Finally, I think I have included Faye in the community of authors; we all do this sort of polishing. By treating Faye as an author, by including myself and her in the same community, I am validating her accomplishment as a writer and encouraging her to think of herself as a writer. Often I am more explicit in making this comment and talk about how I polish my own written work, something I would have little time for in a handwritten comment.

Faye's Final Draft

Accompanying her fifth and final draft, Faye reviewed the entire commenting process in her final memo. She wrote, "In my first version I had too much material, and you made me realize that I had to decide on which aspect I wanted to focus on. My second version had too little material. In my third version I came up with a happy medium. You commented that you liked my stories and voice. You also liked the idea of my sitting and look-

ing through my photo album, but suggested that I remind the audience more of the album throughout the paper. I didn't add any new material to my later versions—I used the same stories but found a better structure for them." It would be nice—as well as convenient—to quote Faye commenting that without the taped commentary approach, her paper would never have improved as it did. Unfortunately, she did not offer such an opinion. But her remarks do suggest that she has listened carefully, heard what I had to say, and made use of what she found helpful in my comments. Were the taped comments solely responsible for Faye's polished final draft? Of course not. But the instructor comments that Faye received were sufficiently clear, thorough, specific, non-threatening, and encouraging to assist a highly-motivated, effective writer to develop a series of drafts of her paper until she reached a satisfying final polished version.

And Faye herself was quite pleased with the final result of her work. She commented, "I can't believe the difference in the paper I started out with, and the paper I ended up with." I was not as surprised. Effective tape-recorded commentary usually assists students to revise effectively.

CONCLUSION

My paper has attempted to demonstrate the advantages of tape-recorded response to student writing, focusing primarily upon the advantages of this approach from the perspective of the instructor. While some of Faye's comments in her memos suggest that she has found the tape-recorded mode of commentary helpful, she does not address the issue of whether she preferred it to written comments. This entire question of how students themselves view tape-recorded response remains open and needs to be investigated. For instructors, however, tape-recorded response offers an opportunity to be more detailed than they could be in written comments, usually allowing instructors to clarify their ideas more effectively. Tape-recorded response also provides instructors with a means of conducting individualized instruction. Additionally, it allows instructors to serve as role models for their student to emulate in peer editing groupwork as well as in conferences.

I have painted a rosy picture. Are there no disadvantages to the use of tape-recorded response? Technological problems with tape cassette players and tape cassettes do occur occasionally,

but not frequently. Tape cassette players have become inexpensive and are readily available to students both at home and on campus, but an occasional student will have problems gaining access to a tape recorder. These difficulties seem to occur less often than the difficulties presented by written comments (Butler, 270-277; Hahn, 7-10, N. Sommers, 148-156; Knoblauch and Brannon, 1-4).

A more serious disadvantage is suggested by Hunt, who concludes his discussion of tape-recorded response by confessing that he is troubled by the message which tape-recorded commentary may be sending to students: "Written language is cumbersome, difficult, mechanically time-consuming and hopelessly limited. Given a choice between writing and dictating, I, a teacher of writing, choose to employ the resources of the spoken word as opposed to the written one" (585).

Hunt's concern is one I have heard from colleagues also. However, the same concerns are equally applicable to the conference approach to responding to student writing, a response approach that also relies upon the spoken word. Such criticism, however, is rarely directed at conferencing, which, in fact, is consistently praised in the literature about response.

On most campuses, composition classes co-exist with courses in oral communication, courses that have value just as composition courses do. Are composition courses supposed to argue that the written word is the most valued and significant means of communicating or are they to argue that writing has its place as a significant and valued means of communicating? Just as writing has its place, so too does speech. Composition instructors, after all, meet with their students and teach in an oral mode; students are accustomed to hearing their writing instructors. The message given by the use of tape-recorded response is not the subversive one about which Hunt is troubled. The message, which I make explicit in my own syllabus, is that there are times when speech can assist writers in ways that writing itself cannot. Peer response groups and teacher-student conferences rely upon speech because speech is more personal and more time-efficient. Tape-recorded response is also more personal and more time-efficient, particularly when the responder's goal is not evaluative. In other words, although I expect a written evaluation of my work at the end of a task (and, in fact, I receive such written evaluations both from

my students at the end of a course and from my department chair at the end of an academic year), while I am engaged in the task, I welcome verbal response as well, for it too can assist me to do my work more effectively. Current thinking about responding to student writing argues that ideally response should occur during the writing process when it can be facilitative rather than occurring at the end of the process when it is likely to be evaluative; therefore, the oral mode of tape-recorded response is entirely appropriate.

I have been arguing that tape-recorded response is in many ways more effective than written response. However, I am willing, for argument's sake, to suppose that all of the advantages of tape-recorded response can be achieved through written response as well, either through judicious marginal comments, well-organized end comments, or even a carefully composed letter to the student. In that case, the amount of effort and time required to produce such written commentary still would exceed the time and effort required to accomplish the same objectives in oral form. In fact, the time involved in producing such polished written response is prohibitive. How many instructors have the time—or are willing to make the time—to compose written responses that are as unified, developed, concise, and readable as the writing they demand from their students? And if written comments are anything else but unified, well-developed, concise, readable, and polished, what is the message they communicate? In other words, *written* comments may be subversive in another way in that they tend to say to students “There are two standards for writing in this class: the standards I apply to your writing, and the standards—or lack of standards—that I apply to my own writing.”

Actually, I suspect that our students are bright enough to recognize that speech has a valued place in their education as does writing and that instructor comments are more akin to free-writing than to edited prose. My argument is that taped response is no more or less subversive than written comments, and once explained to students, will not seem subversive at all.

My final claim is that the distinct advantages of using tape recorded commentary in responding to student writing outweigh any of its disadvantages. Faye, like other students taught in courses that use this approach, benefited from a personal response made in far greater detail than written comments would have offered

and engaged in the very sort of social, collaborative, and cognitive activity that effective response to student writing should provide.

Jeffrey Sommers is Associate Professor of English at Miami University, Middletown campus. He is the author of *Model Voices: Finding a Writing Voice* and has published articles about responding to student writing in *CCC*, *Freshman English News*, and *Teaching English in the Two-Year College*. This is his second appearance in *JTW*.

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